PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 381

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FIFTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 2001–2002

COMPRISING PERIOD
18 March 2002—3 April 2002

£70

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

(Formed by the Rt. Hon. Tony Blair, MP, JUNE 2001)

Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service—The Rt. Hon. Tony Blair, MP
Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State—The Rt. Hon. John Prescott, MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer—The Rt. Hon. Gordon Brown, MP
President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons—The Rt. Hon. Robin Cook, MP
Lord Chancellor—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Irvine of Lairg
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs—The Rt. Hon. Jack Straw, MP
Secretary of State for the Home Department—The Rt. Hon. David Blunkett, MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—The Rt. Hon. Margaret Beckett, MP
Secretary of State for International Development—The Rt. Hon. Clare Short, MP
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions—The Rt. Hon. Alistair Darling, MP
Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions—The Rt. Hon. Stephen Byers, MP
Secretary of State for Health—The Rt. Hon. Alan Milburn, MP
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland—The Rt. Hon. Dr. John Reid, MP
Secretary of State for Wales—The Rt. Hon. Paul Murphy, MP
Secretary of State for Defence—The Rt. Hon. Geoffrey Hoon, MP
Chief Secretary to the Treasury—The Rt. Hon. Andrew Smith, MP
Secretary of State for Scotland—The Rt. Hon. Helen Liddell, MP
Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Lords—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Williams of Mostyn, QC
Secretary of State for Trade and Industry—The Rt. Hon. Patricia Hewitt, MP
Secretary of State for Education and Skills—The Rt. Hon. Estelle Morris, MP
Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport—The Rt. Hon. Tessa Jowell, MP
Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury—The Rt. Hon. Hilary Armstrong, MP
Minister without Portfolio—The Rt. Hon. Charles Clarke, Esq, MP

DEPARTMENTS OF STATE AND MINISTERS

Cabinet Office—
  Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Macdonald of Tradeston
  Minister of State—
    Mrs. Barbara Roche, MP
  Parliamentary Secretary—Christopher Leslie, Esq, MP

Culture, Media and Sport—
  Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport—The Rt. Hon. Tessa Jowell, MP
  Ministers of State—
    The Rt. Hon. Richard Caborn, MP (Minister for Sport)
    The Rt. Hon. The Baroness Blackstone (Minister for the Arts)
  Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State—
    Dr. Kim Howells, MP (Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting)

Defence—
  Secretary of State—The Rt. Hon. Geoffrey Hoon, MP
  Minister of State—
    The Rt. Hon. Adam Ingram, MP
  Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State—
    The Lord Bach
    Dr. Lewis Moonie, MP

Education and Skills—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Estelle Morris, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Minister for School Standards—Stephen Timms, Esq, MP

Minister for Lifelong Learning—Margaret Hodge, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

The Baroness Ashton of Upholland

Ivan Lewis, Esq, MP

John Healey, Esq, MP

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Margaret Beckett, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Minister for the Environment—The Rt. Hon. Michael Meacher, MP

Minister for Rural Affairs—The Rt. Hon. Alun Michael, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Elliot Morley, Esq, MP

The Lord Whitty

Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Jack Straw, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Minister for Trade and Investment—The Rt. Hon. The Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean

Minister for Europe—The Rt. Hon. Peter Hain, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Ben Bradshaw, Esq, MP

The Baroness Amos

Denis MacShane, Esq, MP

Health—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Alan Milburn, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

The Rt. Hon. John Hutton, MP

Jacqui Smith, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

The Lord Hunt of Kings Heath

Ms Hazel Blears, MP

Yvette Cooper, MP

Home Office—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. David Blunkett, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs—The Rt. Hon. John Denham, MP

Minister for Criminal Justice, Sentencing and Law Reform—The Rt. Hon. Keith Bradley, MP

Minister for Asylum and Immigration—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Rooker

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Ms Beverley Hughes, MP

Bob Ainsworth, Esq, MP

Angela Eagle, MP

International Development—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Clare Short, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—Hilary Benn, Esq, MP

Law Officers' Department—

ATTORNEY-GENERAL—The Lord Goldsmith, QC

SOLICITOR-GENERAL—The Rt. Hon. Harriet Harman, QC, MP

ADVOCATE-GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND—Dr. Lynda Clark, QC, MP

Lord Chancellor's Department—

LORD CHANCELLOR—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Irvine of Lairg, QC

PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIES—

The Baroness Scotland of Asthal, QC

Michael Wills, Esq, MP

Ms Rosie Winterton, MP

Northern Ireland Office—
Secretary of State—The Rt. Hon. Dr. John Reid, MP
Minister of State—Jane Kennedy, MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State—
Desmond Browne, Esq, MP

Paymaster General's Office—
Paymaster General—Dawn Primarolo, MP

Privy Council Office—
President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons—The Rt. Hon. Robin Cook, MP
Parliamentary Secretary—Stephen Twigg, Esq, MP

Scotland Office—
Secretary of State—The Rt. Hon. Helen Liddell, MP
Minister of State—George Foulkes, Esq, MP

Trade and Industry—
Secretary of State—The Rt. Hon. Patricia Hewitt, MP
Ministers of State—
Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness—Douglas Alexander, Esq, MP
Minister for Trade and Investment—The Rt. Hon. The Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean
Minister for Industry and Energy—Brian Wilson, Esq, MP
Minister for Employment and the Regions—Alan Johnson, Esq, MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State—
The Lord Sainsbury of Turville
Miss Melanie Johnson, MP
Nigel Griffiths, Esq, MP

Transport, Local Government and the Regions—
Secretary of State—The Rt. Hon. Stephen Byers, MP
Ministers of State—
Minister for Transport—The Rt. Hon. John Spellar, MP
Minister for Local Government—The Rt. Hon. Nick Raynsford, MP
Minister for Housing and Planning—The Lord Falconer of Thoroton, QC
Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State—
David Jamieson, Esq, MP
Ms Sally Keeble, MP
Dr. Alan Whitehead, MP

Treasury—
Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service—The Rt. Hon. Tony Blair, MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer—The Rt. Hon. Gordon Brown, MP
Chief Secretary—The Rt. Hon. Andrew Smith, MP
Paymaster General—Dawn Primarolo, MP
Financial Secretary—The Rt. Hon. Paul Boateng, MP
Economic Secretary—Ms Ruth Kelly, MP
Parliamentary Secretary—The Rt. Hon. Hilary Armstrong, MP
Lords Commissioners—
Mrs. Anne McGuire, MP
John Heppell, Esq, MP
Tony McNulty, Esq, MP
Nick Ainger, Esq, MP
Graham Stringer, Esq, MP
Assistant Whips—
Ian Pearson, Esq, MP
Fraser Kemp, Esq, MP
Angela Smith, MP
Ivor Caplin, Esq, MP
Jim Fitzpatrick, Esq, MP
Phil Woolas, Esq, MP
Dan Norris, MP

Wales Office—
Secretary of State—The Rt. Hon. Paul Murphy, MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State—Don Touhig, Esq, MP

Work and Pensions—

Secretary of State—The Rt. Hon. Alistair Darling, MP
Ministers of State—
  Minister for Work—The Rt. Hon. Nicholas Brown, MP
  Minister for Pensions—The Rt. Hon. Ian McCartney, MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State—
  The Rt. Hon. The Baroness Hollis of Heigham
  Malcolm Wicks, Esq, MP
  Maria Eagle, MP

Her Majesty's Household—

Lord Chamberlain—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Luce, GCVO
Lord Steward—The Viscount Ridley, KG, GCVO, TD
Master of the Horse—The Lord Vestey
Treasurer—Keith Hill, Esq, MP
Comptroller—Thomas McAvoy, Esq, MP
Vice-Chamberlain—Gerry Sutcliffe, Esq, MP
Captain of the Honourable Corps of Gentlemen-at-Arms—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Carter
Captain of the Queen's Bodyguard of the Yeoman of the Guard—The Lord McIntosh of Haringey
Lords in Waiting—The Lord Davies of Oldham, The Lord Grocott, The Lord Filkin, The Lord Bassam of Brighton
Baroness in Waiting—The Baroness Farrington of Ribbleton

Second Church Estates Commissioner, Representing Church Commissioners—Stuart Bell, Esq, MP

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICERS AND STAFF

The Speaker—The Rt. Hon. Michael J. Martin, MP

Chairman of Ways and Means—The Rt. Hon. Sir Alan Haselhurst, MP

First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means—Mrs. Sylvia Heal, MP

Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means—Sir Michael Lord, MP

Chairmen's Panel—
Mrs. Irene Adams, MP, David Amess, Esq, MP, Peter Atkinson, Esq, MP, Nigel Beard, Esq, MP, Miss Anne Begg, MP, Joe Benton, Esq, MP, John Butterfill, Esq, MP, David Chidgey, Esq, MP, Frank Cook, Esq, MP, Derek Conway, Esq, MP, James Cran, Esq, MP, John Cummings, Esq, MP, Roger Gale, Esq, MP, Win Griffiths, Esq, MP, Mike Hancock, Esq, MP, Jimmy Hood, Esq, MP, Alan Hurst, Esq, MP, Eric Illsley, Esq, MP, John McWilliam, Esq, MP, Bill O'Brien, Esq, MP, Edward O'Hara, Esq, MP, Bill Olner, Esq, MP, Peter Pike, Esq, MP, Mrs. Marion Roe, MP, George Stevenson, Esq, MP, David Taylor, Esq, MP, The Rt. Hon. Miss Ann Widdecombe MP, Nicholas Winterton, Esq, MP

House of Commons Commission—
The Rt. Hon. The Speaker (Chairman), The Rt. Hon. Robin Cook, MP, The Rt. Hon. Eric Forth, MP, Archy Kirkwood, Esq, MP, Stuart Bell, Esq, MP , Sir Patrick Cormack, FSA, MP

Secretary of the Commission—R.J. Rogers

Audit Committee—
The Rt. Hon Eric Forth, MP (Chairman), Archy Kirkwood, Esq, MP, Sir William McKay, KCB (Chief Executive), A. J. Walker (Director of Finance and Administration), Sir Thomas S. Legg, KCB, QC

Secretary of the Audit Committee—Mrs. S. A. R. Davies

Board of Management—
Sir William McKay, KCB (Chief Executive), G. Cubie (Clerk of Committees, Department of the Clerk of the House), M. J. A. Cummins (Serjeant at Arms), Miss P. J. Baines (Librarian), A. J. Walker (Director of Finance and Administration), I. D. Church (Editor of the Official Report), Mrs. S. J. Harrison (Director of Catering Services)

Secretary of the Board of Management—R. J. Ware, DPhil

Speaker's Secretary—Sir Nicolas Bevan, CB

Speaker's Counsel—J.E.G. Vaux

Speaker's Chaplain—Rev. Canon A. R. Wright

Medical Adviser to the Speaker—Dr. R. Zeegen, OBE, FRCP, MRCS, DObst, RCOG

Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards—Philip Mawer

4 March 2002

THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY–THIRD PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 13 JUNE 2001]

FIFTY–FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 381**

TWELFTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2001–2002

House of Commons

Monday 4 March 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WORK AND PENSIONS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Attendance Allowance

1. **Vernon Coaker** (Gedling): What recent assessment he has made of the take-up of attendance allowance. [36324]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): There has been an increase of 21 per cent. in the number of people aged over 65 receiving the extra cost benefits since 1996.

As eligibility for attendance allowance depends on the effects of an impairment on a person's care needs, not on the existence of an impairment per se, it is difficult to predict the right level of take-up among the over-65 population.

Vernon Coaker: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. She will know that this is a most important benefit, and that although there is much concentration on the take-up of the minimum income guarantee the take-up of attendance allowance is often not discussed so much. Will she consider whether the new pension service can signpost older people towards ensuring that they claim attendance allowance? In particular, will it focus on the fact that attendance allowance has not only a lower rate but a higher rate, on which significant numbers of people may miss out unless they are properly informed and advised?

Maria Eagle: My hon. Friend makes some interesting points. The number of people who claim successfully is increasing. In fact, there is evidence to show an upward drift from the lower to the higher rate. In 2001, 47 per cent. of those on attendance allowance received the higher rate, whereas in 1996 the figure had been only 42 per cent. We are always trying to make it easier to claim and to encourage take-up. Our Bristol office is today beginning a three-month trial of a shorter form—16 pages, instead of the current 34—for over-75-year-olds.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): I am very relieved to hear that, because I spent the weekend before last filling in two of the forms—one was 12 pages long and the other was 18 pages long—for a 91-year-old constituent. I went to four universities and found them hard enough to fill in—and I am under 65. I do not know how the Minister expects someone over 65 or 75, let alone a 91-year-old, to fill in the forms. Has she ever tried?

Maria Eagle: I could have saved the hon. Gentleman the trouble, because he would be eligible only if he was over 65—he clearly is not, so he will be turned down. There is always a difficult balance to strike with the size of the form. The important thing to remember is that we are not testing whether people have a certain condition or impairment; we ask them what effect the impairment has on their care needs. *[Interruption.]* I must speak up—I am sorry to be so short. The form must give our customers the opportunity to let us know the effect of the impairment on their care needs. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that we are trying to get that difficult balance right. The general trend recently has been to decrease the size of the forms, which we hope will continue.

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the reasons why people, especially elderly people, do not take up attendance allowance is probably that many of them think that it is income related and therefore worry about it affecting their minimum income guarantee, income support or other benefits? Perhaps we ought to try harder to make it clear to them that it is not income related.

Maria Eagle: I hope that everyone can hear me now. My hon. Friend makes another important point, related to the point made by hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) about the pension service. We hope that the pension service will be able to signpost elderly people more coherently towards their eligibility for this benefit. Some 20 per cent. of new claims are unsuccessful, so an awful lot of 75 and 85-year-olds—

Michael Fabricant: And 91-year-olds.

Maria Eagle: Yes—and 91-year-olds fill in long forms but end up not getting the benefit. We hope that the personal and tailored service that the pension service is designed to give elderly people will enable us to be much clearer in advance about those who are likely to be eligible for the benefit and to ensure that people do not fill in the long form to no purpose.

Annabelle Ewing (Perth): Does the Minister accept that the take-up of attendance allowance in Scotland will be substantially reduced shortly, as a result of the United Kingdom Government's shameful decision to withdraw some £23 million of attendance allowance from those who will qualify for free personal care? Are the Minister and her colleagues prepared, even at the eleventh hour, to reconsider that unjust decision?

Maria Eagle: Unsurprisingly, the hon. Lady is wrong. We are not withdrawing any benefit from anybody in Scotland. What is happening there is a result of policy choices made by the Scottish Parliament and has nothing to do with eligibility. We have not changed eligibility for attendance allowance in any way whatsoever. The Scottish Parliament and Scottish policy makers need to take into account the effect of their policy on people's benefit entitlement.

Carers

2. **Dr. Nick Palmer** (Broxtowe): What steps his Department is taking to improve work opportunities for carers. [36325]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): Last April, we increased the earnings limits for invalid care allowance so that carers who combine some work with their caring responsibilities can keep more of their earnings. The earnings limit will now be increased regularly in line with changes to the lower earnings limit. However, ICA is not designed to be an in-work benefit. Carers are also benefiting from the introduction of our new Jobcentre Plus service. In pathfinder areas, a personal adviser will help carers who are making new or repeat benefit claims to look for employment or training that suits their circumstances and provide support to them.

Dr. Palmer: I very much welcome my hon. Friend's comments. Does she agree that there is still a problem with income support and carers allowance, because, above a fairly low level, the benefit is withdrawn, pound for pound, if the carer takes paid work? Does she agree that a policy review would be in keeping with our policy of encouraging people to take at least part-time work where that is possible?

Maria Eagle: My hon. Friend refers to the interaction between different benefits. People on income support lose their eligibility if they work more than 16 hours a week, as such work is full-time. He should remember that the income support carers premium is payable only to people who are receiving ICA, which, as I said, is not an in-work benefit. Eligibility for ICA depends on spending at least 35 hours a week undertaking caring responsibilities. However, as the average length of time spent on ICA is, I am told, two to four years—I do not quite understand why it is not three years—we are keen to ensure that recipients can stay in touch with the labour market.

The ICA earnings limit is intended to allow carers to undertake part-time work. My hon. Friend should also remember that the earnings limit is calculated only after allowable expenses, which might include tax, national insurance contributions, half of any superannuation payments and help with the disabled person's cost of care, are taken into account. In practice, therefore, someone on ICA can earn much more than £72 a week and retain their entitlement to that benefit.

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): Last week, I was visited by a constituent who is looking after her daughter, who has ME, but is working and is obviously over any of the limits that my hon. Friend described. What help can she expect? She is clearly saving the taxpayer money by looking after her daughter at home, and it would cost the taxpayer a great deal more if her daughter moved out and lived independently. She is obviously looking for some help from the Government. Can they give her any help at all and reward her for looking after her daughter at home?

Maria Eagle: The assistance that we could give would depend very much on the individual circumstances of my hon. Friend's constituent. I would be perfectly happy to make some suggestions if my hon. Friend wants to write to me and we can get a full account of those circumstances. ICA is not primarily an in-work benefit and the rules on earnings are intended to allow people who have to undertake at least 35 hours a week of caring responsibilities to keep in touch with the labour market and gain some part-time earnings. There may be other benefits or tax credits from which her constituent could gain some advantage, so if she would care to write to me with the full details I shall look into the case.

Housing Benefit

3. **Syd Rapson** (Portsmouth, North): What steps he is taking to reduce housing benefit fraud. [36326]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): We are working with local authorities on many fronts to reduce fraud and error in housing benefit. Most significantly, in 1998 we introduced a framework for local authorities to make proper checks on claims. We have now made it easier for councils to adopt the framework; 77 per cent. of them are now operating it and that proportion will increase. So far, net savings from the verification framework are estimated at about £100 million.

Syd Rapson: I thank my hon. Friend for that very informative answer, but I am sure that he is aware that most of the problems with housing benefit fraud are caused by the administration of the scheme. What steps is he taking to ensure a higher standard of administration? How will he also ensure a spread of good practice across the country?

Malcolm Wicks: My hon. Friend takes a great deal of interest in this matter. He is right to emphasise the fact that better administration is the key to getting rid of fraud from the system. A performance standards framework, including standards to prevent, detect and punish fraud wherever it occurs, will be published in the spring. A help team is available to help local authorities with particular difficulties. The benefit fraud inspectorate has published the results of its inspections of 115 local authorities. I take this opportunity to thank Chris Bull, the head of the inspectorate, and his team for the important work that they are doing.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): How many cases of housing benefit fraud were there last year?

Malcolm Wicks: Local authority prosecutions and sanctions against fraud have more than doubled during the past two years. The hon. Gentleman asks about the number of cases. For the first time in many years, we are carrying out research to verify the amount of housing benefit fraud in the system, and we will publish the results when we can. We are not complacent about fraud. We have already saved the £100 million that I mentioned and we are working in many ways to get fraud out of the system—an objective that can be shared by the whole House.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Are not many people losing their homes because of the incompetence of private companies that administer housing benefit for and on behalf of local authorities? My local authority, Camden, has received two chartermarks for the efficacy of its housing benefit system. Is it not time for the Government to insist that those at Camden should assist their local authority colleagues, many of whose residents are losing their homes?

Malcolm Wicks: I pay tribute to the good system of housing benefit administration in my hon. Friend's borough of Camden, which I twice visited to listen and to learn. One of its key officials has been transferred to Hackney, which has had particular difficulties, and is doing good work in tackling housing benefit fraud. Standards in Camden are being maintained. A local authority must decide whether to administer housing benefit in-house or to contract it out. Either way, it must insist on the highest standards.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): What does the Minister have to say to the couple I met in Birmingham on Thursday—*[Interruption.]* Labour Members would benefit from doing the same. The couple had been to their local council office to say that they believed that their neighbours were working while fraudulently claiming housing benefit and income support. They were overheard giving their suspicions and the information got back to their neighbours. A gang came round, beat them up and sprayed CS gas at the guy. They were driven out of their house, taking as many possessions as they could manage to take in two taxis; what was left behind was subsequently stolen. They virtually became homeless as a result of telling their local council office that they suspected someone of welfare fraud.

Does the Minister believe that local authorities and the Government have an obligation to protect people who complain about welfare fraud? Does he accept that everyone involved manifestly failed in their responsibilities to protect that couple? Does he regret the fact that many of the advertisements used in the Government's advertising campaign on welfare fraud give no telephone number, so people cannot phone the confidential anti-fraud hotline?

Malcolm Wicks: The number of the fraud benefit hotline is widely published.

The incident that the hon. Gentleman describes is very serious. I should like to talk to him about it to ensure that everything that should be done as regards rehousing and police action is being done. Much of it will be a matter for the police. There seems to have been a breakdown in confidentiality. We need good citizens to report benefit fraud—there should be no question about that—and those who do so have a right to confidentiality and, if in extremis things go wrong, a right to proper protection by the local authority and police service. The hon. Gentleman raises a very serious matter and I take it very seriously.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): Surely the problem lies in the complexity of the benefits system introduced by the Conservatives. What steps is my hon. Friend taking to simplify its administration and the complexity of its rules?

Malcolm Wicks: My hon. Friend is right to say that it is easy for the Opposition to huff and puff about fraud, as they now do, but it blows away no fraudsters. They did very little in government over 18 years; we are doing many things to detect and rid the system of fraud.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): It is getting worse.

Malcolm Wicks: It is not worse. We are taking action, and we have already reduced housing benefit fraud by £100 million. We have a performance framework, the benefit fraud inspectorate is doing its work, and we are taking a number of steps. Are we winning the war against fraud? Yes, we are. Are we complacent? No; there is much more to be done.

Annuities

4. **Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde): How many people with annuities are claiming benefits. [36327]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Alistair Darling): Approximately 200,000 households receive income from pension annuities and are entitled to the minimum income guarantee, housing benefit or council tax benefit. Nearly all those households will, of course, gain from the pension credit, which is designed to reward their saving.

Mr. Jack: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for his answer, but nobody wants anyone with an annuity to have to fall back on income-related benefits. Does the right hon. Gentleman not realise that the review of annuities that the Government recently carried out only scratched the surface of the problem? At a time when final salary pension schemes are going down like ninepins, there is real fear abroad that hard-saving people will not get enough money from their current annuity to enable them to maintain a decent standard of living in their retirement. Will the Secretary of State work with my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) on the Bill he has introduced, and will he try to be more constructive in addressing the problem?

Mr. Darling: The Bill proposed by the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon would do nothing to improve the incomes of the vast majority of people in this country. It is designed to help a minority of people who have retired; the vast majority would not benefit from its provisions.

The right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) raised two matters. On the first, the Government are consulting on the annuities consultation paper, the period for which still has some time to run. On his second point, he is quite right: we need to ensure that more people save more towards their retirement. One of the reasons that we are introducing annual pension statements is that people will be able clearly to focus on how much they are likely to have to retire on. One of the reasons that we introduced new measures such as stakeholder pensions is that they are designed to ensure that more people can accumulate greater savings for their retirement. The right hon. Member for Fylde is quite right; our objective should be to make sure that as many people as possible retire on good incomes. The proposals to which he refers in his right hon. Friend's Bill would not address the problem at all.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): I congratulate the Secretary of State on the consultation paper, which will, I hope, promote wider debate on flexibility and choice in annuities. Does he agree that the issue is how to convert pension savings into retirement incomes? Will not the CAT standards introduced in April 1999—reasonable charges, easy access and decent terms—be as important for the new annuities as they are for ISAs and mortgages?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend is right. One of the objectives of our policy has been to ensure that as much money as possible that people have saved goes into their pension. We found in the past that too many pension contributions were being eroded by high charges, which is one of the reasons that stakeholder pensions introduced a 1 per cent. cap on charging. I am glad to tell the House that the latest figures show that just under 700,000 stakeholder pensions were sold in the first nine months of this year. There is no doubt that the reduced charges introduced by stakeholder pensions are having an effect right across the pensions industry, resulting in more people seeing more of their money going into their savings rather than being eaten up by red tape.

I am determined that we should do even more to reduce regulatory costs—compliance costs—in the pensions industry. I believe that we can do much to reduce the complexity of the present system, which was introduced for the best of reasons by successive Governments. The time has now come to reduce that complexity so that more money goes into pensions, which is why I asked Alan Pickering of the National Association of Pension Funds to look at this matter last year.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): Given that annuities are becoming more important, with the closure of final salary pension schemes and what the Government hope will be the growth in stakeholder pensions, will there not be a problem for women because annuity rates are lower for them than for men? Will it not put women at a disadvantage if the Government rely more on private provision? What are the Government going to do for women, specifically with regard to private provision?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman, being a professor and a clever man, will know that one of the reasons why annuity rates for women are different from those for men is that women live longer, and annuity rates are calculated, among other things, by reference to the likely age to which someone will live. The state second pension, which will be introduced from April, will benefit a further 18 million people, many of whom will be women. Indeed, half the beneficiaries of the pension credit, when it is introduced, will be women, too. The pension credit benefits people who have annuities, precisely because it is designed to reward saving. I should have thought that, when he has thought a little further on these matters, he will welcome the pension credit and the state second pension, which probably do more than any other reform of the pension system for many years to help women.

Mr. James Plaskitt (Warwick and Leamington): May I, too, welcome the consultation document on reforming annuities, which is a useful contribution to the debate? Does my right hon. Friend agree that, when considering changes to the rules and increasing flexibility, we should do nothing to undermine the tax terms under which contributions are made, and nothing to undermine fairness to other taxpayers?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend is right that one of the problems with the Bill proposed by the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) is that it is primarily designed to help those who have very large pension savings. It would do nothing to help the vast majority of people. I am concerned that if that measure were to be passed, it might have an adverse effect on annuity rates for most people, which would not be desirable. We have therefore made it clear that, in our reforms, we want to make sure that we do the best that we can to improve annuity rates, to prevent abuse of the system—which would always be a risk of the right hon. Gentleman's proposals—and to do more to encourage people to save more so that they have more money when they retire.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): First, is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the criticism that a Bill might help minorities is relevant to most of the legislation that the House passes? Secondly, is he aware that the Government have approved a scheme for which the entry fee is £250,000 and which is based offshore in Gibraltar? Will he therefore not persist in saying that there is something wrong with helping only people who are rich, as that will be precisely the effect of the Government's proposals? Furthermore, will he agree that the minority to whom he refers will get bigger as companies cease to provide pension schemes and people have to make private provision? A much larger number of people will therefore be funnelled into the straitjacket of annuities. Does it therefore make sense not only to improve the existing rules but to look for a way of breaking out of the straitjacket of annuities and amending the structures more imaginatively?

Mr. Darling: I agree that the annuity rules need to be improved, and the Government are consulting on precisely that. However, I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman admits that his proposals are designed to look after the interests of a minority of people. The main thrust of this Government's policy has been to make sure that all pensioners gain, that we tackle pensioner poverty and that the vast majority of pensioners, who have modest means and savings, are helped. The pension credit enables us to achieve that.

It is worth reminding the House again that the average amount of money used to buy an annuity in this country is not £250,000 but £25,000. The House will therefore appreciate that the measures on which we ought to concentrate are those that are designed to ensure that the vast majority of people in this country have a decent retirement income, whether they are in a final salary scheme—which we want to support—or a money purchase scheme through stakeholder pensions or other measures. Across the piece, our efforts should be directed towards helping the majority of people, as they must surely be the first call on our resources.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): Reform of annuities is an important measure to encourage people to contribute more to their pensions, and we need reliable figures on how much people are contributing to their pensions in total. Does the Secretary of State endorse the figures given to the House by the Minister for Pensions last week when he claimed that contributions to non-state pensions had gone up by £19 billion—from £50 billion to £69 billion a year? Does the Secretary of State accept those figures, or does he think that they should be reviewed by the Office for National Statistics alongside the reviews of its appalling mistakes on the assets of pension funds?

Mr. Darling: My right hon. Friend gave the latest figures that the Government have, which was the right thing to do. The hon. Gentleman acknowledges that savings have increased since 1997. It is also worth bearing in mind the fact that pension sales increased by about 50 per cent. last year. Almost 700,000 stakeholder pensions have now been sold, which represents £1 billion of new savings. There is evidence across the piece that many people are saving more, but the problem that we face is ensuring that people save more generally and that we build on our reforms to strip away some of the unnecessary regulatory burdens on companies and individuals. We must also ensure that we and companies do more to support people who save and that incentives in the system are working as intended, because they are all designed to increase people's incomes.

Mr. Willetts: I have to tell the Secretary of State that I do not believe that the figure for the supposed increase from £50 billion to £69 billion is any more reliable than the figures he quoted on the value of pension fund assets that got him into such trouble the other week. I suggest that he is so complacent about the state of our funded pensions because he believes his propaganda that pension contributions have increased from £50 billion to £69 billion, when they have not. The figures are wrong, the Government's policies are wrong and the first thing he needs to do is to review the figures so that he has an accurate sense of the scale of the crisis facing our funded pensions industry.

Mr. Darling: It was not me who used those figures in the debate two or three weeks ago: the hon. Gentleman issued a press release, but the figures on which it was based turned out to be utterly wrong, so he had to shift his ground. It is no wonder that he spoke in the debate for only about seven minutes, as his entire argument had been shot away.

On the funded sector, the hon. Gentleman will know—I assume he watched the programme yesterday on which he and I appeared, even though it was recorded at different times—that I have made it clear that the Government need to do more on final salary schemes and to build on our reforms. Once we have the recommendations from Alan Pickering and Ron Sandler, which we hope to receive in June, the Government will publish proposals that will encourage more people to save, reduce the regulatory burden, simplify some of the complexity in the present system, and help companies to support people who save towards their pensions. We must ensure that we are doing the right things in the right way to get more people to save.

We are taking action. The problem for final salary schemes has been building up over the years: they have been in decline since the 1960s. We saw the problem arising, which is why we took action and why we shall continue to do everything we can to ensure that we have a pension system that encourages and rewards saving. That never happened in the 18 years in which the Tories were in power.

Minimum Income Guarantee

5. **Mr. David Rendel** (Newbury): How many pensioners who are entitled to the minimum income guarantee are not claiming it. [36328]

The Minister for Pensions (Mr. Ian McCartney): As at November 2001, 1,200 pensioners in the hon. Gentleman's constituency were receiving minimum income guarantee, and 16,000 were receiving winter fuel payments. The latest estimate of the number of pensioners who fail to claim the minimum income guarantee is reported to be upwards of 390,000 nationally.

The research report that contains those figures warns that care must be taken in interpreting them, as they come from estimates from data that are less than perfect. We have therefore commissioned further research so that we can better identify the people who are entitled to benefits, especially pensioners.

The figures pre-date the latest MIG take-up campaign, which has had a huge response, and produced some 127,000 new successful claims. As a result, those pensioners are on average £20 a week better off.

Mr. Rendel: I am grateful to the Minister for his answer, which revealed that up to a third of all pensioners who are eligible for MIG are not currently taking it up. Does he acknowledge that his colleague in the other place recently revealed that a third of pensioners who will be eligible for the pension credit will not take it up? Does he accept that, in spite of the efforts that he and the Government have been making to increase benefit take-up by pensioners, they are not working if a third will not take up pension credit?

Mr. McCartney: That is a misrepresentation of what my right hon. Friend Baroness Hollis said in the other place. She made it clear that, at the commencement of the new benefits system, we expect more than two thirds to take it up, and we will build up that figure. That is in line with what has happened when new arrangements have been introduced previously, such as tax credits. The main point is that we are the first Government in the last three generations of Governments to do something about pensioner poverty. The Liberal Democrats whinge to deceive. They whinge, whinge, whinge. The Government have made an effort to eradicate pensioner poverty, but the Liberal Democrats have opposed every measure that we have taken, whether it be winter fuel payments or the minimum income guarantee. The truth is that they talk a good game, but it is the Government who do something about it.

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): Does my right hon. Friend accept that, although take-up is not perfect, measures such as that introduced in October last year under which every fresh pension application is automatically assessed for the minimum income guarantee will help to ensure that it improves?

Mr. McCartney: The Government have never concealed the fact that the minimum income guarantee is a rough and ready measure, but it needed to be taken and 2 million pensioners have been lifted out of poverty as a consequence. I am not going to apologise for that. Why should a Government who are taking 2 million people out of poverty apologise for it?

We made it clear that the interim measures would be replaced by the pension credit, which, for the first time since the creation of a national pension system, will give pensioners a minimum income guarantee and pay them a reward for saving too. Under the current system, thrifty pensioners who save lose out, but the new system will ensure that we deal not only with poverty, but with those pensioners with small savings who lose out—a good deal for all pensioners under this Government.

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe): As the minimum income guarantee, like so many Government credits, depends on means-testing, by what date will the Government achieve the aspiration set out by the Chancellor when he said:

> "I want to achieve what in 50 years of the welfare state has never been achieved. The end of the means test for our elderly people"?

By what date?

Mr. McCartney: By October 2003, the introduction of the pension credit will mean that new pensioners coming up to claiming their—*[Interruption.]* I am answering the question. Unlike Opposition Members, I do not have to spin. I tell it as it is.

By October 2003, for the first time, pensioners claiming their basic state pension will claim for the pension credit at the same time. This Government are targeting pensioner poverty, not pensioners. As a consequence, 2 million pensioners have already been lifted out of poverty—and, I may say to the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr. Goodman), pensioners were pushed into poverty by the last Tory Government.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): Despite all the success of the Government's measures in recent years in trying to tackle pensioner poverty, I know from the former mining communities in my constituency that many pensioners still feel reluctant to claim the minimum income guarantee because they worry about the stigma attached to it. What further practical measures can we take, especially in former mining communities, to ensure that every pensioner is lifted out of poverty by claiming the minimum income guarantee?

Mr. McCartney: I also represent a mining constituency. The winter fuel payment and the creation of the new pension service and the pension credit are designed to assist retirement pensioners, including those abandoned by the last Conservative Government in the coalfield communities. In addition, we are working with the National Union of Mineworkers pension trustees to improve basic pensions from the mining fund. It is important that all those building blocks are put in place and we must also improve investment in services in local mining communities, which older people use more than others. Pensioners' income, environment and social and health care are all getting big investments under this Government, and they will continue to get big investments.

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): Will the research to which the Minister referred look at take-up in areas such as Wales, the north of England, Scotland, Cornwall and Northern Ireland? If, as I suspect, it shows that the deficiencies of the minimum income guarantee are more apparent in those regions, what steps will the Government take regionally and nationally to increase take-up?

Mr. McCartney: The research covers the whole country. This Government are concerned about and interested in pensioners wherever they live in Britain. The purpose of the new pension service is to maximise

Government involvement with pensioners and their organisations, so the research will inform us on how best we can work more closely with those organisations and on take-up campaigns over the next few years. That is the focus of the new pension service.

Equal Opportunities

6. **Siobhain McDonagh** (Mitcham and Morden): What recent studies he has undertaken to identify the obstacles facing women returning to work. [36330]

The Minister for Work (Mr. Nicholas Brown): Research commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions has identified four main constraints that affect women who want to return to work: child care; ill health and disability; a lack of relevant skills and work experience; and housing costs. The Government have several measures in place to alleviate those problems, including the national child care strategy, and the introduction of more than 1,000 lone parent advisers in our jobcentres.

The Government recognise the part that employers have to play in encouraging a healthy work-life balance, in addition to our own campaign on that. We also know that women from ethnic minority groups are much less likely to be in employment. Next month, we are introducing a new service in five areas to reach out to people from ethnic minorities, who face a disadvantage in the labour market.

Siobhain McDonagh: Will my right hon. Friend comment on Opposition Members' assertions that the Government's plans to increase maternity pay and leave will make it even more difficult for women to continue in work?

Mr. Brown: I do not think that that is right. Indeed, employers themselves stand to benefit: if only 10 per cent. of those who currently do not return to work stayed in work, the savings to employers on recruitment costs would be about £39 million. We have also extended relief for small employers. About 10,000 firms are now entitled to recover 100 per cent. of the payments, and they also get an extended contribution to cover the costs.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Is the Minister aware that the vast majority of workless lone parent households are women-led and that his new deal for lone parents has proved an abject failure, making it more difficult for women to return to work? That, plus the obstacles that the Government are putting in the path of women claiming pensions, is making it more and more difficult for women in the workplace.

Mr. Brown: The first part of the hon. Lady's assertion is of course correct—the majority of lone parent households are headed by women—but I do not accept that the new deal for them is a failure. In fact, it has had substantial successes. Moreover, there is no alternative—a phrase that will no doubt echo with her. The fact is that, if we want to abolish child poverty and enhance the income of lone parent households, by far and away the best way of doing it is to get them an income from work rather than leaving them dependent on benefits.

Mr. Terry Rooney (Bradford, North): A major obstacle to moving from benefit to work, especially for single parents, is the loss of the free school meal entitlement. Is my right hon. Friend aware of any moves to extend that entitlement to recipients of working families tax credit?

Mr. Brown: I cannot make an announcement now, but I am aware of the issue. The most commonly asked questions are about the effect of returning to work on people's housing benefit and on council tax rebate, and for single parent households with a substantial number of children, school meals are clearly an important factor. We are considering what more can be done, but I cannot make an announcement yet.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Is the Minister aware that, in addition to the list that he enunciated, which is clearly right, many women of a certain age would like to go back to work but cannot do so because employers discriminate against them because of their age? I appreciate that it is extremely difficult to do anything about that, but will he assure us that he takes the matter seriously and tell us what steps he has taken to alleviate the situation?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman is right: there are still discriminatory practices, often based on subjective perception and not rationally founded, against older people, including those who seek to return to work. Older people have a great deal to contribute. I often discuss the matter with private sector employers. The many services provided by Jobcentre Plus are, at least in part, available to older people who want to return to the labour market.

Rapid Response Service

8. **Lawrie Quinn** (Scarborough and Whitby): If he will make a statement on the work of the rapid response service for people made redundant. [36332]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Alistair Darling): The rapid response service works closely with Jobcentre Plus helping people who are affected by redundancy: 56 Jobcentre Plus pathfinder offices have already opened and are working well. Later this week, I will announce that a further 225 offices will open in the coming year, 2002-03. I shall arrange to place a list of the areas where the offices will be in the Library, and my right hon. Friend the Minister for Work will write to all hon. Members with offices in their constituencies setting out the details.

Lawrie Quinn: I thank the many people from the rapid response service who assisted my constituents last year, when Plaxton's bus factory faced closure. Does my right hon. Friend envisage that the service will link up with agencies such as citizens advice bureaux to give debt counselling to those who face redundancy, and to help them manage associated domestic finance problems?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend's point about the rapid response service is important. It is sometimes overlooked that, after redundancies are announced—last autumn, a number were indeed announced—the Employment Service and its specialist services work closely with employers to help get people back into work as quickly as possible. The Employment Service was very active when Plaxton's faced closure in his constituency.

The whole object of the new Jobcentre Plus regime, which brings benefits and job searches together under one roof, is to ensure that we can turn round people who lose their jobs as quickly as possible. I was just asked about the difficulties of the over-50s. Jobcentre Plus is a new and better way to help back into work people who, in the past, were left out and in some cases simply written off when they lost their jobs. Jobcentre Plus and the rapid response service will continue to do everything that they can to help people such as my hon. Friend's constituents.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Given that the number of notified compulsory redundancies is increasing quite rapidly in some parts of the country, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the rapid response service is welcome and necessary? Does he also recognise the need to do something specific about the imbalance between manufacturing and the service sector, and what has he urged the Chancellor to do in the Budget to correct the exchange rate problems and to increase industrial regional aid budgets?

Mr. Darling: The exchange rate issue is probably beyond the scope of this question. As I said, redundancies were announced, particularly last autumn, but the number who went back into work was encouraging. Indeed, a record number of people are in employment. That is due primarily to a strong and robust economy and to the steps taken by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, but also to the supply-side measures that we have taken. We have improved people's skills and training, reformed the Employment Service, established the new Jobcentre Plus regime and the rapid response service, and implemented a raft of measures designed to ensure that we get people who lose their jobs back into work as quickly as possible.

Coupled with a strong economy, those measures have made a big difference; it is just an awful shame that the Liberal Democrats opposed almost every provision that brought them about.

Ms Dari Taylor (Stockton, South): I know that my right hon. Friend understands the trauma that affects an individual who is made redundant, especially if he or she—I do not want to exclude women from this ball game by any means—is in his or her 40s. Can he reassure me that the job transition service, which is currently in project form, will be universally available by April 2002, and that it will build confidence in such people so that they can face new jobs and training for new skills? That confidence is invariably missing in families who face redundancy.

Mr. Darling: It is important to do everything that we can to help people in their 40s or 50s who face losing their jobs. At the moment, nearly a third of people aged over 50 are out of work, and most of them depend on benefits for the majority of their income. There is no doubt that that situation is far from satisfactory. It is a legacy of the events of the 1980s, when people who lost their jobs were written off.

My hon. Friend asked about the job transition service and the rapid response service. We want to ensure that that help is available where it is needed. Some services, such as the Jobcentre Plus regime, will be nation wide. Measures such as the rapid response service have been taken to deal with specific circumstances; they are not intended to deal with every situation because that would not be appropriate.

I can tell my hon. Friend, however, that the idea of bringing together benefits and job searches under one roof is to get rid once and for all of the artificial distinction between those who are looking for work and those who sign on for benefits—disability benefits, lone parent benefits or any other benefits. This is a far better approach, which will build on our efforts to get more and more people into work.

My hon. Friend has the assurance that she seeks. We will do all that we can, particularly for older workers. We need to redouble our efforts in that regard, for obvious reasons given by Members on both sides of the House today and in the past.

New Deal for Disabled People

9. **Mr. Gordon Marsden** (Blackpool, South): What recent discussions he has had with disability organisations about the implementation of the new deal for disabled people. [36333]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): We consulted widely with organisations of and for disabled people, and with disabled people themselves, during the development of the new deal for disabled people. Some 88 organisations contributed to the consultation on the national extension of the new deal. We continue to meet organisations of and for disabled people to discuss its implementation, and to design improvements.

Mr. Marsden: I thank my hon. Friend for her reply, which will be of particular benefit to those of my constituents who are disabled. I have more than the national average, as do many other seaside towns where disabled people are now looking for work.

What additional support and assistance might be made available to encourage small and medium-sized businesses to take on people with disabilities? According to recent research on pilot new deal schemes, employers found awareness of the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to be one of the most helpful aspects of the process.

Maria Eagle: My hon. Friend is right to say that we need to work with employers as well as with disabled people. Part of the job brokers' role—this is one reason why the scheme is so innovative—is to liaise with local businesses and build up a relationship with them, as well as getting to know local disabled people who want to work and who participate in the scheme. That enables the brokers to convince local businesses of the advantages of employing certain disabled people.

The Department has a range of measures to help disabled people who are disadvantaged in the job market. There is, for instance, our access-to-work budget, which can help to meet the additional costs of employing a disabled person, such as communications support and travel to work.

One of the innovations in the new deal for disabled people is the attempt to broker between a disabled person who is looking for work and local employers who are looking for employees to find that person a suitable job.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): We all share the objective of helping disabled people into work, but should not the new deal take on board the lessons of last week's National Audit Office report on the new deal for young people? It showed that, far from reducing youth unemployment by 250,000 as Ministers have claimed, the new deal achieved a reduction of at best no more than 45,000, and possibly as little as 25,000. May we have a proper, objective evaluation of the new deal for disabled people and of the other new deal programmes to see what difference they are really making? And can Ministers remove the need for us to divide by 10 when we hear the claims that they make?

Maria Eagle: The hon. Gentleman is being churlish. Of course there are always proper evaluations of our schemes. That is particularly important in the case of schemes such as the new deal for disabled people, which is highly innovative. It is developing new ways of delivering services to a group that was completely ignored by the last Tory Government. People who were disabled were dumped on to benefits and given no help whatever to obtain work.

Of course it is important to have proper evaluation when we consider whether our scheme has worked and how well it has worked, and of course we will have that evaluation. We shall need to learn from our experience to design improvements, but we are determined to bring about effective services and help a group of people who have been ignored for too long.

I have visited many new deal job brokers, and the enthusiasm of participants in the scheme—both disabled people looking for work and staff looking for jobs for them—is palpable. They welcome this help. It is about time that they received it; they certainly never did when the Conservative party was in power.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): Does my hon. Friend recognise that although we have moved a long way towards helping people with a disability to get back into work, there needs to be a fast track to enable employers to carry out the adaptations and get into place the extra equipment that is needed so that people can begin a job as speedily as possible?

Maria Eagle: When employers consider taking on disabled staff, it is important that they do not feel that they will be disadvantaged by doing so. It is therefore important that the necessary help be provided as soon as possible. Disabled people face not only multiple disadvantages but often discrimination. Our agenda on civil rights—to get rid finally of disability discrimination in the work force and the work place—is going ahead. It is vital that we take forward those two strands so that we help disabled people into work, overcoming the disadvantage under which they find themselves, and overcome the discrimination that is sometimes directed at them. One way in which we do that is by having programmes such as access to work that assist in overcoming those problems.

Incapacity Benefit

10. **Mr. Mark Hoban** (Fareham): What targets his Department has for getting people who claim incapacity benefit into work. [36334]

The Minister for Work (Mr. Nicholas Brown): We have no targets for getting people who claim incapacity benefit into work. Where people are capable of returning to work, the Department will give them every assistance to do so.

Our new Jobcentre Plus service ensures that people who make new or repeat claims for incapacity benefit have the opportunity of work-focused advice and support from a personal adviser so that they can be helped to move into work when they are ready to do so.

From this April, we are introducing new, fairer and more flexible permitted work rules. Any incapacity benefit recipient will be able to earn up to £20 per week for an unlimited period or work for less than 16 hours and earn up to £66 a week for 26 weeks. The new rules are more flexible and give all people in receipt of incapacity benefit the chance to get back into work.

Mr. Hoban: I suppose that it is no surprise that the Government have no targets for getting people on incapacity benefit back into work. More than 50 per cent. of those claiming incapacity benefit have been doing so for more than four years. In addition, the ONE interviews for sick and disabled people have been shown by the Department's own research to be failures. When will the Government come forward with effective measures to increase the number of people in work and decrease the number of those claiming benefits?

Mr. Brown: I strongly disagree with the thrust of the hon. Gentleman's question. Incapacity benefit is there for a purpose, because the people claiming it are ill and not able to work. We should not have targets for forcing people to work if they are sick and cannot do so. That would be completely unfair. However, when people can work, the services of the Employment Service, such as Jobcentre Plus, are there to help them back into work. Moreover, when they are capable of doing some work, the new discretionary sums of money are available for them if they are capable of doing only a small amount of work or if it is of therapeutic value. That seems to be the right approach. To suggest that people should be compelled to work, in the circumstances that the hon. Gentleman advocates, is very wrong, and would not, I am sure, be endorsed by his Front-Bench colleagues.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): I wish to refer to those who are disabled and cannot work. I have a constituent who suffers from a form of heart disease for which only a transplant will lead to any recovery. He had his disability living allowance reduced from the higher to the lower rate and when he lodged an appeal, it was taken away altogether. Why should my constituent be treated in such a shabby manner? Obviously I have written to the Secretary of State, the Benefits Agency and the hospital that is treating him. Surely this is an illustration of the Benefits Agency making decisions that are impossible to understand.

Mr. Brown: I am reluctant to discuss individual constituents' cases on the Floor of the House, and even more reluctant to do so without having the full details of the case. However, I give my hon. Friend this assurance—I will look at the case that he raises and write to him about it.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): Is not the Minister concerned, as I hope we all are, that about 3,000 people leave the labour force each week for incapacity benefit and only a very small proportion return to work? Was it not entirely predictable that numbers on incapacity benefit are rising again?

Has the Minister read the Department's own research report, No. 127, showing that respondents in the sick or disabled group who had not participated in the work-focused interviews were more likely to be in work than those who had participated? Has he also noticed the extraordinary situation whereby vocational rehabilitation is his responsibility in this Department while occupational health sits in the Department of Health? Is it not high time for Ministers collectively, in this most sensitive of areas, to put less emphasis on presentation and more on joined-up thinking?

Mr. Brown: Although we have to be adversarial at Question Time, the hon. Gentleman makes two fair points. First, we need to do more on rehabilitation, and he is right that responsibilities are split between the two Departments. That is why Ministers are talking together to see what more can be done, and we ought to explore that. Secondly, he noted the rising number of people coming on to the benefit. I say to him gently that it is possible to overstate the problem because there are demographic factors at work. Nevertheless, I accept that if one wants to try to intervene, by far and away the best thing is to intervene early with a programme of rehabilitation, where that is appropriate.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Last Tuesday, the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions said in this House:

> "I was not in a position to block any arrangement about his future employment elsewhere—

he was talking about Martin Sixsmith—

> "in the civil service and I accepted that discussions between Sir Richard Mottram and Mr. Sixsmith should continue."—[*Official Report*, 26 February 2002; Vol. 380, c. 564.]

Over the weekend, Mr. Sixsmith published an 18,000-word dossier that is in direct conflict with that statement. Either Mr. Sixsmith was lying to the press or the Secretary of State was lying to this House. Has the Secretary of State made any moves to set the record straight regarding this, because it puts the Secretary of State and this House in some danger of losing their credibility?

Mr. Speaker: There has been no approach to me.

Andrew Bennett (Denton and Reddish): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In the Question Time that has just gone, we completed only nine questions. It is not so long ago that, at Social Security questions on a Monday, we often got up to Question 20. Is it not deplorable that only nine substantive questions were dealt with today? Could I suggest that you consider taking some action on this, and that instead of letting the next Social Security questions run for one hour to 3.30 pm, you let it run until Question 20 has been reached so that individual cases, like that of my constituent dealt with in question 18 today, can be reached?

Mr. Speaker: I have no such powers. However, I have said before that there should be brief questions and, of course, brief replies. That will allow us to get down the Order Paper. I am conscious that hon. Members, including the hon. Gentleman, have waited patiently for their particular question to be reached. It is a pity that we are only getting to Question 10.

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Was it in order for the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) to contact the police in south Wales on no fewer than four occasions regarding a case that was under their active consideration? I refer to the case of Mr. German, the sometime head of the Liberal party in Wales and a former Deputy First Minister. Was it in order for the hon. Gentleman to interfere? Have you received a request from him to come to the House to explain himself?

Mr. Speaker: This is a matter that has taken place outside the House and has nothing to do with me.

Orders of the Day

Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill

As amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

3.34 pm

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I do not want to delay the House, but while I understand that amendments were not published until Friday so that as many hon. Members as possible could contribute them, that has made it hard for Opposition parties to prepare our responses. We saw the selection list only after 1 pm today. Will you use your considerable influence, Mr. Speaker, in passing on to the powers that be our request for a little more consideration about the amount of time that we are given to examine complicated Bills such as this one?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman will remember that I selected the amendments at the Speaker's conference at 12 noon. The Officers of the House disseminated the information as quickly as they could thereafter.

3.35 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Desmond Browne): I beg to move,

> That the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, as amended, be considered in the following order, namely, new Clauses relating to Part 1, amendments relating to Clauses 1 and 2, Schedule 1, Clause 3, Schedule 2, Clauses 4 and 5, Schedule 3, Clauses 6 to 11, Schedule 4, Clauses 12 and 13, Schedule 5, Clauses 14 to 20, Schedule 6, Clauses 21 and 22, new Clauses relating to Part 2, amendments relating to Clauses 23 to 29, Schedule 7, Clauses 30 to 44, new Clauses relating to Part 3, amendments relating to Clause 45, Schedule 8, Clauses 46 to 50, Schedule 9, Clauses 51 and 52, new Clauses relating to Part 4, amendments relating to Clauses 53 to 62, Schedule 10, Clause 63, Schedule 11, Clauses 64 and 65, new Clauses relating to Part 5, amendments relating to Clauses 66 to 80, remaining new Clauses, amendments relating to Clauses 81 to 84, Schedule 12, Clause 85, Schedule 13, Clauses 86 to 92, new Schedules and remaining proceedings on consideration.

The motion proposes minor amendments to the previously agreed order of consideration. It is intended only to reorder the business so that it conforms more closely with the order of the Bill. The proposed grouping is designed for the convenience of the House.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): The Opposition have no problem with the motion, although we do have long-standing and considerable arguments against the amount of time made available for discussion of the Bill. Important amendments have been tabled by the Government. The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) has pointed out how difficult it is to respond to Government amendments published on Friday and selected by your conference at 12 noon today, Mr. Speaker.

Clearly, the passage of the Bill has been thoroughly unsatisfactory. The hon. Gentleman's concern is but the latest example, although I must point out that it would have helped if he had not voted for the original programme motion and the knives inserted during Committee. If he had not done so, we might be considering on Report a Bill of which we had at least read

[Mr. Crispin Blunt]

the 32 clauses that we must now deal with today. I fear that important Government amendments may not be discussed in spite of their immense significance to Northern Ireland.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Will my hon. Friend confirm that a great many clauses—possibly the majority of them—were not discussed in Committee and that tens of amendments and new clauses also went undiscussed because of the programme motions?

Mr. Blunt: To be precise, 32 clauses and 7 schedules were not discussed. That is plainly unsatisfactory. The Select Committee on the Modernisation of the House of Commons is examining the way we legislate, and the Bill provides an example of our profound failure properly to do our job as legislators.

I do not hold the Minister responsible for that in any way. He conducted himself well in Committee, seriously considering amendments and replying to points with care and courtesy. I am delighted to see that many of the substantial number of amendments that I tabled on Wednesday were adopted by the Government as their own amendments on Thursday, which is a proper way to reflect what happened in Committee.

It remains a pity that the Committee was not able to complete its business. Indeed, that is more than a pity: it is a scandal. If I go on any longer about that, however, we shall have even less time. I am happy to support the motion.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): Important matters lie at the end of the list of amendments. It would be a tragedy if those matters were not discussed in the House. No real public discussion would have taken place of matters that all parties in Northern Ireland, no matter what view they take of the Bill, require to be debated.

It would be a terrible tragedy if the House had no opportunity to hold a thorough discussion of matters that are currently in the arena of controversy. This is the place where controversy should be aired and arguments put and debated if we believe in democracy.

Lembit Öpik: In supporting the motion, I want to make two brief points. First, I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your clarification about the understandable restrictions on your time, although that indicates something that we should consider in future: it has been a tremendous strain on the Opposition parties to prepare our responses in the two and a half hours that were available. However, perhaps that matter is one for the Modernisation Committee rather than for us.

Secondly, as the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) rightly said, it was clear in Committee that the Under-Secretary took seriously the representations that were made, although I was concerned that, sometimes, the Government seemed a trifle inflexible about taking those points on board. I deduce from the Government's willingness to consider several of the amendments that were discussed but not accepted in Committee that they want to make amends on Report. That is healthy.

I hope that the Government will be able to provide clear justification where there are still differences between us. I am sure that will be achieved as the debate progresses.

As regards the limitations on time in Committee, it is true that at the beginning we supported the Government's programming timetable. In response to the comments of the hon. Member for Reigate, the Conservatives could have been a little more co-operative when there was an opportunity mid-way through the Committee stage to extend the time. It is perhaps disingenuous for the Conservatives to criticise others when they did not accept that opportunity, although we do not want to pursue that matter in detail now. I hope that, given the spirit of constructive dialogue that we enjoyed in Committee, the Report stage will be similarly constructive.

Question put and agreed to.

New Clause 1

APPOINTMENT OF QUEEN'S COUNSEL

'(1) Her Majesty may from time to time, on the recommendation of the Secretary of State, appoint members of the Bar of Northern Ireland, Queen's Counsel in Northern Ireland.

(2) The power of the Secretary of State to make recommendations under subsection (1) is exercisable only after consultation with a Committee of the Judicial Appointments Commission consisting of all the judicial and legal profession members under a procedure to be determined by the Committee.'.—*[Mr. Blunt.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

3.42 pm

Mr. Blunt: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

I hope that the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) has had enough time to consider his response to the new clause as it was tabled in Committee, although we did not reach it.

The new clause has been proposed because there was no consideration of the appointment of Queen's Counsel in the review and the matter is not dealt with in the Bill. However, the Bar Council of Northern Ireland wants to sort out the problem. In the course of my preparation for dealing with the Bill for Her Majesty's Opposition, I visited Northern Ireland. One of the people I met was Éilís McDermott, the chairman of the Bar Council of Northern Ireland, who briefed me in detail on the issue.

The immediate concern of the Bar Council of Northern Ireland is that the Lord Chancellor has announced a new Judicial Appointments Commissioner for Northern Ireland and has given him a role—as set out in the Lord Chancellor's letter of 9 July 2001 to the chairman of the Bar Council. It states:

> "I consider the appointment of a Commissioner with specific responsibility for auditing, overseeing and monitoring all aspects of the existing Silk and Judicial appointments procedures in Northern Ireland would be a very positive step and intend shortly to announce my decision to appoint a Northern Ireland Commissioner".

It was envisaged that the role would include

> "the audit of the existing processes and policies for appointing Queen's Counsel and the handling of complaints resulting from the application of those processes and procedures."

As that is an important matter, one would have expected the Lord Chancellor to have received a reply on the detail from the Bar Council of Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, the letter from the Lord Chancellor emerged only when people went through the papers of the late chairman of the Bar Council after his untimely death. In those circumstances, it is hardly surprising that there was no reply.

The vice-chairman, Henry Toner QC, wrote to the Lord Chancellor on 21 December:

> "We do believe that changes need to be made. However we believe that we were entitled to be consulted about any changes in the procedures before decisions such as those indicated in your letter of 7 July 2001 were made. This has not happened.
>
> Taking silk is inter alia promotion in our profession. The profession is therefore entitled to have a considerable input into how such promotion should be arranged. Even at this late stage, the Commission's role in this process should be put on hold until the profession has been allowed the opportunity to know precisely what you are proposing and until you have had our comments on those proposals and have had an opportunity to study our 'Silk Report'."

I have had an opportunity to study what the Bar Council of Northern Ireland calls its "silk report", and my new clause is an attempt to meet as closely as possible its recommendations for the appointment of Queen's Counsel within the set-up of the Judicial Appointments Commission established under the Bill. Specifically, the new clause says that the sub-committee for appointing Queen's Counsel should consist of the members of the Judicial Appointments Commission who come from the judicial and legal profession. That comes as close as is reasonably possible to the proposals in the Bar Council's report.

In paragraph 25, the silk report, which was finalised on 20 March 2001, says:

> "The Committee accordingly recommends that the recommending authority charged with responsibility for the entire procedure from the publication of invitation to apply for appointment to the making of the recommendation should be a panel of persons comprising:—
>
> (i) The Lord Chief Justice as Chairman.
>
> (ii) A second Judge of the Supreme Court of judicature in Northern Ireland.
>
> (iii) The Chairman of the Bar Council (or a nominee, being a Queen's Counsel, of the Bar Council if the Chairman for the time being is a member of the Junior Bar).
>
> (iv) On the nomination of the Bar Council a second barrister of senior standing and having a significant practice preferably in an area different from that of the other barrister member.
>
> (v) The Chairman of the Council of HM County Court Judges or a County Court Judge nominated by it.
>
> (vi) A lay person appointed by the Lord Chief Justice on the advice of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland if it is willing to accept such advisory role."

I accept that my proposal is not identical with that put forward by the Bar Council of Northern Ireland, but, given the constraints under which we are operating, it is as close as it could reasonably be.

Lady Hermon (North Down): I ask the hon. Gentleman to bear in mind the fact that the Bill is designed to implement the recommendations of the criminal justice review in Northern Ireland, not those of the Bar Council. What he suggests would be outside the terms of the Bill and beyond its proper jurisdiction.

Mr. Blunt: Plainly it is not outside the terms of the Bill because you, Mr. Speaker, have been kind enough to select the new clause for debate—and for Division if it is pressed and opposed. My suggestion certainly falls within the scope of the Bill. Its main purpose may be to implement the review, but that is not its only purpose. We now have an important opportunity to address related issues, of which this is a precise example.

I do not want to detain the House any longer. Under the structure that we have established for the appointment of Queen's Counsel, my proposal comes as close as it reasonably could to the Bar Council's recommendations. The Government may have reasons to resist the new clause at this stage, and I shall not wish to press it to a Division. However, I think that the structure I have suggested is workable. If the Minister suggests that it is not, we shall go away and think again; there may be an opportunity to reconsider the matter in another place.

This is an appropriate moment to examine the appointment of Queen's Counsel, and the role of the Lord Chancellor and the Secretary of State. It was the present Lord Chancellor who, to put it delicately, "expropriated" that duty from the Labour Government's first Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in 1997. He removed those responsibilities from her, for reasons on which we could speculate—although probably that would not add much to the present debate. The new clause would meet the Bar Council's need for an independent process run by the legal profession. As such appointments constitute the key promotion for barristers, this is an appropriate point at which to consider the subject.

Mr. Garnier: I shall be brief because I more or less agree entirely with what my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) said.

The Bar of Northern Ireland, or the corps of advocates of Northern Ireland, has the advantage of being much smaller than that of England and Wales, so it is easier to conduct the peer review necessary for those appointing Queen's Counsel to be satisfied that they are of a suitable quality. The Bar of Northern Ireland and possibly the Bar of Scotland—the Under-Secretary will be able to tell us about that—are still very much smaller than the Bar of England and Wales, so those who practise before the senior judiciary know each other and are more likely to be well known by the proposed membership of the body of which my hon. Friend spoke.

The only small point that I would make to my hon. Friend concerns the fact that Queen's Counsel from Northern Ireland appear in cases before the Judicial Committee of the House of Lords from time to time and probably more regularly than their counterparts in England and Wales. If the Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland were agreeable, it might be thought sensible for the Commission to consult the Judicial Committee to see whether those being considered for silk were known to its members and whether they had anything interesting or useful to add to the deliberations.

By and large, however, I am happy with the general thrust of what my hon. Friend has reported to the House, following his discussions with the Bar Council of Northern Ireland. To be a pedant, and to grease up to you, Mr. Speaker, I point out that the long title says that the Bill is to

> "make provision about the law officers and other legal officers and the courts in Northern Ireland".

That seems to provide a perfectly good way in for this discussion because advocates and members of the Bar of Northern Ireland and of the Law Society of Northern Ireland are, in addition to being members of their

[Mr. Garnier]

profession, officers of the court. I should have thought that that was quite sufficient, Mr. Speaker, and I am sure that you agree.

Mr. Browne: I infer from the contribution of the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) that, among other things, he seeks clarification of the role of the Judicial Appointments Commissioner in the process for appointing Queen's Counsel. I shall endeavour to give him that clarification in this short contribution.

The criminal justice review recommended that the Judicial Appointments Commission be established to deal with appointments to the judiciary and the magistracy only. The Bill implements that recommendation in full. The hon. Gentleman made the point, which the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) reinforced, that the review made no recommendations concerning appointments to Queen's Counsel. These are not judicial appointments, and I do not consider that it would be appropriate for them to be dealt with by the Judicial Appointments Commission. That is my fundamental objection to the new clause.

Furthermore, as the appointment of Queen's Counsel is made in the exercise of the royal prerogative, on the recommendation of the Lord Chancellor, I see no reason why Her Majesty's powers to make the appointment should be placed on a statutory footing or why existing ministerial responsibility should be transferred from the Lord Chancellor to the Secretary of State.

The review separately recommended the appointment of a Judicial Appointments Commissioner in the period running up to devolution. John Simpson, who has been appointed to the post, has a broader remit, which will include looking at the process for appointing QCs.

The hon. Member for Reigate sought to extrapolate the commissioner's role and remit by reference to a letter that had been sent to the Bar Council of Northern Ireland. In fact, the commissioner's role is properly set out and includes, among other things, monitoring existing processes and procedures for appointing QCs, handling complaints that result from the application of those processes and procedures, and recommending improvements and changes to those procedures to the Lord Chancellor.

That work has commenced, and having inquired today I understand that, as one would expect, Mr. Simpson is carrying it out in a fiercely independent and careful manner. No doubt he will make recommendations, as he is requested to do, to the Lord Chancellor in due course. That process is at an early stage, so it would be premature to anticipate his recommendations.

I have every confidence in the impartiality of the appointments process, but I hope that the commissioner's role will further enhance public confidence in that process. I would expect that the commissioner, in fulfilling his remit, will consult the Bar Council of Northern Ireland widely and in depth. I therefore ask the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) to withdraw the motion.

Mr. Blunt: I am grateful to the Minister for his reply. and I shall accede to his request to withdraw the motion. I am also grateful to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) for reminding me that a particular concern has to be addressed relating to the size of the Northern Ireland Bar and how the system operates. I hope that the Minister will bear that in mind in any input that he has in the commissioner's consultations.

When the system operated under the aegis of the Secretary of State, before the Lord Chancellor came into play, it took only about two or three months from the application for silk to the conclusion of the process. It now takes a considerable length of time—more than eight months in the case referred to in the Bar Council's report. It is important to consider the Bar Council's concerns. It said:

> "With such a small Bar as soon as an invitation to apply for appointment as Queen's Counsel is published speculation becomes rife not just amongst barristers but also amongst their major professional clients, namely the members of the Solicitors' profession. This can have very real adverse effects such as a decision on the part of a Solicitor forthwith to cease to instruct a Junior barrister regularly instructed in the past because of a perception on the part of the Solicitor that the Junior barrister has in fact or has in all probability applied for appointment as a Queen's Counsel and so will shortly be no longer available to render service as a Junior barrister. Such a disadvantage may always be the companion of the publication of such an invitation but in a small jurisdiction that disadvantage is much compounded if a very long period of time is allowed to elapse between the date of publication of the invitation to apply and the date of intimation of the outcome of application."

I would not have expressed that at quite such length. However, the point is that we are discussing a small Bar that can deal with such things rapidly in Northern Ireland, but it has now become ensnared with the processes that involve the Lord Chancellor. I hope that the debate on the new clause will have at least prompted further consideration of that issue, so I am happy to beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 1

GUARANTEE OF CONTINUED JUDICIAL INDEPENDENCE

Mr. Blunt: I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 1, line 6, after "judiciary", insert "and the legal profession".

We return to this subject following a debate in Committee during which I withdrew a similar amendment because the Minister was about to have further consultations with its main proponent, the Law Society of Northern Ireland. Without wishing to detain the House at length by recapping the debate in Committee, it is important for us to note just how wide is the alliance ranged against the Minister—unless, that is, he tells us later that the Law Society of Northern Ireland has withdrawn from the field.

The amendment has been signed by the hon. Members for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) and for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton), who were the only members of the Committee apart from the Minister to express even a smidgen of doubt, but who have plainly now been convinced by the arguments that we adduced in that debate.

4 pm

The amendment arises from the very strong view expressed by the Law Society of Northern Ireland—in written submissions, and also orally, to me and others who have taken its advice on the provisions—that there should be a duty on those responsible for the administration of justice to uphold the independence not only of the judiciary but of the legal profession. I refer the House to the key element of the society's submission:

> "The safeguarding of human rights standards is not just a matter of judicial independence nor (in the specific context of the criminal justice system) of an independent prosecutorial structure. The existence of a genuinely independent legal profession is vital in the protection of human rights, not only in so far as this involves the framing of just laws and procedures but also in the robust and independent application and defence of those laws and procedures".

The society also said:

> "The LSNI recommends strongly to the Government that an equivalent guarantee of the continued independence of the legal profession should be included within the Bill."

The amendment seeks to achieve that aim in the simplest possible fashion, by appending in respect of the legal profession a guarantee such as that which the Bill already seeks to provide with regard to the judiciary.

The Minister found that arguments weighed heavily against him in Committee, especially in his exchange with my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier), who intervened on the arguments that the hon. Gentleman sought to adduce about the consequences of including the word "independence" in respect of the legal profession. The hon. Gentleman could not speak in detail about any specific consequences that would flow from the introduction of a duty to uphold the independence of the legal profession. He said that he wanted to explore in consultation with the Law Society of Northern Ireland the question of whether the society, as the main promoter of the original amendment—and, indeed, the clause—would find that it had created a rod for its own back. He sought to present himself to the Committee as looking after the best interests of the Law Society of Northern Ireland and the Bar by suggesting that specifying the proposed duty in the Bill might somehow cause problems for them.

I look forward to hearing the Minister's response. He is well aware that the amendment deals with one of the issues on which there has been welcome unanimity across the entire field in Northern Ireland. The ad hoc Committee of the Northern Ireland Assembly managed to find an alliance ranging from Sinn Fein to the DUP and including all views in between.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): The hon. Gentleman refers to the ad hoc Committee. Can he give any indication how many of the people who served on the Committee were lawyers, and whether that has any relevance to their independence?

Mr. Blunt: No and no; I do not have the slightest idea about the status of legal education of the members of the ad hoc Committee.

It is plain that the Law Society of Northern Ireland has found it extremely easy to convince a very wide range of people that upholding the independence of the legal profession and making that a duty in the Bill is a sensible way of proceeding. I am still waiting to hear from the Minister arguments that convince me otherwise. We did not hear such arguments in Committee, where I withdrew the amendment because the Minister had the opportunity subsequently to speak to the Law Society of Northern Ireland, but where I said that if, following those conversations, he failed to convince me, I would table and press an amendment on Report. I note that Liberal Democrat Members have put their names to the proposal and I have no reason to believe that other parties have changed their position.

Mr. Mallon *rose—*

Mr. Blunt: I hope that I am not about to be corrected.

Mr. Mallon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way again. I dearly wish to support him because independence should run from top to bottom in the process that we are considering. However, what might the legal profession be independent of?

Mr. Blunt: The hon. Gentleman deliberately tries to draw me into difficult territory. It has been alleged that both sides of the community in Northern Ireland have exerted some influence on the legal profession. An example was given in Committee of a dispute between two clients and their lawyers. The law requires papers relating to one side to be discovered. It is plainly in the interest of the client whose papers are to be discovered for that not to happen. However, the lawyer who represents him would have a duty as an independent member of the profession to abide by the law and make the papers available to the other side. In that example, the lawyer-client relationship becomes subservient to the lawyer's duty to be independent and to stand up for his role as an independent member of the legal profession. I am grateful to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough for the example.

I cannot give specific instances and I shall therefore deal in generalities. That is probably best. However, the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) is plainly referring to the fact that allegations have been made that some members of the legal profession in Northern Ireland got too close to their clients in their political views and objectives, abused their legal position and did not maintain the independence of the profession.

The clause is aspirational rather than detailed. However, the amendment, which would provide for a duty to sustain the independence of the legal profession, is another prop to support such independence. It could work in many circumstances, but it is important in the circumstances of Northern Ireland. In Committee, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough asked what would be the consequences if we were considering not the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, but a Justice (Zimbabwe) Bill. The legal profession in Zimbabwe has to operate under different pressures to maintain its independence. It is under pressure from the state and from armed terror from other semi-state organisations. The case for trying to sustain the independence of the legal profession in those circumstances is beyond peradventure.

Everyone supports the independence of the legal profession. I have not presented arguments that went over exactly the same ground in Committee, but the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh will remember the discussions about the United Nations declarations and the special rapporteur. The Government must present a case against the amendment to convince hon. Members that it is not worth including in the Bill an exhortation to support

[Mr. Blunt]

the independence of the legal profession. After all, the measure places a duty on all those involved to sustain the independence of the judiciary.

I note that the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh did not say that he would not support the amendment, although I am not wholly convinced that I have his full support, and I would be grateful if he could clarify the position. The hon. Gentleman was, however, convinced—as were his party and all other parties in this House and in the Assembly—of the merits of putting such a measure into the Bill, so I hope that the Government will be as well. I look forward to hearing the report of the Minister's conversations with the Law Society of Northern Ireland, to see whether he has been able to identify with them whether the proposals would have any unintended consequences. I cannot for the life of me see that there would be any, and if the Minister is unable to convince me of his argument, I shall wish to press the matter to a vote.

Mr. Mallon: I want to make one brief point on the matters raised by the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt), both in Committee and today. I find it difficult to understand the type of society that he is envisaging in which the legal profession would be independent. I would first have to understand what it is to be independent from. I do not see any difficulty with members of the legal profession not being independent politically. As a matter of fact, when one looks around this House, and most other political forums, one sees quite a number of highly independent-minded members of the legal profession who have party allegiances. So the hon. Gentleman cannot be referring to that. If it is not that, what can it be?

We must be very careful, because on a previous occasion in a previous Committee, reference was made to members of the legal profession in the north of Ireland and, less than one week later, one of them was shot dead. I always have that in mind and I have no doubt that that is not what the hon. Gentleman was referring to. I find it difficult, therefore, to understand what this independence is. The legal profession is, by its very nature, aligned in many ways, and it always will be.

Let us posit the kind of question that will immediately be asked post-devolution. There will be appointments to be made, and those appointees will be drawn from people who have lived and worked in Northern Ireland all their lives. Does that mean that someone who was aligned with the Ulster Unionist party, the Democratic Unionist party, Sinn Fein, the Social Democratic and Labour party or—dare I say it—the Alliance party would automatically be disqualified from consideration for such appointments? I do not believe that that would be the case. Nor do I believe that that has happened in the past, from the foundation of the state to the prorogation of the Stormont Parliament, when the Attorney-General for Northern Ireland was de facto a practising member of the then Unionist party, which became the Official Unionist party and subsequently the Ulster Unionist party.

None of those Attorneys-General was independent in the political sense to which I think the hon. Member may be referring. Perhaps he could again try to help me with my difficulty in understanding what the independence to which he refers is independence of or from. I would be inclined to support him if he could give an indication of precisely the effect that the amendment would have, and of the reason behind it. I hope that he will take the opportunity to clarify the matter before the debate concludes.

Mr. Blunt: I am able to answer the hon. Gentleman directly. The best way of doing so is to quote paragraph 3.53 of the review, which states:

> "Principal 16 of the Basic Principles"—

the United Nations basic principles on the role of lawyers—

> "also provides that governments shall ensure that lawyers are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference. In his report on his mission to the United Kingdom in 1998, the Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers, Mr Param Cumaraswamy, expressed particular concern about the fact that lawyers in Northern Ireland who had represented those accused of terrorist offences had been subjected to intimidation, harassment or improper interference and had been identified with their clients or with their client's causes. The Special Rapporteur welcomed the Northern Ireland Law Society's decision to establish a complaints procedure to enable solicitors to complain to the Society about any agency within either the criminal or civil justice system which had allegedly impugned or threatened their independence, professionalism and integrity."

I cannot put it better.

4.15 pm

Mr. Mallon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his compelling reply. I am grateful that he has had the opportunity to clarify the matter. I am totally at one with him—and with the Cumaraswamy report—in terms of the protection of members of the legal profession against the threats, intimidation, physical violence and, indeed, death that has been meted out to people in the north of Ireland. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his research and for the clarity with which he explained the matter to the House, which has brought much more definition to it.

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the responsibility to maintain the independence of the legal profession is entirely different from the responsibility that all Governments maintain of giving protection to the legal profession? Is not the weakness of the amendment that it does not clarify who is responsible for maintaining the independence of the legal profession? It is clearly the Government's responsibility to maintain the independence of the judiciary, but I fail to understand, perhaps because I have no legal training, how the Government can take on the responsibility of maintaining the independence of the legal profession. Surely that is completely different from maintaining the security and physical protection of the legal profession.

Mr. Mallon: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. Surely, however, it is the Government's objective to ensure that the legal profession is independent. And how better can one enshrine an objective than to put it in legislation? The hon. Gentleman is right that there is a clear distinction between the responsibility of a Government to protect those who are involved in the implementation of law and the profession's responsibility to protect its independence. In normal societies, that distinction would apply, but the north of Ireland has fallen in between those two positions for the past 30 years. On balance, it might be necessary to have the type of protection and influence—the good that the Government might provide—that the hon. Member for Reigate recommends.

Mr. Tom Harris: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that a provision to ensure the independence of the legal profession is perhaps out of place in a Bill such as this, as it is an aspiration rather than a course of action that the Government can pursue? Is not this type of amendment therefore completely out of place in a Bill such as this?

Mr. Mallon: Again, the hon. Gentleman is right in terms of the drafting of Bills. However, if he had had the pleasure of serving on the Committee that considered the Bill, he would have known that we were often told that aspirations are not the stuff of which legislation is made.

Mr. Harris: May I inform the hon. Gentleman that I would have been delighted to serve on the Committee, but that I was otherwise detained on the Committee that considered the Proceeds of Crime Bill?

Mr. Mallon: I well understand the hon. Gentleman's reasons for not serving on the Committee, although I take his remarks today to mean that he is volunteering to serve on a similar Committee in the future. The question to which he has drawn our attention will raise its head in almost every debate that we have about independence, and especially the independence of the judiciary. The same points will arise when we debate later amendments, and I hope that those who are nailing their colours to the mast of the independence of the judiciary and the legal profession will reflect such views on later amendments. It is essential that we do not consider aspirations as something for which we cannot legislate—neither should we consider principles as something for which we should not legislate simply because of the difficulties of drafting.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Harris) has spotted a difficulty with the amendment moved by the hon. Member for Reigate. I sympathise with the amendment, and I thank the hon. Member for Reigate for his clarification of it.

Lady Hermon: It would be helpful if I could quote further from paragraph 3.53 of the review, which was referred to by the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt). The review team said in heavy, bold type that it agreed

> "with the Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers that government has a responsibility to provide the machinery for an effective and independent investigation of all threats made against lawyers and note the role of the Police Ombudsman if such allegations relate to the actions of police officers. Further, we endorse his recommendation that training seminars should be organised to enable police officers and members of other criminal justice agencies to appreciate the important role that defence lawyers play".

However, having considered Mr. Cumaraswamy's report, the review team did not follow it up by recommending that a provision should be written into the Bill upholding the independence of the legal profession. The review team specified other ways of dealing with intimidation.

Mr. Mallon: The hon. Lady makes a valuable point. It is possible that the legal draftsmen advised that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to find the wording to meet the objective that the hon. Member for Reigate has identified. On balance, I believe that the hon. Gentleman has a valid point and, on balance, I will support it.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): It would be helpful if we could know what has been done, following the recommendation in paragraph 3.53, to train the police on the issues mentioned. The independence of the legal profession is of the utmost importance, and its members should not be intimidated in any way.

I was on a Committee with my hon. Friend the Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) when the statement was made that was followed some time later by the death of Pat Finucane. We know from what they have said themselves and from public documents that the people responsible for the intimidation in that case were, in fact, employees of the state and of the Government. We know that intimidation of Rosemary Nelson also took place and we also know—this is well documented—of the comments made about defence solicitors on both sides of the divide and about who they were and what they were doing. It was said that messages should be conveyed. That is an important point.

It has been suggested that the Bill is aspirational. The whole of clause 1 is declaratory and aspirational. If we are to defend the independence of the judiciary, we must equally defend the independence of the legal profession from which the judiciary is drawn. I am only sorry that the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt), in moving the amendment, did not give more details. He mentioned the discovery of documents, but it would be the responsibility of the solicitor to follow the procedures of the court.

I should like the Minister to tell us what protection is given to solicitors, who, after all, are officers of the High Court. Presumably they fall under the declaratory part of the clause dealing with the independence of the judiciary, because I am sure that it applies not only to judges but to all those involved in the administration of justice, with the judges at the top and the Lord Chief Justice at the apex. We need further exploration of precisely what is meant by the independence of the judiciary; how far it goes; and what its limits are. Does it apply merely to the person sitting on the Bench, or does it extend to the whole question of administration?

Mr. Browne: The debate on this comparatively small amendment shows how interesting these discussions can be, and how interesting they were in Committee. Minor amendments can engage us for a significant time. The Bill requires those with responsibility for the administration of justice to uphold the continued independence of the judiciary. It is not possible for me to answer in a few sentences the question posed by my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) about how far that stretches. In any event, I would not wish to be prescriptive, as that would be unhelpful. However, the meaning seems to me to be quite extensive. I am certain that anyone who tried to interfere with officers of the court would be in breach of their responsibility to uphold the continued independence of the judiciary.

This provision was recommended by the review because of the paramount importance of an independent judiciary. Amendment No. 1 deliberately goes beyond the review and would extend the protection to the legal profession. The amendment was debated in some detail in

[Mr. Browne]

Committee, and I said then that I could not accept it until I understood more clearly what it was intended to achieve and until it had been tested to show its potential consequences. I do not accept for a minute that it lies with me to flesh out the amendment's intended or unintended consequences: it lies with those who seek to change the law to explain why it is necessary and what it is intended to achieve. I have endeavoured to do that at some length and in detail on other parts of the Bill.

It goes without saying that the Government fully support the independence of the legal profession, but it is another matter to include in the Bill declaratory statements that have unpredictable effects. I cannot agree to include such statements in the Bill unless I am confident that they are needed and that they will have the desired effects, and that, importantly, they will have no unintended consequences. I was not convinced by the examples given in Committee, even though they came from the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier), who is an experienced practitioner in the courts. With all due respect to the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt), he gave the rather lame example of the discovery of documents. I was not convinced by that argument, and I believe that the other examples that have been given are already covered by existing law.

Above all, I am far from clear what this duty is supposed to mean. It is clear enough and accepted internationally that ensuring the independence of the judiciary is part of the duty of every state, but ensuring the independence of the legal profession has the potential to take us into all sorts of tricky regulatory questions. The example in the report of the special rapporteur is instructive. He commends internal regulation—self-regulation by the profession—as the answer to the problem, not a statutory provision.

4.30 pm

It seems to me, and I have heard nothing to the contrary, that if the amended clause is to mean anything it must imply an extension of Government regulation to this area. Although I do not think that that is the profession's intention, the Law Society has expertly promoted support for an amendment along those lines.

I repeat what I said in Committee: I have read some supportive submissions and although I have yet to be convinced that the Law Society gave anybody detailed and adequate reasons as to why they should back the amendment, it has managed to raise that support. Consequently, I agreed to invite the Law Society to meet me to discuss the points for which it has gleaned support. I did so, and we had a constructive discussion on a number of matters, including my concern that there may be unintended regulatory consequences, which it would not welcome, from such a statutory provision.

The Law Society confirmed to me that it jealously guards self-regulation of the profession and thinks that important to its independence, which I understand and support. I also asked it to consider why it seeks to restrict the statutory provision to its members, as officers of the court, thereby excluding other officers of the court. Why are its members in a different position from other officers of the court? I am not saying that I convinced it, but I am pleased to report that I was persuasive enough for it to agree to reflect on those points and come back to me with responses.

I have yet to receive a response or any further representations from the Law Society, however, so my discussions with the amendment's principal promoter are not yet concluded. I remain to be convinced by its or any other arguments, so I ask that the amendment be withdrawn.

Mr. Blunt: The Minister has not advanced the position at all since we discussed the matter in Committee. He says that the Law Society of Northern Ireland agreed to reflect and that he may have convinced it, but that, I fear, simply reflects its politeness. Indeed, had I been in discussions with the Minister, I might well agree to reflect on his point of view so as not to leave him with a disagreeable impression.

The Law Society of Northern Ireland put its points with singular robustness and force. Its submission says:

> "The independence of the judiciary and the prosecution process is correctly identified as a key issue in maintaining public confidence in the administration of justice in this jurisdiction. This is no less so in respect of those charged with the assertion of rights within the judicial process. In a situation such as Northern Ireland where it is thought necessary to have a statutory statement and guarantee of the independence of the judiciary, there is a parallel need in the same context to affirm the independence of the legal profession."

For precisely the reasons to which the Minister and the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) alluded, I shall not get drawn into individual cases. The very example, the suggestions and the accusations that have been thrown around relate to previous discussion of individual cases. We all know what we are talking about.

The Minister alluded to unpredictable consequences—unintended regulatory consequences—but did not identify any. The Law Society places great value on the amendment and has managed to convince every single party in Northern Ireland that it is the right thing to do. The Bill is to assert the independence of the judiciary in the Northern Ireland situation and there appear to be no concrete reasons for rejecting the amendment.

Lady Hermon: I want to tease out the hon. Gentleman's difficulty with the clause as drafted. Is his concern that people will not get a fair trial?

Mr. Blunt: No. The central purpose of the amendment is to protect the independence of the legal profession. The hon. Lady's party colleagues, along with all the other members of the Assembly ad hoc Committee, agreed the following statement:

> "In their evidence to the Committee, representatives of the Law Society of Northern Ireland . . . highlighted the important role that is played by solicitors in the criminal justice system. One of the key aspects of their role is that they exercise their responsibilities in a manner 'free from political, financial or other influences that may affect [their] independence'. This was recognised by the CJRG"—

the review group—

> "in their report, which made particular reference to the role played by defence lawyers and the nature of their relationship with their clients, and the negative impact of a misunderstanding of that relationship."

Indeed, the second recommendation of that Committee, supported unanimously, was:

> "That a new clause be inserted which acknowledges and safeguards the continuing independence and impartiality of the legal profession."

The Minister has not even begun to make a case against that.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 152, Noes 275.

Division No. 175] **[4.36 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cotter, Brian
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McGrady, Eddie
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mallon, Seamus
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Dr. Julian Lewis and
Mr. Desmond Swayne.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burnside, David
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet

Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Hermon, Lady
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kelly, Ruth
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Martlew, Eric
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ivor Caplin and
Mr. Ian Pearson.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Last week, on 26 February, the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions made a statement in the House in which he led Members to believe that personnel problems in his Department had been resolved. I learned this afternoon that Ian Jones, head of press at that Department, had been suspended. Have you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, received any indication from the Secretary of State that he wishes to come to the House and make a further statement about this worrying development?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): I have no knowledge of the matter to which the hon. Lady refers, and I have had no indication that a statement is intended.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the House that we have a tight schedule today, and that this is taking time out of it.

Mr. MacKay: Further to the point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall bear in mind the fact that, as you say, we have a very tight schedule within which to deal with an important Bill; but is it not outrageous that three separate heads of press and media at that Department have been sacked or forced to leave? Is it not essential for the Secretary of State, immediately after our debates on the Bill—which I agree should be conducted speedily, and concluded by 10 pm—to return to the Dispatch Box? I am not suggesting that that should interrupt the main business, but it would enable us to get to the truth.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman has made his point, and I have nothing to add to the statement that I made earlier.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We have an extremely tight schedule, and we must move on. *[Interruption.]* I have dealt with the point of order. I do not wish to deal with further points of order relating to a point of order with which I have already dealt.

Clause 2

INTRODUCTORY

Mr. Browne: I beg to move amendment No. 104, in page 2, line 5, at end insert—

'(other than the office of Lord Chief Justice or Lord Justice of Appeal),'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Government amendment No. 174.

Amendment No. 169, in clause 5, page 4, line 35, at end insert—

'(8A) Without prejudice to subsection (8), the Commission must, as far as practicable, exercise its functions to select persons to be appointed or recommended for appointment in order to secure that the judiciary is reflective of the community in Northern Ireland.'.

Amendment No. 28, in clause 6, page 5, line 33, after "office", insert—

'for a maximum of three months'.

Amendment No. 70, in clause 8, page 6, line 23, after "by", insert "the Lord Chancellor or".

Amendment No. 29, in page 6, line 23, after "jointly", insert—

'with the agreement of the Prime Minister'.

Amendment No. 30, in page 6, line 30, leave out—

'the Lord Chief Justice or'.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Ms Rosie Winterton): Everyone is leaving. Was it something my hon. Friend said?

Mr. Browne: And to think that I imagined they might be interested in legislation.

In Committee, the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) expressed a fear that the First and Deputy First Minister's order-making power in clause 2 could be used to bring the offices of Lord Chief Justice and Lord Justice of Appeal within the remit of the Judicial Appointments Commission. I assure the hon. Lady that that was neither the intention of the review nor that of our policy. Furthermore, any attempt to make the Judicial Appointments Commission responsible for those senior offices in the future would require a cross-community vote in the Northern Ireland Assembly, and the agreement of the Lord Chief Justice.

Although those are in themselves strong safeguards, I have decided to put the matter beyond all doubt by means of amendment No. 104. I am grateful to the hon. Lady for bringing it to my attention, so that I could concentrate on it. The amendment would make it clear that the First Minister and Deputy First Minister may not use their order-making power to bring the office of Lord Chief Justice or that of Lord Justice of Appeal within the commission's remit.

Let me now deal with amendment No. 174. In Committee, Members expressed concern about the fact that sub-committees of the Judicial Appointments Commission could be made up entirely of members who were not members of the commission itself. The thinking behind the original drafting of schedule 2 was that if committees and sub-committees were always required to include commission members, an unfair imposition could be placed on their time. However, we are now in a better position to assess the commission's likely work load, and accept that the degree of flexibility envisaged in the original drafting may not now be required. The amendment therefore makes it clear that when the commission delegates any of its functions to a committee or sub-committee, the committee or sub-committee must always include a member of the commission and unless that member is a lay member, a lay member or person eligible to be one.

I turn now to amendment No. 169. The review suggested that those responsible for judicial appointments should seek to ensure that the judiciary is reflective of Northern Ireland society. My hon. Friend the Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) proposes putting that in the Bill. In drafting the legislation, we have included the merit principle which the review made clear should be the overriding criterion in making appointments. Unlike the various statutory commissions on which we have placed the statutory duty to ensure representativeness, I see some difficulties in applying the same requirement to the appointment of judges. I recollect that on more than one occasion in Committee I went into these difficulties in some detail.

The amendment makes it clear that merit is the overriding principle, but that is immediately put in jeopardy in the amendment. It is vital that the judiciary continue to be viewed with respect and high regard by all sections of the community. I fear that the amendment would allow insidious suggestions to be made about future appointees—for example, that they were appointed not on merit but to even up the numbers. That is not in the interests of justice in Northern Ireland.

I share the sentiment behind the amendment and I, along with all Members, wish the judiciary to reflect the community that it serves. The best way to ensure a reflective judiciary is by ensuring a suitably balanced pool of eligible candidates who apply for vacancies as they arise. My hon. Friend will know that the judges of the future come from the pool of lawyers—whether they be solicitors or barristers—Queen's counsels and law students of today. This collective group is already highly mixed in terms of gender and community background. With time, the strict application of the merit principle will automatically lead to where we want to go. I hope, therefore, that my hon. Friend will withdraw his amendment.

Lady Hermon: The Minister will recall that on at least one occasion in Committee I mentioned that we already have a High Court judgment in the Evelyn White case in which the judge, quite rightly, took the interpretation of the words "representative of the community" from the context of the Public Processions (Northern Ireland) Act 1998. Will the Minister therefore go some way towards including words such as "representative" or "reflective" in the Bill, so that women and ethnic minorities will be included in judicial appointments?

Mr. Browne: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. This issue exercised us on more than one occasion in Committee and I will endeavour to make myself clear. I repeat that I share the aspirations of all Members that the judiciary of Northern Ireland should be reflective of the community that it serves. However, I am adamant and convinced that that is best achieved by an

[Mr. Browne]

appropriate fair and transparent system that operates on the basis of merit. I am reinforced in that view by the people who are coming through in the profession and their reflectiveness of the community of Northern Ireland. In my view, the future for reflectiveness and representativeness should be left to the principle of merit and the infrastructure set out in the Bill that ensures a transparent system which will allow the best lawyers who want to be judges, wherever they come from, to become judges.

Lady Hermon: I appreciate the Minister's giving way again. This is just a small point. He said that the people coming through would be representative, and I take it that that means representative of women and ethnic minorities. How many women and members of ethnic minorities are coming through at any stage, at any level, in the judiciary in Northern Ireland?

5 pm

Mr. Browne: I do not have the precise figures and I will write to the hon. Lady with them. She will have her finger on the pulse of this better than I do, having taught some of those concerned recently. But having made inquiries, I am assured that, if anything, women make up more than 50 per cent. of those who have been seeking to join the profession; I say that from memory. It would probably be better for me to write to her about the precise figures. She is persistent and consistent on this issue, and rightly so.

The issue must be addressed across the legal profession and not just at the top. Unless the matter is addressed by the Law Society, the universities and the Bar Council, we will get at the top tokenism of the worst kind, which will interfere with the independence of the judiciary. It is my job in terms of the Bill to create an infrastructure and a process that will fiercely and jealously guard the independence of the judiciary. I do not believe that including in the Bill provisions that will allow people to argue that, whatever the merit of an individual candidate at some point in the future, he ought to be appointed to even up the numbers to create some perception of balance, will serve the people of Northern Ireland. I do not think that the hon. Lady is unconvinced by that argument, but I will write to her on her questions.

Amendment No. 28 would place a time limit of three months on the suspension of the Lord Chief Justice in a situation where the Prime Minister and Lord Chancellor were considering making motions for the presentation of an address to Her Majesty for his removal. We expect action under this clause to be a rare event, if ever. If action were ever taken, we hope that the necessary steps would be taken quickly. However, it would be a mistake to tie our hands too much in the way proposed. Clause 6 is only ever likely to be invoked in extremely serious cases. We cannot know for sure how much time a tribunal might take to report. I would therefore urge hon. Members to withdraw the amendment.

The effect of amendment No. 70 would be to give the Lord Chancellor a role in the removal from office of the Lord Chief Justice. The process of removal from judicial office is very much linked to the process of appointment. Given that the Lord Chancellor, after devolution, will not have a role in the appointment of the Lord Chief Justice—or, for that matter, of any member of the judiciary—it would seem inappropriate that he should have a role in considering removal from this judicial office. In Committee it was argued from some quarters that the Lord Chancellor should continue to have a role in the appointment of judges, even after devolution.

The Government's position was clear then and remains so now. It would be inconsistent to devolve that function while retaining a role for the Lord Chancellor. It would be equally inconsistent to retain the Lord Chancellor's involvement in the removal process once the responsibility for judicial appointments had been devolved. I ask therefore that the amendment be withdrawn.

Lady Hermon: The First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, acting jointly, have to convene a tribunal for the removal of the Lord Chief Justice, the most senior judicial post in Northern Ireland. What will happen if the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister are unable to act jointly and cannot agree? Surely we should have a fall-back measure, under which the Lord Chancellor is able to convene such a tribunal. "We are not planning for failure" is not an appropriate answer.

Mr. Browne: The answer will not be my stock answer, which was, "We are not planning for failure." This is a serious and important step that it is envisaged will be triggered in circumstances where the First Minister and Deputy First Minister can act jointly.

Amendments Nos. 29 and 30 seek to retain an inappropriate role for Westminster in regard to setting up a tribunal to consider the removal of the Lord Chief Justice after devolution. As I have said, the Government recognise that tenure is of central importance to judicial independence. We fully support the principle of giving full-time judges and magistrates tenure during good behaviour until statutory retirement. A properly constituted judicial tribunal is, however, a key part of securing a transparent and accountable judiciary, and clause 8 provides for such a tribunal.

Amendments Nos. 29 and 30 seek to replace consultation with the Prime Minister with a need to obtain his approval before a tribunal can be convened to consider removal of the Lord Chief Justice. The amendments are contrary to the spirit of the review and, more importantly, to the spirit of devolution. Although the First Minister and Deputy First Minister can convene a tribunal to consider removal of the Lord Chief Justice, clause 6 makes it clear that they cannot remove him on the basis of that tribunal alone. Only the Prime Minister and Lord Chancellor may do that, under clause 6, by making a motion for the presentation of an address to Her Majesty.

I am slightly mystified as to why the Prime Minister's approval should be required twice. It is sensible that the First Minister and Deputy First Minister should consult the Prime Minister when they consider convening a tribunal to remove a senior judge in Northern Ireland, but it would be unnecessary to require his approval at that stage as well as when a motion was to be made.

Mr. Blunt: I support the Government amendments, which improve the Bill. The Government have recognised a difficulty by tabling amendment No. 104 to protect the Lord Chief Justice and the lords justice of appeal against being included in a schedule by any First Minister and Deputy First Minister with whom their relationship was unsuccessful. Equally, Government amendment No. 174 improves the Bill and I am greatly reassured that members of the commission will sit on the sub-committees. That is necessary, and I am grateful for it.

I assume that that change follows consideration within the Minister's Department of the work load that will be placed on the Commission rather than of how much delegation will be required. That provides satisfactory evidence that proper consideration in Committee improves legislation. It is a great pity that we shall shortly move on to discuss clauses that we never debated in Committee.

Amendment No. 28 raises issues about the length of time for which suspensions may take place. It deals with circumstances in which the Lord Chief Justice has been on the wrong end of a tribunal decision. Clearly, that would be extremely serious, and one hopes that it will never occur, and certainly that it will not happen regularly. Clause 6(8) states:

> "If the Prime Minister and Lord Chancellor are considering the making of motions for the presentation of an address to Her Majesty in relation to the Lord Chief Justice, the Prime Minister may suspend him from office".

The point is that simply "considering" an address will give them the authority to suspend the Lord Chief Justice. If we are to protect his position against politicians who may act unfairly, and if we seek to uphold the independence of the judiciary, it is necessary to put a duty on those politicians to place the address before Parliament in a timely manner.

I can be persuaded that three months is not the right period. Producing the address may take longer, although I think three months fairly generous, given that the Prime Minister and Lord Chancellor would present an address only after a tribunal had taken place and most of the evidence on which Parliament would make a decision about suspension would already be in the open.

The purpose of the amendment is to protect the Lord Chief Justice from the arbitrary use of power under the Bill. I do not want to press the issue now; it can be considered at a later stage and the Government can decide whether they want to pick it up and run with it, as they have done with their amendments Nos. 104 and 174. They can make a judgment as to whether the position of the Lord Chief Justice would need protection in the extreme and rare circumstances to which I referred. I think that the Lord Chief Justice would need protection. The period of three months may be too long, too short or about right. That point can be subject to further reflection.

I hope that the Government will reflect on the matter and that they may be persuaded to consider it in another place and table amendments to protect the position of the Lord Chief Justice from the arbitrary use of power in extreme circumstances. One hopes that the provisions would never be used—I fully acknowledge that—but if they are to be set up, we must consider the protection of the independence of the judiciary. A provision along the lines of amendment No. 28 would do that.

Amendment No. 29 would require the agreement of the Prime Minister if the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister wanted to initiate a tribunal to consider the removal of the Lord Chief Justice. That distinguishes the position of the Lord Chief Justice from that of lords justice of appeal by making a higher test, as the requirement is only to consult the Prime Minister about a tribunal to remove a lord justice of appeal.

My argument runs counter to the Minister's. His point was that as the Prime Minister would have to agree to present an address to Parliament to effect the result of the tribunal we did not need to ask him at the beginning of the process. However, the removal of a Lord Chief Justice is an immensely serious matter, so there is a necessity for the Prime Minister to be convinced—at least prima facie—that he would be minded to present such an address following a tribunal. It would be extremely unfortunate if the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister consulted the Prime Minister, set up a tribunal to which the Prime Minister was opposed and—after consideration of the evidence—he did not want to make an address to Parliament.

Before a tribunal takes place, the case against a Lord Chief Justice is, in essence, the case for the prosecution. Usually, the tribunal would offer the Lord Chief Justice an opportunity to make the case that he should not be removed from office. Such a state of affairs would, of course, be extremely unhappy. It is therefore important that the Prime Minister's consent be obtained at the beginning of the process. The private or public evidence of misbehaviour by the Lord Chief Justice would be available to the Prime Minister—as it would be to the First Minister and Deputy First Minister—before the proceedings were initiated. The position of the Lord Chief Justice can only get better once he has the chance to answer the allegations made against him.

The Prime Minister should have the opportunity to say, "I am convinced of the weight of the case against the Lord Chief Justice before the start of the formal proceedings. I therefore do not agree to them." That is why I have proposed amendments Nos. 29 and 30.

I do not intend to press these matters at present. We did not get the chance to discuss them in Committee, but I have put them on the record. I hope that the Government will reflect on the amendments and adopt them as their own—as they have adopted other amendments and ideas during the Bill's proceedings. Obviously, our purpose here as legislators is to improve the legislation, and this is an opportunity to put those matters on the record and debate them.

5.15 pm

On amendment No. 70, in the name of the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon), I fear that I find myself in agreement with the Minister. I am sorry to disagree with the hon. Lady—

Lady Hermon *indicated assent.*

Mr. Blunt: It is indeed a frightful position to be in, and I am much more comfortable when I agree with her.

On the provisions and amendments concerning the role of the Lord Chancellor in the justice system of Northern Ireland, there is a difference between the hon. Lady's party and Her Majesty's Opposition. We take the same view as the Government's—that if justice is to be devolved and the Lord Chief Justice is the head of the judiciary in Northern Ireland, he must assume all the proper responsibilities. We will have another chance later

[Mr. Blunt]

today to explore some of the other duties that the Lord Chancellor retains under the Bill, and the Minister will be able to explain exactly what happens when justice is devolved.

On amendment No. 169, in the name of the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon), I again found the Minister's arguments convincing. I am pleased that he is able to report to the House that the shape that the legal profession is taking in Northern Ireland will deliver the objectives that we all share. The people who today are law students, or young barristers and solicitors, will form the judiciary of tomorrow, and in the course of time the judiciary will inevitably reflect the community as we all want it to.

I accept the Minister's arguments about the potentially pernicious consequences of amendment No. 169, which would be wholly unintended. Merit must remain the first principle and rule in the appointment of the judiciary. That is connected with the arguments that we had in Committee about protecting the religious and cultural identity of members of the judiciary, and about tracing such information only for the group rather than for individuals. That is aimed at protecting their independence as far as possible.

I hope that the arguments in support of our amendments will commend themselves to the Minister—upon reflection. I also hope that that reflection will be rather more detailed than that which I suspect the Law Society undertook on the previous question.

Mr. Browne: I shall be polite, at least.

Mr. Blunt: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be more than polite; I hope that he will reflect on what we have said and come back with amendments to address our concerns in another place.

Mr. Mallon: I listened with interest to what the Minister said about my amendment, and I find it increasingly difficult to understand his underlying fear. Mine is not a pernicious amendment in any sense; it is a benign, gentle amendment, which reflects what the Minister says is the Government's intention. It also adequately reflects the position represented in the criminal justice review.

I feel that I should address two points that the Minister made earlier. He said that this gentle, innocuous little amendment, which is in tune with his objectives and those of the Government, could put the merit principle in jeopardy—I believe that those were his words. I am trying to think how that could happen, and I shall listen further to the Minister to find out. I await his explanation with interest, because I would have thought that, far from placing anything in jeopardy, my gentle, innocuous little amendment would do something else.

The Minister also said that he is convinced that the merit principle will automatically lead to a situation in which such an amendment will not be necessary. We have all thought that at certain times in our lives. Those of us who have lived in Northern Ireland for a long time thought it not just for a few years but for decade after decade. There are those in many walks of life who are still buying that idea and to whom it is still being sold, and quite effectively. We are told that the merit principle will automatically lead to changes in the civil service in the north of Ireland—changes in gender, ethnic groupings and community divisions. The reality is that those changes will take much longer than my lifetime, or what is left of it. We should not buy the notion that if we take these measures and say nothing about them, they will automatically lead to changes such as those described by the Minister.

I challenge both of the Minister's assertions because at the heart of the amendment is one word, "legitimacy"—the legitimacy of what we are trying to do. If the measures are to enjoy that legitimacy, there should be representativeness of the community in Northern Ireland. The review pointed that out clearly when it said:

> "the extent to which the composition of the judiciary reflects the society which it serves is a confidence issue and has implications for its legitimacy in the eyes of many of the community. If there is a perception that judges come predominantly from a narrow pool, then there is liable to be concern that the way in which the law as a whole is developed may be unduly influenced by one particular set of values."

Those are profound words, and they are even more profound when they are applied to Northern Ireland because at the moment, regrettably, the judiciary is not representative of society as a whole. The Minister has no figures on that; the Government have no figures on it, but all the Members from the north of Ireland who are sitting here know that the judiciary is not representative. Let me be more explicit: women are almost completely unrepresented in the judiciary; ethnic groupings, which are large and growing in the north of Ireland, are largely not represented; nationalists are not fully represented and nor is the wing of Unionism which would tend towards a more robust approach to the Union. Those are facts of life, and they will not automatically change.

That is supposition because the Government do not monitor such data. They monitor such data in every other walk of life but there is a remarkable mystique surrounding this part of life which is reflected in the Bill. The Bill says that a lay appointment must be not only reflective but representative of the community, but an appointment to the judiciary cannot be either reflective or representative of the community. It is okay for the layman; it is not all right for the judge. Frankly, that is not all right for the people of the north of Ireland because we are all ultimately equal and we should all be treated with equality.

It goes without saying that I fully accept the importance of merit in making judicial appointments. Clause 5(8) states that the selection of a person for judicial appointments

> "must be made solely on the basis of merit."

I agree with that. However, I and many others are concerned that, taken alone, the requirement to make appointments solely on merit might limit the ability to take the appropriate affirmation action recommended in the review.

Certainly, without a duty to secure a representative judiciary, in so far as is practicable, there would be no obligation to engage in those affirmative action measures, yet not one of them derogates from the merit principle in any way. The Government themselves have stated that they are committed to implementing those measures, and they are set out specifically in paragraph 6.85 and 6.11 of the review.

Lady Hermon: I rise simply to draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to a provision in the agreement that clearly states that the British Government will have a duty

"to promote equality of opportunity in relation to religion and political opinion; gender; race",

among other things. Those words clearly impose a positive duty on the Government to take action to promote equality of opportunity for women and ethnic minorities. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will regard that as helpful.

Mr. Mallon: I take the point that the hon. Lady makes, but I am not convinced. The agreement also obliges both Governments to ensure parity of esteem, but we shall discuss that matter later. To answer the hon. Lady directly, we are dealing with legislation and we have a duty to ensure that those who make such appointments have a duty to do so in a way that is not contrary to the merit principle, that is in tune with that principle and that reflects the community in the desired way. As the Minister said earlier, that has been done previously by imposing a duty on the appointing authority to ensure representativeness in so far as is practicable.

For example, the Secretary of State has a duty to ensure representativeness in so far as is practicable when making appointments to the Policing Board, the Parades Commission, the Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission. I do not regard that as pernicious, nor do I regard any of those boards as pernicious in the sense that people were not appointed on merit. I believe that there is a substantial weakness in the argument that proposes that, if a Government face their responsibilities in legislating, somehow or other they derogate from the highest standards, including the merit principle.

I do not believe that the Policing Board was appointed on anything other than the type of merit standards that are required to keep that board afloat in Northern Ireland. I do not believe that the Parades Commission, the Human Rights Commission or the Equality Commission derogated from the merit principle in any way. I believe that we should challenge the Government's assertion that a gentle and innocuous amendment such as mine would somehow devalue the merit principle. It does not derogate from that principle; if it did so, whether in terms of the Policing Board, the Human Rights Commission, the Equality Commission or the Parades Commission, it would be illegal. I am not for one moment suggesting that the Government are acting illegally in respect of any of those bodies. However, we must ensure that proper regard is given to taking appropriate measures to help to ensure representativeness. Such measures could relate to public advertising, the operation of boards and the appointments process. The purity of the position that has been argued might emerge and what has been proposed might be effective, whatever it leads to over time, but I do not believe that that will happen. That has not been the experience in Northern Ireland.

5.30 pm

My amendment is designed to impose a duty on people who make appointments to the judiciary. I do not think that they should be without such a duty; they should not have 52 cards to play with. They should not have a free hand because they have a duty to ensure that the judiciary is not only appointed on the merit principle, but reflects the community that it serves. Is that asking too much of any legislation? Is it imposing too much on any commission? I do not believe so. My amendment is fully consistent with the review's recommendation that

"it should be a stated objective of whoever is responsible for appointments to engage in a programme of action to secure the development of a judiciary that is as reflective of Northern Ireland society, in particular by community background and gender, as can be achieved consistent with the overriding requirement of merit."

What better way is there to state such an objective than to enshrine it in legislation? I believe that my amendment, gentle and innocuous as it is, achieves that and I recommend it to the House.

Mrs. Patsy Calton (Cheadle): As it turns out, I want simply to express my support of the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon), who has been infinitely more eloquent than I could possibly be.

I was pleased to hear the Minister use the word "reflective" on at least half a dozen occasions. I am very pleased that he did so, given the arguments that we had in Committee about reflectiveness versus representativeness when we discussed the need to ensure that lay members of the Judicial Appointments Commission reflected the community. I am pleased if he has accepted the arguments that were advanced. I hope that he has done so, as the word "reflective" is more precise in doing what we are trying to achieve and perhaps less ambiguous than "representative".

I would like to support the views expressed by the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon). I agree that merit must be the principle on which judges should be appointed. But to argue that having a reflective group of people doing that job might mean that we end up with people who are not of the highest quality is to argue that women and people from ethnic minorities are less intelligent or less able to do their jobs. That is the current position, and it is nonsense. In Committee we argued strongly that positive action is needed to ensure that merit is recognised, because at the moment, in all sorts of ways, it certainly is not.

Mr. Browne: What does the hon. Lady think that part 1 of the Bill is about?

Mrs. Calton: I am sure that the Minister intends that merit should be recognised, but the problem is that leaving it out of the Bill means that it may not be. I hope that he will have another change of heart.

Mr. McNamara: I was surprised by my hon. Friend the Minister's comments, especially on the amendment moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon). I found nothing in it that seeks to undermine the independence of the judiciary or to prevent the appointment of men and women of merit from different communities.

I am worried about the fact that the very people who will adjudicate on matters involving equality, merit and the whole paraphernalia of human rights law in Northern Ireland will be the only people who are not subject to that legislation. It is nonsense to turn things upside down in

[Mr. McNamara]

that way. Nobody is trying to suggest that merit should go out of the window; certainly, my hon. Friend's amendment does not do so. It is in nobody's interests not to have judges of merit, distinction and independence. We want them to have all those qualities, but we also want them to be women and from ethnic minorities, to reflect the composition of the whole of society. As my hon. Friend said, they may have a background in the Democratic Unionist party, Sinn Fein, or whatever. If they have the qualities of experience, training and intellect, they will get through on merit, but they should also be reflective of society.

Judges will consider matters such as fair employment, human rights, the composition of the civil service and of local government and the operation of equality law in the private sector and in the professions, yet they will not be appointed under equivalent criteria. That is nonsense.

Mr. Browne: My hon. Friend neatly encapsulates the contradiction in his argument. One cannot guarantee that an individual judge who hears such a case in any circumstances is reflective of society in himself or herself. That cannot be achieved.

Mr. McNamara: With the greatest respect, that is not truly applicable. For a start, judges are allocated cases in a way that takes account of such factors. More important, what matters is the whole ambience of the process by which they are appointed. It is nonsense to argue that that should not apply to judges, but should apply to the upper echelons of the civil service, the police, the Policing Board and various other organisations, and then to say that middle-aged, mainly Protestant people are going to be judges and that we are not going to try to change that reflection of society.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Did I hear the hon. Gentleman correctly? Did he suggest that when more than one judge considers a case, that bench of judges should be reflective of the community?

Mr. McNamara: No, the hon. Gentleman did not understand me correctly. What I said was that, when the judges are selected, there should be an ambience that accepts this particular method, in which they are reflective and representative of society as a whole.

Lembit Öpik: Is not the hon. Gentleman saying that this is a matter of having a strategic commitment to reflectiveness in the entire system? To look at an individual case and say that a judge has to be one thing or another at that point does not negate the point that the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh have made. Does he not also agree that the Minister's resistance to this proposal is a good example of unjoined-up thinking, given that he himself has argued this case at other points in this debate?

Mr. McNamara: I could not have put it better myself.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I call Lady Hermon.

Lady Hermon: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was not quite sure whether the hon. Gentleman had finished, so I was playing safe.

I apologise to the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) if I did not appear to be helpful. I quoted from the Belfast agreement with the strong intention of being helpful to him. I believe that the Government should have a positive duty to promote equality of opportunity for women and ethnic minorities, and that that should be incorporated into the Bill by including words such as "representative" or "reflective". It was my intention to be helpful.

I want to go back to Government amendments Nos. 104 and 174, and to move the debate along a little. I appreciate the amendments that the Minister has tabled to deal with the ambiguity in clause 2—a subject that was raised in Committee. The clause states:

> "The First Minister and deputy First Minister,"—

I hesitate to read the next two words—

> "acting jointly, may by order amend Schedule 1 by—
> (a) adding an office".

The amendment makes it clear that "adding an office" refers to an office

> "other than the office of Lord Chief Justice or Lord Justice of Appeal".

I appreciate that, but the Minister and other members of the Committee will recall that I was concerned that High Court judges were listed in schedule 1 rather than being treated as being among the "most senior judicial offices" in Northern Ireland, as I think they should be.

The Minister was good enough to clarify the earlier ambiguity. Will he now clarify the ambiguity that still exists? If the First Minister and Deputy First Minister could, on a good day, agree to act jointly, could they omit an office such as that of High Court judge? If they were to omit such judges, what would happen to that office? Would it automatically fall into the category of most senior judicial appointments? What would happen if the First Minister and Deputy First Minister decided, by order, in their wisdom, to omit High Court judges? That appears to be an ambiguity that has been left unaddressed.

In tabling amendment No. 70, I proposed the alternative arrangement of the Lord Chancellor setting up a tribunal in the unlikely event of the removal of the Lord Chief Justice. I know that I do not have support for that proposal, but there seems to be a genuine problem here. It has been written into the Bill on so many occasions that the First Minister and Deputy First Minister will be obliged to act jointly. With the best will in the world, those posts might be occupied by two politicians who might not be able to act jointly, and there should be an alternative arrangement for very serious occasions such as the removal of the Lord Chief Justice. The fact that such an occurrence would be most unlikely gives me some reassurance that the First Minister and Deputy First Minister would take the responsibility seriously and reach agreement. In the light of that, I am quite happy not to press my amendment, although I should like the Minister to address the ambiguity that remains in clause 2(2).

5.45 pm

Mr. Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry): I take no particular exception to Government amendments Nos. 104 and 174, but I want to allude briefly to amendment No. 169, tabled by the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon). The establishment of the Judicial Appointments Commission caused considerable discussion not only in Committee but among many people in Northern Ireland, because of the proliferation of commissions there and because of Her Majesty's Government's clear failure in the past to make any serious effort to ensure that commissions reflect the community.

I listened with interest as the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh outlined his perception of the difficulties arising from that failure accurately to reflect the community in Northern Ireland. I found myself asking in what other society there would be a fair and accurate reflection of the community in its judicial appointments, but I can only follow the hon. Gentleman's arguments about the commissions that he mentioned.

Within the last month the Government have accepted the need to redress the imbalance that existed in the Human Rights Commission. Rather than redressing it, however, they compounded it by appointing a number of people, none of whom reflected the community that my party represents. Unfortunately, the same applies to the Parades Commission. I would like to hear from the Minister how the Government intend to ensure that the Judicial Appointments Commission will, as reasonably as can be expected, be truly reflective of the community divisions that exist in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Browne: I rise to deal with some of the points that have been raised in this debate. If I am not comprehensive in my answers, I shall endeavour to write to hon. Members on whose points I have not picked up.

I thank the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) for his support for the Government amendments. In relation to his own amendments, I am happy to give him the undertaking that I will reflect upon them. As he knows, when I say that, it is more than just being polite, although he periodically defines it as such to score political points. He knows that throughout my stewardship of my portfolio, I have considered everything that he has put before me. That does not mean that I have to agree with everybody, but I shall reflect on the issues that he has raised.

The hon. Member for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton) ought not to read too much into my use of the vocabulary in the amendment. She sought to invite me into an area into which you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, might chastise me for going, as it is not necessarily relevant to the amendments before us. The hon. Lady ought to be conscious of the fact that the use of the word "reflective" in this debate was a reflection of the use of the word in the amendment. I caution her not to read any more into it than that: the matter certainly does not bear extending in the way that she sought.

The hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) asked a specific question, and I have had the answer to it confirmed. Should the First Minister and Deputy First Minister seek to legislate to omit any judicial office from the list in the schedule, they would be required to make alternative legislative provision for such an appointment. That legislation would, of course, require cross-community support, so it would not be possible for the First Minister and Deputy First Minister—by omitting only—to leave High Court judges in a position in which there was no appointments procedure for them. The judges would not automatically fall into the senior appointments category. The hon. Lady asked whether that would be the case, but it is perfectly clear from the Bill it would not. Alternative arrangements would need to be legislated for by those who sought to omit the judges in question.

The bulk of the debate has been concentrated on the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon). The more he told me that his amendment was innocuous, the more I suspected that he did not believe it. Whether or not it is innocuous, the sentiments behind it are shared throughout the House and by the Government. I do not criticise the hon. Gentleman for seeking to achieve his objective, but I chastise him a little for slightly misrepresenting—totally accidentally—my argument in my opening remarks.

I did not seek to say—I do not think that the hon. Gentleman was trying to give the House the impression that I did—that the merit principle alone would resolve the problem. That was why I intervened on the hon. Member for Cheadle. We cannot debate this issue except in the context of the Bill. The whole of part 1, which is extensive, detailed and ground-breaking in terms of United Kingdom legislation, is designed to achieve a detailed and important infrastructure to ensure a transparent, open appointments system that allows those of merit to move into high judicial office, and other judicial office, in Northern Ireland.

To claim that I am saying to the House, directly or by implication, that if we have faith in the merit principle, it will deliver, is to misunderstand entirely the Government's position and mine as the Minister responsible. The review accepted that change, modernisation and a new structure were needed, and the objective of that new structure was the very one that the hon. Gentleman seeks. We want to attain that shared objective by the use of the merit principle in the context of that infrastructure.

Mr. Mallon: I sincerely apologise if I have misrepresented the Minister's words in any way. I did not intend to. As a matter of fact, I am convinced that I did not, but we shall leave that to further judgment.

I agree with the Minister about the objective—there is no question of any hon. Member being at odds with the Government about that. Surely the best way to set about achieving an objective is to put it in the legislation rather than leave it floating in the ether, hoping that some of it will stick.

Mr. Browne: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I am sure that when he checks the *Official Report* tomorrow, he will discover that my recollection of what I think he said inadvertently is correct. However, we can now move on in the spirit in which we have debated these matters.

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South) *rose*—

Mr. Browne: Let me first expand on my point. There is a shared objective—and a shared sentiment—but a debate about how best to achieve it. The Government have firmly nailed their colours to the mast of the review's recommendations, and we endeavour to follow them as closely as possible. There will always be a difference of opinion about whether the recommendations have been properly translated into legislation. I accept that there is room for debate at the margins. However, the review recommended in elaborate detail an open and transparent

[Mr. Browne]

structure to apply the merit principle—by which the Government have set their stock—to the appointment of the judiciary,

Mr. Tynan: There is a deep feeling that using the merit principle alone will exclude the possibility of a truly representative judiciary in Northern Ireland. On the basis of the argument that has been put, would it not be wise to give comfort to those who feel so strongly about the issue that they have tabled this amendment?

Mr. Browne: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me the opportunity to clarify my position further. I think I have made it clear in Committee and in the House on more than one occasion that I have faith in the review body's recommendations, but it is important to recognise that the review body dealt with the issue of the reflectiveness of the judiciary, as submissions were made on the matter.

As hon. Members including the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh have pointed out, recommendations 69, 89, 90, 91 and 92 deal with aspects of the issue raised in the amendment. Including aspirations in the Bill—my arguments have not been accepted, but there is merit in them—may accidentally have the opposite effect to that which the hon. Gentleman seeks. The innocuousness of the amendment may mask that problem, and the judiciary may be dragged directly into issues of political balance as a result. The contribution of the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Campbell) may be a forerunner to such a debate if we start to use such descriptive nouns collectively or individually in relation to judges.

Instead of depending on a statement of principle, as I am being urged to do, the Government set out their response to the recommendations on page 40 of their implementation plan. That response is to accept those recommendations: to accept that the Northern Ireland court service should take the lead responsibility in delivering them, and to set out in general terms what steps would be taken to achieve the objectives set out in the recommendations. Our response is not one of inactivity but of taking the issues forward in exactly the way that the review recommended.

Mr. Garnier: I was interested in the Minister's criticism of putting aspirations into the Bill, which is exactly the line of argument that I deployed against him when we considered clause 53 and the aims of the youth justice system. He took a different view then, but I shall not detain the House on that point.

The amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh asks for a quota system, but one cannot have justice by quota system. One can have justice only by having dispassionate judges applying the law. The hon. Gentleman simply wants to include in the Bill his aspirations and political hopes concerning the appointment of the judiciary, rather than applying his mind to the real issue of how best to ensure that judges apply the legislation presented to them by the House and the common law.

Mr. Browne: I am grateful for the hon. and learned Gentleman's contribution. He is a paid-up member of the school of thought that there should never be a statement of principle in any piece of legislation. Other hon. Members in Committee and in the House always want statements of principle, and would be happy to replace all specific legislation with a series of such statements. I am happy to occupy the middle ground. When principles are appropriate and serve a purpose, they can be included. When they do not serve a purpose and they are just hot air, there is no point in including them. However, when there is potential for statements of principle to pose a danger—for the reasons pointed out by the hon. and learned Gentleman—it is better not to include them.

The Government's argument is that the appropriate way to respond to the review commission's recommendations is to legislate when there are good and persuasive arguments for legislation. That point applies to the whole of part 1. However, when issues such as reflectiveness are better addressed in other more practical ways, we should move to take other steps. I think that our position is sustainable.

Amendment agreed to.

6 pm

Schedule 1

LISTED JUDICIAL OFFICES

Mr. Browne: I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 71, line 9, leave out "District Judge (Magistrates' Courts)" and insert "Resident Magistrate".

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Government amendments Nos. 3 to 6, 110, 7 to 15 and 132.

Amendment No. 16, in clause 15, page 10, line 31, leave out "District Judge (Magistrates' Courts)" and insert "Resident Magistrate".

Government amendment No. 133.

Amendment No. 17, in page 10, line 32, leave out "District Judges (Magistrates' Courts)" and insert "Resident Magistrates".

Amendment No. 18, in page 10, line 33, leave out "District Judges (Magistrates' Courts)" and insert "Resident Magistrates".

Government amendment No. 134.

Amendment No. 19, in page 10, line 34, leave out "District Judge (Magistrates' Courts)" and insert "Resident Magistrate".

Government amendment No. 135.

Amendment No. 20, in page 10, line 37, leave out "District Judge (Magistrates' Courts)" and insert "Resident Magistrate".

Government amendment No. 136.

Amendment No. 21, in page 10, line 38, leave out "District Judge (Magistrates' Courts)" and insert "Resident Magistrate".

Amendment No. 22, in page 10, line 39, leave out "District Judge (Magistrates' Courts)" and insert "Resident Magistrate".

Government amendment No. 137.

Amendment No. 23, in page 11, line 2, leave out "District Judge (Magistrates' Courts)" and insert "Resident Magistrate".

Government amendments Nos. 24 to 26, 141, 149 and 164.

Mr. Browne: These amendments relate to the Bill's provisions to rename resident magistrates as "District Judges (Magistrates' Courts)".

Essentially, there is only one substantive amendment in this group and that is amendment No. 110, which deletes clause 9, thereby retaining the title of "resident magistrate". The rest of the group are consequential on that. Reversion to the title of "resident magistrate" was suggested by the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) in Committee and the proposal was supported by the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon). I am grateful to both for their contribution in that debate.

The Bill's provisions follow the review recommendation that was intended to demonstrate publicly that the magistracy is an integral part of the judiciary. The review group concluded that the term "resident" had no meaning or relevance in the modern context. These arguments, as with the other recommendations of the review, have some merit.

However, I have also listened to the view raised in the two consultation periods on the review. During the consultation exercise, the Resident Magistrates Association opposed the name change, pointing to the long history of the resident magistrate in Northern Ireland and, before that, in Ireland more generally. It is not our intention to cause offence to resident magistrates and remove a name that has been synonymous with effective justice evenly applied over the years. The title "resident magistrate" also has the advantage of being clearly understood and recognised. In addition, the resident magistrates do not feel the need identified by the review to demonstrate that the magistracy is an integral part of the judiciary. That point undermines the reasoning for making the change.

For these reasons, we have decided that, on balance, the greater merit lies in preserving the title "resident magistrate". I ask that the amendments be approved.

Mr. Blunt: It is an enormous pleasure to speak to amendments that, last Wednesday and Thursday, stood in my name and those of my hon. Friends. I am delighted that the amendments have now received the support of the Secretary of State and his colleagues.

The debate on this issue was one of the most entertaining in Committee. We were diverted slightly by a discussion of the cultural history of the resident magistrate and of the books and the television series that relate to the post. The Minister and I were characterised as a couple of the protagonists in the stories, but I shall not go down that path as the discussion was not necessarily advantageous to me. I was characterised according to a brief summary rather than detailed knowledge.

The Minister has listened to the arguments and the House, resident magistrates and all those in Northern Ireland who understand the term "resident magistrate" owe him their thanks. He has been prepared to listen to sensible argument.

I hope that the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) is not still of the mind that he had in Committee. It is appropriate to remind the House that, in Committee, I read out paragraph 6.142 of the review as a classic example of the bureaucratic tidy mind at work. It is the origin of the recommendation to do away with the historic and well understood name of "resident magistrate" and to replace it with whatever ghastly appellation was thought up. Sadly, the hon. Gentleman was not in Committee when I spoke, but he soon returned to say:

> "It is worth remembering that a strong justification for that exists."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee F*, 29 January 2002; c. 47.]

He then referred to paragraph 6.142 and read it out again.

I wish to caution the hon. Gentleman. If he wishes to support the bureaucratic tidy mind, he may have a problem. If such a mind gets to work on the policies of the Liberal Democrats with all the inherent contradictions that exist, there might not be much left at the end of the process.

Lembit Öpik: If the hon. Gentleman continues to insult my party, I warn him that I may read out his speech in its entirety yet again.

Mr. Blunt: I would be very happy for the House to be so enlightened, but I fear that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would not support the hon. Gentleman through the whole of that process.

The Minister and I have come at this issue from separate directions, which is why several of the amendments that I tabled on Wednesday now appear with the Secretary of State's name attached to them. However, one or two of them do not have his name attached to them, and, although I condemned the bureaucratic tidy mind a moment ago, I am slightly concerned about the bureaucratic tidiness of the exercise. For example, I draw the Minister's attention to what is now Government amendment No. 132 and amendment No. 16. The difference between those amendments appears to be whether the term "resident magistrate" should take capital letters in the way that it normally does in the Bill.

It has also struck me that there were one or two minor complications with the Government's approach. I imagine that the Minister will ask me to withdraw the amendments that are in my name and those of my hon. Friends alone on the assumption that the Secretary of State's approach is utterly comprehensive. In an effort to ensure that the exercise that I undertook was thoroughly comprehensive, I called upon the assistance of servants of the House in drawing up my amendments. I do not want to pay disrespect to them, but I will accede to the request that I assume that the Minister will make. However, I suspect that the servants of the House may be right on one or two matters that the Minister and his officials may have got wrong. That point may best be settled over a small wager in one of the bars of the House.

Mr. Browne: Unfortunately, as I am never in the bars of the House, I will not be able to have that wager with the hon. Gentleman. He anticipates my advice, which is that the amendments in the name of the Secretary of State will be comprehensive in their effect. However, as the hon. Gentleman knows, such matters are constantly reviewed and reconsidered so, if my advice turns out to be wrong, there will be an opportunity to correct things.

Mr. Blunt: I am grateful to the Minister for that assurance. I will therefore not press the amendments to a

[Mr. Blunt]

vote. However, the provisions are worth checking and, if it is necessary to get them technically correct, it might be appropriate to do that in another place.

The debate on this issue—particularly the one held in Committee—and the way in which the Minister has listened to the representations made to him is an exemplar of how the House should go about its business. The friendly tone of the debate was not what many people outside the House expect from legislators with different philosophical views and from different parties. I think that we have come to the right answer. I am glad that the Government support the amendments that we originally tabled, and of course we will support them.

Mr. Mallon: I am against the amendment for three reasons. First, the review body was to the point:

> "We recommend that legislation be passed to redesignate resident magistrates as district judges"—

full stop, clear, sharp and unambiguous. The recommendation was

> "intended to demonstrate publicly that the magistracy is an integral part of the judiciary."

It is an inherent, working part of the judiciary, not some quaint adjunct to it that lives on in literary nostalgia. That is an important point.

The second reason is that the term "resident" has its origins in the 19th century, when there were particular reasons for wanting office holders to live in the district where they held office. The review makes that point, and there are interesting reasons for it. In the 19th century, it was difficult to live in parts of rural Ireland, north and south. That coincided with what became known as the famine, when the population of Ireland went from 8 million to 4 million.

That was not the only reason why the term "resident magistrate" was introduced. It was also to ensure that during that period those living in the country were available to dispense law. I do not mean living in the area or the region, but in the country of Ireland, however it is designated. What is the relevance of the term "resident" as of now? The review says:

> "It has no meaning or relevance in the modern context."

Charming though it may be in Somerville and Ross and the Irish RM television programmes, it is not the folk experience of many. I am against the amendment for those two important reasons.

The third reason is that we are involved in change, which will help to provide confidence in and a new beginning for criminal justice in Northern Ireland. To some the term "resident magistrate" has the air of big house justice about it: justice dispensed on the community, not from within it. The term may have been appropriate at some time, but I believe that it is inappropriate now. That is a much more important consideration than the fondness that "resident magistrates" have for their traditional name. I fully understand that they like to be known as RMs, because if the legislation stands as the Government have written it, they will be known as DJs, and that would not be quite the same.

6.15 pm

Lembit Öpik: I feel betrayed by the Government on these amendments. I shall not read out paragraph 6.142 of the review again, as it can be read twice within two pages of the *Official Report* of the Standing Committee. I defended what I thought was the Government's position only to be betrayed and have the political rug pulled from under my feet by the Minister, who decided to support the Conservatives after all. I have smarted from that, because although the Government have been persuaded by the Conservatives, like the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) I have not. It would be a bridge too far for me to flit like a flag in the wind merely because the Minister has decided that the hon. Member for Reigate was correct and has followed him down this path.

As I said in Committee, the serious point concerns symbolism. Symbolism can appear anywhere and can be interpreted in any way that people choose. The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh has made the substantive point on this subject. I do not think that it is the core issue in the Bill, but I shall provide the hon. Gentleman with some reassurance and consolation at this difficult time, because like him we feel somewhat betrayed by the Minister. However, we shall find it in our hearts to hate the sin and love the sinner.

Mr. Garnier: Debates on Northern Ireland are littered and all too frequently larded with expressions such as "betrayal", and it is wholly inappropriate for the debate on this clause to be concerned with betrayals. The fact that the Liberal Democrat spokesman on Northern Ireland has been wrong-footed does not constitute a betrayal, although I congratulate him on being in Committee rather more often than the Prime Minister is in the House of Commons, which in both cases is not very often.

The issue is not about 19th century big house justice.

Mr. Stephen Pound (Ealing, North): Of course it is.

Mr. Garnier: Simply to shout back "Of course it is" is not an argument, especially from the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Pound). The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) is worried about acronyms and about RM reminding people of 19th century big house justice. DJ may to youngsters such as the hon. Member for Ealing, North mean disc jockey, but to those more familiar with the big house it may mean dinner jacket, so I do not know whether the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh is getting much further.

Mr. Pound: What is a dinner jacket?

Mr. Garnier: Something worn by waiters.

Lembit Öpik: I am sorry to return to this point, but I think I heard the hon. and learned Gentleman imply that my attendance in the House was not very frequent. He may be interested to know that according to a Plaid Cymru survey I was the Member of Parliament who made the most speeches and the most interventions from anywhere in Wales.

Mr. Browne: What about from here?

Lembit Öpik: From the House. I hope that the hon. and learned Gentleman's comments were meant in jest, not to cause offence.

Mr. Garnier: I am sure that plenty of sheep in Montgomeryshire make more noise and more sense than the hon. Gentleman, but there we are. The point I made was not about his attendance in the House, about which I know very little, but about his attendance in the Standing Committee. However, on the few occasions that he was present, he made extremely valuable contributions.

Let me come to the only serious point that I want to make on these amendments, in addition to congratulating the Front-Bench spokesmen for the Government and the official Opposition on their ability to agree something. In the Access to Justice Act 1999, the Government changed the designation of stipendiary magistrates to "district judges (magistrates courts)" for a number of reasons, one of which was that the old stipendiary magistrates wanted to be redesignated as district judges. The Government are being consistent and are listening to the judicial officers in Northern Ireland, who want to remain as resident magistrates. Why disappoint or annoy them when there are plenty of other more important and interesting matters to discuss.

Mr. Mallon: The hon. and learned Gentleman is surely not implying that the Government should satisfy the whim of the resident magistrates. The Government should implement a system of criminal justice based on the recommendations of the criminal justice review, which is quite clear on the matter. They should listen to the views of the people whom they represent, and those of the resident magistrates should not take precedence.

Mr. Garnier: I accept what the hon. Gentleman says, up to a point, but let him answer this point if he will. He says that the review recommendation is clear, sharp and right. I take a different view; it is clear, sharp and wrong. He may wish to push the matter to a vote and it could be tested in that way, but that would not be a terribly useful exercise of our time and I hope that he does not do so. He and I have different views. So be it.

Lady Hermon: On a number of occasions in Committee, the Minister described himself as a Minister who listens to representations. In this example, he has listened to strong representations from resident magistrates and the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) and from me in Committee.

A lot of the confusion arose, certainly in Committee, over a comparison that was drawn several times. The Patten report is entitled, "A New Beginning: Policing in Northern Ireland", but the criminal justice review and the implementing legislation are there to modernise the criminal justice system in the biggest shake-up in 30 years by making it more transparent and more accountable and by modernising it. That does not mean that we must have this new beginning even in language. Changing "resident magistrate" to "district judge" would be a cosmetic exercise, as there will be no change to the functions of resident magistrates. The change is unnecessary and I am delighted that the Minister has listened to the representations.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 3, in page 71, line 10, leave out "District Judge (Magistrates" Courts)" and insert "Resident Magistrate".—*[Mr. Browne.]*

Clause 3

Judicial Appointments Commission

Amendment made: No. 4, in page 3, line 1, leave out "District Judge (Magistrates" Courts)" and insert "Resident Magistrate".—*[Mr. Browne.]*

Schedule 2

Judicial Appointments Commission

Amendment made: No. 174, in page 75, line 12, leave out "lay member or" and insert—

'member of the Commission and, unless he is a lay member,'.—*[Mr. Browne.]*

Amendment proposed: No. 169, in page 4, line 35, at end insert—

'(8A) Without prejudice to subsection (8), the Commission must, as far as practicable, exercise its functions to select persons to be appointed or recommended for appointment in order to secure that the judiciary is reflective of the community in Northern Ireland.'.—*[Mr. Mallon.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 33, Noes 302.

Division No. 176] **[6.23 pm**

AYES

Allan, Richard
Baker, Norman
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cotter, Brian
Doughty, Sue
Ewing, Annabelle
Heath, David
Hermon, Lady
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hume, John
Llwyd, Elfyn
McNamara, Kevin
Mallon, Seamus
Pugh, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tyler, Paul
Webb, Steve
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Lembit Öpik and
Mr. Eddie McGrady.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burnside, David
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cash, William
Caton, Martin

Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
Garnier, Edward
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hendry, Charles
Hepburn, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luff, Peter
Luke, Iain
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marlew, Eric
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Owen, Albert
Paisley, Rev Ian
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Shepherd, Richard
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spink, Bob
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stringer, Graham
Swayne, Desmond
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe and
Mr. John Heppell.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Forth: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can you confirm that there is nothing to prevent a Minister from approaching the Chair, even at this stage in our proceedings, and requesting that a statement be scheduled at the conclusion of our business at 10 o'clock? This is an important Bill, and I could understand Ministers not wanting to interrupt our consideration of it, but you will be aware that here has been some fresh news concerning the suspension on full pay of the head of media at the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions—a matter referred to by the Secretary of State in his statement last week—and I wondered whether you could confirm, to help Ministers, that there is no procedural obstacle to a statement being scheduled for 10 o'clock, to keep the House informed of developments.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): The right hon. Gentleman has been helpful in setting out that point, and there is very little that I can add, other than that the Speaker would have to be consulted about any such arrangement.

Schedule 3

APPOINTMENT TO LISTED JUDICIAL OFFICES

Amendments made: No. 5, in page 77, line 8, leave out "District Judges (Magistrates" Courts)" and insert "Resident Magistrates".

No. 6, in page 77, line 11, leave out "District Judges (Magistrates" Courts)" and insert "Resident Magistrates".—*[Mr. Browne.]*

Mr. Browne: I beg to move amendment No. 105, in page 77, line 23, leave out "expenses" and insert "salaries".

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Government amendment No. 155.

Mr. Browne: Post devolution of criminal justice, determination of judicial salaries is to remain an excepted matter, but the remuneration will be paid from the Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund rather than the United Kingdom Consolidated Fund. Paragraph 10 of the schedule amends section 168(2) of the Magistrates' Courts Act (Northern Ireland) 1964, which provides for the payment of salaries to resident magistrates. The original drafting of the paragraph referred to the payment of "expenses" being transferred from the United Kingdom Consolidated Fund to the Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund. The amendment, which is technical, reflects the fact that the payment of salaries will be transferred by the Bill.

Amendment No. 155, which is also technical, provides for removal of the revocation of section 75(1) of the Judicature (Northern Ireland) Act 1978, which deals with the appointment of the official solicitor. Post devolution, it is intended that the office of official solicitor will be removed from the list of statutory officers in schedule 3 to the 1978 Act, as the status of the statutory officer will be confined to posts of an inherently judicial character. The official solicitor post is not of that character.

The removal will be achieved by subordinate legislation, which is the point of the amendment. In anticipation of that change, it is necessary to retain section 75(1) of the 1978 Act, which provides for the official solicitor's appointment by the Lord Chancellor after consultation with the Lord Chief Justice. As drafted, the Bill did not achieve that objective, and this technical amendment is designed to put that right. That is what it achieves and I commend it to the House.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr. Browne: I beg to move amendment No. 106, in page 82, line 23, leave out "subsections (2) and (11)" and insert "subsection (2)".

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Government amendments Nos. 107 to 109.

Amendment No. 33, in clause 10, page 8, line 6, leave out "Lord Chancellor" and insert—

'First Minister and deputy First Minister acting jointly'.

Amendment No. 34, in page 8, line 9, leave out "Lord Chancellor" and insert "Lord Chief Justice".

Amendment No. 31, in page 8, line 9, leave out from "Chancellor" to end of line 12.

Amendment No. 32, in page 8, line 13, leave out subsection (3).

Amendment No. 35, in page 8, line 17, leave out "Lord Chancellor" and insert—

'First Minister and deputy First Minister acting jointly'.

Amendment No. 36, in page 8, line 18, at end insert—

'( ) No order under this section may be made without the agreement of the Lord Chief Justice.'.

Amendment No. 74, in page 8, line 27, after "body", insert "or".

Amendment No. 71, in page 8, line 30, leave out from "creditors" to end of line 31.

Amendment No. 43, in page 8, leave out lines 32 and 33.

Amendment No. 72, in page 8, line 34, leave out—

'"Prescribed" means Prescribed in the Order'

and insert—

'Notwithstanding subsections (4) and (5), a person shall be disqualified from appointment as a lay magistrate if he has at any time been convicted in Northern Ireland or elsewhere of a criminal offence'.

Amendment No. 37, in page 8, line 41, leave out "Lord Chancellor" and insert "Lord Chief Justice".

Amendment No. 73, in page 8, line 41, at end insert—

'10A The Lord Chancellor must remove any Lay Magistrate from Office if they have at any time been convicted in Northern Ireland or elsewhere of a criminal offence.'.

Amendment No. 38, in page 8, line 42, leave out "Lord Chancellor" and insert—

'First Minister and deputy First Minister acting jointly'.

Amendment No. 39, in page 8, line 42, leave out "he" and insert "they".

Amendment No. 40, in page 8, line 43, at end insert—

'out of money appropriated by Act of the Assembly'.

Government amendments Nos. 111 to 118.

Amendment No. 41, in schedule 4, page 83, line 43, leave out "Lord Chancellor" and insert "Lord Chief Justice".

Government amendment No. 119.

Amendment No. 42, in page 84, line 5, leave out "Lord Chancellor" and insert "Lord Chief Justice".

Government amendments Nos. 120 to 122, 124, 123, 125 to 130 and 156 to 163.

Mr. Browne: The amendments are technical and concern the role and functions of lay magistrates. The criminal justice review recognised the role lay people could play in the justice process. It did not recommend major changes, but proposed removing residual criminal justice functions from justices of the peace, while consolidating the role of the new category of lay magistrates. Of course, as hon. Members know, the position of lay magistracy in Northern Ireland is rather different from that in England and Wales. England and

[Mr. Browne]

Wales have a small number of stipendiary magistrates, but professional resident magistrates in Northern Ireland are the norm rather than the exception. Lay people continue to have a role in the system, however, notably by participating in youth courts.

Amendments Nos. 106 and 107 reorder the Bill to make it clear that when responsibility for paying allowances to lay magistrates transfers to the First Minister and Deputy First Minister under devolution, they must act jointly.

Amendments Nos. 108 and 109, which are technical and consequential to an amendment made in Committee, require that order-making powers relating to community safety be subject to affirmative resolution. As a result, on devolution, an order made by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister concerning eligibility to be a lay a magistrate must be subject to affirmative resolution in the Assembly. Order-making powers relating to community safety will remain subject to scrutiny in Westminster.

Amendment No. 111 allows the Lord Chief Justice, lord justices of appeal, High Court judges and county court judges to exercise all the functions of a lay magistrate. Currently, all those judicial offices are ex officio justices of the peace, and as such they can exercise all the functions attaching to those offices. Given that the majority of criminal justice functions will transfer from JPs to lay magistrates, we want to ensure that the judicial offices that I have mentioned can exercise the functions that will be transferred to lay magistrates.

Amendment No. 112 reflects the review's recognition of the important role that lay persons fulfil in the justice system. The new office of lay magistrate will assume most of the functions currently performed by justices of the peace and members of the juvenile court lay panel, and will be a listed judicial office as defined in schedule 1 to the Bill. The amendment is technical and defines the range and nature of functions to be transferred from justices of the peace to the new office of lay magistrate.

6.45 pm

In the main, those functions, which are currently performed by justices of the peace, relate to hearing complaints and first remands in special courts, with a view to issuing warrants and summonses. The amendment also identifies a number of related and ancillary powers arising from those functions. Schedule 4, which contains amendments consequential on the clauses relating to lay magistrates, deals with those functions in more specific terms. I should point out that lay magistrates will also perform certain other functions currently undertaken by lay panellists in the youth and family proceedings courts. They are of course addressed by clause 12.

Amendment No. 163 is consequential on amendment No. 112. It will amend clause 89 and include the Lord Chancellor's order-making power under clause 11(2)(b), thereby ensuring that it is subject to scrutiny by both Houses.

I have been asked to address amendment No. 123 in particular. The definition of a court of record in the relevant section is used for the purpose of conferring a power to bind over. Magistrates courts already have specific power to bind over by virtue of the Magistrates' Courts (Northern Ireland) Order 1981, so there is no need for the definition in schedule 4 to include a magistrates court. The provision is unnecessary and would constitute a duplication.

Opposition amendments Nos. 31 to 41—which would transfer powers from the Lord Chancellor to the First Minister, Deputy First Minister or Lord Chief Justice—may be based on a misconception. They were tabled in Committee, and for reasons that I shall come to shortly, I am slightly disappointed to see them again. I gave a lengthy explanation in Committee, on being asked to do so, of how the Bill's provisions are intended to work before and after devolution.

Clause 10 deals with the position before devolution, when the power will remain with the Lord Chancellor. Post devolution, the same appointment and removal provisions as apply to the lay magistracy will apply to other judicial tiers. At that point, responsibility will transfer from the Lord Chancellor to the First Minister and Deputy First Minister by means of a transfer of functions order under section 86 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

On turning to schedule 1, hon. Members will notice that the office of lay magistrate is included in the list of judicial offices which, on devolution, are subject to the Judicial Appointments Commission and removal tribunals. For that reason, and in the light of the lengthy explanation that I gave in Committee—the House would not thank me for repeating it—I ask that amendments Nos. 31 to 41 be withdrawn.

Amendments Nos. 41 and 42 would give the Lord Chief Justice an order-making power—which the Bill currently gives the Lord Chancellor—to amend any provision relating to the transfer of functions of the justice of the peace. I am fascinated by the idea of an order-making power exercisable by a judge, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) on this exciting constitutional innovation, particularly in the light of the need for parliamentary scrutiny of provisions at the highest level. However, I doubt whether the British constitution is quite ready for it.

The review recommended that the criminal justice functions of the justice of the peace be undertaken by the new office of lay magistrate. The Bill accordingly sets out the likely qualification requirements for that post. Amendment No. 43 would remove the Lord Chancellor's discretion in applying those qualifications. The Lord Chancellor has, and will continue to have, that discretion in making justice of the peace appointments in England and Wales.

If the amendment were accepted, the Lord Chancellor would be unable, for example, to appoint as lay magistrate an otherwise excellent candidate who lived five miles beyond a prescribed distance outside the county court division in question. Although it is important that lay magistrates reside in, or work in, their county court division, it is surely possible for hon. Members to envisage situations in which that might not be the case. Would they want to lose such a person's expertise? Flexibility is a vital part of any eligibility criteria, but the amendment would remove it. I therefore ask that it be withdrawn.

Amendments Nos. 74, 72 and 71 would remove conviction of a prescribed offence as a potential bar to being appointed as a lay magistrate and replace it with conviction of a criminal offence—any criminal offence.

In addition, amendment No. 73 includes a removal provision, requiring the Lord Chancellor to remove a lay magistrate if he has been convicted of a criminal offence. It is worth noting that there are currently no absolute bars to people with convictions being appointed as a judge in England and Wales or in Northern Ireland. The review made it clear that lay magistrates should be considered part of the judiciary. It would therefore be contrary to the spirit of the review to impose a higher standard on lay magistrates than on other judicial tiers.

In any case, the amendments are unnecessary. I am not convinced of the case for lifting the potential bar on individuals convicted of a prescribed offence and replacing it with the much wider power to remove anyone guilty of a criminal offence. That would mean that the Lord Chancellor would have to remove from office an otherwise excellent appointee who had been convicted of a minor motoring offence.

Lady Hermon: Could the Minister explain why the disqualification of someone who has a criminal conviction from sitting as a lay magistrate is not justified, when someone who is bankrupt or who has made an arrangement with his trustee or creditors would be ineligible to sit as a lay magistrate? That seems extraordinary.

Mr. Browne: The hon. Lady will see from the terms of the clause that all those situations would provide reasons to remove a magistrate, but would not require his removal. The earlier part of my argument suggested the need for flexibility, not the imposition of an absolute bar. I do not accept amendments Nos. 71 to 74 because they would mean that an otherwise excellent appointee who had been convicted of a minor motoring offence would have to be removed from office. That would not be in the best interests of the administration of justice. I do not encourage magistrates or judges—or anybody else—to collect minor road traffic offence convictions, but if they were to acquire one it would not be an appropriate reason to remove them from office. That includes the offence of careless driving, the mens rea for which is carelessness, not deliberate action.

Lady Hermon: I noted the comparative treatment of those of an equivalent status in the rest of the United Kingdom. I obtained the latest copy of the directions for advisory committees on justices of the peace from the Library—it is from July 1991, so it may have been updated—and it makes it clear that in the case of serious offences the Lord Chancellor must be informed immediately. The justice must not sit to adjudicate from the time of arrest to first appearance, and there is an expectation that the justice would resign after any further conviction for a serious offence. We can therefore make a comparative analysis with the position elsewhere.

Mr. Browne: The hon. Lady is right, and I have prayed in aid references to jurisdictions other than that of Northern Ireland. She is also right to say that the repeated commission of serious offences should lead to the consideration of the appropriateness and suitability of a person for judicial office, even if only as justice of the peace. However, for the very reasons that the hon. Lady is able to cite documents on the position in England and Wales, we seek to do exactly the same in Northern Ireland. We seek to apply the flexibility of the system in England and Wales to Northern Ireland.

My objection to the removal provision and the potential bar that the hon. Lady seeks is that it would be absolute and apply at the level of a very minor road traffic offence. I argue, with some merit, that that would not be in the best interests of the administration of justice.

Mr. Gregory Campbell: We had a similar debate in Committee on the issue of court security officers and whether any offence, perhaps relatively insignificant, should debar a person from employment. Could the Minister confirm that if the amendments were passed they would mean that a person could be debarred from being a lay magistrate but could, for example, be in charge of education in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Browne: The hon. Gentleman seeks to widen the debate, which is not about education or the structure of the Executive in Northern Ireland. My points are relevant to the Bill. I have addressed the issues raised by the amendments and it would not be in order to expand the debate into the qualifications necessary to be the Minister of Education or any other Minister in Northern Ireland. The Bill as drafted provides sufficient powers for the Lord Chancellor to exclude persons who have been convicted of prescribed offences, and I ask that the amendments be withdrawn.

Amendments Nos. 113 to 130 and 156 to 162 are of a technical nature and are consequential on clauses 10 to 12, dealing with justices of the peace and lay magistrates. They make specific textual amendments to a wide range of current legislation to ensure that the existing powers of justices of the peace are transferred either to lay magistrates or to resident magistrates. I do not think that the House would thank me for going into further detail.

We do not of course intend to remove the office of justice of the peace. Justices of the peace will continue in office and perform several important civic and ceremonial functions, which are also included in clause 4.

Mr. Blunt: This may not be a debate about education, but it could be, because the issues are technical and difficult. The Minister complains that he might repeat arguments that he made in Committee about which issues devolve and which do not, but those hon. Members not privileged to have served on the Committee would benefit from his instruction and education on the matter. One or two issues are still outstanding in relation to the surviving role of the Lord Chancellor, if any.

I invite the Minister's explanation on one of the areas of complication, which I shall illustrate for him. Schedule 3, paragraph 41(1), would amend section 10 by substituting for the phrase "Lord Chancellor" the words

> "First Minister and deputy First Minister, acting jointly".

That would be the effect of amendments Nos. 33, 34 and 35. I am confused about why those provisions appear in schedule 3, and in the Government's amendments to widen them, but do not appear automatically on the face of the Bill in the provisions under which justice will be devolved. I would be grateful for the Minister's explanation on that point.

The Minister is looking confused, and well he might. My simple question is why those provisions, which relate to earlier parts of the Bill, appear in the schedule when—

[Mr. Blunt]

I presume—they would come into force automatically under the Northern Ireland Act 1998 when the functions are devolved. That was the burden of the Minister's argument in Committee on devolution functions.

7 pm

The Minister did not deal with amendments Nos. 31 and 32, which concern the requirement for training courses to be completed before the appointment of lay magistrates. The Bill simply requires those appointed to have given an undertaking that they will attend such a course. I am not sure that is good enough: I think that those appointed should have completed the course, because that would show not just that they were committed to becoming lay magistrates by undertaking the necessary training but that there was no danger of their adopting the role of lay magistrate before being properly trained. The very undertaking of the course will show up any inherent problems.

I do not intend to press the matter to a Division, but I invite the Government to consider it. If the Minister cannot respond now, perhaps he will table amendments in another place if he thinks it appropriate for people to be trained before becoming lay magistrates.

The Minister has, I think, dealt with amendment No. 36, and the issue of funding. I accept his arguments about amendment No.43, although I may wish to discuss them further, but I want him to clarify what he said about amendment No. 37. This is a technical matter. Will the Minister confirm that, following the devolution of justice, it will be the Lord Chief Justice who can remove lay magistrates from office rather than the Lord Chancellor? I understand that to be the case, but I should be grateful for confirmation. Similarly, I should like confirmation, in the context of amendment No. 42, that the Lord Chancellor's role will not remain after the devolution of justice.

This is a difficult and technical area, and I freely admit that I have struggled to understand it precisely. The Minister may feel a trifle impatient at having to explain it again, but if we are to undertake this role in an area in which there appear to be innate contradictions, we as legislators should surely understand the issues before passing the proposals.

Lady Hermon: I want to speak to amendments Nos. 74, 71, 72 and 73. I can count, but that is the order in which they appear on the amendment paper.

I am very unhappy with the Minister's response to interventions—especially after hearing him explain Government amendment No. 112, which involves a considerable increase in the powers and functions of lay magistrates. I must sa[illegible] we had not anticipated such a proposal. The functions concerned include

> "issuing a warrant or summons"

and

> "remanding an accused who has not previously been remanded for the offence".

I could go on, but I will not. The point is that we have significantly extended the powers of lay magistrates.

The House has already passed the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000. It refers to members of district policing partnerships which, for goodness' sake, have only advisory and consultative powers; they are not involved in judicial or criminal justice functions. It firmly disqualifies a person from independent membership of a district policing partnership if he has at any time been convicted, in Northern Ireland or elsewhere, of an offence and has had passed on him a sentence of imprisonment, whether suspended or not.

The present position is ludicrous. Someone who would have advisory and consultative powers in a DPP cannot become an independent member of a DPP if he has committed a criminal offence. We are told by the Minister, however, that a lay magistrate will not be disqualified for minor criminal offences.

Mr. Browne: The offence specified in the 2000 Act is far more serious than the sort of offence that the hon. Lady seeks to incorporate in the Bill. It attracts either a suspended sentence or a prison sentence.

Lady Hermon: The Minister makes a good point, in that an offence attracting a sentence of imprisonment, whether suspended or not, is clearly serious; but we are talking about people who are responsible for the administration and carrying out of criminal justice functions.

We have a criminal justice review, whose aims were stated in the Belfast agreement. One of those aims was the production of a criminal justice scheme that had

> "the confidence of all parts of the community".

How can people have confidence in the new office of lay magistrate when, under clause 10, the Lord Chancellor may make provision about the eligibility for appointment of lay magistrates? Subsection (5) states that "in particular" orders will provide

> "that a person may not be appointed to be a lay magistrate"

if, for example,

> "a bankruptcy order has been made against him, or his estate has been sequestrated, or he has made a composition or arrangement with, or granted a trust deed for, his creditors"

or

> "if he has been convicted of a prescribed offence".

"Prescribed" is defined as meaning

> "prescribed in an order issued by the Lord Chancellor".

It seems extraordinary that, although the new office of lay magistrate involves dramatically increased powers, there is no equivalent disqualification of those with criminal convictions, although those who go bankrupt will be ineligible. I hope that I am wrong about this, and I hope the Minister will correct me.

Mr. Browne: Let me first deal with the points made by the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon).

The purpose of amendment No. 112 is to describe the functions of justices of the peace that are being transferred to lay magistrates. That transfer was always intended. It was recommended by the review, and it is what the Bill seeks to achieve. The amendment's aim is simply to set the functions in statute, rather than to confer more powers on anyone, in terms of judicial functions, than was always intended and made clear in the Bill. These functions have never been set out before.

Both in Committee and today, the hon. Lady and I have discussed her attempts to include in the Bill a number of counsels of perfection in relation to behaviour.

Our debates have been energetic, and the hon. Lady has pursued them consistently and appropriately, but I think I have dealt with the issues that she has raised. She seeks to create circumstances in which I think it would be almost impossible to persuade anyone to take on the job of lay magistrate. If people were to be automatically removed from the job after being convicted of careless driving, with all the attendant publicity, it would surely be difficult for them to accept the post.

I accept that certain types of offence should exclude people, and the Bill reflects that. In other circumstances, however, there must be a degree of flexibility. People can accumulate criminal records and convictions for comparatively minor behaviour. We drive motor vehicles; we have a statutory structure, built up over the years, to protect people, but also to generate circumstances in which such matters as insurance can be resolved.

I cannot put the arguments to the hon. Lady better than I have already. I know that they disappoint her, but I do not think that it would work if any minor offence automatically barred people from such a position or removed them from it, particularly when judges higher up the judicial ladder, carrying out functions that were far more important and onerous, could have committed just such an offence.

I turn finally to the points made by the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt). The reason for my puzzlement in this very technical area is that I accept that sometimes it takes more than one saying to get the point across. It must have been my fault, but I did not at first understand the hon. Gentleman's point. It was not that I did not know the answer—I did not even know whether I knew the answer as I did not understand the point. However, I think that I have encapsulated his first point in my head and that I understand the answer.

The hon. Gentleman wanted to know why the provisions in paragraph 41 of schedule 3 are not in the body of the Bill. As he rightly identified, the provisions are intended to enable the necessary changes to be made when devolution takes place. They could have been put in the main part of the Bill but if they had been, they would have to be capable of being read in two different ways—pre and post-devolution. Alternatively, they could have been implemented under an order under section 86 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, as we have discussed before. On this occasion, however, the draftsman chose to incorporate these provisions under paragraph 41 of schedule 3, which will become effective post-devolution.

The hon. Gentleman's other substantive question was who could dismiss the judicial office holders post-devolution. It would be the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

Mr. Blunt: I am grateful to the Minister for that explanation. Will he address amendments Nos. 31 and 32 about the need for lay magistrates to be trained before they are appointed?

Mr. Browne: I am afraid that this comes down to the old flexibility argument again. It is difficult to predict at this stage exactly what the demand will be for lay magistrates. If they are to be trained, we might not be able to train them all at the same time. We need a degree of flexibility.

I accept the merit in the hon. Gentleman's argument and I hope that once the original difficulties are seen through and the change takes place, the norm will be that people will not exercise this function until they have been trained to do so. However, I cannot guarantee, in all situations, that the demand for lay magistracy and magistrates courts hearings will be such that they can be serviced in a transitional period, and flexibility will be required. I take on board what the hon. Gentleman says and will bear it in mind. We have been able to do something about a situation when we looked at the figures in more detail on previous occasions and I will consider whether that is possible in this respect.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 107, in page 82, line 24, at end insert—

'(4) In subsection (5), for "Lord Chancellor otherwise determines" substitute "First Minister and deputy First Minister, acting jointly, otherwise determine".

(5) In subsection (11)—

(a) for "Lord Chancellor" substitute "First Minister and deputy First Minister", and

(b) for "he may" substitute "they may jointly".'.

No. 108, in page 82, line 25, leave out from beginning to "(within" in line 27 and insert—

'(1) Section 89 is amended as follows.

(2) After subsection (1) insert—

"(1A) An order under section 10(4) shall be subject to affirmative resolution".'.

No. 109, in page 82, line 28, at end insert—

'(3) In subsection (3), omit "10(4) or".'.—*[Mr. Browne.]*

Clause 9

RENAMING OF RESIDENT MAGISTRATES

Amendment made: No. 110, in page 7, line 24, leave out Clause 9.—*[Mr. Browne.]*

Clause 10

LAY MAGISTRATES

Amendment made: No. 111, in page 8, line 43, at end insert—

'(11A) The Lord Chief Justice, Lords Justices of Appeal, judges of the High Court and county court judges may exercise any function of a lay magistrate (in relation to any matter arising within any county court division).'.—*[Mr. Browne.]*

Clause 11

TRANSFER OF FUNCTIONS OF JUSTICES OF THE PEACE

Amendments made: No. 112, in page 9, line 10, leave out from "from" to end of line 14 and insert—

'a function to which subsection (2A) applies.

(2A) This subsection applies to—

(a) any function of issuing a warrant or summons,

(b) any function of remanding an accused who has not previously been remanded for the offence,

(c) any function of ordering a person to enter into a recognisance to keep the peace or to be of good behaviour,

(d) the function of committal under section 21 of the Treatment of Offenders Act (Northern Ireland) 1968 (c. 29 (N.I.)) (offence during suspended sentence etc.),

(e) the function of committal under Article 5 of the Treatment of Offenders (Northern Ireland) Order 1976 (S.I. 1976/226 (N.I. 4)) (offence after early discharge),

(f) any function relating to perjury, misbehaviour or failure to testify in proceedings before a lay magistrate exercising any function to which this subsection applies,

(g) any function relating to adjournment of, or any other ancillary matter concerning, such proceedings,

(h) the function of granting a criminal aid certificate in respect of a person where the lay magistrate is dealing, or has previously dealt, with him by virtue of paragraph (b), (c) or (f), and

(i) the function of granting a criminal aid certificate in relation to an appeal against anything done by a lay magistrate by virtue of paragraph (c) or (f).

(2B) The Lord Chancellor may by order amend subsection (2A).'.

No. 7, in page 9, line 18, leave out "District Judges (Magistrates" Courts)" and insert "Resident Magistrates".—

No. 113, in page 82, line 35, at end insert—

'(za) sections 79 and 80 of the Harbours, Docks, and Piers Clauses Act 1847 (c. 27) (appointment and dismissal of harbour police),'.

No. 114, in page 82, line 36, leave out paragraph (a).

No. 115, in page 83, line 2, at end insert—

'(ca) section 23(1) of the Government Annuities Act 1929 (c. 29) (confirmation of declaration),'.

No. 116, in page 83, line 14, at end insert—

'(ha) section 57 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982 (c. 16) (appointment and swearing in of constables),

(hb) section 1(2)(c) of the Ministry of Defence Police Act 1987 (c. 4) (declaration by members of Ministry of Defence police force),'.

No. 117, in page 83, line 34, after "peace" insert "or magistrates" courts".

No. 8, in page 83, line 35, leave out "District Judges (Magistrates" Courts)" and insert "Resident Magistrates".

No. 118, in page 83, line 41, at end insert—

'(c) Article 44 of the Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 (S.I. 1989/1341 (N.I. 12)).'.

No. 119, in page 84, line 2, leave out—

'which confers or imposes a function on justices of the peace'.

No. 9, in page 84, line 11, leave out "District Judge (Magistrates" Courts)" and insert "Resident Magistrate".

No. 10, in page 84, line 15, leave out "District Judge (Magistrates" Courts)" and insert "Resident Magistrates".

No. 120, in page 84, line 24, at end insert—

'8A In section 26(4) of the Interpretation Act (Northern Ireland) 1954 (c. 33 (N.I.)) (administration of oaths), after "upon a" insert "lay magistrate or".

8B In section 189(1) of the Army Act 1955 (c. 18) (certificates of arrest or surrender of deserters and absentees), after "justice of the peace" insert "or (in Northern Ireland) resident magistrate".

8C In section 189(1) of the Air Force Act 1955 (c. 19) (certificates of arrest or surrender of deserters and absentees), after "justice of the peace" insert "or (in Northern Ireland) resident magistrate".

8D In section 47(2) and 110(2) of the Naval Discipline Act 1957 (c.53) (certificates of arrest and surrender), after "justice of the peace" insert "or (in Northern Ireland) resident magistrate".'.

No. 121, in page 84, line 32, at end insert—

'10A In section 21 of the Treatment of Offenders Act (Northern Ireland) 1968 (c. 29 (N.I.)) (offences during suspended sentence etc.), for subsection (2) substitute—

"(2) A summons under this section shall not be issued except on complaint; and a warrant under this section shall not be issued except on complaint in writing and on oath.

(2A) Subsection (2) does not apply to a summons or warrant issued (by virtue of section 10(11A) of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002) by a judge of the Crown Court acting in consequence of a notice under section 20(3) of this Act.".'.

No. 122, in page 84, line 39, at end insert—

'(4) After subsection (5) insert—

"(5A) A justice of the peace for a county court division may act as such in relation to all matters arising within that division and may so act even if at the time of acting he is in some other area of Northern Ireland.".'.

No. 124, in page 85, line 5, at end insert—

'13A In Article 84(6) of the Pollution Control and Local Government (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 (S.I. 1978/1049 (N.I. 19)) (judges and justices not disqualified by being ratepayers etc.), for "and a justice of the peace" substitute ", resident magistrate or lay magistrate".'.

No. 123, in page 85, line 5, at end insert—

'(2) A magistrates' court is not to be regarded as a court of record for the purposes of subsection (1).".'.

No. 11, in page 85, line 23, leave out "District Judge (Magistrates" Courts)" and insert "Resident Magistrate".

No. 12, in page 85, line 28, leave out "District Judge (Magistrates" Courts)" and insert "Resident Magistrate".

No. 125, in page 85, line 29, at end insert—

'19A In Article 7 (clerk's immunity in respect of warrant to enforce order), for "resident magistrate or other justice of the peace" substitute "magistrates' court".'.

No. 13, in page 85, line 33, leave out "District Judge (Magistrates" Courts)" and insert "Resident Magistrate".

No. 126, in page 85, line 35, leave out—

'sitting" substitute "lay magistrate sitting"'

and insert—

'" in the words preceding sub-paragraph (a) and in sub-paragraph (b) substitute "lay magistrate", and

(b) for "or justice of the peace" substitute "or lay magistrate".'.

No. 127, in page 86, line 2, at end insert—

', and

(b) for "magistrate, justice or clerk of petty sessions" substitute "person".'.

No. 128, in page 86, line 4, at end insert—

'26A In Article 160(1) (misbehaviour in court), for "justice of the peace" substitute "lay magistrate".'.

No. 129, in page 86, line 9, at end insert—

'28A In section 244(6)(a)(ii) of the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995 (c. 46) (community service orders), for "justice of the peace acting for the petty sessions district for the time being specified in the order" substitute "resident magistrate".'.

No. 130, in page 86, line 17, at end insert—

'31 In section 81(1) of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (c. 23) (interpretation), after the definition of "interception warrant" insert—

"justice of the peace" does not include a justice of the peace in Northern Ireland;".'.—*[Mr. Browne.]*

Schedule 5

TRANSFER OF FUNCTIONS TO LORD CHIEF JUSTICE

Amendments made: No. 14, in page 86, line 26, leave out "District Judges (Magistrates" Courts)" and insert "Resident Magistrates".

No. 131, in page 87, line 20, at end insert—

'10A In section 75(2)(b) (directions conferring or imposing functions on Official Solicitor), for "Lord Chancellor" substitute "Lord Chief Justice".'.—*[Mr. Browne.]*

Clause 15

PRESIDING DISTRICT JUDGE (MAGISTRATES' COURTS)

Amendments made: No. 15, in page 10, line 30, leave out "District Judges (Magistrates" Courts)" and insert "Resident Magistrates".

No. 132, in page 10, line 31, leave out—

'District Judge (Magistrates' Courts) in Northern Ireland'

and insert "resident magistrate".

No. 133, in page 10, line 32, leave out from "other" to end of line 33 and insert—

'resident magistrates and the deputy resident magistrates.'.

No. 134, in page 10, line 34, leave out—

'District Judge (Magistrates' Courts) in Northern Ireland'

and insert "resident magistrate".

No. 135, in page 10, line 37, leave out—

'District Judge (Magistrates' Courts) in Northern Ireland'

and insert "resident magistrate".

No. 136, in page 10, line 38, leave out from "a" to "pending" in line 40 and insert—

'resident magistrate to act as Presiding resident magistrate,'.

No. 137, in page 11, line 2, leave out—

'District Judge (Magistrates' Courts) in Northern Ireland'

and insert "resident magistrate".—*[Mr. Browne.]*

Clause 19

QUALIFICATION FOR APPOINTMENT

Amendment made: No. 24, in page 12, line 34, leave out "District Judge (Magistrates" Courts)" and insert "Resident Magistrate".—*[Mr. Browne.]*

Clause 20

JUDICIAL OATH OR AFFIRMATION

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): I beg to move amendment No. 45, in page 13, line 22, leave out from "either" to end of line 34 and insert—

'take the oath of allegiance and the judicial oath or make the appropriate affirmation.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 81, in page 13, line 28, leave out "according to" and insert "upholding".

No. 82, in page 13, line 34, leave out "according to" and insert "upholding".

Mr. Davies: This is an important amendment but the issues at stake are straightforward and can be simply put. We wish to restore, by means of the amendment, the normal oath of allegiance as it is taken by judges elsewhere in the United Kingdom. There are three arguments that the Government have to address with regard to clause 20. I continue to hope that the Government will accept our view that this is a concession too far and will take the opportunity of accepting amendment No. 45 to restore the position. If they do not, they will have clearly defined the differences that separate us. Those are not nuances of differences of emphasis but differences of fundamental principle. Let me set out those three arguments as simply as I can.

7.15 pm

The first argument, which I hope the Government will not take issue with, is that oaths are important. They mean something; they are not symbols. Oaths create obligations—that is their purpose. In this case, the oath of allegiance enshrines the fact that justice in this country flows from the Crown. If the Minister does not think that justice flows from the Crown, the onus is on him to tell us where it does flow from. If he wishes to create an ambiguity so that although the position is not as clear as it is today, justice is not deemed to flow from any other source, he must justify that. Ambiguity in legal matters is always problematic and generally undesirable. We positively believe in the principle that justice flows from the Crown and that judges should undertake an oath of allegiance to the Crown.

The second major issue between us and the Government is that if that principle is right—and it can be right or wrong—it should, by definition, be extended to the whole kingdom. If a principle of justice is right, it is, by definition, right for everybody. What concerns us is not the suggestion that that principle should be set aside, with republicanism introduced into our legal system and the oath of allegiance abolished. That would be a dramatic move by the Government although they have not done that. Instead, they have decided that in most of the country the principle on which our justice is based should continue while in one part of the country that principle should be changed. That is a dubious procedure; it is a discriminatory and partial approach to a fundamental issue.

This is, by definition, a republican measure. The Government do not want, or do not have the courage—I do not know which it is—to make such a change for the country as a whole, but intend to limit it to one part of the country. That position cannot be sustained—one cannot have a principle that is valid in one part of the country and not elsewhere because a principle, by its nature, is universal and should be applied equally and fairly everywhere.

Why are the Government doing this? There is no doubt that it is part of an agenda to erode, by stealth, the position of the Province of Northern Ireland in the United Kingdom, and that is extremely worrying.

The Opposition are committed to the Belfast agreement, as are, notionally, the Government. The agreement says clearly that there should be no change in the status of Northern Ireland except by the vote of the people of Northern Ireland. We endorse that utterly. It is wrong and inconsistent with the principle of the Belfast agreement that a change should be effected by stealth in this piecemeal fashion. It is death by a thousand cuts; that is the approach of the Government and it is one that we reject.

[Mr. Davies]

Thirdly, we must look at this move in the context of the Government's general policy towards Northern Ireland, particularly over the last few months. I have characterised that policy—rightly, I am convinced, because the Government have never quarrelled with my definition—as an endless series of one-way concessions, almost all of them simply designed to appease Sinn Fein-IRA, which is just one of the parties to the Belfast agreement and to the peace process.

I have said over and over again that we believe that is a disastrous approach to implementing the Belfast agreement. If we are to have peace in Northern Ireland, it must be based on a sense of balance and fairness. For the first time ever at the weekend, the Secretary of State—in an "On the Record" interview that I did not see but of which I have seen a transcript—actually recognised that the perception in Northern Ireland is that all of the concessions have been one way, against Unionism. He said:

> "I am aware of the perception that on balance there has been more taken away from Unionists and from those who feel British and given to those who are of an Irish background."

The Secretary of State is entirely endorsing the analysis that we have made and which we have put before him over the last few months. The balance has been broken in Northern Ireland and there is no sense of fairness. There is simply the sense of a one-way street.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Dr. John Reid): First, I should thank the hon. Gentleman for telling me what I said; I know, since I am the person who said it. As he will see if he reads further on in the transcript—I had to correct the interviewer in the same way as I am having to correct the hon. Gentleman—I was careful to distinguish between the reality and the perception. I fully acknowledged the perception that the process was imbalanced. Quite wrongly, the hon. Gentleman is using that to justify that it is in fact imbalanced.

Mr. Davies: The Secretary of State is perfectly right. Anyone reading the transcript can see that, subsequently, the Secretary of State fought desperately to retrieve what he appeared to have given away. I do not doubt that at all. I dare say that, within seconds of mouthing those words, the Secretary of State began to regret them. There is evidence in the interview that that is what he wanted to do.

The Secretary of State is an experienced politician and he knows that when one is interviewed, one uses terms advisedly. Perhaps he should have thought more carefully about what he was saying. If it was a slip, clearly it was a Freudian slip. It was not a deliberate attempt to mislead anyone; I do not suppose that for a moment. If it was a slip, it was because he was too frank or candid. The Secretary of State is simply acknowledging the position that we have put to him for a long time. It is great progress that even if the Secretary of State has done so by a slip of the tongue or inadvertently, he has acknowledged that position, even in his own mind. Later this evening, we will discuss an instance where it appears that, for once, the Secretary of State responded in deed as well as in word to the worrying situation that the Government's tactics have created in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Reid: I want to help the hon. Gentleman and prevent him from being unintentionally disingenuous with the House. Let me quote my words exactly before and after the interviewer:

> "Secondly, I am aware of the perception that on balance there has been more taken away from Unionists."

The interviewer says later:

> "Ah, well let's look at the reality."

There was no slip of the tongue. That is something that I acknowledged not only yesterday, but in a speech six months ago. The hon. Gentleman may not have heard it, but he has often quoted it.

Mr. Davies: It is obvious that I have touched the Secretary of State on a raw nerve. He is obviously concerned about this quotation, and any hon. Member who wishes to read the whole transcript will see that it is amusing to see how the Secretary of State rowed back from what he said, which was very revealing.

Mr. Tom Harris: Given the sensitivity surrounding politics in Northern Ireland, does the hon. Gentleman think that it is appropriate for a Conservative Front-Bench spokesman on Northern Ireland to define the success or otherwise of any policy in Northern Ireland by a points system for and against any particular community? Is that really a progressive and sophisticated way to define policy in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. May I say gently to the House that we are not discussing politics in Northern Ireland as a whole, but a particular amendment concerning the judicial oath? I would like to hear further remarks in this debate confined to that.

Mr. Davies: Indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but this concession fits into a general pattern. We care about the implementation of the Belfast agreement, and it is important that if the Opposition are convinced—as, sadly, we are—that the Government's tactics are leading in the wrong direction and away from the aim that we all share, we should draw that to everyone's attention and use our influence to try to redress the position. We are not afraid of saying what we believe should be done. I have never run away from that.

Lady Hermon: May I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the actual wording of the oath, as set out in clause 20? It says:

> "I . . . do solemnly and sincerely and truly affirm and declare that I will well and faithfully serve in the office . . . and that I will do right to all manner of people without fear or favour, affection or ill-will according to the laws and usages of this realm."

"This realm"—those words are in the Bill. Clearly that is a reference to the United Kingdom. I cannot see how this can be described accurately as, in the hon. Gentleman's language, "a concession".

Mr. Davies: I am not sure whether the hon. Lady listened to my remarks at the beginning, when I said that there were two ways of interpreting this Government initiative. The first is that it reflects a republican agenda and a desire to introduce an element of republicanism and to get rid of the mention of the Crown in our judicial system in parts of the kingdom. That is a bad thing for the reasons that I have set out, and we reject it on principle. The second possible explanation is that the Government have decided to introduce an element of ambiguity and they do not want to be clear.

Both of those things are wrong and damaging. Ambiguity is extremely bad in judicial matters, and I would have expected the hon. Lady—a distinguished professor of law—in any other context to go along with me on this matter. Difference is bad, because the Government are gratuitously introducing a distinction between the position in the rest of the UK and the position in Northern Ireland. I have rightly described that as an attempt by stealth to indicate that the status of Northern Ireland is different and an attempt by stealth to change it.

Lady Hermon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: If the hon. Lady will forgive me, I will not give way to her because of the lack of time. It is not my fault; it is the fault of the Government and the timetable in the House. Time is limited and she would not thank me were I to prevent her from speaking either in this debate or in debates on the many clauses that we ought to get through before we end our proceedings.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: I have given way to Members of the other Unionist party, so I shall be fair to the hon. Gentleman.

7.30 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley: Does the hon. Gentleman think it strange that the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) should quote from the Bill a passage that she wishes to change? She has tabled an amendment to change the very thing that she has argued for.

Mr. Davies: I felt wry amusement and surprise when I heard the intervention of the hon. Member for North Down, but I shall leave her to defend her own comments to the other Northern Ireland parties.

Lady Hermon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mallon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: The hon. Lady feels unfairly embattled. To allow her to defend her honour and consistency, I shall give way to her, and, because I wish to be courteous to representatives of every Northern Ireland party, I shall give way to the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) later.

Lady Hermon: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's generosity. He said that the clause introduced ambiguity. How, for goodness' sake, can it be ambiguous to specify "this realm"?

The hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) has doubtless made a careful reading of my amendment, which will have drawn to his attention the fact that I wish to change "according to" to "upholding". I should not have thought that he would object to anyone being required to uphold the law of this realm.

Mr. Davies: The second part of that intervention was addressed to the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley), and I shall leave it to him to respond.

The first part was directed at me, and I can only say that I do not believe that when the hon. Lady teaches law in more sober and considered circumstances at the distinguished Queen's university, Belfast, she tells her students that changing a statute from saying one thing to saying something else does not create ambiguity. Any counsel pleading a case will draw the court's attention to the fact that the wording has been changed by Parliament. He will certainly argue that if Parliament had not intended to change matters, Parliament would not have changed the wording. I know perfectly well that that is what the hon. Lady would teach me if I were in her class in Belfast. I am sorry that she thinks that lower standards of intellectual rigour are appropriate in the House of Commons.

Lady Hermon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mallon *rose—*

Mr. Davies: I shall not give way again to the hon. Lady, but will give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Mallon: This is an interesting family squabble, but may I broaden the debate slightly? The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford says that his party is in favour of the Good Friday agreement. In the context of this and other amendments, does he fully agree that

> "parity of esteem and . . . just and equal treatment for the identity, ethos, and aspirations"

of the two communities in Northern Ireland is essential? Does he fully support that principle, clearly enunciated in the Good Friday agreement?

Mr. Davies: Yes, I do, wholeheartedly, sincerely and without ambiguity. I do not believe that that principle is in conflict with a system in which we are all equal subjects of Her Majesty and equally subject to the justice of the realm. On the contrary, I believe that it would be strengthened by it. We should all be equally liable to be judged by judges who have taken the same oath of allegiance throughout the United Kingdom.

We have far too little time to debate these matters. The point before us is one of the most crucial and our amendment would restore the position in a way with which everyone in Northern Ireland can feel comfortable. Unless the House wishes to signal that the concessions being made to one side in Northern Ireland are to go even further, and if the balance is not to be even further destroyed and the sense of fairness further undermined, it is absolutely necessary that there should be nothing ambiguous about the source of justice in Northern Ireland or, unless the people of Northern Ireland decide otherwise under the Belfast agreement, the status of Northern Ireland as a part of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Tom Harris: I spoke on Second Reading in January but was unfortunately unavailable to serve on the

[Mr. Tom Harris]

Standing Committee because of other commitments. I hope that hon. Members who served on the Committee will bear with me as I catch up with the latest moves.

Given your earlier ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall not deviate from the amendments. I had intended to comment on the fact that the consensual approach to Northern Ireland that was evident early in the debate had ended when the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) stood up, but I shall refrain from doing so.

It is a pity, and it is somewhat amazing, that the hon. Gentleman believes that his amendment is the best way to secure the trust of all the people of Northern Ireland. In spite of the history of Northern Ireland, he believes that retaining the royal oath in preference to the words in the Bill will somehow generate trust and security among all the people of Northern Ireland. That is incredible. It would be interesting to know what definition of republicanism the hon. Gentleman would offer. The oath contained in the Bill reads:

> "I . . . do swear that I will well and faithfully serve in the office of . . . and that I will do right to all manner of people without fear or favour, affection or ill-will according to the laws and usages of this realm."

That, according to the modern Conservative party, is a statement of republicanism.

Mr. Quentin Davies: The hon. Gentleman quotes the passage quoted by the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon), and with exactly the same emphasis. Let me repeat what I said to the hon. Lady, since the hon. Gentleman obviously did not hear it. There are only two possibilities facing us. First, the Government intend to change something, in which case they are introducing an element of republicanism to the legal system in Northern Ireland. Alternatively, they do not intend to change anything but the wording, in which case they are creating uncertainty and ambiguity. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman can get away from that analysis.

Mr. Harris: It ill serves the Conservative Front-Bench spokesman to talk in terms of introducing republicanism or caving in to republicanism when we are discussing such a sensitive and important Bill.

I was not a Member of the House when the legislation that set up the Northern Ireland Assembly was enacted. I do not know what the Conservative party's position was when the clauses concerning the oath to be taken by parliamentarians in Northern Ireland were debated. I understand that, unlike Members of this House, Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly do not have to swear the royal oath. That may provide the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford with a good example of how rules can be different for Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom.

Governments of both shades have legislated over the years for different provision in Northern Ireland. It would be madness to say that because members of the judiciary in mainland Britain swear a royal oath, the same must apply throughout the United Kingdom. Surely the Conservative party has realised by now that Northern Ireland is different: that is why we are discussing the Bill. Circumstances and politics are different, and the oath should be different too. We must apply ourselves to the different culture and history of Northern Ireland, and we can surely do so without saying that something is a concession to republicanism.

In principle, the royal oath is right for judges in Great Britain, but it would be immature to say that we must extend that principle throughout the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland, and that if we do not do so we are betraying the royal family and the Crown and giving in to republicanism. That is not the reality; it is not a mature attitude and the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford does Northern Ireland and his party grave disservice by conducting the debate in the terms that he has used tonight.

Mr. Garnier: I am not concerned with the argument put at the beginning of the debate as to who has gained or who has lost—either in perception or in fact; but I am concerned with the integrity of the judicial system and the administration of justice in Northern Ireland.

I hope that I do not undermine anything said by my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) when I say that I am reasonably sure that judges in Northern Ireland, and indeed any other part of the United Kingdom, will do their duty as judges irrespective of whether they take an oath. If they were simply to be sent a letter by the Lord Chancellor, or in Northern Ireland—following the devolution of justice—by the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister or the Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland, which stated, "Dear Bloggs, As from Monday 1 May you will hold the following appointment," I am reasonably confident that all those who were up to the job would do it to the best of their ability and fully in line with both the current oath and the one proposed in the Bill.

I cannot speak with 100 per cent. confidence, but I am fairly sure that at the moment I am the only person in the Chamber who has taken an oath of allegiance on appointment as a recorder. I took an oath of allegiance when I took silk, and I take such an oath every time I am returned to this place after a general election. I have managed to do that three times and hope that I may be allowed to do so a few more times.

I understand and value the oath of allegiance for several reasons, and I regret—to put it mildly—the fact that the Government have seen the need to make a change. I regret it because—as my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford said—justice flows from the Crown. I apologise for paraphrasing my remarks in the Standing Committee, but there is misunderstanding both about the word "Crown" and about the institution to which people swear allegiance when they take the current judicial oath.

It is often thought by people who disagree with me—those who are embarrassed that in the 21st century we have a hereditary head of state—that we take the oath of allegiance only to a particular human being. We do not: we take an oath of allegiance to the structure of the state—if I may diffidently say that. It just so happens that in our country the monarch—the sovereign—is the human representation of the integrity of the state. That reminds us that we are democrats accountable to something bigger than ourselves, and that the Government are smaller than the state.

Over the past few years, the Government have sometimes tended to forget that. It is a truism to say so, but none the less the Government are here at the request of the majority of the voting public. Despite the Government's huge power, they are smaller than, and subordinate to, the Crown—not the Queen herself, but the state and the constitution.

7.45 pm

Although we do not have a written constitution unlike some modern republics or the United States, that does not mean that our constitution is not worth remembering and upholding. It is written down, but not in a single document—it is to be found in several places. One of our most important sets of constitutional instruments are unwritten conventions whereby officers of the state—be they Cabinet Ministers or members of Departments—recognise their place in the constellation that is our constitution. I am fearful—perhaps too fearful—that the way in which the change to the oath is being approached is an indication that the Government misunderstand our constitution and do not want to preserve, or are careless of, the integrity of our United Kingdom and the constitution that rules it.

Despite the comments of the hon. Members for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Harris) and for North Down (Lady Hermon), I can see a distinction between the use of the word "realm" in the proposed oath and in the oath of allegiance. I agree that realms normally have a monarch, but the word "realm" is, by and large, a geographical description, whereas the oath of allegiance to the Crown demonstrates a commitment to something beyond geographical definition.

Mr. Tom Harris: I rise to clarify a point about my contribution. The hon. and learned Gentleman suggested that I had emphasised the word "realm", but I am not aware that I did so. I expressed support for the wording in the Bill, but not especially for the word "realm". The rest of the oath is perfectly acceptable, reasonable and sensible—regardless of the inclusion of the word "realm".

Mr. Garnier: Perhaps when the hon. Gentleman took the oath, when he became a Member in 2001, he faced an intellectual or emotional difficulty, but I am delighted to see him here. Should he be fortunate enough to be re-elected, I trust that he will find no difficulty in taking the oath as he did recently—but I digress. I was making the short point that there is a difference between the word "realm" and what is implied by, and lies behind, the oath of allegiance to the Crown.

In essence, we take an oath to that non-political institution—the state—which is the provider and protector of laws and protects the citizens who live within the realm. There are any number of obvious connections between the Crown and the administration of justice. For example, criminal cases are brought in the name of the Crown, as in the case of Regina *v.* Smith or Bloggs. In this part of the United Kingdom, we have the Crown Prosecution Service. I agree with the amendments proposed by the Ulster Unionists: Public Prosecution Service is a desperately dull name, as well as demonstrating a misunderstanding of the nature of our constitution.

The police are servants of the Crown. Judges are servants of the Crown. Prison officers are servants of the Crown. The armed forces are servants of the Crown. Members of the civil service—I used to believe—were servants of the Crown. To return to my own self-important existence, the expression "Queen's Counsel" connotes some connection with the Crown.

The quality of our justice system has not been adversely affected by that connection with the Crown. I am concerned that by diluting the connection with the Crown that the oath of allegiance represents, the Government are saying that they are happy to see what is good and ought to be respected replaced by something less good.

This discussion reminds me of the debates that we had just before Christmas that led to the Sinn Fein Members being admitted to the precincts and offices of this place, and given access to the financial advantages of being Members of Parliament. One of my complaints then was that the Government motion to admit those four Members from Northern Ireland to this place created two classes of Member of Parliament, which is constitutionally abhorrent.

I fear that in addition to that, we are now creating two classes of judicial officer within the United Kingdom. I dare say there are all sorts of politically convenient reasons for doing that. However, although I see why the Government have devised the scheme, I am not sure that I wholly understand or respect those reasons, even though the Government rightly claim to be following the recommendations of the criminal justice review.

The mere fact that a review says something does not of itself mean that we as thinking Members of Parliament should necessarily accept it. There is a recent example of the Government, after consideration, deciding not to accept one of the recommendations of the review. That was about the designation of resident magistrates, as opposed to whatever the other name is; I have forgotten it.

Mr. Mallon: DJs.

Mr. Garnier: Yes, DJs—dinner jackets—the hon. Gentleman is right. We were discussing them earlier.

One of the Government Whips, who was being unusually voluble, once accused me of being the Member for Pompous, North.

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): It was the *Daily Mail.*

Mr. Garnier: It was the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty), a Government Whip who felt it appropriate to absent himself from the Front Bench and go to the Back Benches to encourage his otherwise feeble colleagues to support the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions

I willingly accept that I am pompous and out of date, and that I am seen as a hugely inconvenient lawyer who is concerned with justice, our judicial system and the integrity of the administration of justice. So be it. I am happy to take that on the chin. What I am not happy about is the diminution in the apparent regard of the Government and those who support them for the justice system in Northern Ireland. That system seems to me to be under great strain, and in need of all the support that it can get—if not from the Government, at least from the Opposition.

Rev. Ian Paisley: The people of Northern Ireland take this matter most seriously, as the Secretary of State well knows. We have heard some talk about perceptions,

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

but the right hon. Gentleman himself has perceived—if we can use that word—that Northern Ireland is getting cold for Unionists; I believe that I am quoting what he said.

Why does the Secretary of State perceive that? Why do the people of Northern Ireland perceive it? Because the facts are crying out to them. Every day when they go out they can see with their own eyes what is happening to their country. The situation in terms of ordinary law and order is very serious.

I am not talking about fighting terrorism. We have a rising crime rate: young ladies studying at Queen's have been savagely sexually attacked, older people are being robbed, and we have a burglary rate that we have not had for a very long time, if ever, in Northern Ireland. Those facts stand.

Amazingly, because of what runs from the agreement, we must now do something about the people in our police force who are not full-time—the reserve men. If we lose the reserve, and if we look at the figures that have been issued for every area of Northern Ireland and see how low our police numbers are—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am having difficulty relating what the hon. Gentleman is saying to the amendment under discussion.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I was simply commenting on what has been said by others about perceptions. I was trying to say that the law and order situation in Northern Ireland is a reality. However, rather than disturbing the quiet of the Chair, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will come to the question before the House.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Harris) talked about why we should introduce the change, but this is not an introduction; it is taking away something that has always been there. The judiciary in Northern Ireland have always taken the oath of allegiance. People who were promoted, on both sides of the religious and political divide, took the oath of allegiance.

The oath of allegiance is to the Queen in Parliament, because the Queen as an individual is not the source of justice; the Queen in Parliament as a constitutional monarch is the source of justice. When someone takes the oath of allegiance they are taking it to what the state is and what it stands for. Because we have a constitutional monarchy, we take the oath to the Queen in Parliament. When people take an oath of allegiance they are acknowledging the state and their allegiance to it, and their loyalty to the laws of the state.

It is a very big thing to propose—as is proposed in the Bill, although we may not reach that part of it tonight—that changes should be made to the coat of arms outside or inside the law courts, which is displayed in connection with the judiciary. I know that you will be getting a bit restless with me now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I am simply using that as an illustration. The changed oath of allegiance that we are now discussing is an attempt to do away with the reality that the law that rules Northern Ireland is not Northern Ireland law, but United Kingdom law.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart was right to say what he did about the first Assembly, and other Assemblies. For example, the law commanded people who were elected to the old Stormont Parliament to take an oath of allegiance to the Queen. It was this House that decided—against the will of the majority of Northern Ireland Members here—that that should happen. It was not our doing.

It is interesting that when someone comes from Northern Ireland to this House, they have to take the oath of allegiance. People in Northern Ireland saw that when many people who violently opposed taking an oath of allegiance in Northern Ireland were elected to this House, they still took the oath when they came here.

Mr. Tom Harris: The hon. Gentleman makes a powerful case for democratic accountability in this House, and points out that the legislation for the Northern Ireland Assembly was voted on by the whole House—against the wishes, on some occasions, of the majority of Northern Ireland Members. Does he not agree that that is simply a case of the writ of the United Kingdom Parliament running in Northern Ireland? Is that not what he stands for in the first place?

8 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley: I have no objection to that, but I do object to the statement that Northern Ireland should not have United Kingdom laws. There is a proposal to alter part of the coat of arms in courthouses—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is a very experienced Member of the House and he knows that he is treading outside the terms of the amendment. As time is limited, I appeal to him to keep within the bounds of the amendment.

Rev. Ian Paisley: In that case, I cannot answer the question of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart. Perhaps I will see him, although not in the bar, and discuss the matter with him then. The point needs to be made that not only is there a proposal to delete from the oath any reference to the Queen but the real oath of allegiance would be destroyed. The people from Northern Ireland who represent the majority Unionist view are told that we should not come to the House and express our concern because these matters are so sensitive, but I believe that the Assembly and this House are the place to talk about these matters. We are democratic representatives. I know that people do not like what other people say, but as we say in Northern Ireland, they have to thole it. We have to thole one another.

This is the place where these matters need to be debated, but when people in Northern Ireland look at this House, they say, "You hardly have time to enter into a proper debate." Today, we are having the complete Report stage and Third Reading of the Bill. We will not get to some of the matters that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have told me I dare not mention, yet those matters go to the heart of the conviction of the majority people in Northern Ireland. It is unfair to those people that their representatives cannot fully discuss matters in this Parliament, where they are being settled and voted on.

The oath of allegiance sworn by the judiciary of Northern Ireland is a very serious issue because the Queen in Parliament is the source of justice. We feel that we should be like every other part of the United Kingdom, and if we are under United Kingdom law, the judiciary should take the oath that is taken everywhere else in the United Kingdom.

Lady Hermon: As the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) was not generous enough to allow me to intervene on him again, I should take this opportunity to correct the suggestion that I regularly return to teaching as a law professor. I have one job and one job only, and that is as a Member of the House. I took early retirement from the law faculty at Queen's in 1988. It is always worth stating the facts correctly.

Mr. Quentin Davies: I stand corrected if the hon. Lady is no longer a professor, but I hope that she does not think that I have to apologise for insulting her. It does not seem to me to be insulting to refer to someone as a professor of law at a very distinguished university.

Lady Hermon: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's remark, but that is not the point that I was correcting. In his earlier remarks he said that he hoped that I would teach my students with more clarity than was contained in the points that I was making, which I thought was unfair and worth correcting.

I want to respond to the curious point made by the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon). He quoted the Belfast agreement and asked Unionist parties whether there was respect for principles such as parity of esteem and for the sensitivity of those who do not feel themselves to be British. I can speak only for the Ulster Unionist party and not for all those on the Unionist Benches—I would not attempt to do that. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that parity of esteem and the other terms that he mentioned appear in the agreement.

The question of whether those principles are compatible with the agreement when one recognises the constitutional position of Northern Ireland has already been tested in court. The judgment of the High Court in Belfast in the Conor Murphy case was handed down on 4 October 2001. In that case the judge had to interpret the regulations on flag flying and test whether they were consistent with the agreement. He made the valid observation that the Government are duty bound to strike the right balance between the constitutional guarantee in the agreement and elements such as parity of esteem and recognition of the identity of communities other than those who feel themselves to be British.

The question is one of balance, and in clause 20 Northern Ireland's constitutional position is recognised in the words "of this realm". That is clearly a reference to the United Kingdom and a recognition of Northern Ireland's status as being within the United Kingdom, and is therefore compatible with the agreement. I would not like the Opposition to press amendment No. 45 to a vote because, if passed, it would remove the words "of this realm".

The amendments in my name would substitute the words "according to" with "upholding". It makes no sense at all to say that

> "I will do right to all manner of people without fear or favour, affection or ill-will according to the laws and usages of this realm."

Will the Minister explain which laws and usages the Government had in mind when the Bill was drafted? It makes much more sense to me to replace "according to" with "upholding".

Turning again to the comments of the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh, I draw his attention to the judgment in the case of two young members of the legal profession who had been called to become Queen's Counsel. In that judgment and in their arguments the point was made that they felt discriminated against on grounds of religion, which was an infringement of their human rights.

The Human Rights Act 1998, which incorporates the European convention on human rights and stands outside the agreement, provides a very strong argument. It makes it clear that everyone within the jurisdiction of Northern Ireland is entitled to manifest their religion. Article 14 of the convention makes it clear that everyone should be able to manifest their religion without any discrimination on grounds of, among other things, political belief or opinion. The two barristers raised valid arguments, and serious issues had to be taken into account. Regrettably, the decision turned on a technicality so we did not get to the core of their arguments, but those points have to be taken into account when people are required to swear an oath of allegiance.

Replacing "according to" with "upholding" would recognise the constitutional position and it would retain the words "of this realm", which would be removed by the Opposition amendment.

David Burnside (South Antrim): Unlike most members of my party, including its leader and my hon. Friend the Member for North Down (Lady Hermon), I did not go to the law faculty at Queen's university; I just struggled through a general degree on the arts side.

The real problem is the totally confused exchange between the Secretary of State and the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman about perception and reality—that lies at the very core of this issue—and the fundamental debate that relates to the clauses on the oath and to the later amendments on arms and symbols, to which I shall not refer now. Those issues are interconnected and interrelated.

There is a lack of confidence. The Secretary of State talked clearly and accurately in his interview during the weekend and in his earlier Cold House speech, but he does seem to think that, in our misty red, white and blue eyes of Ulster Unionism, it is our perception that he is dealing with the reality. As a non-lawyer, I can only consider the reality clearly and clinically in the Bill. As a Unionist, my bottom-line belief is that I will not support or vote for anything in the House that weakens the United Kingdom or the fundamental oath of allegiance for me, as an individual subject or citizen, and for the font of the judiciary which is the Crown.

By making us different, we would weaken the Britishness of the people of Northern Ireland and the oath. I am not really disagreeing with my hon. Friend the Member for North Down (Lady Hermon), but the reality now in Northern Ireland involves judging whether the Bill will weaken or strengthen us as British citizens and subjects. By any judgment, clearly and clinically, it will weaken us. That does not mean that I and other hon. Member across the Unionist Bench might not approve of some improvements to the much worse earlier proposal in the legislation. I would support the Conservative party in its amendment—the leader of my party shakes his head—as I could support the two amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for North Down. All three

[David Burnside]

amendments deal with the problem that the Bill will weaken our position as full British subjects and citizen. Later clauses will weaken the symbolic personification of the Crown inside and outside the courts in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Mallon: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that this or any other Parliament should draft a criminal justice Bill to reinforce the political beliefs of any section of any community? In effect, that is what he is saying. He is not judging the merits of the Bill itself, but dealing with his perception of what Unionism should involve and demand.

David Burnside: The hon. Gentleman is completely wrong on that point. I want legislation to be drafted that affects all affairs related to Northern Ireland, including those reserved to this Parliament and those devolved to the Stormont Executive and Assembly, to involve uniform, full and equal British rights and citizenship as subjects of the Crown—equality right across the board. That is not party political.

The hon. Gentleman makes a major mistake in the pursuance of his views—a Member of the Executive made this point in debating with me on the radio this morning—because he believes that the Belfast agreement somehow gives equal treatment to the head of state, but it does not. The Belfast agreement enshrines the principle of consent. By common consent, we are part of the United Kingdom and we want equal rights. That may not be fashionable any longer and there is a debate within Unionism, but we want equality of treatment so far as we can throughout the United Kingdom.

I have tried to combine the oath of allegiance and the debate that will take place either this evening or in the future on the symbols of the Crown in Northern Ireland. I can only consider the reality, and the reality is that our fundamental citizenship as part of the United Kingdom will be weakened, rather than strengthened.

Mr. Gregory Campbell: In dealing with the oath of allegiance in Northern Ireland, as the Conservative Front-Bench spokesman and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland suggested, it is important to refer to whether it is one person's reality or another person's perception, but the Conservative amendment would at least have the advantage of being much more concise without yielding anything in terms of the integrity of the nation state to which anyone affirms the oath of allegiance.

8.15 pm

Hon. Members who are not from Northern Ireland sometimes have to grapple with the sensitivities of wordings. Only an hour or so ago during the debate, there was a reference to the term "resident magistrate", which most people would consider innocuous. The lineage back to the famine was immediately drawn, so I can imagine that some people would begin to despair if even the apparently innocuous term "resident magistrate" were almost given the standing of a swear word.

I shall not detail all the concessions that have flowed from the Belfast agreement, but when considering Northern Ireland and the oath, the reality for many people, especially in the Unionist community, is that the maintenance of the Bill's wording, as opposed to the concise used in the Conservative amendment, involves the replacement of the original oath of allegiance with something that is somewhat less precise. The Conservative Front-Bench spokesman referred to that as a concession to republicanism, but I shall not use those words. For that reason, I shall support the Conservative amendment.

The amendment tabled by hon. Friend the Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) deals with the distinction between the terms "according to" and "upholding" the laws and usages of this realm. There may be a slight distinction, but I would not imagine that it would cause the House to divide on the two wordings.

Dr. John Reid: I have obviously listened to the views expressed by hon. Members in this debate and read the views that they expressed during the consultation process and on Second Reading. It is worth saying that the oath in clause 20 replicates exactly the words recommended by the review and that the review spent a considerable amount of time discussing that matter. Of course, that is not to say that there can be no deviation from any recommendation—by definition, they are recommendations. In recommending this oath, the review group recognised the need to take account of the independence of the judiciary, as well as Northern Ireland's wider constitutional status.

The Opposition spokesman made a point about ambiguity, but there is no ambiguity at all. Nothing in the clause casts the slightest shadow of doubt on Northern Ireland's constitutional status. As the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) said, the word "realm" reflects the United Kingdom's position as a constitutional monarchy. That word is important on two counts. To dismiss the inclusion of the word "realm", as was done earlier, as somehow being a concession to republicanism—as if people rarely spoke of anything in the pubs of west Belfast besides the welfare of the realm—is to misunderstand the word's importance. The clause brings in a more modern oath that focuses on the impartiality of the judiciary and its independence.

The review group also sought to remove any blockages that might inhibit people from applying for judicial appointment—a key part of ensuring a reflective judiciary. I am sure that we can all agree on the importance of those principles, especially in the devolution scenario. Amendment No. 45 seeks to disregard the rationale that lay behind the recommendation for the special circumstances in Northern Ireland, choosing instead to caricature it as a republican manifesto and template. I can only say again that there will be no change to the judiciary's relationship with Her Majesty the Queen. The clause is not about republicanism, but about protecting independence, impartiality and inclusiveness, and modernising where it is useful to do so. Given all the argument that we have had on the matter, I doubt that my request that we agree on it and that the amendment be withdrawn will get a positive response. None the less, I ask again for that agreement.

Amendments Nos. 81 and 82 seek to amend the new oath and declaration, requiring office holders to uphold the laws and usages of the realm, rather than to act in accordance with them. I listened carefully to what the hon. Member for North Down said. I agree with much of the burden of her analysis of the oath itself. Indeed, she analysed it more perceptively than many others—

especially those on the Opposition Front Bench. However, I am not clear what difference her amendments seek to make by substituting the word "upholding" for the term "according to". It is clear that the wording of the oath already achieves the desired effect. Incidentally, she asked which laws and usages the provision referred to. The word "all" is already implied. Interestingly, the Scottish oath uses the words

"after the laws and usages of this realm".

The clause merely uses the words "according to" rather than "after".

Although I do not object to the word "upholding" in principle, I point out that there are dozens of ways of expressing the same thing. We have stuck pretty closely to both the English and Scottish usage, as well as replicating exactly the recommendations of the review. As there are dozens of ways of expressing the meaning, if we are agreed on the underlying aim—I think that we are—there does not seem to be any point in accepting drafting changes for the sake of it.

I would prefer, therefore, to stick to the current wording, which reflects the review recommendations, and urge the hon. Member for North Down not to press her amendments. Of course, we will vote against them if she does so, but I say to her that I shall reflect further on what she said. Although I cannot discern any important difference in the meaning that is conveyed, having listened carefully to what she has said, I shall reflect further on the matter. None the less, I cannot discern any such difference this evening, so I shall have to oppose her amendments, because we have followed not only the recommendations, but the usage in Scotland and elsewhere.

Mr. Quentin Davies: We have had a very interesting debate. For the sake of brevity, I will say nothing about the support for my amendment expressed by the hon. Members for South Antrim (David Burnside) and for East Londonderry (Mr. Campbell), for which I am grateful. Instead, I shall address the remarks of the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) and of the Secretary of State, both of whom are unhappy with the amendment.

It may be entirely my fault and my inability to understand the remarks of the hon. Member for North Down, but even though I have been wrestling with the matter for the past half hour, I am at a loss to understand her agenda. She seems to want a modification that, as the Secretary of State said, is not essential in any way. Indeed, he said that he had some difficulty in discovering the substantive difference between the Bill as it stands and what her amendment proposes. I think that the word "upholding" is slightly stronger than "according to". If the clause in its current form were included at all, I would be very happy to change the wording to include the word "upholding", but surely, at very best, it is a secondary or tertiary issue.

The real issue is whether we should have a regime in Northern Ireland that is different from that which applies in the rest of the United Kingdom: one regime in Northern Ireland, and a different one the other side of the water. We must ask whether we want to send a signal saying that the same degree of allegiance to the Crown does not apply, and that justice does not appear to flow directly from the Crown or in exactly the same way on both sides of the water.

That is the minimal effect of accepting the Bill in its current form, but the maximum effect is that of a republican agenda. I hope that the hon. Member for North Down will now concede that, as a change of wording is being made, this question is opened up: why does it have no substantive purpose? Is it merely to waste the time of Parliament? Is it to bamboozle somebody or to pretend there has been a change when one has not been made? That is what I call ambiguity and uncertainty, and a lack of clarity, frankness and candour. The Government are expert in all those things, and no doubt that hypothesis is close to the truth. The alternative hypothesis is worse, as it is that they have an overtly republican agenda. I do not think that there is any third, fourth or fifth possibility. I am very surprised that the hon. Lady appears to place herself in the same camp as the Government on this matter.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): Will my hon. Friend admit to the possibility that there is another reason for making the change? It could be suggested that, where there are long-standing difficulties that are unconnected with the proper carrying out of impartial judicial activities, it is as well to be as soft with them as possible. Is it not more difficult to see the provision in that moderate way when one insists that there must be something much more extreme going on? On this occasion, I wonder whether it would be better to say that some problems are of such long standing that we have to find a mechanism that is soft enough to handle them, and that the suggestion that we are not doing that merely makes things more difficult for those who are looking for a moderate way forward.

Mr. Davies: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. I set out two possible explanations for what is going on: an intention either to introduce ambiguity or to make a substantive change. I said what I thought of both approaches. If he thinks about what he said, he will see that he suggested that there is some virtue in ambiguity. In other words, he chose deliberately and willingly—or would like us to do so—one of the two hypotheses that I advanced, and thinks that there is virtue in ambiguity in certain circumstances. However, he is still accepting that there is ambiguity in what the Government propose. I do not think it right that ambiguity should exist, especially in matters affecting the law of the land. I am sorry to disagree with him on that point, but at least he had the candour—other contributors have not shared it—to say, "Yes, there is ambiguity and that is what I want." That is a respectable point of view and I commend such frankness to the Secretary of State.

8.30 pm

The Secretary of State's first defence of the wording in the Bill was that it replicates the wording in the review. We covered that on Second Reading. I explained to the House—the point was well taken and nobody could contradict it—that as he appointed the chairman of the review body, who, like several of its members, is on the Government payroll, there is something more than a little incestuous in the Secretary of State's saying, "I have to do this because that's what the review decided." He packed the body in the first place and was in a position to influence the shape in which it turned out. There was nothing at all independent about the review. It therefore

[Mr. Davies]

has no status, validity or legitimacy separate from the will of the Government, which it merely represents in a different form. Parliament will not be taken in by that. We must, as always, consider the actual substance of the Government's proposals and take a view on the merits of changing the oath of allegiance.

The points that I made in response to the hon. Member for North Down are equally valid in response to the Secretary of State. In changing the law in this way, the Secretary of State must address the dilemma of whether he is trying to change something substantively—he implied that he was not when he said that nothing in the Bill casts doubt on the status of Northern Ireland—or merely wilfully creating uncertainty. If the latter, he is doing a bad day's work for the law, for the Province of Northern Ireland and for the peace process. He will fuel precisely the kind of suspicion and concern in Northern Ireland that, as he acknowledged yesterday in his BBC interview, is in danger of upsetting and destabilising the peace process.

In the light of the debate, I have no doubt that we should press the amendment to a vote.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 137, Noes 311.

Division No. 177] **[8.32 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spink, Bob
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, Rt Hon David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Desmond Swayne and
Mr. Julian Brazier.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cable, Dr Vincent
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cotter, Brian
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank

Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Ewing, Annabelle
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hume, John
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McGrady, Eddie
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mallon, Seamus
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Jim Fitzpatrick and
Dan Norris.

Question accordingly negatived.

Schedule 6

OFFICE-HOLDERS REQUIRED TO TAKE JUDICIAL OATH

Amendments made: No. 25, in page 88, line 34, leave out "District Judge (Magistrates" Courts)" and insert "Resident Magistrate".

No. 26, in page 88, line 35, leave out "District Judge (Magistrates" Courts)" and insert "Resident Magistrate".—*[Mr. Browne.]*

New Clause 3

DISCONTINUANCE OF PROCEEDINGS: INFORMATION FOR VICTIMS

'(1) Where the Director has the conduct of proceedings in relation to an offence against a person and he decides to discontinue such proceedings at any stage, he must inform the victim or victims of the offence, or in the event of their being deceased or incapacitated, their next of kin.

(2) If, following a court appearance, a person is acquitted at the direction of the court, the Director must inform the victim or victims of the offence, on in the event of their being deceased or incapacitated, their next of kin, of that action.'.—*[Mr. Blunt.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

8.45 pm

Mr. Blunt: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: New clause 4—*Reasons for discontinuance of proceedings*—

'(1) Where the Director has the conduct of proceedings in relation to an offence against a person and he decides to discontinue such proceedings at any stage, he shall have a duty to provide the Attorney General and the Advocate General with reasons for his decision.

(2) The Attorney General shall, if requested by the victims of the offence, or in the event of their being deceased or incapacitated, their next of kin, provide a copy of the reasons referred to in subsection (1) to those people, unless he decides that to do so would be against the interests of justice, or the Advocate General, with whom he shall have a duty to consult, decides that to do so would be against the public interest.'.

New clause 5—*Director's reasons for not instituting, or discontinuing, proceedings*—

'Where—

(a) the Director decides not to institute proceedings against a person or discontinues such proceedings; and

(b) a person appearing to the Director to have a legitimate interest in the matter requests reasons for his decision,

he must provide that person with such reasons unless to do so would be against the interests of justice or the public interest.'.

Mr. Blunt: Pressure of time will prevent me from speaking as fully as I would like about these new clauses, which are extremely important. They encapsulate the principle of placing victims at the centre of our consideration of criminal justice, which the Government address in clauses 67 to 69. I want to direct the House to the language in which clause 67 is drafted precisely to show the extent to which I want to carry that principle across to the issue of informing the victims when proceedings in relation to offences are discontinued.

Later, the Government will invite the House to accept clause 67, which states:

> "A victim information scheme is a scheme requiring the Secretary of State to make available information about the discharge or temporary release of persons serving sentences of imprisonment in Northern Ireland imposed in respect of the commission of offences ("imprisoned offenders") to victims of the offences who wish to receive it."

That provision relates to giving victims of crime information about when the prisoners who committed those offences will be released, and we support it. However, informing victims of crime when proceedings against individuals have been discontinued is a much more fundamental duty.

We discussed in Committee examples of how victims, who are currently not central to the process, are unable to discover, unless they are active in seeking the information, that the Director of Public Prosecutions may have decided to discontinue proceedings. When I attempted to formulate a similar new clause in Committee, the Minister correctly pointed out that it reflected only a small part of the process. I have therefore tabled two further new clauses that reflect two separate issues.

The first issue is the straightforward passage of information to victims of offences, or, in the event of their being deceased or incapacitated, to their next of kin. Therefore, under new clause 3, when the Director has the conduct of proceedings in relation to an offence against a person and he decides to discontinue such proceedings, he would have to inform the victim at any stage of the process. Equally, if those proceedings go to court and the court directs that those proceedings should be discontinued, the duty would fall on the Director to inform the victim. The new clause relates simply to the passage of information to ensure that victims know that proceedings have been discontinued against those concerned. There can be no argument against that, although I do not want to speak for too long so that I can listen to the Government should they adduce one.

New clause 4 is necessarily more complicated. It deals not only with the passage of information about discontinuance but with the giving of reasons. I have reflected on our earlier debate, and particularly on the contributions of the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) and the Minister. I have tried to identify the right place at which to lay responsibility for the giving of reasons. I remain convinced that in normal circumstances it is right to give reasons why proceedings are stayed. We discussed in Committee the controversial cases, especially those in which proceedings against members of the security forces in Northern Ireland have been discontinued. There needs to be confidence in the process.

Plainly, two judgments need to be made: the giving of reasons must be in the public interest, and must not be against the interests of justice. I have drawn my new clause more tightly than the more widely drawn new clause 5 tabled by the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh, and have provided that such information should be discoverable by the victim of the offence.

The issue at stake on the giving of reasons is where the responsibility should lie, and in Committee we debated whether it should lie with the DPP or the Attorney-General. I have reflected on that, and have come to the conclusion that the responsibility for the interests of justice test should properly lie with the Attorney-General, who should be accountable having been informed by the DPP that he has discontinued proceedings. On the wider judgment of the public interest, the Advocate-General, who under the arrangements in the Bill will be the Attorney-General for England and Wales and so a Member of this House or the other place, is the appropriate person to have responsibility for the public interest test.

That is how I have framed these two new clauses. They deal with immensely important principles, and if we are to put victims at the centre of criminal justice and bear their interests in mind, the new clauses must be supported and I commend them to the House.

Mr. Mallon: I shall attempt to be brief, but as the hon. Member for Reigate said, this is a crucial issue that was debated at length in Committee, not least because the review recommended that if information is sought by someone with a proper and legitimate interest in the case about why there was no prosecution or why a prosecution has been abandoned, the prosecutor should give as full an explanation as possible without prejudicing the interests of justice or the public interest. That is important in the Northern Ireland context. I shall not go into detail about the reasons why, but would simply ask whether things would be a lot easier with policing and with the Bill had this applied in the Finucane and Hamill cases and many others.

I agree with the Government that such decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis. The Government also stressed that certain considerations had to taken into account, including the interest of witnesses and the risk of jeopardising the safety of individuals. I also agree with that, but where I disagree is that I believe that the presumption should always be in favour of giving reasons. Only when that would be against the interests of justice or against the public interest should reasons be withheld. That is consistent not only with the interests of the administration of justice, but with the interests of victims and their families. It is not enough for us to pay lip service to the interests of those who have been aggrieved while prosecutions have not been brought or have been dropped.

This matter is crucial and I regret that we are unable to give it the time that it deserves. So be it. I shall stop now, so that other hon. Members may speak.

Lembit Öpik: The hon. Members for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) and for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) have eloquently outlined what is virtually a one-sided case in favour of this modification. New clauses 3 and 4 offer us a different degree of implementation of the proposals laid out by the two hon. Members, while new clauses 4 and 5 would achieve more or less the same thing. I hope that the Minister takes the sentiment of what has been proposed seriously; he will be hard put to argue against the rationale for it.

At very least, I am interested to know whether the Minister will accept the absolute bare minimum—too little, in my view—as laid out in new clause 3. If not, what comfort and justification will he offer the victims and their friends and relatives after being intransigent on that point?

Mr. Gummer: I must add my support to the new clause, because I had such difficulty with the Government's position on the last matter. The new clause represents a sensitive approach to the difficulties in Northern Ireland, and sensitivity and delicacy are what we must consider. I hope that the Government take the same view, given that many of us feel that we are drawing a narrow line and that we must walk along it carefully. The big thing is to show that we entirely support the victims, and the new clauses would help in that respect. As we are looking for [illegible] sensitive route through a historically difficult position, that is the way in which we should proceed.

Mr. Browne: I must make it clear to the House that I accept the spirit in which this short debate has taken place. As in Committee, where we addressed these matters at greater length, I have listened carefully to hon. Members and, for reasons that they prayed in aid, I take the issues seriously.

New clause 3 would require the Director of Public Prosecutions to inform the victims of an offence if he decided to discontinue proceedings or if a person were acquitted of an offence for which he was being prosecuted. New clauses 4 and 5 would require the Director to give the victims of the case reasons for non-prosecution, even though, as the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) pointed out, that would be done through another Law Officer.

I understand and agree with the view of hon. Members that victims should be kept informed of the progress of their cases. All too often, the interests of the person who has suffered from a crime are forgotten. The review group was very conscious of that and made a number of recommendations with it in mind, but I do not believe that the provision before the House is the way to proceed.

As the hon. Member for Reigate pointed out, clause 67 provides for an information scheme for victims as to the release or temporary release of offenders from prison that has been welcomed in all parts of the House and spoken of positively in Committee. For obvious reasons, it does not apply to offenders who received a non-custodial sentence.

I draw the House's attention to clause 67(8), which contains a number of safeguards. The Secretary of State will not be able to give out information on the release of an offender if that adversely affects the safety of the victim or any other person. There are no comparable safeguards in new clause 3. *[Interruption.]* Will the hon. Member for Reigate wait until I have finished?

The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) referred to the bare minimum or the bottom line—*[Interruption.]* This is not difficult. Imagining circumstances in which information that a prosecution has been discontinued might disadvantage the health or well-being of a victim may be beyond Opposition Members' credulity or knowledge, but, having practised in the criminal courts for 20 years, I can think of vulnerable people who would not be able to accept such information. For example, people who are mentally ill or those whose vulnerability results from abuse would not be ready to accept it, and I am not prepared to accept a statutory requirement that they be told whether they are vulnerable or not.

Comparable safeguards to the ones that I have pointed out in the clause would be the bare minimum that I would expect, but no such safeguards are to be found in the new clause. The Director would have to give out information regardless of its effect.

Mr. Blunt: I know that we are running out of time, but my point—

It being Nine o'clock, Mr. Deputy Speaker, *pursuant to Order [21 January], put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

The House divided: Ayes 167, Noes 286.

Division No. 178] **[9 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Londy)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
(Rushcliffe)
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel

Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hume, John
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McGrady, Eddie
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNamara, Kevin
Malins, Humfrey
Mallon, Seamus
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*

Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir T[illegible]
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, Rt Hon David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Julian Brazier and
Mr. Desmond Swayne.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John

Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary

Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul

Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain

McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Organ, Diana
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Dan Norris and
Jim Fitzpatrick.

Question accordingly negatived.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *then proceeded to put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that hour.*

Clause 24

TERMS OF APPOINTMENT OF ATTORNEY GENERAL

Amendment made: No. 139, in page 15, line 3, leave out from "time," to end of line 5.—*[Mr. Browne.]*

Clause 27

ANNUAL REPORT BY ATTORNEY GENERAL

Amendment made: No. 140, in page 17, line 1, after second "Minister" insert ", acting jointly,".—*[Mr. Browne.]*

Clause 36

INFORMATION FOR DIRECTOR

Amendment made: No. 141, in page 21, line 37, leave out "District Judge (Magistrates' Courts)" and insert "resident magistrate".—*[Mr. Browne.]*

Clause 38

CODE FOR PROSECUTORS

Amendment made: No. 142, in page 22, line 39, at end insert—

'(4A) In preparing or making alterations to a code the Director must be guided by the general principles of the Guidelines on the Role of Prosecutors adopted at the Eighth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders held at Havana between 27th August and 7th September 1990.'.—*[Mr. Browne.]*

Clause 56

CUSTODY CARE ORDERS

Amendment made: No. 143, in page 42, line 22, at end insert—

'(4A) Where the court imposes a fine on the child under paragraph (3)(a) or (4)(a), it shall order that the fine be paid by the parent or guardian of the child instead of by the child, unless it is satisfied that there is good reason for not so doing.

(4B) A fine ordered under paragraph (4A) to be paid by a parent or guardian may be recovered from him by distress, or he may be imprisoned in default of payment, in like manner as if the order had been made on the conviction of the parent or guardian of the offence for which the custody care order was made.

(4C) A parent or guardian may appeal to a county court against an order under paragraph (4A).'.—*[Mr. Browne.]*

Clause 58

DIVERSIONARY YOUTH CONFERENCES

Amendment made: No. 144, in page 48,, leave out lines 20 to 23.—*[Mr. Browne.]*

Clause 59

COURT-ORDERED YOUTH CONFERENCES

Amendments made: No. 145, in page 53, leave out lines 7 to 10.

No. 146, in page 53, leave out lines 11 to 13.

No. 147, in page 53, leave out line 16.

No. 148, in page 53, line 24, leave out from "unless" to end of line 26.—*[Mr. Browne.]*

Schedule 10

YOUTH JUSTICE ORDERS: ENFORCEMENT ETC.

Amendment made: No. 149, in page 103, line 25, leave out "District Judge (Magistrates" Courts)" and insert "resident magistrate".—*[Mr. Browne.]*

New Clause 2

FLYING OF FLAGS AT COURT-HOUSES

'(1) In Article 3(1) of the Flags (Northern Ireland) Order 2000 (S.I. 2000/1347 (N.I. 3)) (power to make regulations about the flying of flags at government buildings), insert at the end "and court-houses".

(2) The Flags Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 (S.R. 2000 No. 347) (which were made in the exercise of that power) apply in relation to court–houses as they apply in relation to the government buildings specified in Part 1 of the Schedule to the Regulations (but subject to any amendment which may be made to the Regulations in the further exercise of that power).'.—*[Mr. Browne.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

Clause 66

DISPLAY OF ROYAL ARMS AT COURTS

Amendments made: No. 150, in page 58, line 12, at end insert—

'(1A) But subsection (1) does not prevent the display of the Royal Arms anywhere in—

(a) the courtrooms in the Royal Courts of Justice in Belfast,

(b) the courtrooms in the Courthouse in Armagh,

(c) the courtroom in the Courthouse in Banbridge,

(d) Court No. 1 in the Courthouse in Downpatrick,

(e) the courtrooms in the Courthouse in Magherafelt, or

(f) the courtrooms in the Courthouse in Omagh,

where they were displayed immediately before the coming into force of this section.'.

No. 151, in page 58, line 13, leave out subsections (2) and (3).

No. 152, in page 58, line 25, leave out "not a new court-house" and insert—

'in use before the coming into force of this section'.—*[Mr. Browne.]*

Schedule 12

MINOR AND CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendments made: No. 153, in page 113, leave out lines 16 to 18 and insert—

'(c) a fine imposed, or an order made, under Article 41(2) or 44F(3) or (4) of the Criminal Justice (Children) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 (NI 9);

(ca) an order made under Article 44C(3)(a) or 54(3)(a) of that Order;'.

No. 154, in page 120, line 36, at end insert—

'(2B) Where the court imposes a fine on the offender under paragraph (2)(a)—

(a) if he has not attained the age of 16, it shall order that the fine be paid by the parent or guardian of the child instead of by the child, unless it is satisfied that there is good reason for not so doing; and

(b) if he has attained that age but has not attained the age of 18, it may so order.

(2C) A fine ordered under paragraph (2B) to be paid by a parent or guardian may be recovered from him by distress, or he may be imprisoned in default of payment, in like manner as if the order had been made on the conviction of the parent or guardian of the offence for which the juvenile justice centre order was made.

(2D) A parent or guardian may appeal to a county court against an order under paragraph (2B).".'.—*[Mr. Browne.]*

Schedule 13

REPEALS AND REVOCATIONS

Amendments made: No. 155, in page 123, line 12, leave out "75(1) and (3)" and insert "75(3)".

No. 156, in page 123, line 33, at end insert—

'section 21(2) of the Treatment of Offenders Act (Northern Ireland) 1968,'.

No. 157, in page 123, line 41, at end insert—

'Interpretation Act 1978 (c. 30)	In Schedule 1, in the definition of "committed for trial", in paragraph (b), the words ", justice of the peace".'.

No. 158, in page 124, line 15, leave out ", in sub-paragraph".

No. 159, in page 124, line 17, leave out from "(3),"" to end of line 20.

No. 160, in page 124, line 47, at end insert—

'Food Safety (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 (S.I. 1991/762 (N.I. 7))	In Article 8(5), paragraph (b) and the word "and" before it.'.

No. 161, in page 126, line 11, at end insert—

'Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 (S.I. 1999/2789 (N.I. 8))	In Article 2(2), in the definition of "judge", the words "or justice of the peace".'.

No. 162, in page 126, line 18, at end insert—

'In section 89(3), the words "10(4) or".'.

—*[Mr. Browne.]*

Clause 89

STATUTORY RULES

Amendment made: No. 163, in page 70, line 13, after "section" insert "11(2B),".—*[Mr. Browne.]*

Clause 90

EXTENT

Amendment made: No. 164, in page 70, leave out line 25.—*[Mr. Browne.]*

Order for Third Reading read.

9.13 pm

Dr. John Reid: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

Today's debates represent another important step in the process of modernising the criminal justice system and implementing the Belfast agreement. The criminal justice review is the last major feature of the agreement that it falls to the Government to implement. Once again, we have shown that we as a Government will fulfil our responsibilities in full.

The Belfast agreement represents a victory for the people of Northern Ireland. It is not always easy to implement. It requires a balance—a balance recognised earlier, very perceptively, by the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer)—between recognition of the principle of consent on the constitutional status and recognition of diversity and parity of esteem. Both are enshrined in the Belfast agreement. No one got entirely what they wanted from the agreement, or from the unfolding of the agreement; but as a result of that historic agreement we have secured a functioning devolved Administration, and an enormous improvement in the social and security situation that has blighted Northern Ireland since the 1960s. None of us can afford to be complacent, but there has been a significant improvement.

The criminal justice review also holds out the prospect of improvements that benefit both sides in equal measure, I believe, and the whole community in great measure. The review made 294 recommendations over the whole range of activities in the criminal justice field. It was the most comprehensive look at the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland over the past 30 years. The review emerged during the course of negotiations on the Belfast agreement, but I believe that it reflected a somewhat deeper feeling that it was in any case time for a more fundamental review.

Once again, there are a small number of issues on which opinions are divided largely along community lines. Here we have needed and have tried to strike a careful balance between the two dimensions enshrined in the Belfast agreement, which I mentioned earlier. However, the overwhelming bulk of the review, and the Bill which implements it, has been widely welcomed. It is worth noting that despite all the differences that we have on a relatively small number of areas, the bulk of the review has been welcomed. Moreover, having read the Committee proceedings and discussed them with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, I think that it was, for the most part, an extremely constructive and positively conducted Committee stage.

The Bill has been welcomed outside the House by the practitioners in the criminal justice system, including those who work with children and victims. It has been welcomed by the parties which we hope will soon administer it and by the people of Northern Ireland more generally, particularly those who are interested in improvements to the criminal justice system.

In effect, the Bill is about putting Northern Ireland at the forefront of good practice in the United Kingdom and more widely. In some areas, learning from experience of other UK jurisdictions, the Bill implements in Northern Ireland reforms which have already been undertaken elsewhere in the UK. Other parts of the Bill will put Northern Ireland at the cutting edge of international practice.

We have made a number of amendments today on Report. Many reflect important points that hon. Members made during earlier stages of the Bill. Once again, I think that the controversy surrounding some of the amendments should not distract us from the larger number that have been generally welcomed. However, there have been, and remain, areas of controversy.

On symbols, we made amendments to reflect our assessment of a reasonable balance in this controversial area. The review identified an important distinction between the outside of courthouses and the inside of courtrooms. It saw the need to strike a balance between recognising the courts' position within the agreed constitutional framework in Northern Ireland and ensuring an atmosphere within courtrooms with which all the people of Northern Ireland could be comfortable. Once again, the wisdom of Solomon was required in trying to balance those two aspects emanating from the Belfast agreement.

Lady Hermon: I appreciate the Secretary of State's giving way. The amendment that was introduced to preserve royal coats of arms was, I thought, intended to recognise representations that had been made on heritage and architectural grounds rather than to recognise the constitutional principle. If it were a question of recognising the constitutional principle, all royal coats of arms would stay.

Dr. Reid: I do not disagree with the hon. Lady's point. I merely point out that I was talking in the context of the review's original recommendations. I do not dispute the point that she makes. The review identified an important distinction between the outside of courthouses and the inside of courtrooms. In addition, I pointed out that we needed to strike a balance when it comes to recognising the courts' position.

We agree with the distinction that was reflected in the Bill's amended provisions. We believe that we have made some commonsense amendments to preserve certain coats of arms within historic courthouses.

Having listened to the representations made to us—by, above all, the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon)—we do not believe that we would require a new start to criminal justice to be accompanied by what was called at one stage "architectural vandalism" of historic buildings. Our views on this have been reinforced by the practice in the Irish Republic, where court buildings including royal symbols have continued to be used.

I do regret the need to legislate on this matter at all. I believe that the position taken in the Bill is fair and balanced. However, it is no substitute for a decision taken and agreed on by the parties in Northern Ireland. That is why we delayed taking any decision in this area. As I made clear on Second Reading, we were open to constructive suggestions, particularly those capable of achieving cross-community support. Nothing in the Bill as it stands would prevent such agreement on symbols in the future either.

I have said that it would be regrettable if the issue of symbols overshadowed everything else discussed during the passage of the Bill through this House. The parliamentary stages of the Bill have seen debates of high quality on issues that go to the core of our criminal justice system: the independence of the judiciary and the

[Dr. Reid]

prosecution service; the possible shape of the Northern Ireland justice system after devolution; the place of international human rights instruments; and the role of victims, to name just a few.

As a result of these discussions, we have clarified the Bill in a number of useful respects following representations from the hon. Member for North Down and from my hon. Friend the Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon), to which I shall refer. We have strengthened the assurance that the Judicial Appointments Commission after devolution will be solely responsible for such appointments by amending the Bill's provisions on committees to which it can delegate its functions.

As requested, we have also clarified the important role of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister acting jointly in certain areas. We have recognised in the Bill the importance of international human rights instruments on the prosecution. All of these matters have been raised by the SDLP.

I shall mention briefly some of the valuable debates that we have had on the giving of reasons for non-prosecution. I understand the strong feeling that this issue can arouse, both about the general practice and the application of the principle to particularly sensitive cases involving deaths as a result of action by the security forces. Hon Members will be aware that we have not accepted the various amendments on reasons proposed during the passage of the Bill. However, they should know also about developments in the Government's response to the Strasbourg rulings in certain article 2 cases which coincided chronologically with proceedings on the Bill and the representations that were made.

On Friday, the Attorney-General answered a parliamentary question on this subject. His response included the text of a joint statement with the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland. I would urge hon. Members with an interest in the matter to study the text carefully. In brief, the DPP recognises that, in certain types of cases, the public's need for reassurance that a case has been properly investigated and that the rule of law has been maintained in the event of no prosecution following a death in which agents of the state have allegedly been involved may only be fulfilled if reasons for non-prosecution are given. In such a case, and in the absence of compelling reasons to the contrary, the director will give reasons. I hope that that goes some way towards addressing some of the concerns raised during our debates.

Mr. McNamara: I have followed carefully what my right hon. Friend has said about deaths in which members of the security forces are involved. What can he say about circumstances in which non-members of the security forces are involved, on either side, when someone who is an agent or member of the security forces is killed? Stobie is an example.

Dr. Reid: I have the joint statement with me but do not want, for reasons of time, to read it out. I refer my hon. Friend to the parliamentary answer given by the Attorney-General on Friday, which included a joint statement by him and the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland. That addresses the circumstances arising from the Jordan case, and I have formulated my own answer in those terms. That case was chronologically coincidental with our debates. It did not arise directly, but contributions made during debate on the Bill obviously had a bearing on my thinking on that matter as other discussions were taking place. I hope that my hon. Friend will read the statement, and if he has further questions, I shall be only too happy to respond.

I thank hon. Members for the care and attention that they gave to scrutiny of the Bill. As a result, it leaves the House improved in important ways, and that is, of course, the purpose of parliamentary scrutiny. I know that some hon. Members feel that more time could have been available. None the less, the level of scrutiny given in the time available both in and outside the House—the process began some time before Parliament engaged with it—enabled us to take the views of others on board and to develop the Bill. I hope that the House will agree that the Bill can move on to complete its parliamentary passage in the other place.

Mr. Blunt: Given the Secretary of State's remarks about the conduct of proceedings, and given my views about the conduct of the Under-Secretary in Committee, does he agree that it is to be regretted that we have had no detailed consideration of several matters, particularly the new youth justice provisions?

Dr. Reid: I have no hesitation in saying that my experience leads me to wish that several Committees that I served on before I became a Secretary of State had enjoyed such positive and constructive engagement on the issues. I share the hon. Gentleman's regret that we could not find a little more time. He probably knows that some late efforts were made through channels to which we do not always refer in the Chamber to try to find more time. There was a genuine feeling on both sides that that might happen, but it did not prove possible. It might have been more constructive to proceed in that way, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's regrets about lack of time are shared by other hon. Members. Limited time is left to us, but it may be that some of issues not yet addressed may yet be raised.

The Bill is only part of the process of reform. When we published the draft Bill, we also published an implementation plan. Not all the 294 recommendations required legislation, and even for those that did, the passage of the Bill is just the first step. The Attorney-General, the Lord Chancellor and I are committed to implementing the review recommendations. When the Bill achieves Royal Assent—on the assumption that that is the will of Parliament—we will publish a further implementation plan setting out progress made and giving a firm timetable for action.

Many hon. Members have referred to a commitment for swift action on implementation of the review's recommendations. It has been suggested that the review would benefit from an oversight arrangement. My hon. Friend the Member for Newry and Armagh proposed an amendment on the subject, which, regrettably, was not selected as it would have enabled us to discuss it in more detail on Report—as I should have liked to do.

My hon. Friend knows that we have doubts about a statutory post, as the review team—even with the policing example before it—did not make such a recommendation.

Nevertheless, he expressed his views forcefully and with some import. I assure him that I shall consider further the implementation of such arrangements.

By any standards, the complexity of the reforms and the number of agencies involved are formidable, but progress has already been made. After Royal Assent, I hope that the revised implementation plan will make it clear that the process of giving effect to the review is gathering momentum.

I hope that is the case because the prize before us is huge: a reformed criminal justice system and, ultimately, the devolution of responsibility for criminal justice and policing some time after the Assembly elections in 2003. That is what we all want, however difficult it may be politically. If it is to be achieved, we have no time to waste and I hope that the House will show confidence in the process by giving the Bill a Third Reading.

9.32 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies: I wholeheartedly agree with the Secretary of State that the consideration of the Bill in the House and in the Standing Committee has been thorough—as far as it has gone. The debate has been excellent. There have been some distinguished contributions and some lively exchanges of views—as there should be in this place. However, I emphasise the words "as far as it has gone".

I fully share the Secretary of State's regret that we have been unable to do the Bill justice. I know that it is not personally the fault of the right hon. Gentleman and that he did everything possible to ensure that we had slightly more time to consider the Bill. I hope that he will tell his colleagues that the treatment of the Bill during the past few weeks has been a classic example of the appalling damage done to the operation of Parliament by the so-called reforms of the new Labour Government. They are anything but reforms.

It is absurd that more than 30 clauses were not even dealt with in Committee. We have been unable to discuss some of the important youth justice reforms—the youth conferences and so on. At the very last moment, the Government introduced substantial and substantive changes to one of the two most controversial clauses—clause 66—which deals with courtrooms, courthouses and the royal coat of arms, but the House had no chance to discuss it. That is grotesque.

If there is to be any parliamentary scrutiny of the Bill, it will have to be undertaken by the other place. Under new Labour, we are the lower House in name and in substance. That is a most regrettable state of affairs, and I hope that the Secretary of State will pass on to his colleagues the strong feelings experienced by everyone in the House. It is especially grotesque that Members from six parties would have liked to take part in the Third Reading debate, but we have only 45 minutes for it. That is a terrible, terrible way to conduct our affairs.

As we were not able to deal either in Committee or on Report with the Government's new proposals for the royal arms in courthouses and courtrooms, I shall briefly touch on them. In substance, we welcome the Government's reconsideration, even at this late stage, and their decision to make some gesture—albeit inadequate and limited—that will at least recognise the strong feelings among the Unionist population in Northern Ireland, even if it does not mollify them.

That concession is hopelessly inadequate to redress the balance and undo the damage done by the one-sided stream of concessions in the past few months, almost all of which have been made to Sinn Fein-IRA. And it, of course, would be eclipsed out of existence if the Government committed the folly of announcing an amnesty for on-the-run terrorists.

Nevertheless, I commend the Government for having recognised—for once in deed, as well as in word—the lack of balance in the implementation of the peace process so far. Perhaps the imbalance has not been so much in the implementation of the peace process as in the Government's making all sorts of concessions not required by the Belfast agreement, and making them all in the same direction. The Secretary of State has recognised the damaging impact that that has had on confidence in and commitment to the peace process among the Unionist community. He has at least done something about that, and it would be churlish of me not to recognise it.

The Government's tactics have been pretty shambolic. They have introduced a change at the last minute. They have not assuaged much of the concern, anxiety and opposition that they aroused in the Unionist camp with the original clause 66—and they have now managed to infuriate the nationalist camp, too, by withdrawing some of the concessions that they had made. The Secretary of State smiles, but there is an alternative approach, which I have been urging on him for some months.

The Government should look upon the implementation of the Belfast agreement in terms of a balanced and agreed programmed process, in which everybody knows what they have to do by when, what the full cost will be, what the concessions will be, and how we get to the endgame. Until we have that kind of balance and understanding of the process, the programme and the schedule required, I do not think that either side will be confident that the process can really be implemented.

There are obnoxious issues in the Bill, some of which involve serious matters of principle. I spoke earlier about clause 20, and the judicial oath of allegiance. Given the appalling treatment of Parliament over the allocation of time, and several other issues that have been raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt), we would be thoroughly justified in opposing Third Reading. I dare say many among my colleagues, and perhaps in other parts of the House, too, would have expected us to do that.

However, we will not vote against the Bill, in recognition of small mercies, and of the new element of pragmatism and balance that has crept into the Government's behaviour over the past few days. I welcome that, and I want to make it clear by a gesture of my own that we take it seriously and appreciate it. We want to do what we modestly can, as the Opposition, to encourage the Government to go in the right direction.

The second reason why we will not vote against Third Reading is even more important. The concessions that have been made in the Bill, some of which we find genuinely obnoxious—advisedly, I expressed myself in strong terms about clause 20—have not, for once, been made to Sinn Fein-IRA, but to the Social Democratic and Labour party. As I can see, and as I have heard in the repeated accounts of my hon. Friend the Member for

[Mr. Quentin Davies]

Reigate, SDLP Members have done a magnificent job on the Bill, and have already modified it in a number of important ways.

The concession is on an important headline issue by which they clearly set a lot of store. I do not like it, for the reasons that I explained earlier. I do not like having a distinction between the oath of allegiance taken by judges in Northern Ireland and that taken by judges in the rest of the United Kingdom. However, I recognise that the SDLP has made a major positive contribution to the peace process, to law and order and to justice, with its support of the new Police Service and the Policing Board.

For once, the rewards have gone to people who deserve some rewards, and the concessions have been wrung out of the Government by people who deserve some concessions. Again, it would be wrong of us not to recognise that fact. We must swallow very hard, as I am having to do, and ask our right hon. and hon. Friends not to vote against the Bill on Third Reading.

9.39 pm

Mr. Mallon: First, I thank my colleagues on the Standing Committee for their courtesy and help, and for the constructive way in which the Committee carried out its business. I thank those who chaired the Committee for their guidance and for the expertise that they brought to the proceedings.

I congratulate the Under-Secretary on the honest and very competent way in which he dealt with the Committee and with the issues. One could have some reliance on him. He gave nothing easily—nor did one expect him to—but he played with a straight bat, and I thank him for that.

Like the supporters of the English rugby team on Saturday, I feel a touch of déjà vu—a sense of having been here before, done it and got the T-shirt. I am trying to find an easy way of saying that this is the third time that I have stood on the Floor of the House on the Report stage of a Bill when, in effect, a googly has been bowled after a Standing Committee has dealt with things. Whatever position people adopt on an issue, that is not the way to do business; it is not the way in which to treat Parliament; it is not the way in which to encourage and nurture the Standing Committees that are so valuable. One begins to wonder whether, on issues such as this, there is a straight bat left. For that reason, I again thank the Under-Secretary, who proved that it is possible to deal honestly with an issue.

It is important to make that point because for non-lawyers, as many of us are, dealing with legislation is an onerous task. There is nothing easy about it, and it becomes all the more difficult when one knows in one's heart of hearts, as one is battling with detail in the Committee Room, getting expert advice and doing all the things that one should, that somewhere outside a dealing game is taking place which makes no reference whatever to our parliamentary process. It adds to the difficulty when one has experienced that before. However, we are big boys and we will live through it and get over it. It is a lovely thing to be able, as one walks out of the door, to look in any mirror that one passes and say, "Okay." We should all learn that lesson.

I am referring particularly, although not exclusively, to the issue of symbols. I have always tried to be sensitive when I talk about symbols in any context, because I have always tried to show respect for the symbols of others, even those with which I disagree. I have done that in this building, in the Assembly and, by and large, everywhere else. However, it is very difficult to maintain that position when, for the third time, the issue of symbols has been used as a bargaining chip by the Government in a unilateral, secretive and partisan way. It is difficult to maintain that position when one sees key principles of the Good Friday agreement and the draft Bill being used as bargaining chips—concessions to be granted to Unionists to build up confidence so that other deals can be done with others.

If I were a Unionist, I would be rather sceptical. I would look at new clause 2 and I would say to myself, "You can hold them or fold them, but don't get over-excited about what's going to happen because this is not being done in the interests of anything but the next bargain and the next deal that will be made." It hurts me to say that because I have supported Labour Governments for my entire time as a Member, including throughout hung Parliaments, day after day, and I will continue to do so. I make an appeal: it is much easier, much better and much more successful in the long run to play things straight, decent and honest than it is to become almost a roulette table for bargaining.

Dr. John Reid *rose—*

David Burnside: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mallon: I shall give way to the Secretary of State.

Dr. Reid: My hon. Friend speaks with great passion, conviction and sincerity. He is absolutely right to say that this was not the Under-Secretary's decision; it was my decision. I would like to correct the hon. Gentleman on one thing: the decision was not taken late. I could have taken it two or three months ago. I did not take it then precisely because what he likes to call "little deals" and what I like to call "discussions between parties" were taking place between his party and others to try to discover whether there was a way in which we could reach agreement. I thought it better to wait until absolutely the last moment to take a decision which I would have much preferred to be taken by the parties in Northern Ireland.

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): Why did the right hon. Gentleman not discuss it with us?

Dr. Reid: Precisely because I was advised by both parties, including by representatives of my hon. Friend's party, to stay out of the issue while the discussions continued. So I take full responsibility for the decision, but I would not like the hon. Gentleman to believe, having spent many hours discussing such issues with him, that the decision to wait until late was taken for any other reason than to try to allow the parties to reach the decision—a situation that I would much have preferred.

Mr. Mallon: I note what the Secretary of State says. It is right that he makes it clear that the decision was his, but I regret to say that there is no doubt that today's actions by the Government will have negative repercussions. I very much regret that, in the long term, they will outweigh any temporary, one-sided benefits that might accrue. I believe that the devolution of justice powers will now be more difficult to achieve and implement.

In short, this is no way to proceed. It is no way to legislate. It is no way to implement the Good Friday agreement, which requires the two sovereign Governments to show parity of esteem to every section of the community in Northern Ireland. Above all, it is no way to manage a peace process and no way to create the new beginning that we all want to achieve.

9.48 pm

Lembit Öpik: As I said in Committee, because of the way we were sitting, the light shone all around the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) and bathed him in an angelic aura every time he stood up to speak in Committee. I was hesitant to tussle with that saintly light, as the Minister was cast into the heart of darkness in the Room. Although I was joking then, what the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh has just said underlines the genuine sincerity and honesty with which he has sought to represent the people whom he was elected to represent. We must take very seriously the frustrations that he describes because, at the end of the day, he is one of the people who has to sell these proposals to his part of the community.

I was frustrated to some extent by the Government's apparent lack of flexibility in the Standing Committee. They have made some amendments on Report, but difficulties arise when the whole process appears to the public eye to show that deals are being done outside the Chamber and that changes are being slipped through at the last minute. Even if that is not what Ministers intend, such impressions make it more difficult in practical terms for individuals—especially those on the nationalist side, on this occasion—to sell the proposals.

In addition, Ministers gave very strong reasons why they refused to do something on a number of occasions, only to change their position later—even though, if there is a clear example of a subject area in which one benefits by showing genuine openness and flexibility at all times, it is surely Northern Ireland. Examples of such an approach include resistance to the word "reflective" in place of "representation", which was discussed earlier when it was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton). A more recent example arose in the last debate on Report, when the Under-Secretary sought to give an extreme example of circumstances in which new clauses 3 and 4, which related to information for victims and next of kin, should not automatically come into play, even though new clause 4 clearly allowed an exception to be made when the public interest would not have been served.

Mr. Browne: I do not want the hon. Gentleman to be in any doubt about reflectiveness and the judiciary, on which I have argued from principle. I have sought to enunciate my position in many different ways and I will not abandon that principle at any stage. I do not want there to be any suggestion that I was arguing one position and taking another. On his other example, there is a distinction between the effect of new clause 3 and that of new clauses 4 and 5. As we ran out of time on Report, I did not have the chance to explain that distinction, so I do not think it appropriate for him accidentally to misrepresent my position by anticipating what he did not hear.

Lembit Öpik: I would not seek to misrepresent the Minister, and there is no time to enter into detailed discussions on that matter now; I am aware that at least two hon. Members on the Benches behind me want to speak.

None the less, in relation to that point, as the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) pointed out, I supported the timetabling motion. I still hold the view that it might have provided enough time for the Committee stage in certain circumstances, but with the benefit of hindsight, I must say reluctantly that I probably was not right to be sympathetic in terms of the time allowed for Report and Third Reading. I make that comment with some humility; we have had discussions outside the Chamber, and I have to say that Conservative Front Benchers were probably right. We could have had the very discussions to which the Minister just referred, but we no longer have the chance to do so.

We have covered many specifics, including flag and emblems, and the inclusion of human rights legislation in the Bill. It goes far in that regard, but as hon. Members know, the Liberal Democrats would have taken it further. We also discussed the independence of advocacy and crucial issues relating to youth justice. In my view, the latter involved many important principles, and we did not take advantage of the opportunity to handle youth offending differently, as organisations such as Youth at Risk, which seeks to get down to the motives of offending rather than trying to prevent reoffending in a more superficial way, seek to do.

Given that we do not have time to debate those matters in more detail, the question on my mind is: what happens next? I guess that the answer will be based on the degree to which those who are in a position to make the Bill work will make the decision to do so. Some individuals in the Chamber will have a heavy influence on the degree to which the nationalist and Unionist communities take the Bill on. I hope that they accept that, even with its flaws, it is a huge step forward and most of it was uncontentious.

In that context, the Liberal Democrats are very happy to offer our assistance and to help if there is any way in which we can do so, although we are realistic and recognise that many people in the communities of Northern Ireland are already doing that work. I sincerely hope that Sinn Fein, which is, sadly, not represented in the Chamber, will regard the Bill as a step forward and not act as a dog in a manger by saying that, because not everything was exactly how the party wanted it, it will stand by and refuse to co-operate with what the Government seriously intend to be steps forward. In a few years' time we shall see if the Bill has worked.

I am pleased with the Bill in principle, and I think that all parties can accept that an overwhelming majority of its 294 proposals represent a step forward for justice in Northern Ireland.

9.55 pm

Mr. McNamara: I shall be as quick as I can to allow other hon. Members to speak.

[Mr. McNamara]

In the past, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said that the Unionists feel that they are in a cold house. Generally speaking, for the nationalist community the issue of the administration of justice and the Police Service has been not only a cold house, but an igloo. They therefore regard the implementation of the review as at least a considerable thaw. That is why, on Second Reading, I welcomed the Bill in what, for me, were rather generous terms. In the light of how the Bill has emerged on Report, I would not make the same comments. I feel that it is like Patten all over again, and that we will have to have something like a Weston House agreement to reconsider the issues and rectify the faults.

On Second Reading, I posed three questions. Can the new structures make the criminal justice system accountable to the community that it serves? Can equality measures make the system representative of the community from which it seeks accord? Can we create a new ethos and a new beginning? I am not certain that the Bill meets those tests. On accountability, the review called for a new and independent Public Prosecution Service, but it is not there. If one looks at the history, accountability was not there because the same Director of Public Prosecutions and the same department made the decisions on all the contentious cases. Although I welcome what the European Court of Human Rights forced and persuaded the Government to do—they announced their decision when the Bill was in Committee—I am sceptical about whether the DPP would have given the same response were it not for that judgment by the court.

I find it extraordinary that the equality principle and the representative principle are not to be mandated through the judicial system, the prosecution system and the Attorney-General. As I said on Report, it is incredible that the people who will enforce the equality legislation and be responsible for making judicial decisions on fair employment and human rights will not themselves be subject to such restrictions. I am attacking not the merit principle, but the concept of an old boys' network that thinks it is above the law because it administers the law.

My final point concerns the coat of arms. I respect the argument about the architectural vandalism of taking down coats of arms from historic courthouses. However, there is no argument against curtailing those symbols when the court is in session to create the neutral environment to which my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary referred when he spoke so positively of these matters in Committee. If we were able to find a non-contentious symbol suitable for the Police Service of Northern Ireland, I am sure that we could have found one equally non-contentious for the courts. I regret that that was not dealt with. I was not party to any of the discussions that went on; I can only see what emerged from them. It will not lead to the resounding success that I thought we might achieve at the start of the Bill's passage and on Second Reading.

9.59 pm

Lady Hermon: How many words can I squeeze into one minute? At about five minutes to 10 o'clock I thought that as DUP Members have not tabled a single amendment this evening I should, in fairness, give them an opportunity to speak. However, with only one minute left I shall speak as quickly as I can.

The Committee was an enormously useful experience. I thank the staff of the Northern Ireland Office, the Clerks of the House and all members of the Committee for their help and assistance and for the banter that we enjoyed in the course of our serious work.

Will the Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary concentrate on two matters that have not been dealt with? First, serious confusion will arise if the title of Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland is retained. That would lead to the PPSNI being confused with the PSNI. This is a serious point that has to be addressed. Secondly, the Minister gave an undertaking that—

It being Ten o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Order [21 January].*

The House divided: Ayes 311, Noes 11.

Division No. 179] **[10 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, Kevin
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cotter, Brian
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Ewing, Annabelle
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian

Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keetch, Paul
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona

McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Eric
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn

Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*

Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Angela Smith and
Mr. Nick Ainger.

NOES

Beggs, Roy
Burnside, David
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Hermon, Lady
Hunter, Andrew
Paisley, Rev Ian

Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spink, Bob
Trimble, Rt Hon David

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Iris Robinson and
Mr. Gregory Campbell.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees),

Common Fisheries Policy

That this House takes note of European Union Documents Nos. 7262/01, the Commission Green Paper on the future of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), 7263/01, the Commission Report on the state of the resources and their expected development, 7377/01, the Commission Report on the economic and social situation of coastal regions, and 7378/01, the Commission Report on the implementation of the Community system for fisheries and aquaculture over the period 1993–2000; recognises that the review of the CFP offers an important opportunity with considerable implications for the future of fisheries management; supports the Government's view that current positive aspects, notably the access regime, relative stability (including Hague Preference) and the Shetland Box, must continue to operate; agrees that current weaknesses, including the continued use by some Member States of counter-productive subsidies, uneven enforcement, a lack of environmental integration, unsustainable agreements with third countries and the mismatch between fleet capacity and available resources, must be addressed, anticipates with the Government the forthcoming publication by the Commission of its legislative proposals for the review; and supports the Government's efforts to secure the best outcome for the whole of the UK fisheries sector throughout the negotiations.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

Question agreed to.

COMMITTEES

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): For the convenience of the House, we shall take motions 3, 4 and 5 together.

Ordered,

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

That Mr. Anthony Steen be discharged from the Select Committee on Public Administration and Sir Sydney Chapman be added to the Committee.

STANDARDS AND PRIVILEGES

That Mr. Peter Bottomley be discharged from the Committee on Standards and Privileges and Mr. Andrew Mackay be added to the Committee.

PROCEDURE

That Alistair Burt be discharged from the Procedure Committee and Mr. Desmond Swayne be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

Ordered,

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

That Mr. Christopher Chope be discharged from the Trade and Industry Committee and Mr. Philip Hammond be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. McWilliam.]*

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Ordered,

DISABLED FACILITIES

That the Disabled Facilities Grants and Home Repairs Assistance (Maximum Amount) (Amendment No. 2) (England) Order 2001, (S.I., 2001, No. 4036), dated 19th December 2001, a copy of which was laid before this House on 20th December 2001, be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

PETITION

Mobile Phone Antennae

10.14 pm

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Residents of Silverpoint Marine on Canvey Island are deeply concerned about the proposed positioning of a mobile phone antenna in their small community. They are particularly worried about the longer-term health implications for the children who live and play in the vicinity of the proposed antenna site. Although they accept that there is no evidence at the moment of such antennae causing significant damage to children, they believe that there is no evidence that there will be no such damage in the longer term. They also believe, therefore, that a safety-first approach is appropriate.

This small community's petition was compiled by Jayne Gough, Samantha Duffield, Nicola Dowsett and others. It states:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The Humble Petition of Mrs. Samantha Duffield and Mrs. Nicola Dowsett, residents, and others of like disposition sheweth

That residents and others connected with Canvey Island object to the siting of a mobile phone mast at Prout Holdings, Canvey Island and are deeply concerned that the long term health implications of such a mast, particularly on children living and playing in the area, are as yet unknown.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House shall urge Castle Point Borough Council to reject the planning application for the mast.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

International Terrorism

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

10.16 pm

Mr. Jim Murphy (Eastwood): Everyone in the House will agree that this debate on Government policy towards countries providing support for terrorist organisations takes place at a heartbreaking moment. Lives are still being lost in Afghanistan in the ongoing effort to rid that nation and the region of the terror of al-Qaeda and on both sides in the continuing tragedy that is the middle east conflict. I am delighted to introduce the debate, but I regret having to seek it.

I want not simply another debate on the middle east peace process, but a much wider discussion. I believe absolutely that there will be a lasting peace in the middle east, but events of recent weeks and months have made me uncertain as to whether that peace will be delivered by this generation of politicians. I also have absolute faith that there will indeed be a viable Palestinian state, and so there should be, that lives in security and peace alongside a secure neighbour, the state of Israel.

The tragedy is that so many innocent people on both sides have died so needlessly over recent months when peace seemed such a realistic prospect under the prime ministerial leadership of Ehud Barak and his partner in peace at the time, Chairman Arafat. Now it appears that both sides are looking up from an abyss. I hope that at least one or two steps forward result from the most recent suggestions emanating from Saudi Arabia. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will comment on the Government's position in respect of the latest reported Saudi effort.

I shall concentrate on the terror organisations that so undermine that drive for peace and three states—Iraq, Syria and Iran—that do so much to support and give succour to those terror organisations. In respect of Iraq, there is a history that everyone acknowledges of support for terror organisations within its borders and the use of domestic terror as a means to carry out low or occasionally medium-level conflict with regional opponents, Iran in particular and, of course, Israel.

More recently, Iraq has again assumed a high profile, taking centre stage in world politics. It is now absolutely clear in the wider sense of global and regional security that Iraq must act. Saddam Hussein, newly armed with an improved weapons of mass destruction capability, is a threat not only to his own people and his neighbours, but to international security. The United Kingdom, along with its allies, is rightly considering action, but I firmly believe that we must also publish whatever evidence we can, notwithstanding the lack of observers on the ground.

There is evidence of the increased viability and range of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, and we need to persuade not only the House but the British public and world opinion—especially Arab opinion—that, because of the threat posed by Saddam to his neighbours and to world security, we may, unfortunately, be left with no alternative as an international community but to act, in more than a diplomatic sense. That gives me no sense of enjoyment—it gives me a considerable sense of foreboding.

I believe firmly that the Prime Minister was right to go to Syria following 11 September, to try to impress on the Syrian leadership that it should step back from support for terror organisations. He was absolutely right to stress that terrorism in all its forms must end. I am not aware, however—the Minister may have evidence to the contrary—of lasting or meaningful efforts being made by the Syrian Government since that visit to clamp down on the terror organisations that operate within its borders.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Does my hon. Friend think that there is sufficient international appreciation of the threat from the terrorism that he describes to there ever being a successful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

Mr. Murphy: Personally, I do not believe that there is a widespread understanding of the role played by these terror organisations. Their very raison d'être is the destruction of the state of Israel, not an accommodation or peace with it. We must do all that we can to ensure that people understand that, while we hope that the conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Authority can be resolved in the foreseeable future, it is very difficult to envisage an accommodation between Israel and Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Hezbollah and others. The international community must understand the lack of any desire on the part of those terror organisations to recognise the state of Israel's right to exist.

Of the 28 foreign terrorist organisations that the co-ordinator of counter-terrorism in the United States State Department listed in October last year, about three and a half weeks after the horrific events of 11 September, seven operate from Syria. The Syrian Government provide succour, support and sponsorship for those organisations in many different ways. The organisations include Hamas, which continues to cause such devastation; Hezbollah; Palestinian Islamic Jihad; and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which I had the misfortune of meeting in Ramallah in 1994, just as the Oslo peace accord was published. The disappointment among its leadership that a compromise and a lasting settlement could be viable was palpable. I am sure that it is much happier with events as they stand today.

Syria directly also supports other terror organisations, including the Palestine Liberation Front, allowing them to have headquarters, training camps and political and propaganda offices throughout the nation, including in and around Damascus. As if that were not enough, some of the leading international terrorists live in Syria, with the full knowledge of the Syrian state. The general secretary of Palestinian Islamic Jihad and his deputy live there, as do the head of the Hamas political bureau and his deputy. The chairman of the Hamas interior committee and the leadership of the PFLP also live there.

Two days after the Prime Minister's visit, an event took place in Damascus that underlined the degree of co-operation between the Syrian regime and the panoply of terrorist organisations in that country. A gathering took place in Damascus to pay tribute to the secretary general of the Islamic Jihad. Such events cannot take place without the full support of the tightly controlled political elite that runs Syria. The gathering was attended by the Iranian ambassador, and representatives of the Syrian Ba'ath party, Hezbollah and others. Such a commemoration of a leading terrorist could take place only with the Syrian Government's support. Some of those individuals appear on the Federal Bureau of Investigation's "most wanted" list of terrorists, which was published just after 11 September.

[Mr. Murphy]

It is because of those individuals, organisations and events that I find it very difficult to see Syria in any sense as a partner in peace. Indeed, the opposite is true. Syria plays a festering role in undermining any middle east peace process. Although I entirely support the Prime Minister's visit to that country, and any Government effort to convince the Syrian regime to join the family of nations in enforcing international law and order on terror organisations, I do not perceive any great movement in that regard. Indeed, the Jordanian media reported security officials' attempts to undermine Syrian attacks on Israel and the embassies of Jordan, Britain and the United States. By comparison with Syria, Jordan is playing an entirely mature and constructive role in the campaign against terror and for peace in the middle east.

The third and final nation on which I seek ministerial comment is Iran. I publicly pay tribute to Iran's courageous efforts to control trafficking in the opium poppy. Many hundreds of Iranian border guards have been killed in their strenuous efforts to prevent opium poppy from leaving Afghanistan and, tragically, coming to this country. I understand the need for closer relationships with Iran, but despite internal political and cultural conflict in that country, as yet I see no detente with its partners in the middle east, or support for a lasting and meaningful middle east peace process. Iran continues to arm terrorist groups such as Hezbollah, which causes such strife and bloodshed in the region, and supports Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): Perhaps my hon. Friend will bear in mind the fate of missing Israeli service personnel held by Hezbollah, which, as he says, is supported by Iran. They include Elchanan Tenenboim, for whom today was his 500th day in captivity after being kidnapped in Switzerland; Ron Arad, Tzvi Feldman, Zacharia Buamel and Yehuda Katz, who were kidnapped in the Lebanon in the 1980s; Guy Hever, who was kidnapped in the Golan heights in 1997; and Benny Avraham, Omer Suaed and Adi Avitan, who were kidnapped on the Israeli side of the Lebanese border in the past few years. Perhaps my hon. Friend would like to speculate on why Iran supports Hezbollah, which refuses to give any information whatsoever to the families of those people, who have been missing for so long.

Mr. Murphy: It is clear that Iran has considerable influence over Hezbollah. An easy way for it to play a role or to make a symbolic shift in its position would be to instruct those that it funds and supports—namely, Hezbollah—to provide information on the whereabouts of, tragically, what might prove only the remains of the individuals whom my hon. Friend mentions. Certainly, the Iranian Government could easily instruct Hezbollah to make the limited concession of revealing the whereabouts of those poor individuals, whether living or dead.

My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the relationship between Hezbollah and Iran, but I am also worried by the recent Karine A shipment of weapons from Iran, seemingly bound for the Palestinian Authority. That is worrying, and I hope it is not part of a wider pattern. It is frightening that such an enormous arms shipment could go to an organisation that publicly remains committed to a peace process in the middle east.

Iran shamelessly uses anti-semitism as a strategic weapon. The Iranian Government's recent refusal to accept Her Majesty's Government's nominee for the post of ambassador is yet another example of that.

Many of us are determined—I know that my hon. Friend the Minister is—to continue to press the Iranian and Syrian Governments, in particular. As the Prime Minister said in Damascus, terrorism in all its forms has to end.

10.31 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Murphy) for raising this subject. I want to speak first about the Government's general policy on countries that promote terrorism, and to illustrate it with reference to positive developments in a couple of countries, before turning to the specific examples raised by my hon. Friend.

My hon. Friend may be interested to know that Iraq—we have concerns about support for terrorism there, but especially about the programme involving weapons of mass destruction—will be debated in Westminster Hall on Wednesday morning. My hon. Friend and other Members who support the Government on this issue may wish to make their views known then.

State promotion of terrorist groups is a cruel, destabilising and ultimately self-destructive instrument of the foreign policies of some Governments. It is an instrument that Governments should and must now abandon. The last six months of terrible attacks on civilians and those engaged in the democratic process have exhausted the tolerance of this Government, and of the international community, of terrorism of any kind. I am thinking, of course, of 11 September, but also of the savage murder of the journalist Daniel Pearl; the attack on the Indian Parliament which destabilised relations between two nuclear powers; the hijack of a Colombian airliner last month; and the sickening bomb attack in Jerusalem on Saturday—a terrorist attack that has perpetuated the current cycle of violence in Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

Yet there are Governments who persist in providing terrorist groups with funds, weapons, information and political support—Governments who continue to believe that agreement with the objectives of terrorists justifies terrorist methods. The British Government's view is simple: such state promotion of terrorism is unjustifiable and must end. There is no moral distinction between an attacker who kills civilians or parliamentarians and a state that wittingly provides the resources that facilitate such a terrorist attack.

Mr. James Wray (Glasgow, Baillieston): Does the Minister agree that Syria, Iraq and Iran do not have inter-continental ballistic long-range missiles that could reach the United States? Does he agree that article 15 of the 1972 treaty on the limitation of anti-ballistic missile systems, which gives the Russians and the Americans the right to withdraw from the treaty, does not help? The treaty's globalising of peace and war, whether it refers to American, British or Iraqi terrorism, really does not help. It is the poor who suffer.

Mr. Bradshaw: I do not agree with my hon. Friend one bit. Although the countries that he mentioned may not have the ballistic missile capability to deliver weapons of mass destruction to that extent at this moment, we do not doubt that at least two of them are actively attempting to acquire that capability, and may be much closer to it than any of us would like to think.

We welcome the progress that has been made by Libya towards abandoning state sponsorship of terrorism and the importance of a strong international condemnation and concerted action against the states concerned. A decade ago, Libya sponsored and incited terrorists. The international community responded by imposing an effective sanctions regime on Libya. The sanctions have resulted in Libya returning to international standards of decency.

The Libyan state has satisfied us that it has severed its links with the IRA. The joint United Kingdom-Libya statement on the murder of WPC Yvonne Fletcher allowed us to re-establish diplomatic relations. Libya has taken steps to make amends for the terrible damage that it caused in the past. The Security Council recognised Libya's surrender of two suspects accused of the Lockerbie bombing. Sanctions were suspended at that point and can be lifted entirely once Libya has complied with the final requirements of the Council.

There has also been progress in Sudan, which in moving away from tolerance of terrorism has offered an example to other nations that retain links with terrorist groups. In the mid-1990s, Sudan allowed bin Laden and the al-Qaeda organisation to organise their international terror campaign from Sudanese territory. The international community's response was robust—we delivered a clear message that such activity could not be tolerated. The imposition of Security Council sanctions was again a valuable tool. Sudan responded. The Security Council in turn responded by lifting sanctions in September last year.

My hon. Friend raised the prospect of military action against a state sponsor. The Government are prepared to use a military approach, as we did in Afghanistan, if again confronted with an Administration who threaten us and care nothing for the views of the international community. There are, of course, many other means of effecting change that we would explore first. We would pull all available diplomatic and economic levers. We would work with Governments who are willing but unable to confront terrorists. Military action is very much a last resort.

Angus Robertson (Moray): I suspect that the Minister is talking about the situation in regard to Iraq. What conversations has he had with colleagues from other European Union countries? Do they share the Prime Minister's views about the possibility of widening the campaign against terrorism into a military phase in regard to Iraq?

Mr. Bradshaw: Our European allies very much share our concern that Iraq should comply fully with its obligations under the United Nations resolutions to allow weapons inspectors back into that country without any conditions attached. If Iraq fails to do that, the international community will face some very difficult decisions. Those who oppose in principle any talk of a military response against countries such as Iraq in such circumstances need to say how they would deal with rogue states determined to acquire weapons of mass destruction and use them on their neighbours and elsewhere.

My hon. Friend also expressed concerns over the behaviour of Iran. We share his concern about the support that the Iranian Government give to terrorism in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We are satisfied that the Iranian Government make material contributions to the capabilities of terrorist groups, including Hezbollah's External Security Organisation and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Both organisations are proscribed in the United Kingdom under the Terrorism Act 2000.

Iranian encouragement of those opposed to the peace process can only inflame and escalate the cycle of violence. The Government take every opportunity to tell the Iranians that we condemn their support for those terrorist groups and that it is without any possible justification. We believe that that critical engagement is helpful, and I am glad that my hon. Friend supports us in that policy.

In answer to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore), we raise the case of the captives at every opportunity with the Iranian and Syrian authorities and in the limited contacts that we have with the political wing of Hezbollah in the Lebanon. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met with the families of those captives on his recent visit to Israel.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): Before my hon. Friend the Minister continues, can I say that there is great unease on his own Benches at what some see as a softening-up process for taking action that will not get the support of our allies and friends in the middle east? I ask the Foreign Office in particular to take cognisance of that concern and to think about it before we go down a road from which we will find it difficult to withdraw..

Mr. Bradshaw: Of course my colleagues and I will take notice of the points made by my hon. Friend, because of his wisdom and experience in this area. However, we should not overestimate the amount of support that Saddam Hussein or his regime have in the Arab world, if that is what my hon. Friend was implying by his question. We need to think carefully and rationally about how the international community deals with a state which has used weapons of mass destruction on its own people and its neighbours, and which is acquiring chemical, biological and nuclear weapons as we speak. We believe that that state would have no inhibitions about using those weapons not just on its immediate neighbours, but on us and further afield. If my hon. Friend has a miracle solution as to how one deals with such rogue-state behaviour, I should be pleased to hear it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood also mentioned Syria. We accept that Syria plays host to a number of terrorist groups. It allows terrorists to set up their headquarters in Damascus. As my hon. Friend has said, both the External Security Organisation of Hezbollah and the People's Front for the Liberation of Palestine have a presence in Syria. Both these organisations are proscribed in the UK as terrorist organisations.

We have made it crystal clear to the Syrians that we expect them to use their undoubted influence to secure de-escalation and restraint. They must dissociate themselves from the terrorists responsible for the tragic and futile upsurge in violence over the last 12 months. I will look into the specific allegations that my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood made and, if he will allow me, I will write to him.

[Mr. Bradshaw]

We are broadly encouraged by the Government's contacts with the Syrians in recent months. There are signs that Syria may be exerting some helpful influence to contain the violence. If such a policy is confirmed and sustained, Syria will find that it can advance its objectives effectively using political means.

It is also a cold fact that no party in the current confrontations will obtain security or peace until the cycle of violence ends. There is no solution through violence for either side. As the Foreign Secretary wrote in a newspaper article last week:

> "The conflict will never be solved by military means alone. But every day the violence continues, as the number of families broken by the bloody conflict increases, the extremists are strengthened, distrust grows and peace is more difficult to achieve. The violence and state-sponsored terrorism must stop. It is futile and serves only to postpone the day when Palestinians and Israelis can achieve a permanent settlement in which two states, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace and security".

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood asked me to comment on the recent proposals from Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. These are not exactly new or revolutionary ideas, but we have warmly welcomed them and believe that both their timing and their source are extremely significant. We wish the proposals well.

State sponsorship of terrorism is a cruel and cowardly policy that is now more than ever beyond tolerance. The Government will engage with sponsors and potential sponsors in order to tell them how profoundly we deplore their conduct and how gravely their actions destabilise fragile regional security.

All nations have new obligations to stop supporting terrorism under the two UN resolutions passed unanimously after 11 September. The international community is determined to ensure that those resolutions are fully implemented and, in doing so, it will enjoy Britain's full support.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at sixteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 5 March 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

MERSEY TUNNELS BILL (*BY ORDER*)

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Tuesday 12 March.

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Homelessness

1. **Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): When the Government will publish a national homelessness strategy. [36643]

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Stephen Byers): We have announced the establishment of a new directorate within the Department to co-ordinate action to tackle homelessness. I have asked it to report to me as a matter of urgency on the steps that need to be taken to address this issue.

Simon Hughes: The House and the country will be glad that the Homelessness Act 2002 gives us the basis for moving forward, and we welcome the Government's initiative in that direction. Will the Secretary of State confirm that the record number of homeless families in temporary accommodation who are waiting for a permanent home will form part of the discussions between him and the Treasury about funding the strategy? Will he assure us that in cases of family breakdown, those who leave the family home, particularly because of fear of violence, will immediately be accommodated safely, rather than having a harrowing wait before they find alternative secure accommodation?

Mr. Byers: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his warm welcome for the Homelessness Act. I was pleased that it was the first measure introduced after the general election last June and that it got Royal Assent last week. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that we amended the Bill as it was going through the House to ensure that, where a relationship breaks down, the interests of children are put first, which is a positive change. The hon. Gentleman points out that, for a variety of reasons, the number of families in temporary accommodation is increasing, which is a matter for real concern. Young children are being denied life chances because they do not have somewhere that they can call their home. In facing the challenges in housing, we must ensure that we can deliver for those young children.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Who will be responsible for monitoring the efficacy of the homelessness strategy? Will it be the homelessness directorate? Will my right hon. Friend ensure that any national strategy will incorporate what would work most efficiently within the Greater London area, which is a pan-London strategy in partnership not only with the Association of London Government but with the Greater London Authority?

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend makes a very important point about the situation in London, particularly as it is clear that individual housing authorities alone cannot solve the deep-seated housing problems faced by London. There has to be a pan-London approach to the issue, and that is something that the newly established directorate is looking at carefully. We will be monitoring the strategy ourselves, but a variety of voluntary organisations will be looking closely at how we are delivering this important part of my Department's agenda. I believe that in this Parliament housing will move towards the top of the political agenda.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Does the Secretary of State accept that if he had spent a bit more time putting roofs over the heads of families who need them and less time giving house room to the likes of Jo Moore, we would not now have a situation in which the number of families in bed-and-breakfast accommodation has increased by 152 per cent. and the number of empty council houses in England has increased by 6,000 since 1997? What has he got to say about that sort of record?

Mr. Byers: The increase of 6,000 in the number of empty homes sounds significant, but what the hon. Gentleman did not say is that there are 750,000 empty homes in the United Kingdom, so perhaps 6,000 is not too many. As he should know, in last year's Budget we introduced measures to bring empty properties back into use, such as 100 per cent. capital allowances to convert space above shops into flats and a reduced rate of 5 per cent. for VAT on the cost of renovating homes that have been empty for over three years. We are taking action to deal with empty homes; the Conservative party in government did absolutely nothing.

For the record, this Department and this Secretary of State are going to deliver on the housing agenda. As far as I am concerned, it is one of the top priorities, and Opposition Members will see the results in the very near future.

Mr. Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow): While I welcome the homelessness strategy, I hope that it will not apply to people whom councils have spent months trying to evict. Will my right hon. Friend assure us that when councils get rid of such tenants, they will not get in somewhere else through the back door as a result of the strategy?

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend makes an important point. His constituency is just south of mine on the River Tyne, and we share similar problems, even if one football team is doing better than the other.

Local authorities are being far more robust in dealing with tenants who make the lives of their neighbours hell. Those tenants are moving out of council housing into private accommodation, and a growing number of private landlords are taking on tenants who have been evicted. In many well-established streets up and down the country, private tenants are being installed, often on housing benefit, who make life hell for private owners. We want to consider a licensing system for private landlords so that they will have to deliver on their responsibilities.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): In considering his homelessness strategy, the Secretary of State will wish to think about the number of rough sleepers, which has been artificially massaged down. Is he aware of the press release issued by the Transport and General Workers Union on behalf of independent charities, which alleges that the rough sleepers unit used public money to pay for rough sleepers to stay in bed-and-breakfast accommodation and states that outreach workers were pressurised into not declaring the full number of rough sleepers? It also alleges that rolling shelter beds were left empty for a month before the count, and that four hostels had dining rooms turned into bedrooms—all to massage the figures down artificially. Will the Secretary of State announce today that he will hold an inquiry into that, and if he will not, will he accede to the request from Shelter and the Simon communities to hold a meeting to discuss the allegations?

Mr. Byers: What the hon. Gentleman has not said is that the methodology used in the rough sleeper count was constructed not by this Government, but under the Conservative Government in 1996. The voluntary agencies that conducted the survey followed the methodology agreed by that Administration. The hon. Gentleman may shake his head, but those are the facts. He does not like the facts to get in the way of his prejudices, but we all know that the Conservative approach to rough sleepers was well stated by a former Cabinet Minister who spoke about the inconvenience of coming out of the opera and having to step over people sleeping in the doorway. For the Tory party, rough sleepers are an inconvenience to be ignored—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I call the next question.

Rail Services (East Midlands)

2. **David Taylor** (North-West Leicestershire): What recent assessment he has made of the need for new passenger rail services to relieve motorway congestion in the east midlands. [36645]*

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): As my hon. Friend may be aware, we are currently conducting a programme of regional multi-modal studies, including several involving the east midlands region. The studies are assessing demand for all modes of travel to 2021, including public transport, road use and motorway congestion. Recommendations to Ministers are expected shortly.

David Taylor: I thank the Minister for that answer and for visiting north-west Leicestershire 11 days ago for a briefing on the national forest rail line project in my area and in south Derbyshire. When he receives the conclusions of the M1 multi-modal study for the east midlands, will he examine carefully any reference to that project in the light of the information that he has received? Will he do his best to arm-wrestle the Chancellor for the necessary funding, which is but a small fraction of the £60 billion rail investment announced two years ago? That investment works out at £100 million for each constituency, and a small amount would do a lot of good.

Mr. Spellar: My hon. Friend makes a strong case for his constituency, just as he and representatives of his local authorities did when I visited his area. I shall bear in mind the comments that I heard then when we receive the multi-modal studies. My hon. Friend and his colleagues sought to tackle the issues in the interests of their constituents by considering new communities in the area and new modes of travel. We shall consider those issues in his and in other areas when we make our assessment of how to remedy the substantial under-investment that we inherited from the Conservative Government.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): I am sure that the Minister will have seen the letter that I received from the Secretary of State this week. I had raised with him the matter of the statement by the Strategic Rail Authority about East Midlands Parkway station. How can we take seriously anything from a Department that sends a letter to a Member of Parliament stating:

> "I understand from the SRA that the May 2003 opening date given in the Strategic Plan was an inadvertent error"?

We are fed up with errors from this Department. When will we start to get some action, some true information, and proper apologies when people give us wrong information in the Chamber?

Mr. Spellar: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman was asking for that particular project. He was probably not making his presentation in such an approachable way as my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor). As I understand it, there was a straightforward error by the Strategic Rail Authority, for which it has apologised. In spite of the hon. Gentleman's protestations, we will certainly give the matter proper consideration, so as to extend travel opportunities, comfort and facilities for travellers right across the east midlands. I guarantee to the hon. Gentleman that I shall look into the matter for him.

Liz Blackman (Erewash): Ilkeston is the only town of its size in the east midlands without a railway station. A project for a station there has been identified by the SRA and by a multi-modal study. The problem is the Trent junction signalling box, which needs to be upgraded before capacity can be improved. Unfortunately, that upgrading will not take place for quite some time. May I urge my hon. Friend to look at the issue, and to do all that he can to bring that project forward so that capacity in the area can be increased?

Mr. Spellar: The Strategic Rail Authority and Railtrack are looking at a number of the constraints and bottlenecks in the railway system, in respect of which they could make a considerable cost-effective enhancement to facilities. That is extremely important because, previously, Railtrack seemed to be far more focused—although not particularly effectively—on the major projects, and did not look at running the system that it already had. We are already seeing a significant improvement in Railtrack's attitude and performance.

Rail Freight

3. **Mr. Peter Duncan** (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): What recent representations he has received on the expansion of rail freight. [36646]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson): Both my Department and the Strategic Rail Authority regularly receive representations from interested parties promoting the expansion of rail freight. The scope of these contacts is wide ranging. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is as encouraged as I am that, after years of decline, there has been a 20 per cent. increase in the amount of freight on the railway lines since 1997.

Mr. Duncan: The Minister will be aware that the Government's target for the increase in rail freight is 80 per cent., and some 43 per cent. of that needs to be delivered through the completion of the west coast main line. What is the projected mix of passengers and freight on that line, given its crucial importance to the Scottish economy? Exactly when is it going to be rescued from its current state of chaos?

Mr. Jamieson: The SRA is looking closely at the west coast main line with a view to increasing the amount of passenger and freight traffic. It may have been a temporary lapse of memory that caused the hon. Gentleman not to mention the substantial amount of funding that Scotland has derived from the rail freight grant, not least for the Nith valley project near his constituency, which received £1 million for the Thornhill loop in June 2000.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Is my hon. Friend aware that, before we can encourage more freight on to the railways, we have to maintain our existing services? Will he please give an undertaking that the French Government will be told in no uncertain terms that firms in my constituency are about to go bankrupt because of the attitude of the French authorities to the constant pressure of people trying to get on to freight trains on the other side of the channel tunnel, and that that will not be allowed to continue because it is putting drivers and would-be immigrants at risk?

Mr. Jamieson: I thank my hon. Friend for her justifiable concern in this important matter. The restrictions and their impact are of considerable concern to the Government. We are exerting pressure at the highest levels to get the French Government to restore the freight service without further disruption. The French Government have taken the extremely helpful step of changing French law to give United Kingdom immigration officials authority on the Eurostar while they are on French soil. Since February, we have even had the power to check the papers of those who are making internal journeys in France, which is an unprecedented extension of our powers. My hon. Friend raises important matters with regard to freight and they are being dealt with at the highest level by the Government.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman has misunderstood the question. The question was not about checking papers but about freight and people smuggling themselves on to freight trains. In a written answer to me dated 30 January 2002 the Minister promised that work to strengthen the fencing was under way and due to be completed by mid-February. He also said that he had received assurances that security measures and a police presence would be put in place. That increased fencing turns out to be little more than 3 m high, flimsy and little better than chicken wire. Not surprisingly, last week 200 m of that was pulled down and there is no sign of the French CRS police. It is little wonder that business is losing confidence. The Scottish whisky industry no longer uses the tunnel, large paper manufacturers no longer use the tunnel and major freight companies are going into bankruptcy. When will the Government do something about that? It is time that they ended the pointless civil war inside the Department, stopped attacking civil servants, and stood up for Britain rather than a departed spin doctor.

Mr. Jamieson: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman rather lost the plot at the end of his question. While the Government concentrate on the problems of the channel tunnel, he concentrates on the problems of personalties. Many of the matters that he just mentioned have been dealt with already. Unfortunately, he looked rather pleased when he said that some of the measures that had been taken were not working. The Government are concerned—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Gentleman would stop wagging his finger for a moment and listen to what I am saying, it might be beneficial to the House. The hon. Gentleman is clearly rattled by the answer that he is getting and does not like it. I can assure him that the issues that my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) raised in a serious manner in the context of current discussions are being addressed at the very highest level, and that many of the measures that we have put in place, or have asked the French to put in place, are working.

West Coast Main Line

4. **Dr. Phyllis Starkey** (Milton Keynes, South-West): What discussions he has had with the Strategic Rail Authority on the allocation of track space on the west coast main line between different operators. [36647]

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): The Strategic Rail Authority is leading a review, with the input of principal stakeholders, of the outputs to be delivered from the west coast upgrade, including an assessment of how capacity should be utilised to meet the requirements of the many different users of the line. The SRA is keeping the Department in touch with developments.

Dr. Starkey: My right hon. Friend will be aware that my constituents, although pleased about the upgrade and its effect on inter-city services, are seriously concerned about Virgin having exclusive use of the fast lines and squeezing everyone else on to the slow lines. In particular, we are concerned about a deterioration in the county services that commuters use heavily in the mornings and evenings and about the loss of the Rugby to Brighton service north of Watford. Will he assure me that the Strategic Rail Authority will give proper consideration to the needs of all my constituents and those of my hon. Friends who represent Northampton and Watford, and not just consider the Virgin—

Hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Spellar: That was rather ungallant of Opposition Members as a serious point was being made. It is clear from this afternoon's proceedings that Opposition Members are not interested in making serious points on behalf of their constituents; they are interested only in point scoring.

Two issues are involved here. One is the reduction in the number of paths while modernisation work is being undertaken on the west coast main line. As I understand it, that is having an immediate effect on the service to Gatwick and beyond that my hon. Friend described. Secondly, the Strategic Rail Authority is engaged in significant discussions—not only with Virgin and other train operators but with freight companies—about full use of the paths after modernisation of the west coast main line is completed.

We need to consider how the questions that my hon. Friend raises will be dealt with. I accept that the service has been reduced in the short term, but in the meantime passengers will be able to change between the two services at Watford.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): The Government have paid a great deal of attention to the west coast main line, but they have quietly dropped from their 10-year plan proposals to build crossrail and to upgrade the Great Western line. Is that related to the fact that, according to the Department's own forecast, public sector investment in the railways will be 30 per cent. lower in 2010 than it was in 1995?

Mr. Spellar: That is fine cheek, coming from a member of a party that did nothing about crossrail when in government. We are working with the City, Transport for London and the Strategic Rail Authority to decide on the paths for the project. The project has always been long term and has nothing to do with the 10-year plan. We would not have to deal with the issue now if the hon. Gentleman's party had got on with it a lot earlier.

Andrew Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Does my right hon. Friend accept that, although commuters in Greater Manchester are prepared to put up with a deterioration in the service while the west coast main line is being upgraded, they want the certainty that services will be restored to at least their former level, if not improved?

Mr. Spellar: I will draw my hon. Friend's comments to the attention of the SRA, which, as I said, is involved in ongoing discussions with train operators and other operators on the line. As he fully understands and as he pointed out to his constituents, some disruption will occur while the line is being modernised, but there will be considerable improvements for rail travellers and a shift in passenger transport.

Planning Green Paper

5. **Mr. Stephen O'Brien** (Eddisbury): What representations from environmental groups he has received concerning the planning Green Paper. [36648]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): Quite a number of environmental groups have written to Members of Parliament, who have passed on that correspondence to Ministers. In addition, there have been more than 3,000 responses to the consultation exercise, of which about 2,000 were from environmental groups or their members.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: Who in the Minister's Department will be available to assist in considering representations on the Green Paper from environmental groups, now that Jo Moore, Martin Sixsmith and Ian Jones are not available? More to the point, will she confirm whether Martin Sixsmith is or is not available, given that some dispute exists as to whether he officially resigned?

Ms Keeble: I hate to disappoint the hon. Gentleman, but the consultation exercise arrangement has always been that the responses will be sifted and analysed by external consultants on our behalf.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): Can my hon. Friend tell the House how many of the organisations that responded to the planning Green Paper raised issues about telecommunication masts and planning procedures relating to their location?

Ms Keeble: We have yet to analyse the responses. Most of them—about 2,500—have come in in the past week, doubtless in response to the campaign by environmental groups. We receive many submissions about telecoms masts and they are always considered very carefully. We also take up matters directly with some operators.

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): I entirely support the Government's approach to the sensitive environmental considerations associated with building 3.75 million new houses in Britain by 2011. However, how does the Minister reconcile that with a fast-track approach to major public building infrastructure works which downgrades the environment and regards it as of little significance? How does she square those two approaches to the environment?

Ms Keeble: The Green Paper repeatedly emphasises the fact that we take environmental issues and the importance of community involvement very seriously. It contains a number of recommendations that benefit community groups and the environment.

The housing policies that are already in place will continue, including the use of brownfield sites. The infrastructure proposals will be the exception for major areas of infrastructure, and we believe that our proposals still enable community and environmental groups to have an input into the decision-making process. I underline the fact that we completely understand the importance of taking into account environmental considerations. I would argue that this Government's track record on protecting the environment is far superior to that of the Conservative Government.

Mrs. Lorna Fitzsimons (Rochdale): Can my hon. Friend tell us whether there have been any submissions about the misuse of planning law by environmental groups when it is quite clear that the will of the people in an area is in favour of a development? Groups misuse planning law, especially on the village green issue, filibustering and wasting millions of pounds of taxpayers' money, when what is wanted is much-needed industrial development.

Ms Keeble: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. One of the aims of the planning Green Paper is to provide a system that is more transparent and is not held hostage by filibustering tactics, but that can be well used by community groups to enable them to put their views directly and not turn planning inquiries into what has been called a banquet for barristers.

Railtrack

6. **Mr. Gregory Barker** (Bexhill and Battle): What the estimated cost to date is of Railtrack being in administration. [36649]

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): We estimate that the total amount so far drawn down from the commercial loan facility—

Hon. Members: Where's Byers?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House must come to order.

Mr. Spellar: All I can say about that outburst is that it was one that they prepared earlier.

We estimate that the total amount so far drawn down from the commercial loan facility, which is used for running the railway, together with the administrators' fees, is some £1.8 billion. That is an interim arrangement, and the administrator will shortly start the process of raising banking facilities to refinance the loan from the commercial sector. When that takes place, there will no longer be a direct call on taxpayers' money.

Mr. Barker: I listened carefully to the Minister's answer, but is not the real economic cost far higher? Taken together, more expensive financing, higher performance targets and tens of millions in lost efficiency savings will mean that the real cost of Railtrack administration will be £400 million this year, and more like £1.75 billion cumulatively to 2006. Given the Secretary of State's record for factual inaccuracy, would the Minister care to revisit his answer and tell the poor old British travelling public what the real cost of the Labour Railtrack fiasco will be?

Mr. Spellar: I can tell the hon. Gentleman what the cost of Railtrack is. It is a failed privatisation. It did not have a clue about its own assets. It could not run its programmes. It went from £2.3 billion estimated expenditure on the west coast main line to between £6 billion and £7 billion and rising, and it was not able to organise its contractors. If the hon. Gentleman actually talked to the operators in the industry, he would know that they found Railtrack to be out of touch and incompetent. They have already seen considerable progress under John Armitt, who is a respected figure from the construction industry. There has been a change of attitude and a change of practice. Travellers will welcome that, because it is delivering the rail service that they want. By his question, the hon. Gentleman shows yet again how out of touch the Conservative party is on this issue.

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Does my right hon. Friend recognise that the process that led to the administration of Railtrack—both the ending of that debacle and the role played by the Secretary of State—has been warmly welcomed, especially by Labour Members? Is he also aware of the concern that creating yet another company—even one limited by guarantee—is bound to lead to more damaging fragmentation of the industry?

Given that all the resources for our rail infrastructure are either dispensed directly or are guaranteed by the public purse, will my right hon. Friend give urgent consideration to the suggestion from the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions that all the infrastructure should be incorporated in the Strategic Rail Authority?

Mr. Spellar: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the fragmentation of the industry. I am sure that he is pleased about the measures that the Strategic Rail Authority is taking to consolidate the operator side of the industry.

Bids are currently being prepared for the infrastructure. One proposal is for a company limited by guarantee, which would provide an effective way of focusing Railtrack's successor on the operation and management of the infrastructure. Under Railtrack as it was, there was an absolute focus on short-term shareholder value, to the detriment of the travelling public and the rail infrastructure.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): Is the Minister aware that the cost being suffered by my constituents is a one-third increase in delays since the effective renationalisation of Railtrack? They want a Secretary of State who will focus on making the trains arrive as rapidly as his information officers depart. They are not interested in those people; but how can they trust a Secretary of State who has seen resign—or has sacked, or disowned—the chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority, the chairman of Railtrack, the franchising director, and that other fellow, Winsor? All those people were appointed by the Secretary of State, or by his Government. How can my constituents trust him if he cannot retain the trust of those whom he appointed?

Mr. Spellar: As well as giving an unmitigated endorsement to the old Railtrack, the right hon. Gentleman seems to favour the whole of the failed structure. I would expect the great majority of those in the industry to consider the new chairmen of the Strategic Rail Authority and Railtrack a considerable improvement, and indeed we are already seeing progress.

That is not in any way to underestimate the difficulty of recovering from the considerable problems created by the structure introduced by the last Government. First there was the privatisation of the train operators, and the way in which it was handled; then there was the rushed and botched privatisation of the infrastructure of Railtrack, a company which, as we have seen, was wrongly focused on short-term shareholder value rather than the running of the system. We are considering how to improve the structural position, and we have already made considerable changes in personnel, to the good of the industry.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Minister aware that the British people were fed up to the back teeth with handing over billions of pounds to a few people in Railtrack? At some point, it had to stop. Let me suggest a precursor to the company going into public ownership—I hope that is the idea—and point out that, shortly, one or two other companies might be going for a song. Let me say this, to the fury of the Tories and the press: snap them up. It might result in a few top civil servants effing and blinding and all the rest, but we should not worry about that. The British people out there want to get rid of the way in which the railway companies were assembled by the Tories—lining the pockets of their friends—and make sure that travelling by rail benefits all the British people.

Mr. Spellar: What I am sure the British public want, and what freight operators want, is a rail system that works efficiently and effectively. We will introduce the mechanism that will best ensure that. The key is that we do not start with any ideological predisposition towards one course or another—unlike the bunch on the Opposition Benches, who could see only one way. That is why they made such a mess of things.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): The Secretary of State was right to put Railtrack into administration, even though he waited too long and the process was badly executed. However, private consortiums will be running London underground for the next 30 years. Will the Minister explain why, if they fail to perform adequately, the next Secretary of State will not be able to terminate their contracts, or put them into administration?

Mr. Spellar: Quite simply, if the consortiums fail, there will be provision for taking over their work. There must always be a default position. I hope that the hon. Gentleman and his friends on the Greater London Assembly will use what influence they have in Transport for London to urge all concerned to get on with the contracts and to start to deliver benefits for the people of London. The bodies involved should start getting in the investment that the infrastructure so desperately needs. The system will have to cater for a considerable number of extra travellers as a result of the million extra jobs created in the economy since the Government took office.

Regional Governance

7. **Mr. David Lidington** (Aylesbury): What role regional assemblies will have in the determination of planning decisions and housing and transport policy. [36650]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Dr. Alan Whitehead): The forthcoming regional governance White Paper will set out our proposals for the functions of elected regional assemblies.

Mr. Lidington: In what ways will abolishing a county council in Aylesbury so that powers can be transferred to a regional assembly in Guildford or Reading bring government closer to local people?

Dr. Whitehead: The hon. Gentleman seems to be under the misapprehension that the purpose of regional government is to suck powers up from local government. I cannot guarantee that regional assemblies will draw no functions from local government, but any such cases will be very much the exception. Local government will remain the community champion and chief service deliverer, whereas regional government will lead in the development of the strategic vision for the region. Our programme of reform is about ensuring that local government deals with local services, that regional government deals with regional priorities, and that Westminster deals with issues of national importance.

Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Is my hon. Friend aware that regional bodies on both sides of the Pennines wholly support the proposal by Central Trains to reopen a tunnel for rail freight under the Pennines? That matter was commented on by the House a short time ago. Does my hon. Friend accept that, on strategic transport policies of that sort, it is crucial to take note of the wishes of regional bodies? Does he agree that they will play an extremely important role when they are fully established?

Dr. Whitehead: My hon. Friend makes an important point. It is essential that accountable regional bodies take careful note of the benefits that can accrue to regions as a result of collaboration—both between regions, and with regard to projects within regions. My hon. Friend will have noted that the Green Paper entitled "Planning: Delivering a Fundamental Change" envisages that elected regional assemblies will take over strategic regional planning functions, among other things.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Why did the Minister evade the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington), who suggested that the creation of these absurd regional bodies would lead to the demise of county councils? Will the Minister confirm that that is what would happen?

Dr. Whitehead: The hon. Gentleman seems to have had something of a memory lapse. He should recall that the previous Conservative Government introduced a series of unelected regional bodies. They sucked power up into the regions, but they were not accountable. One of the purposes behind developing elected regional assemblies is to ensure that power is accountable, and is exercised at the appropriate level. Regional activities will be accountable at regional government level, and local activities will be accountable at local government level.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): Whatever powers are eventually devolved to regional assemblies, there is a growing feeling in the north-east—among sporting personalities and people in entertainment, as well as among politicians—that the area needs a strong regional voice. Will my hon. Friend say when we can expect the White Paper on the matter? Will he confirm that the timetable to which the Government are working would allow a referendum in the north-east before the end of this Parliament?

Dr. Whitehead: My right hon. Friend makes the important point that in the north-east keen interest has been expressed from a variety of sources in the idea of an elected regional assembly. He can expect the forthcoming regional government White Paper to appear shortly. Among others things, it will set out the timetable for early referendums when the creation of regional assemblies on an elected basis is regarded as desirable.

Mr. Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley): Whatever the future role of regional assemblies, what steps are the Minister and his Department taking to ensure co-operation with the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly to bring about a strategic, co-ordinated transport policy for the whole United Kingdom?

Dr. Whitehead: The hon. Gentleman should know that the Government, my Department and the devolved governments of the regions and nations of Great Britain undertake regular discussions on issues of mutual strategic importance. Those discussions are proving useful in terms of the sort of issues that he has raised.

Mr. Malcolm Moss (North-East Cambridgeshire): Does the Minister agree with the headline in a recent edition of the *Local Government Chronicle*, suggesting that the Prime Minister is selling the counties out? Will the Minister tell the House whether the Government intend to sell the counties out?

Dr. Whitehead: Not only do we not intend to sell the counties out, but we intend to ensure that elected regional assemblies will be created only when people in the region concerned want those assemblies to be created on an elected basis. Therefore, the idea that there is a plan for the extinction of county councils, regardless of the popular feeling in the regions, is completely untenable.

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): I welcome my hon. Friend's determination and that of the Secretary of State to honour the manifesto commitment on the introduction of regional assemblies. I agree that it is not so much about creating an extra tier of government as about democratising an existing tier, and giving that tier back to the regions where it belongs. May I also press my hon. Friend on timing? Will he confirm that the publication of the White Paper will be accompanied by a proper period of consultation, and that legislation this autumn to pave the way for referendums will not be ruled out?

Dr. Whitehead: I confirm that the White Paper will be published shortly, will contain substantial proposals about the functions and working of elected regional assemblies and will set out a timetable according to which discussions will take place. An opportunity will be provided for full consultation on the way forward set out in the White Paper.

Homelessness

8. **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): What progress the bed and breakfast unit has made in reducing the number of homeless households in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. [36651]

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Stephen Byers): In September last year, 12,500 households were in bed-and-breakfast accommodation, of which some 6,500 were families with children. I regard that figure as unacceptably high. Based on the advice of the bed and breakfast unit, I hope to be able to make an announcement on the steps that we intend to take to reduce this number in the near future.

Dr. Cable: What estimate has the unit and the Secretary of State made of the additional demand for bed-and-breakfast accommodation as a result of new Government regulations in June that will substantially increase the number of homeless people to be rehoused by councils? Does he not recognise that this will cause severe problems for councils such as mine that are chronically short of social housing? To head off the pending crisis, will he therefore speak to his colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions about reforming the system of housing benefit to enable social landlords to lease private accommodation for the homeless?

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman raises an important issue about the relationship between housing benefit and the use of accommodation. It is one of a range of issues that we are considering in the context of making an announcement in the near future on how we intend to tackle the increasing number of households and families with children in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. The number is going up dramatically and that has to be brought to an end, but in a positive way in terms of the good accommodation that we should be able to offer to those who have to suffer bed-and-breakfast accommodation. We take this issue seriously and we will be making an announcement in the near future.

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the number of social housing units for rent in London has plummeted since the mid-1990s? Does he agree that supply is the key? Will he do what he can to ensure that we get a settlement from the Treasury to tackle not only the crisis in bed-and-breakfast accommodation but the equally serious crisis that underpins it of chronic overcrowding? It is twice as high in London as it is in any other part of the country, leading to catastrophic consequences for families with children.

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend is a strong campaigner for decent housing for families with children. I would like to think that we will be able to respond positively to her representations and many of those made by my hon. Friends. It is a question of funding, and we are putting in additional resources. It is also a question of developers facing their obligations, particularly in London and the south-east. At present, we are able, through the planning process, to put obligations on affordable housing only where it is residential accommodation for which planning is proposed. It would make a lot of sense if we could put such an obligation on a commercial development that was proposed. We are consulting on whether such an obligation should be introduced.

Regional Governance

9. **Mr. Anthony D. Wright** (Great Yarmouth): What progress he has made on proposals for elected regional Government in England. [36652]

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Nick Raynsford): We are making good progress. A White Paper on regional governance will be presented to Parliament by the Deputy Prime Minister as soon as it is ready. It will set out the Government's plans for taking forward our manifesto commitment on elected regional government.

Mr. Wright: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer, but I wished for a date to be given. There is lively debate in the regions on the pros and cons of regional government. Can my right hon. Friend tell us in broad terms what benefits he believes will flow to the regions that adopt the regional assembly approach? Furthermore, will the option for regional assemblies be open only to those areas that have unitary rather than two-tier government?

Mr. Raynsford: As my hon. Friend rightly points out, a debate is taking place, with different views emerging in various parts of the country. It is our view that people should have the opportunity, through a referendum, to determine the appropriate outcome in their region. A number of regions feel strongly that there would be benefits in having an elected regional assembly to give greater regional focus to economic development and related policies and to introduce a proper democratic framework to govern the activity of organisations that are accountable only to Ministers or are unelected quangos. Those regions perceive clear benefits in having an elected regional assembly.

As the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead), has already made clear, we will in our White Paper spell out the specific arrangements for the relationship of local government to elected regional assemblies where those are proposed.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of the considerable need to review regional boundaries? The south-east Dorset conurbation, for example, has no road or rail communications worth talking about with the proposed regional seat of government. The Highways Agency now deals with this under a central southern region, shown on all its maps. Is the right hon. Gentleman now considering a central southern region?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman has been around a long time and knows from experience that debates on boundaries are almost guaranteed to generate a long, protracted and not terribly productive outcome. For that reason, the Government have formed the view that it is right to work in the first instance on the basis of the government regions, as defined for the Government offices, which will provide sound building blocks. However, the hon. Gentleman will have to wait for the publication of the White Paper to see in detail how we propose to take forward the boundary arrangements for elected regional authorities.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): If voting in the referendum for regional government dictates the end of the county council tier, what implications will that have in any future reorganisation of local government? Would not a further referendum have to be held before a future Government could get rid of county councils?

Mr. Raynsford: As my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary made clear earlier, there is no agenda for the abolition of county councils, but we recognise the need to look at the relationship of local government to elected regional assemblies, where people determine through referendums that they want an elected regional assembly in their area. The precise way in which that will be handled will be spelt out in the White Paper.

Railtrack

10. **Mr. Colin Breed** (South-East Cornwall): If he will make a statement on the progress towards establishing a company limited by guarantee to take over Railtrack plc's responsibilities relating to running the network. [36653]

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Stephen Byers): The team that has been engaged by the Strategic Rail Authority to develop a bid based on the concept of a company limited by guarantee is currently preparing its proposal. All potential bidders are aware that the administrator and the Government would like to keep the period of administration as short as possible.

Mr. Breed: I thank the Secretary of State for that response. What does the right hon. Gentleman expect the public expenditure required by the new company to be, and how much will be generated by private investment?

Will that entail more moneys from the Treasury, over and above what has already been announced as part of the 10-year plan?

Mr. Byers: We shall have to await the business case that will be put by the bid team for the company limited by guarantee. Any bidder will have access to Government grant and track access charges and will be able to borrow on the financial markets on the basis of those two secured revenue streams. That is the current situation, but obviously the detail will depend on the proposal and the business case made by the company limited by guarantee or any other bidder.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): When my right hon. Friend next talks to Railtrack, will he ask whether something can be done about the Oulton Broad North level crossing? Because of an antiquated signalling system, the gates have to be lowered manually and are left down for five minutes to allow the passage of a two-carriage local train, thus blocking off one of the only two roads through the area. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we need an integrated approach if the proposal made by Anglia Railways for more trains between Lowestoft and Norwich is not to cause chaos on the roads?

Mr. Byers: As it happens, I know the Oulton Broad North level-crossing extremely well. I was on my way to campaign for my hon. Friend in the general election last year—successfully, of course—and, as all campaigners will understand, I was running behind schedule and then the level crossing gates came down, manually. It was even more frustrating because I wanted to be with my hon. Friend. My hon. Friend has made an important point: we need to ensure that investment goes into the network. That includes the Oulton Broad North level crossing as well as the west coast main line.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): The Secretary of State has an entire Department of civil servants at his disposal—although the number is falling by the day. He has external consultants to advise him on the planning Green Paper, external consultants to advise him on his relations with the City and, of course, external consultants to advise the bidder for the company limited by guarantee. Is the SRA's cost for putting together a bid for a company limited by guarantee counted as public sector investment?

Mr. Byers: The SRA is meeting the costs of the bid team from within its resources and will be accounted accordingly.

Mrs. May: So it comes within the public sector.

The Secretary of State told the House that total investment in the railways would be £64.9 billion over the next 10 years, but analysis shows that a third of that is accounted for by inflation, a quarter of it is double counting and a third of the remainder is ongoing renewals and maintenance work: so the real figure for investment for improving the railways over the next 10 years is not £65 billion, as the Secretary of State told the House, but less than £20 billion. Will the right hon. Gentleman apologise to the House, or does he just regret giving the wrong impression?

As this is the last DTLR Question Time before the Easter reshuffle, I just want to say to the Secretary of State—goodbye.

Mr. Byers: There are important issues that need to be addressed. Whether it is the hon. Lady saying bye-bye to me, or me saying bye-bye to her, time will tell. Under the 10-year plan, £64.9 billion will be invested in the railways. Those are the figures and that is the money that will be invested. The hon. Lady should not rely on the comments made in some of the newspapers. Those are the figures and that is the amount that will be delivered. The important issue for the Government and for me is that, whereas the hon. Lady may reflect the priorities of the Westminster village, the Government and I will deliver on the priorities of the people of our country. Those priorities are improving our transport system, decent housing for our people, regeneration of our economy and ensuring that we deliver for all our people. That is what I intend to do, and that i[illegible]at I shall continue to do.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Hon. Friends and I have been tabling questions in recent weeks about the cost of sending British NHS patients for treatment in Germany and France. Over the past few days, we have received answers to those written questions, refusing us any information about the cost of that treatment on the spurious grounds of commercial confidentiality. The answers to further questions as to what constitutes commercial confidentiality are, apparently, confidential. Surely it is legitimate to seek details of whether taxpayers' money is being spent effectively, not only on those NHS escapees going to the continent, but for the 1 million-plus patients who remain on waiting lists at home. Could you give us your guidance on how we can get that information about taxpayers' money into the public domain?

Mr. Speaker: I am not responsible for ministerial answers.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You may have seen in *The Times* today an article on the second page reporting that yesterday the Government organised what the paper calls a pre-emptive strike to discourage discussion of a proposal by a think-tank close to the Government to raise the basic retirement age to 67. You will have noticed that on the Order Paper yesterday there was a question specifically on that subject from the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice), which was withdrawn. Could you make inquiries as to whether any improper pressure was put on the hon. Gentleman to withdraw that question; could you rebuke anyone, from the Whips Office or otherwise, who did that; and could you offer counselling and support to Labour Members who feel inclined to give in to pressure from the Whips to remove embarrassing questions from the Order Paper?

Mr. Speaker: I do not think that a proper point of order.

Animal Welfare (Journey to Slaughter)

3.33 pm

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): I beg to move,

> That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require the Secretary of State, in setting standards for slaughterhouses, to have regard to the desirability of reducing the length and duration of animals' journeys to slaughter, and for related purposes.

The Isle of Wight, the constituency that I am proud to represent, was fortunately free of foot and mouth during the last outbreak, although on 19 February last year the first of two contacts was identified on the island. Fortunately, we were given the all-clear, but why should contacts be identified as far apart as Northumberland and the Isle of Wight? Both cases had been dealt with at an abattoir in Little Warley in Essex.

That is just the problem. As my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) said:

> "The volume of traffic through any one abattoir has increased the risk of the virus spreading.
>
> As vehicles come from a wider geographical area to reach their nearest abattoir they then take the virus over a far wider area, meaning much of the country may be affected."

Why must animals travel such long distances to slaughter? The answer is, first, because of the closure of many small abattoirs, and secondly, because many supermarkets demand that animals be slaughtered at slaughterhouses of their choice and not those nearest the farms.

The hon. Member for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor) introduced a ten-minute Bill in November with the objectives of limiting journey times, promoting local slaughterhouses and limiting the frequency of animals' journeys to markets. The Government had the opportunity to take up his proposals in both the Animal Health Bill and the document "England's rural future". Regrettably, neither of them mentioned the hon. Gentleman's proposals; hence my Bill, which takes a slightly different approach by considering why animals have to travel so far.

A wide range of organisations, from Compassion in World Farming and the Soil Association to the Meat and Livestock Commission and the Countryside Alliance, recognise that small slaughterhouses have closed at an unprecedented rate and that supermarkets' dealings with farmers frequently require animals to be slaughtered far away from the farm. The result is, of course, considerable additional stress to the animals caused by long journeys, overcrowding, inadequate rest periods, lairage and drinking facilities, and by repeated loading and unloading.

The indefatigable countryside campaigner Mr. Robin Page pointed out in 1999 that there were 1,000-plus slaughterhouses in Britain in 1980, with 44 having the capacity to kill more than 50,000 beasts a year; in 1999, however, thanks to the European Union fresh meat directive, there were only 416 slaughterhouses, with 78 killing more than 50,000 beasts a year. Mr. Page went on to say:

> "For humanely killed stress-free animals, slaughter needs to be as close to the farm as possible. Under the directive, the reverse has happened: with unnecessary closures, due to ridiculous hygiene regulations and unacceptable costs, animals are now being transported many miles to die."

I want to stop that stress.

Compassion in World Farming reports that we are down to about 300 abattoirs. As Mr. Page said, EU meat hygiene legislation has driven up costs to a point beyond the reach of many small slaughterhouses. The increased costs have arisen both because EU legislation has stepped up its requirements on veterinary supervision and because the EU has imposed a range of additional structural requirements on slaughterhouses.

A number of steps need to be taken if a network of local slaughterhouses is to be re-established. The Government and the abattoir sector need to make a concerted attempt to prevent the closure of more local abattoirs and to secure the reopening of those that have closed. The Government should give careful examination to the ways in which we can give financial assistance to that development and encourage investment in small local abattoirs. They must negotiate with our EU competitors to secure a revision of EU meat hygiene legislation. Such revision must provide a more sensible balance between the need to achieve good hygiene standards and securing economic viability for small local abattoirs.

Farmers and others who sell for slaughter should be encouraged to use an abattoir that is reasonably nearby rather then sending animals to a distant slaughterhouse. Those supermarkets that source their meat only from a few large abattoirs must be persuaded to alter that policy. They should be willing to source their meat from local abattoirs up and down the country, especially if it is for local consumption. Indeed, there would be little point in creating new local abattoirs if supermarkets refused to use them. Supermarkets want to be regarded as a responsible part of the food chain, so they should be prepared to facilitate a return to local slaughter, which will bring benefits in terms both of animal welfare and of disease control.

I am pleased to say that the agricultural sector on the Isle of Wight is working towards the creation of its own local abattoir, which would prevent a two to three-hour journey by road, ferry and road again to mainland abattoirs such as that situated at Frome. I compliment the agricultural community on the island on its work, and especially the Isle of Wight county branch of the National Farmers Union, the Isle of Wight Partnership and the South East England Development Agency, which have all contributed to the plans. I also thank Lord Whitty for the interest that he has shown in those plans.

Let us think how much easier it would be if the Government were fully behind shorter journeys from farm to table. The objectives of my Bill are to require the Government specifically to compare the stress of additional distance of transport with that of abattoirs, while reducing burdensome regulation; to adopt EU standard veterinary qualifications for those who inspect abattoirs—such qualifications are already acceptable, but we have to make them available for those who train in the United Kingdom; to assist in the recreation of small abattoirs, perhaps paid for by a standard headage payment across all slaughterhouses, instead of the bulk purchase scheme that exists at the moment and unfairly benefits large slaughterhouses; and to ban unreasonable trade practices in supermarkets.

The Bill is an important animal welfare measure. Personally, I consider it a more important such measure than others that may come before the House in future weeks and months. The fact is that far more animals suffer every day from long-distance journeys to slaughterhouses and markets than will ever suffer from foxhunting, but I do not wish to make a partisan point on that subject. This is such an important animal welfare measure that I believe that it deserves the support of all parts of the House.

I commend the Bill and I hope for the support of the House in introducing it.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Andrew Turner, Mr. Richard Bacon, Mrs. Helen Clark, Mr. Jonathan Djanogly, Mr. Jeffrey M. Donaldson, Mr. Peter Duncan, Mr. Adrian Flook, Jane Griffiths, Lady Hermon and Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger.

ANIMAL WELFARE (JOURNEY TO SLAUGHTER)

Mr. Andrew Turner accordingly presented a Bill to require the Secretary of State, in setting standards for slaughterhouses, to have regard to the desirability of reducing the length and duration of animals' journeys to slaughter, and for related purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 10 May, and to be printed [Bill 108].

Opposition Day

Steel Industry

Mr. Speaker: We now come to the main business. I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

3.43 pm

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): I beg to move,

That this House is gravely concerned about the Prime Minister's role in supporting LNM/Ispat International's contract for the SIDEX steel plant in Romania and is unimpressed with the explanations given hitherto; notes Lakshmi Mittal's non-domicile resident status and his donation of £125,000 to the Labour Party; condemns the Government's support for a company that is actively lobbying in the United States against the interests of the UK steel industry; notes the potentially devastating effect on the domestic steel industry posed by Mittal-inspired steel import tariffs imposed by the US Administration; calls for urgent action to be taken to help support the UK steel industry as a consequence of any US-imposed tariffs; urges the Prime Minister to publish guidelines regarding Government support for companies that are also substantial donors to the governing party; and demands a full public inquiry into the Government's support for the Romanian SIDEX steel plant deal.

The motion was tabled in my name and those of my hon. Friends, and on behalf of the UK and Welsh steel industry.

Like me, the Secretary of State comes of ironworkers' stock. His constituency suffered 1,000 job losses as a result of last year's Corus closures. I feel genuinely sorry for him that he has been chosen to answer on the Government's behalf on matters on which he was not consulted and over which he has no control. Yet again, the Secretary of State for Wales has been handed all the responsibility and none of the power.

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Adam Price: In a minute.

Llew Smith: Will he give way?

Adam Price: In a minute.

Llew Smith *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Adam Price: But the Secretary of State does have the choice—a very simple one: to defend his Government and his party's reputation, or to represent the people who elected him. If he will not stand up and defend Welsh industry and Welsh communities, there are many hon. Members on these Benches who are prepared to do so.

Llew Smith: The hon. Gentleman says that he is involved in this debate as a representative of the Welsh steel industry. Can he explain that remark, given that those who are closest to the industry—the trade unions—have dissociated themselves from the remarks that he has been making for the past few weeks? He is intervening not on behalf of the Welsh steel industry, but on behalf of the Welsh nationalist party.

Adam Price: I am sure that the Welsh steel communities will be proud of the hon. Gentleman's remarks. I do not want to get involved in an inter-union dispute, but we have received full support from employees in Allied Steel and Wire and the GMB. The GMB takes a different line from the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation as regards loyalty to the Labour Government.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Adam Price: I should like to make some progress, if I may. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman says that he wishes to make some progress.

Adam Price: We demand answers from the Government on behalf of those who expect a British Prime Minister—a Labour Prime Minister, at that—to be batting for British workers, not supporting foreign business men. Throughout this affair, the Government have singularly failed to provide a satisfactory answer to the central question—why did a British Prime Minister put the full weight of the Crown behind a foreign company's investment in eastern Europe that will cost British jobs? That is the key question that the Secretary of State for Wales must answer in the Prime Minister's absence.

It is shameful that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has not found the time to come to the House at this critical juncture for the steel industry. She is not so much washing her hair as washing her hands of the steel industry. She found the time to attend Mr. Mittal's reception in November, however.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As you know, the rules of the House allow copious use of notes. Nevertheless—apart from the fact that I personally feel that Welshmen should speak extempore—those rules dictate that hon. Members must not follow notes too closely.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is in order at the moment.

Adam Price: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has twice flatly refused to come to the House. At this of all times the steel industry is entitled to expect leadership from the Government, yet we see political cowardice of the most contemptible kind. The Government have tried to brazen and bluff their way out of the crisis. Downing street has issued a string of denials, discrepancies and dissembling. The Government's smokescreen of denial and fake indignation is designed to obscure the truth, but the key facts are clear.

Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): The hon. Gentleman says that he—and, I suppose, his party—

speaks on behalf of the UK steel industry. What are they doing to support the Secretary of State, the Prime Minister and other members of the Government who are pressing the United States Government to take action over US steel tariffs? We hear a lot of bluster from the hon. Gentleman and his party, but what positive action are they taking to support what our Government are doing to protect the jobs of my steelworkers, as well as those in Wales?

Adam Price: The hon. Lady will know that I am a fellow founding officer of the all-party steel group. She will also know that President Bush announced his intention to call a section 201 inquiry last June. What did the Prime Minister do? He wrote a letter 24 hours before the deadline was up, yet Mr. Mittal got his letter within four days of asking. All the British steel industry is asking of the Government is parity of esteem; surely it is entitled to that.

The facts are clear. Mr. Mittal gave £125,000 to the Labour party. In July, the Prime Minister signed a letter urging Romania to sell its nationalised steel industry to Mr. Mittal's company. In November, Romania did so, after the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development had, at the Government's behest, given Mr. Mittal a loan. Labour has argued that there was no connection between the donation and the letter or the letter and the deal, and that the loan was also unconnected. The Labour party says that those are all coincidences, but I call coincidences that recur a pattern.

Of course that was not the first time that the Government had helped Mr. Mittal; he received his first loan from the Government to buy a state-owned steel plant in Kazakhstan just months after he gave the Labour party £16,000 in 1997. That is part of a chain of coincidences, where favours are given to the Government or to the Labour party and favours are done in return.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): Can the hon. Gentleman therefore explain why, on 9 March last year, the leader of the Welsh nationalist-run Rhondda Cynon Taff local authority, Pauline Jarman, met representatives of the Rhondda Cynon Taff bus and coach operators association to talk about extending their £4.5 million agreement; and why, only two weeks later in the run-up to the general election, the convenor of that group gave a £1,500 donation to the local Plaid Cymru party? Can he also explain why, two weeks after the general election, Plaid Cymru councillors on the local authority decided not only to extend the contract for a further year, but to give an additional 7.5 per cent.—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Interventions should be brief.

Adam Price: Unfortunately for the hon. Gentleman, I was given ample warning of that issue; it was raised by his colleague Councillor Robert Bevan in the scrutiny committee, but he immediately withdrew the allegation. Councillor Robert Bevan and the hon. Gentleman were opponents for the Labour party nomination and they are not on speaking terms, but if the hon. Gentleman were to speak to his colleagues in the Labour group, perhaps he would have better information. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) must be quiet.

Adam Price: The Government have made a concerted effort to confuse, conceal and conflate our understanding of this case, and the hon. Gentleman's intervention is an example of that. Line after line of defence has been demolished, as the Government have been forced to amend, to correct and to retract statement after statement.

The Prime Minister said that LNM was a British company, which it is not. Those at Downing street argued that it was owned by a British parent company—another false statement. The Prime Minister's official spokesperson said that Mr. Mittal was a British citizen—he is not—and that the donation came after the election, but it actually came before. It was said that Mr. Mittal had given money to the Tories—another untruth that had to be retracted. It was claimed that the letter was signed after the deal was agreed—not true; a late bid from the French company triggered the letter. It was said that the letter was drafted and signed unchanged—wrong again. The original draft was written on 19 July including the words "my friend Lakshmi Mittal", which Jonathan Powell removed to avoid embarrassing the Prime Minister.

We have been assured that the Prime Minister had not met Mr. Mittal bilaterally and did not know about the donation. Again, that is untrue. Mr. Mittal, according to his official spokeswoman, had met the Prime Minister on several occasions, most recently at a celebration dinner for 15 of Labour's biggest donors just weeks after the general election. Four weeks later, the Prime Minister signed the letter.

Finally—it is such a long list that I am breathless with mentioning so many retractions—it was claimed that the Prime Minister writes frequent letters to heads of state on behalf of businesses, but when the BBC checked the list of countries, not one of them could confirm ever having received such a letter, and the Government have refused to provide any example, citing that familiar excuse—commercial confidentiality. Ten lines of defence have been uttered by the Prime Minister's official spokesman, but later retracted in one of the most appallingly inept cover-ups that this country has ever seen.

Ian Lucas (Wrexham): The letter written by the Prime Minister was requested by an independent civil servant, the British ambassador to Romania. Is not that the key fact in all this? Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting—it is important to be clear about this—that that gentleman was in some way acting at the behest of the Labour party? Will he make that clear?

Adam Price: We are familiar with this Government's strategy of heaping blame on officials when events turn against them and when information comes out that contradicts Government statements. The way in which Her Majesty's ambassador in Bucharest has been treated as the fall guy is appalling. If the hon. Gentleman is seriously suggesting that a member of the diplomatic service would take it on himself to have dozens of meetings with a business man without checking for ministerial approval, his understanding of the operations of the British state is different from mine.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, in accepting £125,000 from one of the wealthiest families in the United Kingdom, the Labour party has sold itself short?

Adam Price: I totally agree. It was crass and insensitive in the extreme of the Labour party to accept

[Adam Price]

that donation from a Corus competitor at the same time as redundancy notices were being sent out to people in the Secretary of State's constituency. That is absolutely disgusting. Not only should we expect an explanation, but we deserve an apology, not for ourselves but for redundant and current steelworkers in the right hon. Gentleman's constituency.

Mark Tami: Has the hon. Gentleman seen the comments of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, the main union in the steel industry, praising the British Government for their fight against any American protectionist measures? Would it not be better if we concentrated on those issues, the real issues facing the steel industry, instead of this nonsense?

Adam Price: I will come on to the United States, as Mr. Mittal has clearly had a role to play there. I am not an apologist for the management of Corus, which has treated its workers appallingly, not least in the latest pay freeze.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Now that I get a sense of the general thrust of the hon. Gentleman's comments, will he, for my clarification, answer the following question? Has Plaid Cymru, at any stage in its history or, let us say, in the last 10 years, promoted a political point or campaign on behalf of an individual or organisation who has given a donation to Plaid Cymru?

Adam Price: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his robust opposition to the Government, once again. For a new Member, he is a fine example of an Opposition Member who scrutinises the Executive without fail at every available opportunity.

Lembit Öpik *rose—*

Adam Price: I crave the indulgence of the House; I want to make progress. I have been fairly generous in giving way.

The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) mentioned the United States. Of course, we know that Mr. Mittal has spent $600,000 in the USA lobbying for tariffs on steel imports. Mr. Mittal's closure in Ireland has already cost British steel companies millions of pounds in its knock-on effect on credit availability. Crucially, Mr. Mittal's Sidex plant, funded by the British taxpayer, is a prime example of the problems of the steel industry: an eastern European steel maker is selling steel in western European markets, subsidised in this case by the British taxpayer.

Mr. Nigel Beard (Bexleyheath and Crayford) *rose—*

Adam Price: I should like to make some progress. I hope that the hon. Gentleman catches your eye later in the debate, Mr. Speaker.

Graham MacKenzie, the chief executive of Allied Steel and Wire, said:

> "The fear is that the investment in the Romanian steel is going to lead to a surge in imports from Romania and that is going to damage steel producers in the UK."

Mr. Mittal himself told *The Times of India* that he wanted to make the Romanian plant Europe's main steel producer and that he saw no future for manufacturing in the UK. Mr. Mittal is entitled to his opinion, but he is surely not entitled to the support of the British Government as he hammers another nail into the coffin of the British steel industry.

The balance of trade in steel has collapsed in the past five years, under this Government. A surplus of 2.8 million tonnes in 1997 turned into a deficit of 1.2 million tonnes last year. That is part of the wider meltdown of manufacturing under this Government. For the first time, the amount of steel contained in manufactured goods imported into the UK is now greater than the amount that we are producing. It is no longer enough for the Government to shrug their shoulders, point to global overcapacity in the steel industry or blame the Corus management, as if Governments are now powerless to intervene to save jobs or support indigenous industry. The Government, as the Secretary of State admitted during Thursday's Welsh debate, could have opposed the merger of British Steel and Hoogovens and referred the matter to the competition directorate, as my party demanded in June 1999. The Government refused to consider that and told us that the jobs at Llanwern were safe. I recall the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation saying something similar. The Government could have intervened in the currency markets to bring about a more competitive exchange rate.

Llew Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Adam Price: I must make some progress. I apologise to the hon. Gentleman, but I have been generous in giving way.

The Government's policy of a high pound has led to a loss of more than £3 billion in export earnings over the past five years for the British steel industry. They could have found a Longbridge-type solution to the problems of Corus in south Wales, even supporting compulsory purchase as a last resort. Perhaps the problem is that Torfaen is not a marginal constituency whereas Birmingham, Edgbaston is—at least, Torfaen is not marginal yet.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman has yet addressed the question asked of him by my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik). Has Plaid Cymru ever taken up the interest of someone who has made it a financial contribution? If he will not answer, we must assume that the answer is yes.

Adam Price: I am disappointed in the hon. Gentleman. As he is vice-chairman of the steel group, I should have hoped that he would use his valuable opportunity to address the concerns of the steel industry.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): My hon. Friend is making a comprehensive case for why the Prime Minister should have spent more than 30 seconds reading the Mittal letter. Does he feel that the Prime Minister should spend more time on such matters than he takes to choose his shirt in the morning? Will he address the point made by two hon. Members from the Liberal Democrats, a party that has recently exerted undue influence on South Wales police in pursuit of a Member of the National Assembly?

Lembit Öpik: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it in order for the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) to make accusations about individuals who are not in a position to justify themselves in a debate that has nothing to do with the police investigations into Mike German?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) made an attack on a political party on a matter that has occurred outside the House. So far, he is in order, but I think that his intervention has ceased.

Adam Price: Let us drag the House back to steel, Mr. Speaker.

Above all, the Government could have decided not to support, under any circumstances, an investment in an eastern European plant that would bring further competition to the British steel industry.

Llew Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Adam Price: The Prime Minister—

Llew Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) has said several times that he will not give way.

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): He is giving way to his own side.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let me chair the proceedings; it is easier that way.

Adam Price: I am grateful, Mr. Speaker.

Rather than making half-hearted and empty gestures late in the day, in order to deflect criticism of his Government's double standards and inaction over the past eight months, the Prime Minister should have announced an emergency package of contingency measures to safeguard the future of the steel industry. We have known for eight months that tariffs were coming. Where have the Government been? Where has the Prime Minister been?

The effect of the tariffs could be devastating, not just because of the loss of a market that was worth up to £500 million two years ago, but because a surge of cheap imports frozen out of the American market will flood western Europe, particularly the United Kingdom. That is where the Government should be concentrating their efforts. It will not be enough to do as the Secretary of State has said and refer the matter to the World Trade Organisation—it could take years to receive an answer from that, and by then the British steel industry could be devastated. We need action now. We need a targeted package of measures and we need the Government to lobby the European Union in the strongest possible terms to introduce EU-wide tariffs against dumping by low-cost producers.

In addition, the European coal and steel treaty is currently being renegotiated, and we need to reconsider whether the steel industry should receive targeted Government support in the form of investment aid under the new terms of that treaty.

There were many factors that should have led to extreme caution being exercised and a thorough evaluation taking place before any help was given to Mr. Mittal, whether in the form of the Prime Minister's imprimatur or the loan from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. There was no evidence of caution or evaluation; indeed, there was an almost reckless commitment of effort and resources. The full endorsement of the British state was given to Mr. Mittal. After the Ecclestone affair, it is surely vital for the Government to avoid even the faintest suspicion that British Government policy could be influenced by donations.

Mr. Bryant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Adam Price: I am afraid not.

The conduct of the Government has achieved the opposite effect: a persistent scandal and the loss of public trust. I note that the chair of the Labour party has said that

> "those who do contribute overwhelmingly do so because of their desire to promote the values of the party they support".

It is interesting to note the choice of language there: "overwhelmingly", for example. The right hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke) clearly does not deny that some businesses try to buy access and action. In Mr. Mittal's case, it would surely be stretching credibility to suggest that he woke up one day and decided that he was a socialist.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn): Now that the hon. Gentleman has moved away from the subject of the steel industry and is talking about donations, I will give him the opportunity to answer this question. Has his party received a donation from an individual—yes or no?

Adam Price: I shall let the hon. Gentleman into a secret. I gave the party about £900 myself last week.

Mr. Mittal operates in countries with some of the worst—*[Interruption.]*

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Adam Price: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick).

Mr. Hendrick: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that the Prime Minister went out of his way to support a foreign company in deliberately undermining the Welsh steel industry for a measly £125,000? *[Interruption.]*

Adam Price: I think I am getting somewhere here. Well done! Congratulations to the hon. Gentleman.

In 1998, Mr. Mittal was involved in a political corruption scandal in Indonesia—reported by the *Financial Times*—surrounding the privatisation of the former state-owned Krakatau Steel in west Java, under the Suharto Government. The former president of the board of directors of Krakatau Steel resigned in protest at what

[Adam Price]

he called the mysterious way in which the sale was handled. As with the Romanian deal, the allegations centred on the under-valuation of the company and the secrecy surrounding the deal.

Ispat bought a 55 per cent. stake in the company for $400 million, even though the directors of the company had negotiated the sale of a 25 per cent. stake to another company for $500 million. The directors were not consulted on the sale and, as in Romania, no one was ever allowed to see the contract, which according to a *Financial Times* report, was "pocketed" by the privatisation Minister, Tanri Abeng. The deal later unravelled when Abeng was indicted for corruption in two other privatisations. The clear implication was that Ispat had bribed Mr. Abeng into accepting their lower-value bid for Krakatau.

In November, while Mr. Mittal was busy lobbying for tariffs against imports to the United States—against the interests of the British steel industry—he applied for his Mexican subsidiary to be exempted. To say that this man was two-faced would be a gross understatement, but one of his faces would certainly be the unacceptable face of globalisation, involving business without passports, without borders and without principles, and with little commitment either to the country where he was born or to the country where he lives.

Mr. Mittal is a lobbyist for tariffs, and a lobbyist against the British in Bucharest. He is an Indian in Algeria, where he bought the state-owned steel complex with diplomatic support from New Delhi, two weeks after the Sidex signing in London. He is a Republican donor in Washington, and a socialist firebrand in Hampstead, or so we are led to believe. Throughout all this, he is a man who knows the value of money.

As the London correspondent of *The Times of India* has said of Mr. Mittal's donation:

"He gave it to get exactly what he wanted, and they"—

the Labour Party—

"took it for the same reason."

It is clear from the way Mr. Mittal operates on a global scale that his donation was clearly designed to win favour with the UK Government at a critical time during the Sidex negotiations. The evidence for that may be circumstantial, but it is powerfully persuasive.

Mr. Mittal got what he wanted. I am prepared to accept that there may be an entirely innocent explanation for the Government's acquiescence in his demands. The problem is that we have yet to hear a convincing explanation. If a Minister backs a firm for a string of reasons and it happens to be a Labour donor, who can ever prove what was uppermost in the Minister's mind? The problem with this case is that the string of reasons has evaporated into thin air. We cannot know for certain whether anyone in this affair has committed a conscious act of corruption as a direct result of improper influence. This probably did not—probably did not—involve anything so overt as a crude pay-off, but something much more insidious: a culture in which business supporters of a project—to use new Labour phraseology—are not subject to the basic checks that would otherwise set the alarm bells ringing.

We can be certain of one thing—this affair will continue to poison the Government's relations with the steel industry, will corrode public confidence in the political process and will undermine the Government's standing and the Prime Minister's personal integrity at home and abroad as long as the questions go unanswered.

The British people, not least the redundant steel workers from the Secretary of State's constituency, are owed an explanation and an apology from their Government. In refusing to answer questions, in refusing an inquiry, in making a series of false and inaccurate statements, in putting up a Minister today who has no responsibility for what was done nor for what can be done, the Government have shown their contempt for democracy, for the steel industry and for the people of the UK.

The Government are running out of time and excuses. *[Interruption.]* With all due respect, the 3,000 redundant steel workers are not laughing tonight. Unless the Government answer the charges against them and the steel industry's calls for support, they will be held in contempt by the British people—in this case, a contempt, I regret to say, that will be richly deserved.

4.12 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Paul Murphy): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"recognises the fundamental strengths of the British steel industry, which is amongst the most efficient in the world; believes that, despite the regrettable decision of Corus to cut UK steel capacity, the industry has a long term future in Britain, as recently demonstrated by the decision of Corus to invest in the Port Talbot works; further recognises that the success of economic restructuring in Central and Eastern Europe, together with the enlargement of the European Union, is essential for the future of the British steel industry and other British manufacturing as it will extend markets and reduce hidden subsidies; congratulates the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development for its work on restructuring the Romanian and other Eastern European companies, including through supporting the successful sale of the SIDEX steel corporation; and further welcomes measures put in place by the Government and the National Assembly for Wales to train and retrain former steel workers and regenerate communities affected by Corus job losses.".

Plaid Cymru—*[Interruption.]* It is good to see right hon. and hon. Members on the Opposition Benches for a debate on Welsh matters; I wish we could see them a little more often. Plaid Cymru has the chance once a year to bring a Minister—me, or anyone else; all Ministers represent the Government—to the Dispatch Box to answer for Government policy, especially as it applies to Wales. Plaid Cymru wants to separate Wales from the rest of the United Kingdom, so presumably its interest lies in how these matters affect Wales.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Not Romania.

Mr. Murphy: We will come to that in a minute. The hon. Gentleman should not be so flippant, because the essence of this debate is Romania.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Murphy: I shall give way in a few moments.

We could be debating the health service, days after the opening of the first new hospital in Cardiff in three decades. We could be debating education and how we can build on our record exam results. *[Interruption.]* That does not prevent the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) from talking about health or education matters in Welsh questions. We could be debating pensioner poverty—a real and genuine problem in Wales—and how we can build on the success of the minimum income guarantee. We could even be debating transport and how we can speed the recovery of our railways in Wales from the disastrous privatisation forced on them by the Tories. But we are debating none of those matters today. Instead, whether the Opposition like it or not, we are debating the Romanian steel industry and its impact in terms of the development of Europe.

Plaid Cymru often claims—indeed, it has done so for many years—that it is a truly internationalist party. It says that it wants to see Wales in Europe and that Britain—it has discovered Britain in the last couple of weeks—has nothing to do with that scenario. It wants to create what is termed "a Europe of the regions", stretching from the Urals in the east to County Cork in the west. Now we know the truth: its internationalism stops at the River Wye. It wants the economies of eastern Europe to remain stuck in the Soviet era, rather than having a reasonable chance of competing, like other European countries.

Mr. Cameron: How does the Secretary of State define Mr. Mittal's steel company? Is it a British company, a British-based company, a company with British connections or none of the above?

Hon. Members: Phone a friend.

Mr. Murphy: I think I understand what "phone a friend" means. I will come to the thrust of my argument in a moment, but first I shall touch on what the hon. Gentleman says. Of course the company has a British base, a headquarters in London and employs people in Britain. The Prime Minister wrote to the Romanian Prime Minister some days before the signing ceremony—but after a decision on the Sidex plant had been taken. If the Romanian economy prospers, develops and becomes part of an enlarged Europe—I will come to the European loan in a moment—companies in Great Britain and Wales will benefit.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): I have the highest regard for the Secretary of State, so I am sorry that he is the fall-guy who has to open the debate; there are others who should be at the Dispatch Box instead.

It is widely believed outside the House and on the Opposition Benches that the Prime Minister intervened only because of Mr. Mittal's very large donation to the Labour party. To prove me wrong, would the Secretary of State be good enough to consult the fat red file in front of him and tell us which, and how many, other companies with small interests in our country—like Mittal's—the Prime Minister has made representations about to the leaders of other countries?

Mr. Murphy: I completely reject the accusation that the letter had anything whatever to do with a donation to the Labour party. The Prime Minister has made it absolutely clear from this Dispatch Box—*[Interruption.]* He said what he said because it is true that the donation was in no way linked to the letter to Romanian Prime Minister. I shall come to what the letter was about in a moment, but I should point out that it dealt with nothing other than the absolute need to ensure that Romania becomes part of a new and energetic Europe.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): Is the Secretary of State seriously suggesting that neither the Prime Minister nor any Government Department was aware that Mr. Mittal was a donor to the Labour party?

Mr. Murphy: I am certainly telling the House that the donation had absolutely nothing to do with the letter. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] Of course I am saying that.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): It is with some trepidation that I intervene in what is essentially a Welsh debate. I have listened with great care to my right hon. Friend's remarks. The whole House will agree that it is in the long-term interests of the rest of Europe that the Romanian economy and steel industry be restructured, but in the short term Mr. Mittal's interests clearly run contrary to those of the British steel industry. It remains a conundrum to many people inside and outside the House that the Prime Minister should sign that letter, as in the short term he has signed up to interests contrary to those of the British steel industry.

Mr. Murphy: I shall come to that point in a moment, but first I propose to address the relationship between the British steel industry—particularly in Wales—the letter and the development of the Romanian economy. That is why I am here. I am here at the Dispatch Box, not because I am a fall-guy, but because I am interested—as I am sure are all those who represent Welsh constituencies—in the development of the Welsh economy, including the Welsh steel industry. There are not many Opposition Members who represent as many steelworkers as I do. I represent a steel constituency and I know about the position of the steel industry.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Murphy: I wish to continue the thrust of my argument, which I have only just started.

Mr. MacKay: In the heat of the debate, the Secretary of State inadvertently failed to answer my principal question, but I am sure he will wish to do so before he moves on. How many other small companies has the Prime Minister made representations about to other heads of state, and who are they?

Mr. Murphy: I cannot tell the right hon. Gentleman about correspondence between Prime Ministers, which is governed by international convention and commercial confidentiality. When his Government were in power, they did exactly the same for company after company. There was a time, when I was a younger man, when I could not go into a high street and buy produce that did not come from a firm that gave money to the Conservative party. However, I am also sure that both Labour and Conservative Governments helped those companies, to the benefit of the British economy.

Mrs. Jackie Lawrence (Preseli Pembrokeshire): I am amused by some elements of the exchange that has just taken place. Will my right hon. Friend remind the House

[Mrs. Jackie Lawrence]

which Government introduced legislation to bring transparency to donations to political parties? What was the attitude of the party that has chosen the subject of this debate, and how did it vote on the issue? If the official Opposition are so concerned about the issue, why did they not do something about it during the 18 years they were in government?

Mr. Murphy: The irony is that the debate would not be taking place if it had not been for legislation introduced by this Labour Government. That is the reality.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Murphy: I must move on; otherwise, other hon. Members will not have an opportunity to make their contributions.

During last week's Welsh affairs debate, the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) said that

> "many things are happening in the world that will be detrimental to the prospects for Welsh companies in a range of sectors. However, should our Government actively support such developments?"

Predictably, he answered his own question, in the negative, and said that we should never have supported Mr. Mittal's acquisition of Sidex because a successful Romanian steel industry would mean that

> "jobs in the Welsh steel industry will be endangered."—[*Official Report*, 28 February 2002; Vol. 380, c. 917.]

That, in a nutshell, is the Plaid Cymru approach to east European industrial reconstruction: there should not be any if it supposedly threatens any Welsh jobs.

In a written answer recently, the Prime Minister said:

> "Privatisation of its steel industry through the sale of Sidex is an important element in its economic reform which will help to establish a level playing field between EU and Romanian steel producers and should lead to a reduction in levels of state subsidies which disadvantage UK steel producers. The privatisation did not threaten British jobs."—[*Official Report*, 14 February 2002; Vol. 380, c. 612W.]

Corus has also said that Mittal is not one of its major competitors.

Mr. Simon Thomas: The Secretary of State's central point is that the privatisation of the Romanian steel industry was of benefit to a British company. The letter written by the Prime Minister to the Romanian Prime Minister clearly stated:

> "I am particularly pleased that it is a British company which is your partner."

He means that Mittal's company is a British company. The letter continues:

> "This should send a very positive signal to investors and businessmen"—

I do not know what happens to business women—

> "in Britain and more widely. Together with the other measures you are taking, I hope it will stimulate renewed interest by British business in Romania."

The letter specifically says that a British company will be Romania's partner. As it has now been comprehensively proved that it is not a British company, does not the Secretary of State's argument fall to pieces?

Mr. Murphy: Of course it does not. The hon. Gentleman omitted to quote from the beginning of the letter, which said:

> "I am delighted by the news that you are to sign the contract for the privatization of your biggest steel plant SIDEX, with the LNM Group. This represents an important step forward in the efforts you and your government are making to restructure and modernise your country's economy."

The rest of the letter came from that, not from the sentence to which he referred.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Murphy: No, I shall not give way.

Mr. Simon Thomas: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. My copy of the letter that I prayed in aid and which the Secretary of State relied on comes from www.guv.ro, which is the Romanian website, as the Government refused to give it in answer to a parliamentary question from my hon. Friend the Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price). Hon. Members may not have a copy of the letter. Will you ensure, Mr. Speaker, that a copy is placed in the Library?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a point of order.

Mr. Murphy: The whole letter is printed in the booklet "The privatisation of Sidex SA Galati", so it is there for all to see. The hon. Gentleman still misses the main point. It is all very well questioning the newly discovered Britishness of companies, but it is much more important to concentrate on Romania and eastern Europe. If eastern Europe does not come up to the level of other countries of the European Union, how on earth can we expect enlargement to work? How on earth do we expect companies from Wales and the United Kingdom to invest in Romania, which has a population of 25 million? If right hon. or hon. Gentlemen had a factory in their constituency that traded with Romania, they would welcome this news, not disparage it.

Mr. Llwyd: No doubt it is laudable to assist Romania to modernise and to join the European Union. We are in favour of the EU, but I doubt that it is sensible or right for the Government to bat for Romania against Welsh and British jobs, and to use British taxpayers' money to bring the Romanians over to sign the deal.

Mr. Murphy: In no way is it a question of using the full power of the state or British taxpayers' money. I shall come to the issue of the British taxpayers' money, because that relates to the European loan. I doubt the points that the hon. Gentleman and his party have made about the euro, because I saw in *Wales on Sunday* last Sunday the headline "Garbagegate MP Sparks Euro Storm". Presumably that refers to the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr, whose views on Europe may differ from those of the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd). They are entitled to disagree, but if the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr opposes Europe, I can understand what this argument is about.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Murphy: I shall finish my point.

I know that the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy is very much in favour of the European project. Romania is a small country—of all parties, surely the Welsh nationalist party should support small countries—that is trying to develop and, as a struggling democracy, to get out of the grip of communism that held it down for years. That is what the letter and the debate is about. It is not about a nonsensical claim that the redundancies at Corus were made as a result of the letter that Mittal had. It is nonsense to suggest that, and I shall explain why.

Mr. Boris Johnson (Henley): I am still perplexed about why the Prime Minister saw fit to call this company British when it patently is not. Will the Secretary of State enlighten the House as to whether he thinks LNM is any more British than Usinor, the defeated French company that also has offices in this country? If LNM is more British, will he explain why? Is there any reason other than that Mr. Mittal gave £125,000 to the Labour party?

Mr. Murphy: I doubt whether there are many steelworks in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. Those of us who represent industrial areas know that in a global economy a company's headquarters may be anywhere in the world, and its factories and other parts of the company may be somewhere else. Even Corus, which has said nothing about the tariffs, has an American subsidiary. In this era of global capitalism, we know full well that virtually every company is from a different country—that is certainly the case in my constituency. It happens all the time.

Let us return to the central point. It is nonsense to suggest that the Welsh steel industry somehow suffered as a result of the letter. Let me first touch on the question of British taxpayers paying towards Mr. Mittal's company—

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Murphy: Yes, for the last time.

Mr. Blunt: Can the Secretary of State explain why Jonathan Powell—or the Prime Minister, or someone else in his private office—saw fit to remove the word "friend" from the Foreign Office draft of the letter?

Mr. Murphy: First, Jonathan Powell did not do that. Secondly, as the hon. Gentleman knows and as any Conservative Member who has been a Minister will know, letters are routinely drafted and redrafted before reaching the Minister who signs them.

Let me now deal with the question of the loan, which is central to the argument advanced by the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr. I assume that he was referring to the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development, as there was no other financial involvement. According to the bank, its mission is

"financing the economic transition in central and eastern Europe and the CIS".

Its aim is simple and straightforward: to help those countries, just as it helps developing countries in Asia, Africa and elsewhere.

Adam Price *rose—*

Mr. Murphy: I have only just finished quoting the EBRD. I will give way to the hon. Gentleman in a second. The bank has helped similar projects throughout eastern Europe. There has been a 14 million euro investment in refrigerator makers in Russia, as well as a 36 million euro loan to the Croatian tourist industry, a 21 million euro loan to boost the export hopes of Bulgaria's leading pharmaceutical company, and a 21 million euro investment in the railways of Bosnia-Herzegovina to improve the transport of industrial goods. There are many other examples. Just about every project that the bank supports could—if the facts were stretched beyond the realms of possibility—be said to have some effect on Welsh industries.

Let us now examine the issue of United Kingdom funding of the bank. We have subscribed 1.7 billion euro to its capital. Along with many other countries, we guarantee its loans. That allows it to borrow at preferential rates on the world's markets. But there is no question of any direct financial aid from Britain to make the purchase of Sidex possible: that is a myth.

The reason for our actions is obvious, but those who tabled the motion still do not understand the purpose of all the help for Romania and other eastern European countries.

Adam Price: That is ridiculous.

Mr. Murphy: Of course it is not ridiculous. Let me give an example. My hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Touhig), the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, is going to Prague next week. He will take with him Welsh business people, who will try to secure as much business—and, therefore, trade and jobs—for Wales as possible. That would not happen if the Czech Republic had not been helped. If such countries are not helped to attain a certain standard by the European Union, and by developed countries throughout the world, how on earth can we be expected to trade with them?

A classic example was the privatisation of Sidex. Without it, the chances of an improvement in the Romanian economy and of Romania becoming part of an enlarged European Union would have been very slim.

Adam Price: Will the Secretary of State tell me why no assessment was made of Mr. Mittal's record as an employer in Ireland, where there was the same binding five-year agreement regarding employment as exists in Romania? Mr. Mittal ripped up the agreement two weeks after it was terminated, throwing 600 people out of work. If that is repeated in Romania, how will the Government and the country look to the Romanian people?

Mr. Murphy: It has not been repeated. Besides, although the hon. Gentleman and others seem to think that all this business happened yesterday, it happened nine months ago.

Ensuring that we help Romania, which was the purpose of the letter, depends on the success of the steel plant, Sidex. It was holding up the Romanian economy, because it was in the grip of old-fashioned, Soviet-style, communist economics. It had to change, and this was an ideal opportunity.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): The Secretary of State has just informed the House that the Under-Secretary of State for Wales will be going to the

[Mr. Nigel Evans]

Czech Republic with representatives of Welsh companies to promote Welsh business. Will the right hon. Gentleman say what constitutes a Welsh business? How many people does a company have to employ in Wales for it to be considered a Welsh business?

Mr. Murphy: The hon. Gentleman is better than that question implies. Would he suggest, for example, that some of the American companies that between them employ 3,000 people in my constituency are Welsh? They are American, not Welsh. This nonsense about semantics is rubbish, as the hon. Gentleman, and everyone else, knows.

I turn now to the question of how this country has helped the Romanian economy. Last year, UK exports to Romania amounted to £340 million. Do Opposition Members consider that to be worthless or meaningless? Should the companies in this country that produced that £340 million of exports to Romania be discarded? The increase is substantive, compared to just a few years ago. Companies such as Unilever, Glaxo and Shell have operations in Romania, and that is a pointer to the future.

We have not yet touched on the question of what the National Assembly thinks should be done with regard to eastern Europe. A recent report to the Assembly from the Wales European Centre stated:

> "There is evidence of increasing interest in securing trading links by individual Welsh companies in the central European countries . . . enlargement of the EU will vastly increase the opportunities for Welsh business."

That is what it is all about.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): The Secretary of State was not consulted about the matter under discussion, but he has looked into the mind of the Prime Minister and declared him to be innocent of any undue influence. Will the right hon. Gentleman look into the mind of Mr. Mittal for a few seconds? Given what we know about Mr. Mittal's global interest, why did he give £125,000 to the Labour party? Does the right hon. Gentleman think that that was a matter of principle?

Mr. Murphy: I am not in the business of looking into people's minds. All I know is that the acquisition of Sidex had to be applauded by our Government and by other Governments in Europe. That is why the European loan was made. The EBRD press release about the acquisition of Sidex makes it clear that the European Union, the World Bank and the EBRD all agree the acquisition did the development of the Romanian economy nothing but good.

Of course, the principle that strong economies and trade are good for all of us is exactly why the European Union has an objective 1 programme. In my view, it is good that there are no nationalists in government in France or Germany: if there were, the chances of money coming to Wales would be zilch.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): The question has been asked already, but did the Prime Minister know about the donation by Mr. Mittal of £125,000 to the Labour party? Did any Secretary of State, special adviser or civil servant know about it?

Mr. Murphy: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has said already that he did not know. All those matters are on the record.

I wish to return to the question of whether the factors to which I have referred in some way affected the Welsh steel industry. About 18 months ago, we heard that there were to be dramatic changes to the Welsh—and British—steel industry, and to Corus. It fell to me, as Secretary of State for Wales, to have meeting after meeting with senior officials from Corus, including with its chairman and chief executive, Sir Brian Moffat. The meetings were held in my office, and were attended by other Ministers and people from the National Assembly.

Time after time, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister asked Corus what the Government could do to help the company out of its troubles. Time after time, the answer was, "Nothing. Absolutely nothing."

Mr. Blunt: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am sorry to interrupt the Secretary of State, but I fear that, just now, he may inadvertently have misled the House. He said from the Dispatch Box that the Prime Minister has said, in terms, that he did not know that Mr. Mittal was a donor to the Labour party. I am not sure that the Prime Minister has said that. If the Prime Minister has not said, in terms, that he did not know about the donation, will you confirm that the Secretary of State will return to the House as soon as possible to put the record straight?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): That is not a point of order; it is a point of debate.

Mr. Murphy: The Conservatives are more interested in that than they are in the Welsh steel industry. As I have said, time after time, we had meetings with Corus, and, time after time, it said that the Government could not help. The hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr talked about compulsory purchase—I assume that he means nationalisation—but it did not want that, and neither did we. All the time, we asked whether there was anything that we could do. Corus has denied that the Mittal situation had any effect. None of it had the slightest effect on Corus's decision to cut 3,000 jobs in Wales and 6,000 jobs in the United Kingdom as a whole.

There was nothing that the European Union could do because of strict regulations on state aid, all of which were examined. There is no question of Corus's decision being affected by anything other than the fact that it wanted to do what it eventually did—shed those jobs. It blamed certain things such as the euro, and hon. Members might get involved in that argument. It also blamed over-capacity but, whatever the reasons, it did not blame Mittal.

Mr. Evans: It is important to clarify this point because I do not believe that the Prime Minister has ever denied that he knew that the £125,000 donation had been made. Has the Prime Minister ever stated that he did not know that that donation had been made before he signed the letter?

Mr. Murphy: I have already answered that, and I shall not go over it again now.

Some of my hon. Friends have referred to the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation—some Conservative Members referred to it disparagingly. However, it is the biggest steel trade union. Its general secretary stated:

> "As the union involved in trying to save UK steelworkers jobs and preserve this strategically important UK industry, the ISTC can state unequivocally that we received the full support of the Prime Minister and the Welsh First Minister."

Indeed, he went on to dismiss the allegation that a donation to the Labour party was linked to the Corus closures, and stated:

> "I explained this to Adam Price, Plaid Cymru MP for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr following his decision to raise this matter . . . and he apologised. I am dumbfounded that he continues to make this spurious connection."

Lembit Öpik: I listened with interest to what the Secretary of State said about our international responsibilities. Knowing about eastern Europe, on account of my roots, I have a lot of sympathy with his remarks. On the core subject of the debate, if it can be shown that the political parties who are attacking the Government have represented in a political context individuals or groups who have given money to those parties, does he feel that to some extent that undermines the credibility of the points made?

Mr. Murphy: Of course. We might all be tempted to go down that line. The events of a previous Parliament make the subject of today's debate pale into insignificance. However, the jobs to which I referred are significant.

The Government remain implacably opposed to tariffs. The Prime Minister has made his views clear in a letter to and a conversation with President Bush. Of course, we understand that the US steel industry needs restructuring, but we believe that tariffs are against the interests of the European Union and Europe.

I represent a valleys constituency and, as has been mentioned, a steel seat. There are still steel jobs in my constituency, although, of course, many of them have been lost in the past few months. I did not read about the problems of the steel industry in a newspaper or see them on television. I have lived in steel communities in the Gwent valleys all my life. Last week, I visited Ebbw Vale—a great steel town—where I worked for 17 years. The town has taken a real knock thanks to the closure of the steelworks, not because of Mittal but because of Corus's decision. However, the people have not given up. They are not quitters, and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Llew Smith)—who was here this afternoon—will agree, there is as much dynamism and entrepreneurial spirit in Ebbw Vale as there is in many towns in England and Wales.

What the people of Ebbw Vale want from Government are not handouts or even expressions of sympathy, but the solid support needed to help them pick themselves up and get moving again. The Government and the Assembly are providing just that. We have a £32 million recovery package to assist the Gwent communities hit by the Corus decisions, and we are putting money into new training and retraining packages, with £1 million going into the Wales union learning fund.

In Ebbw Vale, the Assembly is putting in the money needed to reopen passenger train services and to establish the Ebbw Vale learning campus and create a centre of excellence. We are also providing assistance for the other communities that have been hit. For example, £4 million is going to the community in Bryngwyn.

Today, Plaid Cymru Members have ignored all that. They have not said a word about the regeneration of our steel communities. They are not interested in hearing good news stories about Wales. They ask for more money from a state to which they do not want to belong in the first place. By their friends, of course, we shall know them. The hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr was cheered by the Conservatives, and I wonder what people in his constituency will say about that. The two parties are united by many things, not least of which is their deep frustration at the successes—economic, social and electoral—of the Labour Government and those parties' opportunistic willingness to exploit the suffering of our communities under stress just for the sake of political points scoring.

That will not wash, and it did not wash in Ogmore. Nobody is fooled. When all the dust has settled on this farrago of nonsense, one thing will be remembered: Plaid Cymru's rhetoric about internationalism has no weight, no sincerity and no credibility.

4.46 pm

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford): I congratulate the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) on choosing this subject for the debate. There is no doubt that it is a matter of great importance not just to the steelworkers in Wales, but to steelworkers across the country and to everyone who cares about the probity and integrity of government.

The motion tabled by Plaid Cymru encapsulates the concerns of Conservative Members too, and I shall invite my colleagues to support it in the Lobbies. It is noticeable that the motion does not refer to Wales or to the Welsh industry. It refers to the problems afflicting the whole steel industry in the United Kingdom. It is therefore extraordinary that the Government have chosen not to put up a Minister to reply to the debate from the Department that is responsible for that industry. Nothing could more clearly demonstrate the fact that the Government have something to hide than the failure of a Minister from the Department of Trade and Industry to come to the Dispatch Box today.

Mr. Frank Roy (Motherwell and Wishaw): On the point about the United Kingdom steel industry, will the hon. Gentleman tell the House what he did when the Conservative party was in power for 18 years? Year after year in that period, the Conservative party made steelworkers redundant, including 10,000 in my constituency.

Mr. Whittingdale: One of our achievements was to help to make the British steel industry one of the most efficient and competitive in Europe. It most certainly was not that when the Conservative Government came to office.

Mark Tami: Does the hon. Gentleman recall that, in 1980 in Alyn and Deeside, Shotton steelworks lost 15,000 jobs in a single day? If that is the achievement of the Conservative party, it is a very sad one.

Mr. Whittingdale: This is not an exercise in delving back into history, but that was part of the process that made British Steel the most efficient company in Europe. The more that the hon. Gentleman and other Labour Members attempt to distract from the main issues that the debate is about, the more the people listening out there

[Mr. Whittingdale]

will be convinced that the Government are desperate to avoid having to answer the real questions that have been put to them.

This is not the first occasion on which Ministers from the Department of Trade and Industry have refused to come to the Dispatch Box or that the Government have attempted to duck the issue. When the issue was first aired in the Chamber at DTI questions last month, the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Miss Johnson) was deputed to answer on behalf of the Government. I have great respect for the hon. Lady, but she is an Under-Secretary of State whose responsibilities in the DTI have nothing to do with the steel industry. Yet those who are responsible—the Secretary of State and the Minister for Industry and Energy—were content to sit on the Bench next to her and watch her while she squirmed.

Last week, in the St. David's day debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) again set out the questions that steelworkers in Wales and across the country want answered. Yet in his response, the Minister did not mention the issue even once. It is clear that the Government will do anything to avoid having to answer questions on this matter. The Secretary of State's speech so far has done nothing to counter that impression.

Mr. Paul Murphy: The hon. Gentleman is aware, I am sure, that this debate is sponsored by Plaid Cymru. It happens only once a year, for half a day, and it is conventional for Wales Office Ministers to reply to it. More significantly, does the hon. Gentleman accept that when we talk about the Welsh steel industry, the fact that his party does not have one single Member of Parliament representing a Welsh constituency puts his credibility at risk?

Mr. Whittingdale: As I have pointed out, the motion on the Order Paper does not refer to the Welsh steel industry but to the United Kingdom steel industry. In his speech, the right hon. Gentleman appeared to suggest that the minority parties could bring any Minister to the Dispatch Box to answer their debate. That is clearly not the case. This debate should be answered by a DTI Minister, and it is plain that DTI Ministers are not willing to do so. Indeed, the only party that appears willing to come to the Government's aid in this debate so far is the Liberal Democrat party.

Mr. Llwyd: It strikes me as arrogant of the Government to suggest that the Secretary of State for Wales should reply to the debate even before they saw the motion. The right hon. Gentleman said to me last week that he thought that he would be replying even before seeing the motion, and the motion does not mention Wales.

Mr. Whittingdale: The hon. Gentleman is entirely right. If the minority parties were able to bring any Minister they wanted to answer their debate, it would not be the Secretary of State who has been put up today, but the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Lembit Öpik: I understand the hon. Gentleman's criticisms of the Liberal Democrats. If I may clarify matters, I made my earlier contribution because I do not like hypocrisy in the Chamber. I hope and expect that the hon. Gentleman will make no criticisms of other parties if his own is not capable of achieving high standards. What bothers me most in this debate is the effort made to besmirch political parties, when the truth is that politics as a whole is involved. No public interest is served by such efforts.

Mr. Whittingdale: If the hon. Gentleman really were so concerned about hypocrisy, he would be a little more critical of the Government than he appears to be.

I want to talk about the UK steel industry, which is the issue before us. The UK steel industry, as I said earlier, is one of the most productive in the world, employing 50,000 people. However, the industry is suffering from declining output and competitiveness, with thousands of redundancies having been declared in the past 18 months alone. In part, the industry is suffering from the same problems as the rest of manufacturing—the weakness of the euro, cheap imports and the cumulative impact of the extra tax and regulation that have been introduced by the Government, not least the climate change levy.

In addition, the industry is having to operate in a global market that is suffering from severe overcapacity. In a written answer to me yesterday, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry said that there is no precise estimate of global overcapacity, but that estimates ranged from less than 80 million tonnes a year to more than 200 million tonnes a year. The United Kingdom Steel Association uses the latter figure, while some estimates are higher still.

Through the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Governments are negotiating to reduce the surplus inefficient capacity in steel with more than 100 million tonnes identified for closure within the next four years. It was in recognition of that need that the last Conservative Government pressed the European Commission not to allow the aid to be given to Irish Steel which was going to be given to pave the way for a takeover by Mr. Mittal's Ispat company. As a former DTI Minister said:

> "Irish Steel, in a subsidised way, was just edging out British Steel products and that led directly to the loss of British jobs."

He made it clear that that was the view not only of British Steel but of the trade unions and indeed of Labour Members who were lobbying the Department to stop the takeover from going ahead.

What has changed since then? It is certainly not the problem of overcapacity, which—if anything—is worse. This time, why did the Government, instead of trying to encourage the reduction of global capacity, work against that by backing Mr. Mittal's proposed takeover of the Romanian steelworks?

First, we were told that such support was no different from that given by the Government to any other British company trying to win a contract abroad—except that LNM is hardly British. It is a curious definition of "British" that allows a company whose headquarters are not in London, as the Secretary of State for Wales suggested, but in a Caribbean tax haven, and which employs fewer than 0.1 per cent. of its work force in this country to qualify for support to promote its interests not only from the Government but from the Prime Minister in a personal capacity.

We were then told that the letter was merely one of congratulation after the deal had been signed, yet a spokesman for the Romanian Government has since said that it played a decisive part in winning the contract. Then we were told by the Minister for Europe, that it was a battle with the French. He said:

> "It's better for a company with British staff, and British connections . . . to get a contract ahead of a French company."

However, while Mr. Mittal's LNM company has been in the UK only since 1995 and employs 91 people in this country, Usinor, the French company, has had a British arm since 1923 and has more than 250 people on its payroll. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development said:

> "The French company fell out months earlier. That was widely known."

We were then told that the letter had been drafted by the British ambassador to Romania, that the Prime Minister had barely glanced at it before signing it and that he would have had no idea that the beneficiary had given any money to his party. Yet we now know that the original draft referred to Mr. Mittal as a friend of the Prime Minister and that that reference was removed by Jonathan Powell, the Prime Minister's chief of staff. I was interested to hear the Secretary of State say that that was not the case although the "World at One" programme had clearly identified Mr. Powell as responsible.

The Prime Minister then said that he certainly had not known that Mr. Mittal was a Labour donor, nor that he had any connection with the LNM company, despite the fact that the reason why the company is called LNM is that those letters stand for Lakshmi N. Mittal—something that must have been in the briefing note supplied to the Prime Minister when he signed the letter. We also know that not long before signing the letter the Prime Minister attended a party for major contributors to the Labour party, at which Mr. Mittal was present.

The suggestion that Mr. Mittal's company was British or that the Government's support for it was part of a battle to win some lucrative contract in the teeth of French competition does not bear scrutiny. In fact, the position is even worse than that, for we now know not only that the connection between Mr. Mittal's company and this country is tenuous at best but that LNM has been actively working against our national interest.

Irish Steel, now named Irish Ispat, went into liquidation last year, owing money to hundreds of businesses in this country. Many of them are small firms such as Mawdlseys in Gloucestershire, which is owed £260,000 for work done with no indication that it will ever be paid. Even the Government are owed money in unpaid VAT, yet the Prime Minister was happy to write to the Romanian Prime Minister recommending Mr. Mittal's firm.

Mr. Bryant: If all that the hon. Gentleman says is true, why did the Conservative party refuse to stop receiving money from foreign organisations and businesses until forced to do so by the law?

Mr. Whittingdale: As I pointed out, the last Conservative Government intervened to try to prevent Mr. Mittal's company from taking over an overseas business. We were standing up for British steel and British jobs, rather than supporting a company which plainly is not British and which is threatening British steel and British jobs.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): I apologise to my hon. Friend and to the Secretary of State for not having been present for the earlier part of the debate, but I was present for the debate on Welsh affairs on Thursday. The line that the Secretary of State took then was that the Government had acted out of the goodness of their heart to help build up Romania and deprived areas of eastern Europe. However, the line that the Prime Minister has consistently taken is that they were acting to help British industry and back a British company. Can my hon. Friend tell me which line the Secretary of State has been taking today?

Mr. Whittingdale: Part of the problem is that the Government's defence of their actions has changed every five minutes. We have been given a dozen reasons why the Prime Minister chose to intervene, and each one that is probed is shown to be incredible and untrue. That is why nobody believes the Government's explanations any more.

I return to the threat to the UK steel industry.

Mr. Paul Murphy: The hon. Gentleman has not yet touched—he may do so later in his speech—on the significance of the enlargement of Europe, and Romania being part of that. Does he agree, first, that the enlargement of Europe, which includes Romania, is a good thing for British industry, and Welsh industry, for that matter, and secondly, that a privatised Sidex is much better for competition than a communist-controlled state industry, heavily subsidised, which does not produce a level playing field for our own steel industry?

Mr. Whittingdale: I am utterly delighted to welcome the Secretary of State to the ranks of those who support privatisation. That is a fairly new theme for the Labour party.

I support enlargement of the European Union. I support Romania coming into the EU. I want to help the Romanian economy. However, I do not want to do so at the expense of British steel, British industry and British jobs. That is what is at stake.

Mr. Murphy: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Whittingdale: A last time.

Mr. Murphy: This question is crucial to the debate. Every time the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development gives a loan to a country such as Romania or Bulgaria, of course there will be a risk of competition. That is inevitable, but the consequence is that the trade which this country will have with the burgeoning economies of those countries will mean more jobs, more work and better conditions. Does the hon. Gentleman agree?

Mr. Whittingdale: Once again, the explanation is changing by the minute. First, we were told that the Romanian steel works would have been acquired by the French, had the Prime Minister not intervened in support of a supposedly British company. There was no question of the steel works not having a purchaser if the company had not gone ahead. The point at issue, which the right hon. Gentleman should know, as he represents a large number of people involved in the steel industry, is that the biggest threat to the steel industry is overcapacity. That is

[Mr. Whittingdale]

why Governments across the globe are working to try to reduce overcapacity. The right hon. Gentleman's Government have maintained overcapacity, which must be damaging to the long-term interests of British steel and British jobs.

There is a greater threat to the steel industry, and it is much more immediate: the potential prospect of import controls imposed by the US Government. Perhaps the most extraordinary revelation of all in this saga is that fact that Mr. Mittal, we discover, is actively campaigning in America for the imposition of tariffs on steel imports from the UK.

At Department of Trade and Industry questions last month, the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Miss Johnson), replied to me that

> "the industry faces concerted unilateral US action on steel imports that would create fresh barriers to transatlantic trade and fresh distortions in the global steel industry. That is the real issue facing the UK steel industry."—[*Official Report*, 14 February 2002; Vol. 380, c. 302.]

She was entirely right. The threat of US import tariffs is the greatest threat facing the steel industry. It will directly place at risk 400,000 tonnes of UK steel exports, and it will indirectly risk adding to the steel surplus elsewhere, further depressing prices and threatening jobs. We are told that an announcement on the matter is expected tomorrow.

The Secretary of State said that the United Kingdom will support retaliatory action against the United States if import controls are imposed, and the Prime Minister raised the issue with President Bush, yet once again no Minister from the Department of Trade and Industry is willing to come to the Dispatch Box to speak about this immediate and extremely serious threat to the UK steel industry, despite it clearly being one of the main topics for debate today. Ministers are embarrassed that one of the prime lobbyists for US import controls is none other than Mr. Mittal. Ispat Inland, Mr. Mittal's American steel company, gave more than £400,000 to the lobbying organisation that is pressing the US Government to impose import tariffs; yet the Prime Minister was happy to write to the Romanian Prime Minister recommending Mr. Mittal's firm.

Why did the DTI not advise Downing street that preserving global steel-making capacity was the last thing that the UK steel industry needed? Why did it not tell No. 10 of the hundreds of British small firms that were still owed money as a result of Mr. Mittal's Irish takeover? Why did it not warn the Prime Minister that his friend was actively campaigning in the US against UK interests? It did not because, as we are now told, it was not even consulted before the letter was signed. It is the maxim of Sherlock Holmes that once we have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth. The one explanation left for the Prime Minister's intervention in support of Mr. Mittal's bid is that it was a payback for the support that he had given to the Labour party.

I am not necessarily suggesting the Prime Minister wrote because Mr. Mittal rang him up to call in a favour. However, we know from Sir Richard Packer, a former permanent secretary, the extent to which the culture of cronyism permeates the Government's activities. In a masterly understatement, Sir Richard said that it was grossly disproportionate for the Prime Minister to write to his Romanian equivalent supporting Mittal's bid for Romanian assets. His explanation is that Downing street must have contacted the British ambassador in Romania to inform him that Mittal was known cordially to the Prime Minister. The ambassador would have realised that, in Sir Richard's words, examining closely Mittal's precise entitlement to help from Her Majesty's Government would be only too likely to result in the Foreign Office being told that he was proving "unhelpful". According to Sir Richard, once officials know that Ministers view certain developments or people favourably, they will do their best to help the endeavour or the individual. The result is that help is given not because it is in the British national interest, but because it is in the interests of the Labour party.

Last week, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry said that the Government were not going to stop talking to business. No one is suggesting that they should, but the right hon. Lady should know only too well that what is poisoning the Government's reputation is the growing perception that the way to influence the Government is not by speaking to Ministers and officials, but by supporting the Labour party. As the Secretary of State said in a speech:

> "we should all be worried about what happens to the health of our democracy if such cynicism takes hold."

The Minister for Industry and Energy (Mr. Brian Wilson): The hon. Gentleman mentioned Sherlock Holmes. Before he gets too deeply into conspiracy theories, I want to test one out on him. Is he aware that Tuscaloosa, the Corus subsidiary in the US, is a member of the American Iron and Steel Institute, which is campaigning for the introduction of the US steel tariffs? Does he agree that that suggests that companies behave in different ways according to the location of an interest within a multinational? Yesterday I visited Corus at Stocksbridge. It is a fantastic business that is working closely with the Government and greatly appreciates our support. Will the hon. Gentleman spin the same ludicrous Sherlock Holmes conspiracy theory charge against me if I support, encourage or collude with Corus in any way in future because of what its American subsidiary says?

Mr. Whittingdale: First, I would be very surprised to learn that Corus had authorised its American arm to give £400,000 to the campaigning organisation that is pressing for the imposition of US import controls. Secondly, I am sure that the Minister will want to visit LNM Holdings in this country and to congratulate it on its work in support of British interests, but he will be hard pressed to find anybody, as most of the people involved do not live or work in this country.

Despite all the best efforts of the Secretary of State and the Minister to brush this matter under the carpet, it is not going to go away. Yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition wrote to the Prime Minister pointing out that the statements made by his spokesman have now been clearly shown to be untrue. Unless these matters are cleared up, they will leave an indelible stain on the Government. The only way of avoiding that is to conduct the full, independent public inquiry for which the motion calls. It is for that reason that I urge the House to vote for the motion.

5.10 pm

Alan Howarth (Newport, East): I think that Plaid Cymru and, I am sorry to say, the Conservative party, have not exercised good judgment on this matter. No one believes that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister would be improperly influenced by a donation to the Labour party; the country knows that it is simply not in his character. As long as Opposition parties continue cynically to peddle this garbage, they will do no more than demonstrate the bankruptcy of their own thinking and the fact that they have absolutely nothing useful to say about policy and how to support the British steel industry and help it to thrive. They have not done themselves any good politically, as was evident, in the recent Ogmore by-election, and they have done politics a disservice. By flaunting an obsession with sleaze—and, indeed, fabricated sleaze—they persuade all too many of our fellow citizens that politics is a squalid affair. That is a damaging thing for them to do.

Mr. Salmond: Will the right hon. Gentleman cast his mind back to when he sat in Parliament as a member of a different party and the Labour party ran a sustained campaign against the Conservatives—some of us felt that it was very justified—on the basis of sleaze? What did he think of that campaign? Did he think that the personal probity of the then right hon. Member for Huntingdon, John Major, was in doubt? His views on these matters seem to have developed as he has developed his political career.

Alan Howarth: I believe absolutely in the personal probity of the then Prime Minister and I take the same view now as I took then: such things do politics no good at all.

It is absurd that it has been alleged that the Government were indifferent to what might happen to Corus and that their sole concern was to benefit Mr. Mittal and LNM. At least since summer 2000, and for many months afterwards, my right hon. Friends on the Front Bench did everything that they possibly could to find ways to get alongside Corus and see what could properly be done to avert the threatened closures and support Corus and the UK steel industry. I have a thick file of correspondence and notes of discussions from that time with the First Minister, my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales, Trade and Industry and Education and Employment, the Chancellor and the Prime Minister. In that period, my right hon. Friends experienced great frustrations that derived partly from the nature of the rules of the European Union, but also very much from the attitude of Corus. As we know, the European Union rules on state aid are stricter in respect of steel than of coal or the automotive industry. The steel aid code of the European Coal and Steel Community prohibits aid for the rescue from closure of a steel plant.

Mr. Simon Thomas: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Alan Howarth: Not at the moment; perhaps I shall do so later.

Exceptionally, under article 95 of the ECSC treaty, it is occasionally possible, if there is unanimous agreement from the European Council, to go further in providing aid. The unions, including the ISTC—it gives me pleasure once again to express my thanks and congratulate the ISTC on the part that it played—proposed a scheme to preserve most of the jobs that were earmarked for cuts in Corus's announcement of 14 February 2001. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister met representatives of the steel unions. Having been present at that meeting, I can bear witness to the fact that he listened with the utmost care to the case that they made to him, was persuaded by it and supported it.

Consequently, the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry agreed to approach the European Commission and member states on the basis of article 95. A working party of Whitehall officials, Assembly officials, union representatives and Corus personnel was set up to pursue that project. However—the ISTC will bear witness to this—Corus participated only reluctantly. It did not take the initiative seriously and confirmed its closure decisions before it had received the EU response to the application under article 95. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales said, it was determined to take out the capacity that it took out.

In the months that preceded the announcement of its decision, Corus refused to share its thinking with my right hon. Friends or with any others who were naturally extremely concerned and had a locus in the matter. For example, Corus would not join the Llanwern taskforce. In December 2001, Sir Brian Moffat met my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Trade and Industry and the First Minister, but he did not clarify the company's restructuring plans. I understand that he was similarly unwilling to share his thinking with the Chancellor.

My right hon. Friends naturally discussed the matter with the Prime Minister, who was intensely concerned about what might happen. The sole demand that Corus made was that the Government should act to lower the value of the pound—the demand that Plaid Cymru made then and has continued to make. That was disingenuous. It is not open to the Government simply to engineer a fall in the value of the pound, and to have done so would have had dangerous consequences for inflation and interest rates, damaging the industry that we were seeking to help.

As hon. Members from all parties can confirm, Corus was equally unforthcoming in meetings of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs and with Welsh Labour Members of Parliament. Those meetings were therefore unproductive.

In his announcement on 3 May 2001, the First Minister said:

> "We have worked almost on a daily basis with the unions to press the company to come to its senses and think long term."

More recently, Michael Leahy, the general secretary of the ISTC, confirmed:

> "We received the full support of the Prime Minister and the Welsh First Minister."

So it is grotesquely wrong to allege that Ministers were not willing to do all that they could to support Corus, and especially shabby to suggest that it was because of some possible donation.

Mr. Thomas: Of course, the hon. Gentleman is talking about allegations that have not actually been made.

Let me return to his earlier point that the European Coal and Steel Community treaty forbids member states to give aid to companies like Corus or to the UK steel industry

[Mr. Thomas]

in general. That treaty is up for review in July. Does the hon. Gentleman agree with my hon. Friend the Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) that it should address the extension of investment aid, rather than operational aid, to the UK and European steel industries? That is especially important given the tariffs that are being imposed by the United States.

Alan Howarth: When a treaty of such fundamental importance is up for review we must be willing to approach it in an open-minded spirit. However, I would be wary of contemplating an opening of the gates to permit national competition in subsidies for any industry. We have had a great deal of experience of that, and by and large it does not make good sense.

When it tragically proved that Corus could not be dissuaded from making large-scale redundancies—involving, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State reminded us, the loss of 3,000 steel jobs in Wales—the Assembly, supported by the Government, produced an excellent package to support those made redundant, their families and the communities that depend for their livelihoods on making steel. The original announcement provided for £66 million of support, which was followed by an additional £26 million. Of that, the Government directly put in an initial sum of £16 million. Of course, the Assembly was in a strong position to produce a large-scale package precisely because of the success that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State had achieved in the previous comprehensive spending review.

We in Newport are deeply grateful for the help that was given to us—the on-site advice centre at Llanwern, with the Employment Service, the Benefits Agency, Careers Wales, Education and Learning Wales and a variety of organisations, some from the voluntary sector, all providing a model of integrated support. That quality of support continues; only last month, a new advice centre was set up at the citizens advice bureau in Newport, funded by ELWa, for people directly or indirectly affected by last year's job losses at Corus. Case workers have been allocated to housing offices in the Alway and Ringland wards in my constituency, so I am very grateful for the sensitive support that we are continuing to receive.

The Government negotiated with the European Commission to enable modernised iron and steel employees readaptation benefits scheme—ISERBS—payments to be made. Since then, the Welsh Development Agency has held meetings with about 100 companies in the Corus supply chain, which was so damagingly affected.

The promised urban regeneration company is of particular interest for Newport because of its exciting potential. For more than a year, Newport county borough council and I have called for an urban regeneration company to be established for Newport, and I want to express my thanks again to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for his unwavering support for that project.

The far-reaching complexity of the direct and indirect impact of Corus's decisions on the supply chain, the retail economy and the communities that make steel requires a multi-agency, integrated and sustained response. It is not just a matter of immediate damage limitation—ensuring that benefits are paid, that counselling is provided and that reskilling programmes are quickly made available—but of developing a coherent long-term strategy that involves rebalancing the local and sub-regional economy, so that we achieve a better balance in south-east Wales between the public and the private sectors and between manufacturing and services and a more diversified economy, supported by the inward investment that the WDA continues to seek for Wales.

We need to provide education and training of the very highest quality because, in a competitive global economy, unless our skills match those to be found anywhere in the world, our future will not be promising; we indeed need to be a learning society. We need investment in infrastructure, not only in road and rail, but in information technology. We need a sensible strategy on land use, and a commitment to very high standards of urban design. We continue to need a sensitive approach to nurturing and supporting the health, well-being and strengths of the community—for example, the voluntary sector networks that are immensely important in Wales and certainly in Newport. We also need to ensure that, in our arrangements to carry forward that strategy in the future, we hear the voice of local people—those who have borne the brunt of industrial change and for whom our policies are principally intended.

That analysis was confirmed and amplified by the excellent steel communities study, led by Professors Fairbrother and Morgan of Cardiff university, which was submitted to the Assembly in July last year. That integrated process ought to be led and owned locally and democratically, so I was delighted when the First Minister wrote in a letter to me on 29 June last year:

> "In an area such as Newport, joint public/private sector action within the well focused and disciplined format of a company initiated and driven by the local authority would add real value . . . The sharing of objectives, budgets and decisions—together with the Chancellor's promised tax incentives—have the potential to make a real difference."

As good as his word, on 31 January, the First Minister announced pump-priming funding for the new URC for Newport of £10 million immediately from the Assembly and £10 million over three years from the WDA, with a promise that the value added through the URC's activities would be recycled back into Newport to enable us to develop the process further.

I would only say that we need early clarification of the structure and terms of reference of the URC. As it is, yet another consultancy has been set up, and I understand that we must wait some little time for the answers to those questions. I hope that when we have the advice of the consultants, it is that the mandate of the URC should be Newport-wide, but of course it must operate within the strategic context of south-east Wales and the five counties regeneration forum, which includes not only the Gwent local authorities but the WDA, ELWa and the Assembly. We have been waiting over a year for clarification on those points, and my constituents may be forgiven for being a little impatient now.

We have had a mass of consultants, academic studies, agencies, boards and taskforces. All the different layers of government have been involved. They are all full of good will and make valuable contributions of ideas and resources. I pay particular tribute to Mr. Allan Martin, who willingly took on the chairmanship of the Llanwern taskforce. He and his colleagues have done great service in south-east Wales. However, this cat's cradle of overlapping programmes, budgets and accountabilities will not do. We need all the players around the table of the URC as quickly as possible, contributing their particular skills and resources in a unified effort. That way, there will be an opportunity for leadership, and we will achieve the integration of effort, decisions, action, momentum and results.

Meanwhile, the communities who draw their livelihood from steel in the United Kingdom await tensely the decision that we expect to hear announced by the Bush Administration tomorrow. Last June, President Bush announced the possible activation of section 201 of the US Trade Act 1974 to protect the USA from steel imports. Already, there has been a host of measures that, to me, look pretty protectionist, and in the first 10 months of last year US steel imports were down by 25 per cent.

The US International Trade Commission is now calling for blatant protectionism—tariffs of up to 40 per cent. and quotas—in what would be clear violation of the rules of the World Trade Organisation. The problem is that uncompetitive US steel producers face great difficulties in a period of global overcapacity, and of course it is election year in the US. We well understand the miseries of restructuring. In the 1980s and 1990s, Wales and Europe as a whole went through that process. Throughout, however, European markets were kept open and strict rules on state aid for the steel industry were formulated and adhered to, even during the period when the number of steelworkers employed in the Community, enlarging as it did during that period, halved.

The ability of Corus to maintain its newly reduced configuration in the United Kingdom depends on the strength of its UK customer base, and any swamping of the UK market by cheap imports displaced from the USA would be a major disaster. I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State stands shoulder to shoulder with EU Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy in making it absolutely clear that the cost of restructuring the US steel sector should not be shifted on to the rest of the world. The EU supplies about a fifth of steel imports into the USA, and we would be worse affected than Canada, Mexico and Brazil.

Europe should be open-minded about possible federal or state subsidies for what are termed the "legacy costs" of pensions and health care for the industry. It might not be a wise decision for the Americans to take, but it should be a decision for them. We cannot accept that there should be tariff barriers leading to a diversion of steel exports to Europe in order to shelter the US industry from the necessary structural change.

As Mr. Lamy has said, to listen to the debate in Washington one would think that only US steelworkers have families and mortgages, which is not the case, as we all know. I am glad therefore that my right hon. Friend said firmly yesterday:

> "Should the US propose significant action we would strongly support any moves by Pascal Lamy to seek WTO settlement action . . . We defend our right to consider options for preventing serious injury to the industry, including the possibility of safeguard measures."

There are problems about the slowness of the WTO procedures. It can take more than a year for the WTO to arrive at an initial finding. The European Union's procedures have also been criticised as glacially slow. However, the will now exists in the EU to act rapidly and effectively.

In the time that it might take the EU or the WTO to get their acts together, our industries and communities could be badly hurt. The EU is permitted by the WTO rules, unilaterally and without seeking authorisation, to restrict imports of dumped steel from third countries. It must take that action if tomorrow's announcement proves as negative as it may be. I hope that the diplomacy undertaken by the Government and the European Union have persuaded President Bush against the decision that we apprehend that he might take. The Prime Minister's phone call to the President last Thursday and the call made by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to the United States Commerce Secretary yesterday make it clear that in this and other matters, my right hon. Friend and his Ministers are acting firmly and decisively in the interests of the British steel industry.

5.31 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I congratulate Plaid Cymru on identifying a topical subject. I do not know whether it owes more to good luck or good management, but the party's timing in introducing a debate on steel the day before the American announcement was certainly deft.

The central charge made by Plaid Cymru was that the Government had acted wrongly in accepting political donations from a man and a company said to have acted against United Kingdom interests. The problem is that one charge is right and another probably not right. The right charge, emphasised by the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) for the Conservatives, is that Mr. Mittal has campaigned for tariffs in the United States. If that is true, that action is damaging. Its impact would be somewhat diluted, however, if the Minister for Industry and Energy was correct in saying that Corus had done exactly the same. If that is true, Mittal is just one of a series of lobbyists who have behaved badly, but he is not unique in that.

I have greater difficulty with the other charge, which is that Mittal activities in Romania are contrary to the interests of the British steel industry. The Secretary of State made some telling points on that. I fear that I detected in at least some of the remarks of the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) a strong hint of economic nationalism. That did not increase the force of his many good points.

The logic of what will happen with Mr. Mittal's venture in Romania is either that it will have no impact on the UK industry or that it may even prove favourable. There are two reasons for that. First, one of the consequences of privatisation in eastern Europe is that it effectively stops the normal practice by which state-owned steel companies dump products by selling below cost or at variable cost. When a company is privatised, there is no incentive to do that. Why should Mittal sell at a loss? He is interested in short-term profit and it would make no sense for him to sell at a loss. The argument that he would undercut British workers' jobs is patently implausible. In fact, Mr. Mittal's intervention will probably increase discipline in the industry.

The second point is that Mr. Mittal is, to put it bluntly, an asset stripper. He will remove a lot of capacity from the Romanian industry. That is probably why he has taken it over. One of the central problems with the steel industry, globally and in eastern Europe, is that capacity

[Dr. Vincent Cable]

is too great. He is not doing it for idealistic reasons, but Mr. Mittal will, because it fits the logic of his business, probably act in ways that will, in a back-handed way, turn out to help our steel industry.

Mr. Simon Thomas: The hon. Gentleman makes an optimistic assessment of the likely effect on the steel industry. Will he consider an alternative scenario that is not an imaginary but a real one? When Ispat took over steel in Ireland, it had a five-year contract to keep the plant open. Two weeks after that contract ended, the plant closed. As a result, several companies, including Allied Steel and Wire in Cardiff, lost a huge amount of money owed by Ispat—one of Mr. Mittal's companies. That company now finds it hard to obtain lines of credit in the United Kingdom because so many investors have had their fingers burned by Ispat's dealings in Ireland. Now the hon. Gentleman may be right—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Interventions are meant to be brief.

Dr. Cable: I did not entirely follow the hon. Gentleman's rather complicated story, but if it is true that the Irish plant was shut, as he says, I would have thought that that undermined his argument that Mittal is investing overseas in a capacity that competes with UK workers. None the less, on this particular charge, the argument that the Romanian enterprise is taking jobs away from British workers is extremely flimsy.

The serious issue, which the Conservative spokesman and the right hon. Member for Newport, East (Alan Howarth) were right to emphasise, is the damaging consequences of what may happen tomorrow. Whether or not we get a statement from the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, we should spend some time reflecting on this matter. The problems in the United States steel industry have very little to do with trade. There are two central problems, one of which is that there has been a big technical change in the industry. The mini-mills, which represent the new technology for steel production, are gradually replacing the big mills, and the big mills are losing vast amounts of money.

The second problem for the American steel industry is that the dollar, like the pound, is massively over-valued for manufacturing industry, which is losing pots of money. Manufacturers are running to the Government—just as they do here—to appeal for help. As the right hon. Member for Newport, East mentioned, there is a way to help. If the American Government were seriously interested in the welfare of the workers, there would be plenty of ways of helping them—through retraining or pensions, for example.

The manufacturers—the companies—which are very close to the Bush Administration are not interested in that, however. They want something that will increase their profit margins, and the best way of doing that is to introduce a tariff, because that pushes up their domestic prices. This is naked self-interest by the producer interest groups in the United States, backed by the United States Administration.

This battle—this trade war—could well have wide ramifications not only for the steel industry but for many others if it gets out of control, and the issue that we must now face is how we are going to respond to it. There is one sensible response and one very unhelpful one. The unhelpful response is to start clamouring—as one or two Members did—for Europe to put up its own barriers against so-called cheap imports. I think I heard the phrase "floods of cheap steel" being used, in the context of needing to put up our own barriers against them. That would be wholly unhelpful. First, that response would do nothing to deter the United States, which is not an exporter of steel. Secondly, it would do great damage to our own steel-using industries, which employ far more people than the steel industry. It is an entirely perverse, illogical response that would do a great deal of harm.

What ought to happen—I agree that it is difficult—is that the European Union, pushed by the British Government, should act within the framework of international law. The World Trade Organisation has shown that it has teeth. Only a few weeks ago, it instigated a powerful action against the United States over illegal subsidies. There is no doubt that the European Union, acting within the rules—I think it is article 19 that applies to the kind of safeguard actions that obtain in the US—has every right to introduce targeted retaliatory action against the United States.

The real test for the Government is not how the Prime Minister responds to Mittal but how he responds to his friend President Bush. The Prime Minister has invested an enormous amount in that relationship, and he may well now have to confront him on the ground that the American Administration are doing something very damaging to the western world, to Britain and to international trade—something which will have to be fought. That is the issue with which we may well be confronted in the coming weeks.

A second issue relates to the lobbying that took place on behalf of Mittal. The Plaid Cymru spokesman expressed genuine shock at the way in which British officials and ambassadors cheerfully run round doing errands for companies—in this case, one with a rather tenuous relationship to the United Kingdom. He is right to be shocked. It may surprise him to learn—I do not think that it will surprise the Conservatives, because they saw this in action when they were in government—that, unfortunately, this is the way British Governments of all parties behave.

I know that because, as a civil servant, I drafted many of the letters that go to British ambassadors telling them to fight for company X or company Y. Many of the mainstream British companies with a lot of jobs here are just phantom companies whose representative a Minister may have met at a cocktail party. I do not know whether such companies gave donations. There is a deeply embedded tradition—based on the old idea of Great Britain Ltd.—that it is the job of Ministers to run errands for companies that portray themselves as British. It is a dangerous tradition, particularly in a world of globalised companies. As the Secretary of State rightly said, Toyota and Ford have more right to be called British companies because of the jobs they create than many companies which call themselves British and fly the Union flag.

The system whereby British officials and ambassadors and the Ministers who direct them are running round the world, as the Foreign Secretary did with BAE Systems last week, selling Hawk jets to India, is not the sort of thing in which the British Government should be engaged.

I hope that the Government will take to heart the painful lesson learned from the Mittal affair—that that is an area of Government activity that needs to be tightened up.

Another area where Government activity needs to be tightened up is that of political donations. No one pretends that the Government are unique in accepting money from companies, but we are travelling down a slippery slope, heading towards an American type of system whereby Governments of all parties take money from large companies who expect favours in return. It may well be that no commitment to return the favour has been entered into, but the expectation is there.

In the United States, that process has reached an advanced stage. Companies give money and they expect ambassadorships and to be on commercial delegations for negotiation purposes. Here the process is much less advanced, but it is a dangerous and corrupting process. If the Government saw the danger that is being created, they would stop it.

The way to stop the process is to put a severe cap on donations to political parties. The Government have taken the first step in political reform, which the Secretary of State rightly described as a major step forward, by making the process of donations transparent. The next step is to say that companies should not give money to political parties. Companies such as BP and Shell do not do it anyway because they realise that it tarnishes their image. That should now become part of our electoral law. There should be a strict limit on individual donations to political parties. A combination of that reform, possibly augmented by state funding, is needed to clean up British politics. If Plaid Cymru's motion helps us a little along that road, it will have performed a public service.

5.42 pm

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): Most hon. Members would accept that when the Government say or do anything that I think is wrong I say so, and vote accordingly. I have too much respect for the community that I have the privilege to represent to do anything else. I have long said that I am opposed to the Labour party taking donations from big business. That is not a recent idea but one that I have held for many a long year.

To say that is not to accept the arguments that have been reiterated by the nationalists during the past few weeks, however. It is ironic that those who now pretend to be the champions of the Welsh steel industry and its workers were hardly to be seen when some of us were involved in the struggle to defend those plants and jobs.

In my constituency of Blaenau Gwent, which was hit worse than any other community in the United Kingdom, the local trade union officials had no contact with the local nationalists. The nationalists spent most of their time writing in the correspondence columns of the local newspapers attacking the Labour Government and everyone else who was trying to support the unions and defend the jobs. What they have said during the past few weeks is utter nonsense and I want to concentrate on two of their arguments.

First, the nationalists have argued that jobs have been lost and plants have been closed, as in my constituency, because the Government did not offer Corus a favourable enough package, since they were more interested in placating and responding to the views of Mittal. Secondly, and linked to that, they have argued that the lack of Government support resulted in the failure of the workers' buy-out and, in particular, the buy-out by the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation at the Llanwern plant. Both those accusations are nonsense.

When we were campaigning to save the plant and the jobs, and in many other ways to save our communities, I had many meetings with the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Wales, Assembly Members, local authority representatives, trade union officials both local and national, and the chief executive of Corus. It became obvious to me when I had meetings with the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Wales that they had the impression, from talking to and negotiating with Corus, that it was not interested in any package, no matter how big or small.

One could argue that I, the Prime Minister or the Secretary of State would say that anyway. However, I and other Labour Members met Moffat and asked him what he required of the Government in order to maintain the jobs in the UK steel industry, and in particular in my plant in Ebbw Vale. His response was direct. He said that there was no package, no matter how big, which could persuade Corus to go back on its commitments. He said that Corus had a vision—if vision is the right word—of the steel industry's future and that it intended to go forward with that.

When we met Moffat we also put to him the charge that Corus was unwilling to support a workers' buy-out or the proposed buy-out by the ISTC of the Llanwern plant. Once again we asked him whether there was any Government package that could persuade Corus to sell that plant to the ISTC. Once again, Moffat was direct in his answer. He said that there was no package, no matter how big, which would persuade Corus to sell Llanwern to the ISTC, because to do so would be to increase the competition against it.

Some of us found that not only offensive but ironic. Throughout our political lives we have always been told by the right that public ownership equals monopoly and is bad, while capitalism—free enterprise, as it is laughably called—equals competition. But here we had the situation where a union was willing to buy out a plant in order to maintain jobs and the community, but was refused the opportunity to do so because one of the bastions of capitalism, of that free enterprise system, refused the union the right to do so. That is a funny type of competition. I came away from that meeting utterly despondent about the future not just of my plant in Ebbw Vale but of the steel industry in general.

The nationalists have done a great disservice to working class communities and steel communities such as my own. Contrary to the opinions that Corus may express, there is no doubt that it is the guilty party. I remember when Corus was formed. I had a phone call from one of its managing directors, Vickers. He rang me at 8 am from Holland saying that he wanted to confirm that there was no threat to the Ebbw Vale plant, that it had a secure future and that everything on the horizon was good. But it was obvious from day one that those were merely words, because it was clear that Corus was bent on asset-stripping the industry.

If anyone doubts that, they should look at the old balance sheet. Corus appropriated £863 million from the surplus in the British Steel pension fund and paid out £694 million to its shareholders. When we met Moffat he

[Llew Smith]

accepted that if Corus had not paid out that £694 million as a massive sweetener, its shareholders would not have agreed to the takeover. Corus also paid out millions upon millions of pounds to former directors, and, in particular, to its chief executive, Bryant. It also handed out millions upon millions of pounds to senior managers, once again to placate them and to line their pockets.

I have spoken to several people in and outside the industry since then. Many have expressed shock and horror at Corus's possible involvement in that act of asset stripping. To me, it was no surprise at all. Moffat is on record as saying that the company is in business to make money, not steel.

It is true that people in my community who devoted their lives to the steel industry worked for money—they had to pay the rent or the mortgage, and feed their children each and every day—but their involvement in the steel industry was somewhat different. They took pride in that industry and craft, and took great pleasure in building the Llanwern plant into the most effective and productive in the world. In return, they received a closure notice from people whose only interest in the steel industry is the money that they can make from it. The nationalists argued in the past few weeks that the blame lies entirely with the Labour Government, but in doing so they diverted attention from the real enemies: Corus, Moffat and the shareholders, who asset-stripped that industry and did their damnedest to wipe out my community.

As a past student of Coleg Harlech, Madam Deputy Speaker, you will know that one of my predecessors was Aneurin Bevan. Nye had something important to say—a phrase that he often used—on issues such as this:

> "This is my truth: now tell me yours."

What I have said today is my truth, and I know it to be true because I was there. I was part of the struggle to maintain those jobs and that industry. It is sad that the nationalists have not followed that example. Once again, they have come down on the side of the bosses against the workers.

5.52 pm

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): I am delighted to follow those bizarre closing remarks, and I promise to be brief.

I want to start on a positive and perhaps consensual note by expressing my gratitude to the Government Whips for helping us to secure today's debates. You may be aware, Madam Deputy Speaker, that there is a new arrangement whereby we in the minority parties now represent ourselves in dealing with Government Whips. We have found that productive and useful, and we are delighted to be relieved of the dead hand of Liberal Democrat representation in Committee. Towards the end of our relationship, our Liberal Democrat colleagues were actively acting against our interests, so we are pleased to be shot of them. It is important that the minority parties have something to contribute, and we are pleased that the necessary structure and arrangements are now in place. We look forward to many more such days.

I want to congratulate my hon. Friend—it is good to be able to say that, as an SNP Member—the member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price). I hope that I have not put back SNP/Plaid Cymru relations by perhaps pronouncing the second part of his constituency incorrectly. It is he who has unearthed and led on this issue, and who has tried to expose a new, murky dynamic involving donations by key individuals and business men, and key Government concessions. He has dominated the issue and become the major opposition, and I congratulate him on unearthing it.

The SNP has major concerns about what my hon. Friend has uncovered. As the hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Mr. Roy) will know, we in Scotland once had a viable, productive and efficient steel industry. Ravenscraig was one of the largest steel producers in Europe. In fact, it made excellent flat-rolled steel, produced in the distant steel mill in Kazakhstan that is now owned by Mr. Mittal, which he acquired with the assistance of Government money. I wish that a Mr. Mittal had been around in the 1980s, when the Scottish steel industry started to experience difficulties. Perhaps we could have encouraged him to try to get Government investment in Scotland. If such a figure had existed in those days, we might well have secured some jobs and retained a steel industry to call our own.

We are concerned not only about recent events in the steel industry, but about a further "cash for access" issue. *Scotland on Sunday* recently highlighted the case of Snowie, a waste company that donated some £5,000 to the Labour party in Scotland. Five months later, it secured some £30 million-worth of work. Snowie handed over the money after it was awarded clean-up work by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Scottish Executive, following the foot and mouth epidemic.

There is also the case of Ballathie Estates, a hunting and fishing estate on the River Tay, in my Perthshire constituency. Its director, Mr. John Milligan, was recently appointed chairman of the Scottish new deal advisory taskforce after giving some £25,000 to the Labour party.

Finally, there is the case of Hunter Esson, a director with Aberdeen-based Esson Properties, who said that he could not imagine why anyone would think that his company's £5,000 donation to Labour had any impact on the decision to grant it planning permission to build on greenbelt land.

Mr. Roy: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that that donation was dependent on the granting of planning permission? Is he saying that that director had to pay for planning permission?

Pete Wishart: I am coming to that point.

All those cases might indeed be legitimate and above board, and I am not trying to suggest that any wrongdoing took place, but the perception is that something was not quite right. We should remember that this is the Government who were going to remove sleaze from politics, who were going to be whiter than white, who were going to clean up politics. They have had five years to do so, and the key question that must now be asked is this: what do such companies think they are getting in return for the money that they give to the Labour party? We have not received a satisfactory answer or explanation. Perhaps they are simply big investors in this socialist—or third way—Labour party, but I suggest that it goes beyond that.

It is not simply a question of what Mr. Mittal thought he was getting in return for his £125,000 donation to the Labour party. Why were the Government intervening in the first place in the fate of a Romanian steel plant that Mr. Mittal wanted to acquire? Anyone who carries out even five minutes' research into the current state of the steel industry will know that there is massive overproduction and overcapacity throughout the world. As has been mentioned, a Mittal-owned plant is lobbying the Bush Government ferociously to impose curbs and ensure tariff control for the United States.

I agree with the warning from the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) about the Labour party's business links. He is the one brave soul in the Labour ranks who has questioned the judgment of the Downing street aides who allowed the Prime Minister to sign the letter to his Romanian counterpart. The hon. Gentleman said:

> "What I'm not happy with is an outcome where you have a company seemingly supported by the British Government which is acting against the interests of British workers."

That is the key issue, and I could not have put it better myself. We cannot allow any perception of a conflict between Government support for business and support for the Labour party, and that is why I ask Members to support the motion.

5.58 pm

Dr. Hywel Francis (Aberavon): As a representative of the steel constituency of Aberavon, I take this opportunity to thank on my constituents' behalf the Secretary of State for Wales, whose constituency of Torfaen is also a great steel constituency. He and the Labour First Minister of the Assembly have made great efforts to support the Welsh steel industry in the past year, which has arguably been the most difficult in our history since the war.

I also welcome the Government's commitment to referring the United States to the World Trade Organisation if it introduces steel tariffs. Hon. Members on both sides of the House should welcome that, and we should also welcome the support of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for the introduction of safeguards to ensure that steel currently sent to the US by non-EU countries is not dumped in the EU. Further to that, the House should demand that Corus in the US—Corus Tuscaloosa—unequivocally oppose US tariffs.

While my constituency has not borne the job losses experienced elsewhere in Wales, we have had our own terrible tribulations, with the tragedy on 8 November 2001, when the explosion at the No. 5 blast furnace in Port Talbot resulted in the deaths of three steelworkers. Thankfully, all the injured men have now been discharged from Morriston hospital, thanks to the dedication and skills of staff in the burns unit.

This debate affords those of us from steel communities the opportunity to review the very considerable efforts that have been made in the last year by the Labour Government and the Labour-led National Assembly in partnership with many bodies, including my own union, the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation.

The pretext for this debate, on the face of it, is one company and one political donation, but we believe that the real issues facing the industry, steelworkers and our communities are being addressed by the Labour Government in real, tangible and constructive ways. As secretary of the newly formed all-party parliamentary group on steel, I am well aware of the efforts made not only by our Labour Government here in Westminster, the Labour-led Welsh Assembly and the many Labour authorities in Wales and throughout the United Kingdom but by the many agencies and private sector companies that have worked together in social partnerships to rebuild and diversify our local economies.

In my own constituency, we have the welcome news from Corus of the £75 million investment in rebuilding the No. 5 blast furnace. We also have the announcement by the Welsh Assembly of the establishment of an advanced technology centre at Port Talbot, which will bring together Government agencies and the very best applied research in our Welsh universities to drive forward innovation in the industry. We have the continuing very good progress of the new Baglan energy park, again through public and private social partnerships, notably with General Electric, the Welsh Development Agency and Neath Port Talbot county borough council—a Labour authority that has been outstanding in its efforts to diversify the local economy. Next Monday, we launch our own Afan community credit union, with strong support from the ISTC and the Welsh Assembly—yet another example of how we are getting on with the job of rebuilding and serving our steel communities.

Across Wales, great efforts have been made by the main steel union, ISTC, and all the other unions in the industry, Steel Partnership Training, UK Steel Enterprises and Steel Action. All those bodies have placed great emphasis on the acquisition of new skills and new learning opportunities. I am proud to say that one such initiative, the newly formed Port Talbot union academy, links into the new local community learning network in my constituency, established through objective 1 funding, which our Government achieved.

Too many Opposition politicians tend to undervalue the efforts and achievements of the past year. Who on the Opposition Benches applauds my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Llew Smith), who has consistently championed the steelworkers of Ebbw Vale? In the wake of the redundancy announcement last year, through his efforts and the efforts of Lord Brookman of Ebbw Vale, as well as those of the local Labour Assembly Member, Peter Law, and the Labour authority, we have the reopening of the passenger train service to Ebbw Vale and the new UK steel enterprise innovation centre. The new centre will be launched at Victoria, near Ebbw Vale, at a cost of £3 million, to assist local start-up enterprises.

It is clear that steel and manufacturing are still major players in the Welsh economy. Manufacturing accounts for more than 18 per cent. of employment in Wales. Corus has made it clear to our Government that Wales is now a place where world-class steel production can take place and says that it is committed to achieving that.

Much has been done in the past year that deserves praise. The Prime Minister and other Ministers supported the attempted ISTC workers' buy-out at Llanwern. The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the Foreign Office and the Prime Minister have all been unequivocal in their condemnation of possible US tariffs on British steel exports. The possible announcement tomorrow of such tariffs will add to the existing difficulties faced by large companies such as Corus. They have already identified issues relating to tax, transport and energy costs, which they consider to be challenges for them, and the imposition of a US tariff would only add to those problems.

[Dr. Hywel Francis]

It would be appropriate for this debate to focus on those challenging issues rather than the irrelevance of trying to link political donations to the Government's policies. As internationalists, and as supporters of European enlargement and the modernisation of the global steel industry, we should be proud of what our Government are doing in Westminster and Cardiff.

I trust that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales will convey to both the Prime Minister and Mr. Mittal our expectations that every effort should continue to be made to prevent such tariffs from being introduced. That should be done in the spirit of extending and strengthening our Government's commitment to developing corporate social responsibility.

I arranged for the all-party steel group to write to Mr. Mittal last week urging him to support the aims of our group, in particular our desire to ensure a fair deal for the UK steel industry and to aid the regeneration of steel and former steel communities.

We would all concur with the words of the First Minister of the Welsh Assembly, Rhodri Morgan, earlier this year when he said:

> "The new blast furnace which will be constructed at Port Talbot will not only be a memorial to those who lost their lives but also a symbol of the endurance of an industry vital to Wales and its continuing contribution in the years ahead to this country and the communities that serve it".

He continued:

> "There are no quick fixes to problems as entrenched as those of our long neglected industrial communities. I believe that the programme set out"—

by the Welsh Assembly—

> "is a new start and the strongest possible expression of faith in the future of these communities".

Modern Wales was built on and built by those great steel communities. Historians have written that the building of Margam steelworks in my constituency was a symbol of Labour's commitment to the reviving of south Wales in the post-war period. Margam in its day was the greatest steelworks in Britain and the historian Dr. John Davies saw its creation as one of the three great political landmarks of post-war Wales.

I find it encouraging—indeed, prophetic—that the rugby sides enjoying success this year are from the great south Wales steel towns of Aberavon, Newport, Pontypool and Ebbw Vale. Unlike Opposition Members, we can speak legitimately for steel communities and former steel communities in Wales and throughout the United Kingdom. We are proud of what our party in government is doing to address the serious challenges facing our industry. That is why Labour Members took the initiative to establish the new all-party parliamentary group on steel, and I urge all Members, of whatever party, to assist us in our objectives of ensuring a fair deal for the UK steel industry.

This year, steelworkers in Port Talbot celebrate a centenary of steel making. The industry continues to be a very significant contributor to the economy of the region. It is my belief that Labour's policies assist, even in these most difficult times, in sustaining our steel communities and in assisting those who wish to develop new initiatives to achieve a more diverse local economy.

I shall end with the words of David Ferris, the chair of the unions at Port Talbot steelworks. We would all do well to listen to and show some respect for the steel unions. I only wish some parties—daffodil Tories all—had done so after the explosion in Port Talbot. David Ferris said this to me yesterday:

> "What Labour is doing today is to be welcomed by all of us: it is comparable with our achievements after 1945."

6.8 pm

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): I congratulate the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) on his speech and it is no accident that my speech is written on a brown envelope. It is nice to follow the hon. Member for Aberavon (Dr. Francis), who demonstrated clearly how the Government give with one hand and take with the other.

I wish to question the role of the Secretary of State for Wales in this debate. I was led to believe that his role was to act as a liaison between the National Assembly and the Government, and to perform his duties by ensuring that the funding for the Assembly was as successful as possible. It is a great shame that he has come before us today to defend the actions of the Prime Minister.

It is the role of the Prime Minister that is called into question by the letter that he signed in support of Mr. Mittal and his purchase of the Romanian steel mill. The question about the Government's support for that has not been answered. Many hon. Members have already asked how many other companies have been assisted in the same way as Mr. Mittal. How many other small businesses have been helped by a letter from the Prime Minister? I have written to the Prime Minister many times and I have even invited him to come to Hereford to see our hospital for himself. However, he has not written back to me. We need to know how many other companies have been helped. *[Interruption.]* I am not sure that I could afford £125,000. If I could manage 50 grand, who knows, perhaps I could be running the BBC.

One of the temptations for a governing party is the potential corruption that any funding from a company could bring. The Government knew about that when they took office in 1997. Their crime is that they did not learn from what history taught them. Whether or not Mr. Mittal is as British as I am is a question that needs to be answered. How were the donations given, and did the Prime Minister know about that before he signed the letter?

The human side of this affair is the effect it has on people's jobs. Anyone who has been made redundant will know the misery and despair that goes with it, and usually it is through no fault of their own. I have been made redundant once in my career, and it is a terrible thing. Before Labour Members jeer, they should wait until after the next election when they will realise what it feels like. I should have hoped that they would show sympathy for people who may have lost their jobs through the Government's actions, and I am disappointed that I have been heckled. We should have great sympathy for workers who have lost their jobs

Llew Smith: There is a slight difference between someone being made redundant in Blaenau Gwent, which is one of the poorest communities in the United Kingdom where people have difficulty paying their mortgage or rent, and someone like you who may be have been made redundant in the past—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Gentleman must remember to use the correct parliamentary language in the House.

Mr. Wiggin: Redundancy does not matter; what matters is the misery that goes with it. It does not matter who it applies to: what matters is what is going on.

Llew Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wiggin: I shall give way again, because the hon. Gentleman did not finish his remarks.

Llew Smith: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that there is no difference between a person who is made redundant and has nothing in the bank and a person who is made redundant who has £1 million in the bank?

Mr. Wiggin: If the hon. Gentleman is implying that I have £1 million in the bank, I have not: I wish I did. No Romanian has bunged me anything recently. *[Interruption.]* My envelope is from the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

I hope that we get a more truthful answer when the Minister winds up the debate. I also hope that he will describe the criteria he is using to judge the Welshness of the companies that are accompanying him to the Czech Republic. Perhaps he will take the opportunity, highlighted by the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Llew Smith), to apologise to all those who have been put out of work by the Government's actions. Will he tell us how many other companies have been helped? The Liberal Democrats tell everyone that they oppose the Government, so why were they so quick to leap to their defence in that shameful fashion?

The lessons from this scandal, which has rocked the Government, are that Governments must be brave enough to resist such temptation and that none of us must ever underestimate the misery and sadness that goes with redundancy. Every effort must be made to prevent that, especially in Wales.

6.14 pm

Mr. Martin Caton (Gower): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin), who is always amusing, even though he talks nonsense. It is an even greater pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Dr. Francis). I pay tribute to the work that he has done following the terrible tragedy in the steelworks in his constituency. He has visited families and given support, but most of his efforts have been unsung, and he deserves credit for them.

It has been something of a groundhog day for those of us who attended the Welsh day debate last Thursday. It is more in sadness than in anger that I contribute to the debate. Opposition Members have chosen to link two important issues, each of which should be the subject of debate in the House at this time and in the weeks and months ahead.

The first issue is the danger to our democracy and to the perception of democratic politics of political parties relying on large donations from individuals, business or industry. The second is the recent history of the steel industry in Wales and the rest of the United Kingdom and, just as important, the future for steel and other manufacturing industry in our country. Plaid Cymru has tied those tremendously significant matters together with a connective tissue that artificially tries to make the central focus an unsubstantiated allegation of Government impropriety.

At its nonsensical extreme, articulated by the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) in last week's Welsh day debate, the link becomes causal. That must be the implication of his call for the Government to ask

> "the 6,000 people who lost their steel jobs in the United Kingdom whether they prefer to be on the dole while the Prime Minister supports competitors in Romania."—[*Official Report*, 28 February 2002; Vol. 380, c. 881.]

The same line was taken by the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price), who asked:

> "Does the Prime Minister care more about his billionaire friends . . . than the families in the steel communities that have loyally supported the Labour party for more than 100 years?"—[*Official Report*, 28 February 2002; Vol. 380, c. 917-18.]

What about this afternoon's debate? In a reply to an intervention asking whether the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr was really suggesting that the Prime Minister wrote his letter to the Romanian Government deliberately to undermine the British steel industry, his hon. Friends and Conservative Members shouted yes, and he said, "I think I'm getting somewhere". That is the level of the accusation.

Not only is an unjustified and unjustifiable link being made between a donation to the Labour party and a letter from the Prime Minister to the Romanian Government, but the impact of the letter on that Government's actions has been exaggerated out of all proportion. We are supposed to extrapolate from that that if the Prime Minister had shown a similar commitment to Welsh and Teesside steelworkers, perhaps by writing a timely letter, thousands of jobs could have been saved. That is pure cloud cuckoo land, and everyone, including Opposition Members, knows it.

A debate is rightly beginning about future funding of political parties. As has already been said, the Labour Government have introduced a transparency that was not there before, and they have capped total expenditure on general elections. Those are both valuable steps forward. Like many right hon. and hon. Members across the House, I believe that we should go a lot further.

With large political donations there is always the danger that donors will want something in return. Many of the people whom we represent believe that there is or may be a payback time with such donations.

Pete Wishart: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Caton: I am afraid that I do not have time to give way.

At a time when fewer and fewer people are taking part in the democratic process, that must be a cause for concern.

Adam Price: So we are right.

Mr. Caton: It is justifiable to raise the issue of party political donations, and Opposition Members could

[Mr. Caton]

usefully have focused on it. Their accusation about the actions of the Prime Minister is unsubstantiated. They have had hour after hour to substantiate it, but they have completely failed to do so. I should like to talk about the more important issues that they failed to raise.

The hands of all political parties must not just be clean: they must be seen to be clean. It is right to consider issues such as state funding of parties, radically reducing the total spend available to each party at elections, and extending the provisions in kind available to each political party, as we do with television time for party political broadcasts. I am sure that there are many related ideas on which we could and should focus. The debate could have centred around those ideas, as part of our discussion on how we re-engage with the sections of the Welsh and British public who have become deeply cynical about politics. What is, perhaps, even more important is that we could have used this debate to concentrate on the future of the United Kingdom's steel industry, in the light of recent history and in the context of manufacturing generally. We could have raised a range of issues—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We must not have these continual sedentary interventions—

Mr. Caton: A range of issues—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That applies to Members on both sides of the House. I call Mr. Caton.

Mr. Caton: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It is a shame that, instead of discussing those issues, we are discussing an untenable thesis that attempts to shift responsibility for last year's steel closure programme to the Labour Government. That is clearly unfair to the leadership of my party. I guess that that is politics, or at least a sort of politics; but it is a travesty of history, as was demonstrated by my right hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Alan Howarth) and my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Llew Smith). It also does a grave disservice to the steelworkers and their families who were victims of the mismanagement and intransigence of Corus.

I speak as the representative of some of those whose lives were shattered by the announcement of the closure programme just over a year ago. The Bryngwyn works, in Gorseinon in my constituency, was the smallest target on the hit list of Sir Brian Moffat, chair of Corus; but it employed 127 people, and its closure—which ended 100 years of steel making in Gorseinon—has had a real impact on the village and the surrounding area.

Last February and March I spent hours in the Bryngwyn works and in trade union offices in Swansea talking to workers and their representatives, with our local Assembly Member Edwina Hart and with local councillors, trying to put together a strategy that could have saved the plant. The work force came up with proposals—painful ones from their point of view, which would have meant the acceptance of some job losses and the mothballing of one production line to reduce costs and keep the works going until the wheel turned full circle and steel production was more profitable—but those proposals were rejected out of hand by the Corus management.

I said that I spoke as a representative of those affected by the closure. I also speak as a member of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs, which engaged in two gruelling evidence sessions with Sir Brian Moffat and members of his management team.

Mr. Llwyd: I was a member of the Committee too.

Mr. Caton: Indeed, and I suspect that the hon. Gentleman will concur with my interpretation of what happened.

What became clear during those sessions—ironically, the first took place on St David's day and the second on the day after May day—was that 6,000 people in Wales and on Teesside would be sacked come hell or high water, and that nothing that government at any level could offer would change the decision. All the things that Corus had moaned about in the preceding months—the climate change levy, the comparative values of the pound and the euro, its demand for great rebates—were no longer key factors. Corus had decided that it could not export, and that demand from United Kingdom home markets was inadequate. To improve its stock-market value it wanted to downsize, and to downsize quickly.

When we asked Corus why it had paid £700 million to shareholders when British Steel merged with Hoogovens, it said that that was to make the merger fairer in terms of the cash that each side brought to the marriage. When we asked why, if it had needed to dispose of cash, it had not invested it in the UK steel industry—this, I think, is relevant to points made by Opposition Members about variations in European rules to allow investment aid, and they may find Sir Brian Moffat's answer instructive—we were told that the last thing the industry needed was more investment. But when I asked what Corus was doing with a laminator process from Bryngwyn after its closure, the management representatives admitted that it was over 30 years old and redundant.

That is typical of the company's failure to invest to improve quality in plants such as Bryngwyn, but it was only the first in a list of failures that we heard about during our two sessions. We heard of its failure, after the merger, to honour its commitments to maintain the then current configuration of plants, and to maintain and improve market share; its failure to engage and involve its work force and its representatives at any stage and any level when the new strategy was being developed; its failure even to discuss with the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation the possibility of letting a union-led consortium take over Llanwern and bring a new initiative to steel production on the site; and its failure, even at the end, to take seriously an alternative proposed for all the plants involved—presented by the unions, and backed by the Government and the National Assembly for Wales—that would have involved access to European Union and Government money to help maintain production for at least another year. Corus rejected that proposal, but admitted under questioning in the Select Committee that it had never even costed it.

The company's overall failure also included a failure to listen to Government and to explore with Government, either at Assembly or at UK level, ways of saving jobs. Even so, under questioning Sir Brian Moffat acknowledged that he had been told by the Prime Minister that the Government would help in any way they could.

It is just plain wrong to blame the Government for what has happened. Government at various levels is trying to pick up the pieces, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State pointed out. I pay tribute to those who have contributed to the £4 million regeneration programme in Gorseinon—

Mr. Evans: As the hon. Gentleman will know, Allied Steel and Wire, which employs more than 1,000 people in Wales, is complaining about the climate change levy. What representations will he make to his Chancellor of the Exchequer before the Budget statement about its removal?

Mr. Caton: I shall make no such representations. I strongly support the levy. In certain circumstances when industry has specific problems—as was the case with Corus—the Government have reduced it. As Sir Brian Moffat told us, however, the levy was costing £8 million at a time when there was talk of a loss of £1 million a day. It was not a significant factor. At one stage there was an attempt to build it up into a significant factor, and the Conservative party jumped on it, but it was not the major issue.

Mark Tami: I had discussions with the unions at Shotton, which spent weeks preparing alternatives to the proposed job losses. The management of Corus took just five minutes to look at those proposals and reject them out of hand. It was a cruel pretence for Corus to go through the process when it had no intention of giving serious consideration to any of the alternatives. It had made up its mind, despite all the good efforts of unions and Government to find a solution.

Mr. Caton: That was exactly the experience we had with Gorseinon, and I am sure that every steel plant facing closure or cuts had the same experience.

Llew Smith: My hon. Friend said that during cross-examination of Sir Brian Moffat he had asked questions about the moneys handed out to shareholders. Did he have an opportunity to raise the subject of the moneys appropriated by Corus from the workers' pension fund, and did he have an opportunity to remind Sir Brian that much of the fund had been built up when the steel industry was in public ownership, and that it had therefore been appropriated from taxpayers?

Mr. Caton: We did not focus on that in the Select Committee, but I have often heard my hon. Friend explain what went on. It was an absolute crime, and he is right to focus on it.

I hope that lessons have been learned from last year's experience. I certainly welcome the investment at Port Talbot mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon. I think, however, that lessons will never be learned from history if we allow it to be distorted. That is one reason why we should reject the Tory-supported Plaid Cymru motion.

6.29 pm

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I shall begin by referring to the fine speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price). *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Conwy (Mrs. Williams) laughs, but she was not here to hear it. That is how interested she was.

Mrs. Betty Williams (Conwy): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I should like to point out that I was present to hear the speech from the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. Llwyd: If I have misled the House, I apologise.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr made a powerful speech. We must remember that it was he who discovered the trail of deceit from Mr. Mittal to No. 10 and back, the various favours and the less than truthful accounts that have been given. It is clear that the interests of one party have been put above those of the UK steel industry. The speech was full of passion, and I congratulate my hon. Friend, and my researcher Alun Shurmer, on their hard work and research.

The Secretary of State made a rather desperate start to his speech. He wanted to refer to education, health and transport, among other devolved matters. However, by praying in aid such matters so that he would not have to refer to Mittal, he caused us to go around the trees and the woods. We discussed everything. I have a high regard for the right hon. Gentleman, but it was a desperate start.

The Secretary of State assaulted Plaid Cymru, of course, for raising the issue. Uncharacteristically, he attacked us over our participation in the House. That was interesting. We are here far more often than he is. The latest figures show that all Plaid Cymru Members have voted more often then he has recently, so I object to what he said.

The Secretary of State may have been a bit peeved to have received the hospital pass. He did not want to deal with the debate, any more than I should like to play against England at Twickenham in a few weeks. The right hon. Gentleman struggled valiantly, and made a valiant effort, but without any real success. He started in a hole and kept on digging: in the end, we lost him altogether.

A sort of explanation or apology was made for what went on—a clever bit of historical revisionism about what Corus did. The Secretary of State made it clear that the ISTC is worth listening to, but that the GMB and other unions are not, because they say things that are not favourable to the Government. That is another classic case of revisionism. The right hon. Gentleman referred to the Soviet Union, where revisionism was big. It may be coming back into fashion with new Labour.

The point is that Mittal gave money to the Government, and the Prime Minister wrote a letter. When the ISTC gave money to the Government, it had to write a letter. It was a rather desperate attempt to bail out this discredited Government.

If the Sidex deal represented so much benefit to Britain—and I accept that assisting Romania was a laudable objective—was it right that the British taxpayer had to pay for Romanians to come here and sign the deal? The Prime Minister explained that he wrote the letter because it was already a done deal. Where is the logic in that? Moreover, Romania has open government, and the

[Mr. Llwyd]

Romanian Government's website makes clear what the letter said. It was patently obvious to all at the time that Lionel Jospin was in Romania to argue on behalf of the French company. That company has better British credentials than the Romanian firm.

In any event, it was not a done deal. The Prime Minister misled everyone in that regard. We were told that LNM was a British company, but clearly it was not. The French company was far more British, according to the definition used.

I listened carefully to the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale). He dissected what had happened, and referred to the deletion of the word "friend" from the draft of the original letter. We do not know who did that, although the "Today" programme said that it was no less a person than Mr. Powell. The hon. Gentleman referred to a speech in the Welsh day debate by the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), which mentioned steel in Wales. I did not speak about the matter then, as I knew that this debate was coming, but there was no mention of steel when the Ministers replied to that debate. That shows how deep their conviction was that day.

The hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford spoke about the Irish Ispat company. He described how it owed millions of pounds to people everywhere, including in these islands. He noted that it sacked 600 workers without a by-your-leave only a fortnight after promising to adhere to a five-year contract. I do not think that the company is a good employer.

However, the main thrust of the speech from the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford had to do with the culture of cronyism that pervades the Government. It is obvious to all that the Government keep the door wide open for people with money. That perception grows as day follows night. We need a full and independent inquiry into what happened.

The right hon. Member for Newport, East (Alan Howarth) tried to show that he and other hon. Members had been active during the Corus debacle. I have no doubt that he was. Who am I to doubt the sincerity of those Members? However, I was a member of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs when we took evidence. The big question is, where were the Government for the two years before the Corus announcement was made? In that time, it was known that Corus was losing millions of pounds each month. Why did the Government not intervene when something could have been done?

I well recall one Welsh debate about three and a half years ago when the previous Member of Parliament for Caernarfon stated that Corus was in great difficulty and that we should concentrate on it. In response, Labour Members called him a scaremonger and a whinger—the usual stuff. That was a disappointing response, and nothing was done as a result.

My point is that it was all very well for the Government to jump in and act when it was too late, but where were they when they could have been doing something effective? They have acted too late, and done too little.

I also want to correct a factual inaccuracy in the speech of the right hon. Member for Newport, East. Corus joined the European Commission in opposing any action to impose tariffs as a safeguard, but it supported later objectives. The right hon. Gentleman contended that the company had been in the US, arguing for tariffs. I am afraid that that is not correct, according to my information.

Alan Howarth *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Llwyd: The right hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but there we are.

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Llwyd: I am sorry, but no. The hon. Gentleman has not taken part in the debate.

The hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Llew Smith) offered his usual bluster. Of course we sympathise with the people who have lost jobs. We do not lay all the blame on the Government, but we do consider that the Government acted too slowly. The hon. Gentleman referred to the unfortunate failure of the ISTC buy-out. There is no argument about the fact that everyone was disappointed about that.

The hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent as usual referred to Nye Bevan. The subliminal message is that the hon. Gentleman might be as good one day. I rather doubt that.

The hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) looked at the wider issue of political donations, and the mire of political sleaze in Scotland. It is bad down here, and pretty bad up there. We can see that every day, and it is very worrying. The hon. Gentleman was right to say that we should examine business links, which do no person or party any favours. We urgently need full, thorough and public investigations into that matter, and into the general subject of the debate. We must ensure that similar things do not happen in the future.

The hon. Member for Aberavon (Dr. Francis) referred to the explosion at the Port Talbot plant. All hon. Members sympathise with the families of the bereaved, and with those who were badly injured. The investment of £75 million by Corus is most welcome, but it was an insurance payout. That means that the company did not dig into its reserves, but I hope—and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman does too—that there will be more investment.

The hon. Member for Aberavon has been in the House a relatively short time, but he has sadly become rather tribal. I counted the number of times that he found fault with everyone, although he made it clear that he thinks that the Labour Government are doing perfectly well. Obviously, the hon. Gentleman has been sucked into the system, which is a shame. I used to think that he was an independent thinker. The hon. Gentleman did not deal with the Mittal affair. He is a clever man, but he had no answers to the questions that have been posed. In the circumstances, it was sensible of him to avoid the matter so assiduously.

The hon. Member for Aberavon referred to the Prime Minister being opposed to tariffs. When did he start being opposed to tariffs? This week. When is the announcement to be made? Tomorrow. That is not very good stewardship of the economy or the country; it is very poor. It has been known since July of last year that the section 201 application was likely to be processed. This week, of all times, the Prime Minister's website says that he has warned—"warned", my God—President Bush.

The hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin), reading from a brown paper envelope—no smear intended—referred to the agony of redundancy, with which we all sympathise. The hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Caton) made some good points about accepting large donations from industry. He, too, probably believes that it is time to consider the matter dispassionately, not today but in another forum. I sympathise about what happened at Bryngwyn, and I was also on the Welsh Affairs Committee at the time. As he said, when big business makes a payment, it is looking for something. However, he did not ask what Mr. Mittal was looking for. I would ask that question.

I made the point about the French company being more British than the one that was backed. I also want to refer to Ispat's attempt to purchase the Irish plant. That was disgraceful, and, oddly, in 1995, the Department of Trade and Industry objected to it on the basis that it would be against the interests of British industry. Now, however, it apparently has full support.

This is our first opportunity to have a full parliamentary debate on this subject. The Prime Minister should rightly be here to reply. He should not have given a hospital pass to the Secretary of State for Wales. The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions had to come here to explain himself. Why cannot the Prime Minister make time to do so? He makes time to go everywhere else in the world.

One or two questions remained unanswered about the United States tariffs. Mr. Mittal paid £400,000 to put up those tariffs against British steel interests. United Kingdom taxpayers' money was actively being used to undermine UK steel jobs at the same time as Corus was rapidly going down. At the same time, by a happy coincidence, £125,000 was donated to Labour. We remember the Ecclestone affair, the Hindujas, Mr. Mandelson and Mr. Vaz—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must refer correctly to Members of the House.

Mr. Llwyd: I refer to the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) and the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson). The others are not yet Members; no doubt they will be parachuted in when they have paid enough.

I shall quote from the final sentence of an early-day motion tabled by the Minister for Europe when he was in opposition. It states that the House

> "calls on the Prime Minister to instigate an immediate independent inquiry and instruct the Chairman of the Conservative party to open all Party accounts to public scrutiny, so that British voters will at last understand that 'The best government that money can buy' leads to the sleaze and corruption evidenced by these findings."

That sums up the present position.

6.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): Before the debate began, Plaid Cymru was complaining to the press and others that Wales Office Ministers were being put up to answer the debate today. They did not want my right hon. Friend or me to take part. Apparently, Welsh Ministers are not good enough for the so-called party of Wales.

The debate has shown that at least Labour Members have a real interest in the future of the steel industry, since they, like me, represent steel workers. It has also shown that the issues that affect steel are common throughout the United Kingdom and the European Union, and that whingeing is no substitute for policies—a fact which, sadly, the nationalists have still not learned.

We have heard some very good and important contributions, such as that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Alan Howarth), who dealt extremely well with the history of the Government's support and efforts to persuade Corus not to make people redundant. The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) warned us of the dangers of economic nationalism, and he was right to do so. He argued that the Sidex sale to Mittal would not hit British jobs saying that the argument that it would was flimsy, and I agree with him in that respect. He also pointed out the importance of the issue of political donations, and I remind him and the House that the Labour party legislated to make them transparent.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Llew Smith) asked where the nationalists were when we were trying to defend steelworkers and keep their jobs. We did not see them. We supported the steelworkers all along the line and we certainly supported the attempt by the ISTC union to buy the Llanwern steelworks. I was with my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent when we met Sir Brian Moffat of Corus and tried to persuade him to change his mind. He would have none of it. He was determined not to sell the Llanwern steelworks to the ISTC because, as my hon. Friend said, that would increase competition for him. My hon. Friend has a staunch record as a defender of his community, and we have seen that again this evening. The hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) also made a contribution.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Dr. Francis) welcomed the Government's stance on steel tariffs and the Americans. I have no doubt that the Government will reinforce their position at every opportunity. He also referred to attempts by the ISTC to buy Llanwern steelworks. He rightly derided as irrelevant the nationalists' attempt to link the donation from Mr. Mittal to the Prime Minister's letter to the Romanian Prime Minister. He spoke about our steel heritage but he also stressed the importance of a modern Wales. He spoke legitimately as a Member representing a steel area—a steel town that has produced steel for the last 100 years.

The hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin)—the Tories have formed a new alliance—congratulated Plaid Cymru on securing this debate. He clearly demonstrated that there are close links between the two conservative parties in Wales. My hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Mr. Caton) paid tribute to the efforts made by my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon following the awful tragedy at Port Talbot steelworks. He also strongly attacked the nationalists and the Tories for their smears—their trademark throughout. It is a travesty of history to say that the job losses at Corus are the responsibility of this Government. We have done everything possible to prevent those job losses. My hon. Friend the Member for Gower spoke movingly of his efforts and those of his colleague in the Welsh Assembly to try to avoid the closure of the works at Bryngwyn.

The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) said that Corus's difficulties had been known about for years, and asked what the Government were

[Mr. Don Touhig]

doing. All I can do is refer to his remarks at a meeting of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs, when he said to Sir Brian Moffat:

> "You have already confirmed today and it was in the Western Mail yesterday, that there have been 145 meetings with Ministers and Members of Parliament over the last two years."

That is what we were doing in the two years before Corus announced the job losses.

The remarks made by the hon. Members for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) and for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) were very similar. The hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr said that the Prime Minister had asked the Romanians to sell the Sidex plant to Mr. Mittal. That is not true. He went on to say that this Government had given financial support to Mr. Mittal to buy a steelworks in Kazakhstan. That is not true. He went on to say that there had been a late bid by the French to acquire the Sidex steel plant, but that is not the case. He went on to accuse one of the Prime Minister's staff, Jonathan Powell, of amending a letter, but that is not the case either. For good measure, the hon. Gentleman then decided to impugn the integrity of our ambassador in Romania. That is the level that we have come to expect of the hon. Gentleman's contributions.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Touhig: No, the hon. Gentleman has only just come into the Chamber.

The hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr went on to insist that there were links between Mr. Mittal's donation to the Labour party and the Prime Minister writing a letter, but the hon. Gentleman then added that the evidence may be circumstantial. He cannot have it both ways. He ended his speech with every cliché known to man, save "God is love" and "Please adjust your dress before leaving the cubicle."

Adam Price: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Touhig: The hon. Gentleman has had his chance. He left the Chamber part way through the debate, perhaps to give another television interview, and I am having my say now. He had his earlier.

The hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford congratulated Plaid Cymru on the choice of subject for the debate and said that Conservative Members would join Plaid Cymru Members in the Lobby tonight. That is nothing new. The Tories and the nationalists are always in the same Lobby.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the letter that the Prime Minister had written to the Prime Minister of Romania. When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State spoke earlier, he referred to the fact that the Sidex sale was important to economic reform in Romania. In a written answer to a question tabled by the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister referred to Romania and said:

> "Privatisation of its steel industry through the sale of Sidex is an important element in its economic reform which will help to establish a level playing field between EU and Romanian steel producers and should lead to a reduction in levels of state subsidies which disadvantage UK steel producers."—[*Official Report*, 14 February 2002; Vol. 380, c. 612W.]

That is exactly the same message as we had from Corus more than a year ago.

Mr. Gale: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Touhig: No, I will not give way. Sit down.

If there is one thing that has characterised this debate, it is the remarkable similarity between the arguments deployed by the Conservatives and by their partners in Wales, Plaid Cymru. It has been a rerun of last week's debate on Welsh affairs, when we could not insert a cigarette paper between the arguments of the two parties. In Wales, Plaid Cymru Members say that they are socialists, yet night after night they troop through the Lobbies and vote with the Conservatives. They will do that again at 7 pm and they will do it again in the days to come. The Tories and their new partners, the daffodil Tories, are working together against the interests of the people of Wales.

Indeed, so similar were the contributions of the hon. Members for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr and for Maldon and East Chelmsford that they could go on the stage as a double act. We have had Laurel and Hardy; we have had Morecambe and Wise; now we have smear and innuendo—the typical way in which they sought to distort the real truth of this argument.

The debate has been very instructive. The fact that the Tory party has no understanding of our steel communities is not news to anyone—not to those in Gwent, Clwyd, Teesside, Corby or Lanarkshire. However, what constantly amazes me is the Conservatives' brass neck. These are the friends of Asil Nadir, Jonathan Aitken and Jeffrey Archer. They look more often like a remand centre than a political party, yet they come here to lecture us on standards in public life. The cheek of it! They have no shame. The Labour party and the Labour Government opened up scrutiny of political donations. We do not even know who paid the Conservatives' 1997 election bills, because they have not released that information.

As for the Welsh nationalists, they are silent as the grave when asked about their attempts to raise funds from foreign backers in the United States. We do not hear much from them about that. Those who thought that devolution might lead to greater maturity on the part of Plaid Cymru have been sadly disappointed, although few Labour Members will be surprised by that.

What has been surprising, however, is the complete lack of thought in Plaid Cymru's arguments in this debate. It tells us that it wants a Wales in Europe; that has been its whole theme. Until now, Britain has not existed. It has been the place that nationalists have wanted nothing to do with, but today they have argued against policies needed to strengthen Europe, to encourage trade within Europe and to help the European Union grow.

Plaid Cymru Members tell us that they want strong regional policies and structural funding in Europe, but apparently that must not apply to parts of Europe that are not called Wales. That point again emphasises their narrow, nationalist approach. They go on, as they did earlier, about their concerns about tariffs. We have concerns about tariffs, but Labour Members in the European Parliament are not arguing with their colleagues in support of tariffs. One cannot have it both ways. One is either for or against tariffs, but the nationalists clearly do not know what they are for and what they are against.

The nationalists did not stop to think about the issue that they were raising today. Like children going into a sweet shop, they thought that they had a good story with which they could knock the Government. They immediately sought to exploit it during the Ogmore by-election, but did that work? No, it did not, because a Labour Member—we won—now represents Ogmore in this Chamber.

At the heart of this argument is a letter sent by the Prime Minister to the Prime Minister of Romania. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already referred to it, and it is not a secret that the Prime Minister wrote to the Prime Minister of Romania. I have the letter here that was published on 25 July last year by the Romanians at the signing ceremony. However, the Hercule Poirot of Plaid Cymru, the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr, now gives the impression, supported by the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy, that they have just discovered it.

The hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr then sought to link the letter that the Prime Minister sent to a donation that Mr. Mittal made to the Labour party, but that donation has been known about since May and June of last year. It is not yet another great Hercule Poirot discovery, but just a sham. Both the letter and the donation have been in the public arena for eight or nine months.

As to the impact of the Prime Minister's letter to the Romanians, I refer to a comment made by the Prime Minister of Romania on 11 February when he was asked about articles in the British press that referred to our Prime Minister's letter. The Romanian Prime Minister said:

> "I would like to make it very clear. A privatisation like the one at SIDEX cannot be done on the basis of a letter, irrespective of from whom it would come. Secondly, the letter came at a moment when, after months, the examination and evaluation process had been completed and a decision had been taken."

He said that the letter came as his Government were preparing to sign the contract. That is the truth of it; there is no link whatever.

After months of unending bad news, weak leadership and three electoral trashings in eight months, Plaid Cymru thought that it had a stick with which to beat the Government, but it has got it wrong yet again. We know the rotten nature of its policies. They are like so many decaying teeth; they are falling out in front of it.

At the end of the debate, Plaid Cymru will still have a second-rate leader and third-rate policies. As has been shown in the debate, the party is governed by narrow bigotry, a little Wales-ism and a hatred of anything that succeeds. It does not even qualify for a fifth-rate political party tag. Bankrupt of real policies, badly led, riven with divisions and afraid to tackle the language of extremists, this rag-bag bunch masquerading as a political party have failed Wales today. I invite my hon. Friends to come into the Lobbies with me and deliver it a resounding defeat in the vote.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 192, Noes 318.

Division No. 180] **[6.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
(Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew

Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, Rt Hon David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger–Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Simon Thomas and
Pete Wishart.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry
(B'ham Hodge H)
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca–Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kelly, Ruth
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Prosser, Gwyn

Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George

Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Woodward, Shaun
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Mr. Phil Woolas.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 306, Noes 181.

Division No. 181] **[7.14 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Alexander, Douglas
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Beard, Nigel
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*

Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann

Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry
(B'ham Hodge H)
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy

Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kelly, Ruth
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael

Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Woodward, Shaun
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Mr. Phil Woolas.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
(Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, Rt Hon David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Simon Thomas and
Pete Wishart.

Question accordingly agreed to.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House recognises the fundamental strengths of the British steel industry, which is amongst the most efficient in the world; believes that, despite the regrettable decision of Corus to cut UK steel capacity, the industry has a long term future in Britain, as recently demonstrated by the decision of Corus to invest in the Port Talbot works; further recognises that the success of economic restructuring in Central and Eastern Europe, together with the enlargement of the European Union, is essential for the future of the British steel industry and other British manufacturing as it will extend markets and reduce hidden subsidies; congratulates the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development for its work on restructuring the Romanian and other Eastern European companies, including through supporting the successful sale of the SIDEX steel corporation;, and further welcomes measures put in place by the Government and the National Assembly for Wales to train and retrain former steel workers and regenerate communities affected by Corus job losses.

7.27 pm

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Have you had any indication from the Secretary of State for Health that he intends to make a statement to the House this evening, possibly at 10 pm, on the suspension of a civil servant in his Department? It apparently arises from the failure of the Department of Health to answer a number of parliamentary questions. As those were parliamentary questions, Parliament has a right to hear about the matter, rather than learning about it from the media. Hon. Members have not been properly notified; we should not hear about the matter on the news. The Secretary of State should make a statement in the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): I am not aware of the matter to which the hon. Gentleman refers, but he has made the point that he wanted to make. I have no knowledge of a statement being requested.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. On a different matter, but connected with a parliamentary question, I seek your guidance in respect of an astonishing answer that I have received tonight from the Under-Secretary of State for Defence. I asked him on 6 February, which is a very long time ago—the answer is already a month late—to let me have the latest strength of the Territorial Army by unit and location, as against its establishment.

I received a reply tonight, which states that the Under-Secretary regrets

"that the strength and establishment of the TA by unit and location is not available".

Even allowing for the Government's difficulty in assembling factual accuracy, to be polite, is it not astonishing that the answer to a question of such importance can be dealt with in such a way? As I have already waited a month for the answer, may I have your guidance on how it may be possible for us to establish the strength and establishment of the TA, which is, after all, the land defence of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I understand the point that the hon. Gentleman makes, but I have no responsibility for the content of ministerial answers.

Nuclear Power

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): I must inform the House that Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

7.30 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I beg to move,

That this House notes that planning consents for nuclear and other power stations over 50 MW require consent under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989, and that in Scotland section 36 powers are the responsibility of Scottish ministers accountable to the Scottish Parliament; further notes the confusion in Government policy on this matter in light of the reported remarks by the Hon Member for Carrick, Cumnock & Doon Valley on Wednesday 27th February, suggesting that Westminster would have the final say over approving nuclear power stations in Scotland; reaffirms that in all circumstances Scottish ministers accountable to the Scottish Parliament should have full planning powers over the siting of nuclear and other new power stations above 50 MW in Scotland; believes that planning decisions on nuclear power in Wales should be taken in accordance with the views of the National Assembly for Wales; and calls for the development of energy strategies in Scotland and Wales which make full use of indigenous energy resources, including gas, clean coal technology, and the enormous potential for renewable supply.

In the previous debate, my colleagues from Plaid Cymru pressed for clarity on the Government's response to the accusations and information that they were bringing before the House, but clarity came there none. I hope that we have better luck in getting clarity on Government thinking on the development of power stations, especially nuclear power stations, in Scotland.

For those hon. Members who are not familiar with the story as it has developed over the past week, the chaos and confusion at the heart of the Government became evident in an interview that the Minister of State, Scotland Office gave to the BBC "Reporting Scotland" programme last week. On the development of energy, especially nuclear power, the hon. Gentleman said:

"Anyone looking at it logically would think it wouldn't be for a legislature which has powers devolved from Westminster to then thwart the policy of a UK Government on areas which are clearly reserved to Westminster, such as energy . . . It would look a wee bit daft if, in reserved areas, decisions were being made north of the border which had a very significant impact south of the border."

The hon. Gentleman may think that daft, but many Members of the Scottish Parliament and people in Scotland would think it daft to give powers to the Scottish Parliament in 1997, as confirmed by the people in a referendum, only to take them back a few years later.

The hon. Gentleman set out Government policy but, to be fair, it lasted only 12 hours. The following morning, again on the BBC—the recipient of so much information from the Government—the Minister for Industry and Energy responded by saying:

"The position is unambiguous. If anyone wants to build a power station of any kind in Scotland, it will be a matter for the Scottish Executive to determine. End of story."

We want the Government to clarify their policy. Where is the final decision to be made on the development of new power stations, including, more controversially, of nuclear power stations? Does the power lie with the Scottish Executive—responsible to the Scottish Parliament, "end of story", as the Minister for Industry and Energy said—or does it not behove the Scottish Parliament to thwart the

[Mr. Alex Salmond]

United Kingdom's energy policy, as the Minister of State, Scotland Office said? They cannot both be right. One must represent Government policy.

We know what is in the Scotland Act 1998. The Minister for Industry and Energy has been specific on the powers. In a letter to my hon. Friend the Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) and me in November, he made it clear that the powers rightly lie with the Scottish Executive. Incidentally, I know that the letter is important because the Prime Minister's office phoned my office on Thursday to request a copy. I have no idea why the right hon. Gentleman's office did not just ask the Minister. However, the letter confirmed the planning policy guidelines as set out in section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989, under which the power of consent for a power station of more than 50 MW lies with the Scottish Executive, responsible to the Scottish Parliament.

The power is not narrowly drawn. The guidelines for planning policy set out the criteria against which a decision should be judged. They include the policy of the Scottish Executive and the Government's policy on reserved matters, national planning policy guidelines, European policy, the draft structure or local plan, the environmental impact of a proposal, the design of a proposed development, access, the provision of infrastructure, the planning history of a site, the views of statutory bodies and other consultees, and legitimate public concern or support expressed on the relevant planning matters.

Until the intervention of the Minister of State, Scotland Office on the BBC last week, it was widely assumed that the power lay with the Scottish Executive. Our suggestion that there might be a reserve grab-back power that the Westminster Government would want to exert over the Scottish Parliament was described by the former First Minister of Scotland, Henry McLeish, in a letter to John Swinney on 23 August as "a sensationalist view". He accused the Scottish National party leader of publicising a sensationalist view, but only a few months later the Minister of State, Scotland Office has confirmed what my colleague argued might be at the back of the minds of the Government in London.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): The hon. Gentleman refers to the accusation that his suggestion was a sensationalist view. Unfortunately, that view has come true in Wales: section 36 agreements were not devolved to Wales. In addition, the Government in London are increasingly attempting to take back the devolved powers that the National Assembly for Wales has over power stations between 1 MW and 50 MW. They are trying that policy out in Wales. It is surely the Government's intention to introduce it in Scotland as well.

Mr. Salmond: No doubt my hon. Friend will consider the Welsh position in detail if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is worth pointing out, however, that the letter from the Minister for Industry and Energy to my hon. Friend the Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy and me also dealt with the Welsh situation. Although it confirmed what my hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) says, the Minister for Industry and Energy also said that the views of the Welsh people will be taken into account when any decision is made. We are beginning to wonder whether the views of the Welsh and Scottish people will be listened to, taken into account and then disregarded if they are seen as thwarting Government policy.

I am interested in the role reversal—the political cross-dressing—that is taking place. The Minister of State, Scotland Office is a lifelong professed devolutionist. He once described himself as an ultra-devolutionist—a "dog of war"—as he harried the Tory Government in the early 1990s, but he now seems to be adopting the position that Westminster should have reserved powers over such matters. The Minister for Industry and Energy, however, whose record on devolution and the Scottish Parliament is chequered, seems to be emerging as the champion of the Scots Parliament by saying that the powers should reside in Scotland—"end of story". What is going on? Have they swapped their positions? Only last week, someone told me that it was like "Alice Through the Looking Glass", with the Minister of State, Scotland Office arguing the pure Unionist position and the Minister for Industry and Energy arguing from the Scottish perspective. Stranger things have seldom happened in politics.

Although the issue is important for energy development in Scotland, especially as nuclear power might be foisted on an unwilling Scottish Executive, Parliament and population, I want to determine whether a theme is developing in the attitude of the Scotland Office to the powers that are being exercised in the Scottish Parliament.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs. Helen Liddell): The hon. Gentleman talks about nuclear power stations being foisted on the Scottish people. Does he therefore support Bruce Crawford MSP in calling for civil disobedience?

Mr. Salmond: I am not familiar with that, but I remember taking part in peaceful civil disobedience against nuclear dumping in Scotland with many members of the Labour party. The right hon. Lady's views may develop on such matters, but mine do not.

Mrs. Liddell *rose—*

Mr. Salmond: If the Secretary of State can contain herself for a second, I will give way in a moment. No doubt she will take the opportunity to clarify Government thinking on the matter and tell us where the decision will be taken so that Mr. Crawford and others can decide how to react.

Mrs. Liddell: The hon. Gentleman need not worry: I shall have plenty of opportunities to make those points. Even if he has not heard statements from Mr. Crawford about civil disobedience, will he clarify his own view and tell us whether he supports its use in trying to stop the building of nuclear power stations—yes or no?

Mr. Salmond: It depends on the circumstances that might arise. Let me take the point further. Let us imagine the circumstances in which a majority—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has been asked a question; he must be allowed to reply.

Mr. Salmond: I do not think that Labour Members are necessarily going to like the reply. If the Secretary of

State can envisage circumstances in which a majority in the Scottish Parliament want it to exercise its powers to stop the building of a nuclear power station, and if we can envisage a position à la gauleiter from Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley, the Minister of State, Scotland Office, who wants to impose a Westminster veto on such democratic decisions, many people in Scotland may say that peaceful civil disobedience is appropriate.

Mrs. Liddell *rose—*

Mr. Salmond: I shall give way to the Secretary of State once more. If I may say so, I should then like to make just a little progress. I do not think there has been any time in politics when the Secretary of State has given way to me three times in a debate, never mind three times consecutively.

Mrs. Liddell: So the hon. Gentleman confirms that the answer is yes and that he supports civil disobedience.

Mr. Salmond: If the right hon. Lady is confirming that she and her Government intend to override a democratic view of the Scottish Parliament—*[Interruption.]* She nods; is she agreeing with the argument that Westminster is going to override that process? She nods again. If that is what is happening, I can assure her that many people in Scotland will think that the sort of response that I have described is appropriate. She will not join us on the barricades, but that is no surprise whatever.

Mr. Brian H. Donohoe (Cunninghame, South): When will we hear exactly what alternative the Scottish National party proposes?

Mr. Salmond: I have just given way three times to the Secretary of State. I hope that the Minister for Industry and Energy, the other hon. Member for Cunninghame, shares his near neighbour's enthusiasm for the rights of the Scottish Parliament. I hope also that I shall be given a chance to develop my speech and that we will hear more about exactly that matter.

I was asking whether what is happening is part of a pattern or a one-off blunder by the Minister of State. [HON. MEMBERS: "It is a pattern."] My colleagues say that it is a pattern in which the Scotland Office is arguing for taking back the powers of the Scottish Parliament and Executive. I think that such a pattern is evident in current issues, such as free personal care—*[Interruption.]* I say to the parliamentary Labour party that that is an important policy for many people in Scotland. It was pursued by the Scottish Parliament, but there was subsequently a dispute with the Department of Health and the then Department of Social Security about the payment of £22 million that was held back. No doubt, the Scottish Executive looked to the Scotland Office for some support and wanted it to advance the argument as the custodian of the Scotland Act—after all, that is what the Secretary of State recently called herself. Instead, it seemed to adopt a policy of arguing in favour of the UK Departments, but against the Scottish Executive and the spirit of devolution.

The position on Sewel motions is extraordinary. Some 31 such motions have been passed from the Scottish Parliament to Westminster. The SNP agreed with many of them, but last week we saw the procedure that is now being adopted, whereby such a motion goes through the Scots Parliament and is subsequently transformed and amended by this place, but does not go back to the Scots Parliament for confirmation. I think that we can see a pattern developing. People have asked about the role of the Scotland Office in the post-devolution environment. *[Interruption.]* I think that we are identifying that role now—it is to argue against Scotland and the Scottish Parliament and to thwart the Scottish Executive. *[Interruption.]* If hon. Members do not agree, they will have to cite examples. On free personal care, Sewel motions, nuclear power stations—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The House must listen to the hon. Gentleman's speech. Hon. Members cannot constantly intervene from a sedentary position.

Mr. Salmond: The sedentary interventions would not get a lot better if Labour Members got to their feet, so I do not think that we should complain too much.

The second issue that I want to explore relates to the circumstances in which any reasonable Scottish Executive will envisage a configuration of power and energy development in Scotland that is different from what is envisaged in Westminster. We had a good debate in the Scottish Grand Committee a couple of weeks ago—

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Before the hon. Gentleman moves away from nuclear power, does he agree that although it is certainly right for the whole United Kingdom to be involved in decisions about nuclear power—a nuclear accident would affect an area of its size—the crucial point is that the Government should not ride roughshod over the concerns of people in Scotland and Wales? One gets the feeling that there is a significant danger of that happening under the current policy arrangements.

Mr. Salmond: There is a significant danger. Perhaps the Minister of State is involved in a much more subtle plan than any of us realise.

The Minister of State, Scotland Office (Mr. George Foulkes): A cunning plan.

Mr. Salmond: Yes, perhaps he has a cunning plan and is the Baldrick of Scottish politics. As a lifelong, heartfelt devolutionist, perhaps the only way he could see of raising the issue about the Scottish Parliament—this point of view has been suggested to me—was to give that apparently careless interview to the BBC last week. Some people think that he was being much more cunning and was merely starting the argument running because he wants the position of Scotland and Wales to be defended. *[Interruption.]* It is clear that some of his colleagues think that that suggestion is a bit far-fetched, but I still have faith in him, even if they do not.

I was about to consider circumstances in which any reasonable Scottish Executive might determine that Scotland's energy configuration was different from that south of the border. Currently, if all the power stations in Scotland are running at full strength, we have a capacity of 12,499 MW. The normal running capacity is 9,000 MW and peak demand in Scotland is 5,000 MW. There is currently huge overcapacity in Scotland.

We have a huge opportunity in relation to two significant developments. In that context, the absence of the Minister for Industry and Energy from this debate is

[Mr. Salmond]

extraordinary, given that he represents half the story. He sat through the previous debate, but is not speaking in this one, despite the fact that his position is interesting and important in relation to it. I understand that he has an alternative diary engagement; obviously, that has not kept the Scotland Office away, although I accept that there can be pressures on the ministerial diary. None the less, he expressed his view that there is huge potential for development of renewable resources in Scotland, and it was backed by the Scottish Executive, which said that the proportion of Scottish electricity capacity provided by renewables could increase from its current level of 10 per cent. to 30 per cent.

Furthermore, as the Minister of State knows from visiting Peterhead power station in my constituency, we have not only the most efficient combined cycle gas reactor in the world, but 800 MW of spare capacity that cannot currently be used because the connecting lines on the east coast are inadequate for advancing the major opportunity to use gas power that is currently sitting unused. Scotland has under-invested in gas power in comparison with the rest of the United Kingdom and perhaps has more potential in terms of renewables than anywhere in Europe, to echo the comments of the Minister for Industry and Energy. I welcome his initiative and the establishment of the renewables unit; even though there are initially only six jobs, an important signpost for the future has none the less been given in Aberdeen this week.

Those are all important developments, but no one who considers the situation from a reasonable position—and certainly not the Government's energy policy review—in terms of a Scottish perspective of renewing the existing stations or establishing new ones after the old ones have reached the end of their economic or technical life could suggest other than that our nuclear option will be controversial, given the significance and prominence of clean technology coal and the potential for expansion of gas power, as well as the huge potential for renewables. I can well foresee—

Mr. Frank Doran (Aberdeen, Central): The hon. Gentleman has been on his feet for 20 minutes, much of which he has spent nitpicking about who said what and on what radio programme. When will he deal with SNP policy? Once a year he gets the opportunity to initiate a major debate in the House of Commons, but he is navel-gazing.

Mr. Salmond: The SNP's policy is set out in the motion, which calls for the

> "full use of indigenous energy resources, including gas, clean coal technology, and the enormous potential of renewable supply",

but the amendment on the Order Paper does not clarify the Government's position. The Government say that they have full confidence in the planning processes in Scotland, which the Minister seemed to undermine last week, but they do not tell us what those planning processes are. The SNP approach to these matters is crystal clear: the Government's policy is masked in total confusion. I have dealt with clean coal technology, the potential expansion of gas and the enormous potential of renewable supplies.

Mr. Peter Duncan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to intervene on this important section of his impressive speech.

The hon. Gentleman is detailing his concerns about the anticipated decline in nuclear power and saying that he and his party will oppose it here, in the Scottish Parliament and, if necessary, on the picket lines outside planning offices. How does he plan to replace that power with renewable power, given that the political reality is that SNP activists the length and breadth of Scotland oppose each and every renewable energy proposal that I have come across?

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Gentleman is being foolish. He is repeating something that was said in the Scottish Grand Committee. I have looked through some of the cuttings to find out who is supporting wind energy projects in Scotland. In Galloway, as the hon. Gentleman should know, Alasdair Morgan MSP is very much in favour of them. In Fenwick Moor in east Ayrshire, the two local SNP councillors, Katie Hall and Annie Hay, are leading the campaign in favour. Adam Ingram, the MSP for South of Scotland, is supporting the Eaglesham Moor project in that area.

I came across one MSP who has spoken up against a renewable project in Scotland—Jamie McGrigor, the Conservative MSP for Highlands and Islands, who spoke against it in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Angus Robertson), who, like Margaret Ewing, the former MP, supports it. So the only person of political significance who has actively opposed the development of wind energy is the Conservative MSP for the Highlands. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Duncan) says, "Not guilty." He is disavowing Mr. McGrigor's activities.

The hon. Gentleman is right, however, that there is an organisation that opposes wind energy projects the length and breadth of Scotland. During the past year, it has singlehandedly stopped 14 wind energy projects in the south of Scotland, which have been detailed by Alasdair Morgan, the MSP for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale. The Ministry of Defence, controlled by the Government, has scuppered every one of those projects because it thinks that they are a danger—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Front-Benchers say, "Quite right, too." I can see that there is unity there. The MOD thinks that such projects are a danger to low-flying aircraft.

I am happy to acknowledge that people in every one of the Scottish parties may object to one scheme or another. In the course of my extensive research, I came across a Member of Parliament who stood out against a key development in the electricity infrastructure—the interconnector linking Scotland and Ireland. He conducted that campaign as an Opposition party spokesman against the Conservative Government, continued it even after the late Donald Dewar gave the interconnector planning consent, and revived it when the Scottish Parliament was established, on the basis that he was no longer bound by collective responsibility: that Member is now the Minister of State, Scotland Office.

The Minister may have thought that he had good reason to oppose the interconnector because there was strong local feeling against it, and that he was doing no more than representing his constituents, but it ill behoves someone who takes that position to start to complain about Mrs. Jones or Mrs. Smith objecting to a wind policy planning application somewhere in Scotland. Before he starts to pick on ordinary people around Scotland, he should look at his own track record of trying to thwart political developments.

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): Will the hon. Gentleman clarify his response to the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Duncan)? Is he saying that he is totally in favour of all renewables at any time, anywhere in Scotland?

Mr. Salmond: I am in favour of the target announced by the Scottish Executive, which is supported by the Minister for Industry and Energy. It should be possible to raise the contribution of renewables from 10 per cent. to 30 per cent. over the next 20 years, albeit that it will be a tough target to meet. It will require investment and infrastructure in the west of Scotland, where many people have huge enthusiasm for renewables projects. Securing the gas expansion that goes with it will require a huge investment in infrastructure—not only electricity lines, but of the gas network on the east coast of Scotland.

A few days ago the Minister sent me a courteous letter about a matter that I raised in the Scottish Grand Committee—entry charges for the gas system at St. Fergus compared with other landfill terminals such as Bacton. Entry charges south of the border are much lower. The Minister gave me a comprehensive answer in which he says that that is the result not of Government policy, but of the auction system; that the price that is determined in the auction for entry is determined by the capacity in the system. For the past 10 years, the price of entry at St. Fergus has been many times higher than that at southern terminals because capacity has been inadequate. Although St. Fergus is the most economic place for companies to use, they cannot get into the system.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): Has not the hon. Gentleman kept up with the science? Sheerwater and others now carry out gas cleaning on the field. They do not put it through St. Fergus, but straight into the gas grid, so St. Fergus is no longer the bottleneck that he describes.

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Gentleman is not in command of the subject. Expansion is under way at St. Fergus. In the past few days, Marathon announced a 675 km pipeline from the north-east of Scotland to Bacton. The pipeline, which goes an enormous distance at enormous expense, is required because Marathon cannot get through the network at St. Fergus owing to undercapacity in the system.

Mr. Doran: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive my saying so, that is nonsense. The gas goes to Bacton so that it can be exported to Europe.

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Gentleman may not be familiar with the science. If the system is reinforced on land, gas can be exported anywhere through the gas system. It is not necessary to use an expensive offshore pipeline if the pipeline on land has sufficient capacity to take the gas. That is elementary. The hon. Gentleman is an experienced Member of Parliament for the north-east of Scotland; I suggest that he familiarise himself with the oil and gas industry that he is meant to represent.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): I am listening with interest to the hon. Gentleman's enthusiasm for renewables. Will he and his party give a commitment to support hydro-generating projects that are at the planning stage in Scotland? Experience has shown that it takes years to reach such decisions, which is damaging employment opportunities in my constituency.

Mr. Salmond: For the first time in 40 years there is a new hydro project in Scotland, for which the SNP has expressed support. It will be a test of whether people are prepared to accept the further development of that enormous resource, which was originally developed because of the vision of a group of people after the second world war. The straight answer to the hon. Gentleman is yes, we would.

So far, I have considered whether there is a pattern of the Scotland Office grabbing back powers from the Scottish Parliament and Executive. We will be interested to find out whether the position that holds is that of the Minister for Industry and Energy or that of the Minister of State, Scotland Office. I have considered Scotland's potential across a range of electricity-generating options, which, by common consent, is enormous.

Mr. Connarty: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Salmond: I have given way once to the hon. Gentleman; I have given way 10 times in total so far—perhaps more—which is reasonable, so I shall now make some progress. The hon. Gentleman might strike it lucky before the end of my contribution, which is slightly longer than I originally intended.

We know that the Conservative party has been the only party unambiguously in favour of nuclear power. The Labour party went into the 1997 election with the same policy as that which the SNP and the Liberal Democrats now have: that the current nuclear power stations should be phased out when they reach the end of their technical or economic life. The most recent Labour manifesto made no mention of that policy. No doubt, the policy might emerge as this debate continues, but it has a lot of support in the Scots Parliament, so it is entirely reasonable to suppose that a majority of its Members may well not want to give section 36 permission to develop a new nuclear power station in Scotland.

That brings us to the crux of the debate. If such a majority exists and the Scottish Parliament and the Executive, who are responsible to it, decide to say no to a new nuclear power station in Scotland, will that decision prevail, as the Minister for Industry and Energy has said; or will there be a reserved power, such as that alluded to by the Minister of State, Scotland Office? The Minister for Industry and Energy said that that decision would prevail—"end of story." We want the Government to tell us whether they and the Scotland Office share his view; whether they are willing to argue and fight for Scotland and the Scottish Parliament; or whether they want to thwart the democratic will of the Scottish people.

8.2 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs. Helen Liddell): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

has confidence in the process of granting planning consent for new nuclear power stations in Scotland and Wales; notes the benefits of addressing issues relating to energy policy within a UK framework;

welcomes the contribution of the recent PIU Energy Review to the debate on energy policy; and welcomes the intention of HM Government and the devolved administrations to work in partnership in implementing an energy policy to ensure energy supplies are secure, competitively priced and sustainable.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) spoke for 32 minutes, and we got to the crux of the issue 31 minutes into his speech, but the Government welcome debate about the future energy needs of our country. We are addressing those issues, as any responsible Government should, and we are in the midst of a fundamental review of energy needs. That is why the Cabinet Office has recently published the performance and innovation unit's energy review, why we will consult on it and why we are planning to publish a White Paper later this year.

Energy needs must—I repeat, must—be looked at in a United Kingdom context, in the interests of all our people and of the entire United Kingdom economy and environment. It has taken a visionary Labour Government to see the need to look 50 years into the future and assess what the United Kingdom-wide demand for energy throughout that period will be and how it might best be met. It has taken a visionary Labour Government to develop a strategy that ensures current policy commitments are consistent with longer-term goals.

Ensuring security of supply, tackling climate change and maintaining low prices are key issues. However, tonight's debate is not about the vital issue of energy but about the Scottish National party's distorted priorities. Its motion is based on the false assumption that the Government have a master plan to build more nuclear power plants and are determined to foist them on an unwilling Scotland. Nothing could be further from the truth. There are no such proposals. The Government have looked at all the options for energy supply for the next half a century and refused to rule anything out.

Mr. Salmond: Last week, the Minister for Industry and Energy said:

> "The position is unambiguous. If anyone wants to build a power station of any kind in Scotland, it will be a matter for the Scottish Executive to determine. End of story."

Does the Secretary of State support that position?

Mrs. Liddell: I urge the hon. Gentleman to be patient. I will get to that point, and to a number of other issues that he raised. I suggest that he relax and hauds his wheesht for a wee while longer. This Government will keep open all our energy options so that we can do what is in the best interests of the people of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Salmond: If we cannot find out whether the Secretary of State supports the position of the Minister for Industry and Energy, will she say whether she supports that of her own Minister of State, who said that reserved area decisions made north of the border should not have a significant impact south of the border?

Mrs. Liddell: Again, the hon. Gentleman should be patient. He is wasting more time, having called an unnecessary vote at 7.15 pm to delay the start of this debate, spoken for 32 minutes without saying anything and sought to delay the progress of the debate. What is he frightened about? I will come to what my hon. Friends said on BBC radio, but his motion raises several other issues, and I intend to take them into account as well.

I shall now return to the fundamental assumption behind the PIU energy review: the need for a balanced energy policy. That is essential not just for our continued economic strength, but for our strategic security. The specific and very narrow issue that the SNP wants to discuss tonight is hypothetical and light-years away from the priorities of the Scottish people. The SNP has used its one chance in the year to have the Floor of the House to discuss not how we can advance Scotland's competitiveness or secure an environmentally balanced energy policy, but how planning consents work and who says what when—and even that is based on a false premise.

Mr. Doran: Is my right hon. Friend surprised that the leader of the Scottish National party has taken that view? He is sitting next to the man whom his party seems to be spending so much time promoting as the hardest working Member of Parliament, and next to him is the sleaze-buster general, who seems to be making it his job to root out sleaze wherever he finds it. None of them has a policy of any interest to the Scottish people.

Mrs. Liddell: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. Indeed, I shall deal with those points later. The people of Scotland want to know how we can secure for our children a place at the centre of the knowledge economy, with a robust and competitive economic environment, but the SNP wants to talk about a mythical company producing a proposal at some point in the distant future to build a nuclear power station that the Scottish Executive then reject on planning grounds. So what? That is their right. Planning is devolved, and the fact that executive devolution was granted to the Scottish Executive by the Government in relation to the Electricity Act 1989 as well is a sign of the close partnership between the Government and the Scottish Executive. I did not hear the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan refer to that Act during his speech; he obviously did not get round to that in his research.

Mr. Salmond: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mrs. Liddell: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman for the third time.

Mr. Salmond: Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 is part of what we are debating. The right hon. Lady seems to be saying that that power lies with the Scottish Executive, who are responsible to the Scottish Parliament. Is that the end of the story? If so, what on earth was the Minister of State talking about last week, when he said that the policy in Scotland should not

> "thwart the policy of a UK Government"?

Who will take the final decision—Westminster or the Scottish Parliament?

Mrs. Liddell: I know that the hon. Gentleman likes the sound of his own voice, but if he will keep quiet a little longer, he will be told the definitive position.

The SNP always sees these issues in terms of confrontation, tension and failure. Its argument, like that of the hon. Gentleman, is ill informed and has been inadequately researched. It falters precisely because of the partnership that exists between the Scottish Executive and the Government. I have no doubt that the SNP wishes that there were no such partnership. Its only hope of carving out a future for its separatist ambitions is to seek to foster such conflict. It is out of touch and out of tune with the growth of a modern Scotland.

Annabelle Ewing (Perth): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Liddell: No, I am going to make some progress. The hon. Lady may be lucky in catching the eye of the Deputy Speaker later.

Let me explain the position, as set out in the Scotland Act 1998, on planning consents in general, not just for nuclear power stations. Planning law is devolved. It is clear that the intention behind the Scotland Act was that the Scottish Parliament would have legislative competence for the planning regime in general, and that would include its application to airports and nuclear power stations, just as much as it has competence for the planning regime for any other type of development.

Nuclear energy, however, is reserved by dint of section D4 of part II of schedule 5 to the Scotland Act. The provisions of schedule 4 also make it plain that the Scottish Parliament has legislative competence for planning in reserved areas to maintain consistency of approach throughout devolved and reserved areas. That deals with the point that we are discussing tonight.

I ask the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan to listen carefully to my next point because it concerns the area that he did not see fit to research. Scotland Office Ministers have been involved in discussions on two recent policy reviews in which consent procedures for major projects have come up: the performance and innovation unit energy review and the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions Green Paper on new procedures for dealing with major infrastructure projects of national importance.

In both instances, the Scottish Executive were involved in consultations with the PIU and the DTLR. Both reviews drew attention to the UK dimension of some major infrastructure projects. One such dimension is the extent to which reserved law continues to apply to the development of such major projects—law that is a matter for this Parliament, and law that this Parliament must make with regard not just to England and Wales but to Scotland.

For example, some of the infrastructure projects referred to in annexe C of the DTLR consultation paper require separate authorisations under specific legislation relevant to those developments, quite apart from planning development permissions. In particular, the construction of power stations or overhead power lines needs authorisation under part I of the Electricity Act, as well as needing planning permission. There are similar specific authorisation procedures for pipeline developments.

That means that both Parliaments may have legislative competence to make law relating to controls governing such infrastructure developments. But there are other ways in which UK responsibility may apply. In the context of energy developments such as power stations, it remains the responsibility of the Government and of this Parliament to ensure that there are sustainable and secure supplies of energy for industry and for domestic consumers throughout the UK. We have to have regard to this country's need for energy supplies.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Will the Secretary of State take into account the forecasts that after 10 years we may have to depend on Soviet and middle east supplies for up to 70 or 90 per cent. of our needs? In light of her remark about secure supplies, that is a daunting prospect. Can some of us be forgiven for being in favour of Hunterston C as well as new nuclear power stations at Sizewell and, probably, at Hinkley?

Mrs. Liddell: My hon. Friend makes an important point. That is a daunting prospect. The motion in the name of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan commits the SNP only to the use of indigenous energy supplies. One of the jobs of the Energy Minister is to keep the lights on; SNP policy would not get anywhere near that.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): Does the right hon. Lady recognise that the prospect may not be as daunting as it first seems? First, the premise of the energy review was an over-pessimistic view of the growth in energy demand that is not matched by any previous projections. Secondly, the forecasts underestimate the potential for the North sea to continue to provide the country with considerable gas reserves. Finally, we must recognise that the European Union is supplied from many diverse gas sources.

Mrs. Liddell: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I will not be diverted down that route. We discussed that in the Scottish Grand Committee, and a consultation exercise will follow the PIU report. The successor to the oil and gas industry taskforce looked at all those issues, and they are not as clear-cut as the hon. Gentleman suggests.

Mr. Salmond: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Liddell: No, I want to make progress.

I turn now to other issues raised by the motion. It states that the Minister of State, Scotland Office is reported in the press as saying:

> "Westminster would have the final say over approving nuclear power stations in Scotland".

Let me be absolutely clear: he said no such thing. I have the transcript here in front of me. In his interview with the BBC, my hon. Friend said:

> "the decision might ultimately rest with the Westminster Government".

He went on to say:

> "I think it is very important to establish the position absolutely clearly at an early stage so that we know who has the ultimate responsibility."

That is the statement of a sensible Minister addressing significant issues.

Naturally, as always, the SNP wants to turn this debate from a matter of common sense into a constitutional wrangle. It sees conspiracy in everything because, as it emphasised again this weekend, it lacks vision and, indeed, the commitment to devolution that allows mature reflection on issues that require further analysis. SNP Members need to learn to leave their paranoia in the cloakroom if they wish to be taken seriously.

[Mrs. Liddell]

What is more, the United Kingdom has international treaty obligations on energy and the environment, and as a responsible Government, working with a responsible Scottish Executive, we need to ensure that we do not build in obstacles to meeting those obligations, which are not devolved. These are complex matters requiring mature consideration. Responsible Ministers have to seek clarity in these complex areas before specific issues arise. There must be no question of the United Kingdom being restricted in meeting our international obligations, for example, in relation to Kyoto and the liberalisation of European energy markets.

As part of the DTLR review, we must be prepared to look at all the issues that are raised. That is what makes us a competent Government, and indeed a Government committed to ensuring that the devolution settlement works—something that the SNP is fundamentally opposed to. That is exactly the position to which my hon. Friend the Minister of State was alluding. He made it explicitly clear that Scottish Ministers have full planning powers on the siting of nuclear and other power stations. As an experienced and senior Minister, he made it clear that there are broader issues that it would be remiss of the Government to ignore.

I am conscious that the motion refers to Wales as well as Scotland, and I turn now to Wales, although I do not profess to have great expertise on Welsh planning matters.

Mr. Alan Reid (Argyll and Bute): Before she turns to Wales, will the right hon. Lady answer a simple question? If a planning application for a nuclear power station in Scotland were submitted, who would have the final say over whether it should be built—a Scottish Minister or a UK Minister?

Mrs. Liddell: The hon. Gentleman plainly has not listened to what I have said. Planning consents are devolved to the Scottish Parliament. Areas of executive devolution under the Electricity Act 1989 have been passed to the Scottish Executive. However, legislative responsibility for nuclear energy rests with Westminster.

Existing procedures for certain projects in Wales are a matter for the National Assembly. They involve a planning decision committee receiving an inspector's report following a public inquiry. The report brings together the relevant issues, including environmental concerns, and an environmental statement produced by the developer where necessary to meet environmental impact assessment requirements.

Cross-border infrastructure projects involving Wales are normally the subject of an application under the Transport and Works Act 1992. Decisions are normally taken by Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, and the Assembly must approve a draft order before a final order confirming a project can be made.

Planning responsibilities for major projects, such as power stations over 50 MW, are reserved to the United Kingdom Government and are not subject to the Transport and Works Act. Planning procedures for major projects are, of course, subject to the current DTLR consultation exercise, and I am sure that the National Assembly will make its views known to my colleagues at the DTLR.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): The Secretary of State has addressed Wales, but, for example, the Cefn Croes application for a large wind farm in Ceredigion was determined by a Minister at the Department of Trade and Industry. The Minister had the option of holding a public inquiry and there was considerable concern in Wales about the effect of the proposal on the landscape. He decided not to do that and issued permission. Should not the Government respond to the views of the people of Wales and hold public inquiries for contentious applications of that sort?

Mrs. Liddell: The hon. Gentleman may ask for that, and I shall undertake to ensure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales replies to him.

Let me return to the motion and examine energy policy. The whole House should thank the SNP for the information that we can glean from the motion. It provides rather more information about SNP energy policy than has hitherto existed. We can contrast its approach with the Government's approach to energy policy, which has been thoughtful, considered and mature. The SNP has nothing more to say about its energy policy than that it is an avowedly anti-nuclear party. Its decision to depend only on indigenous sources of supply puts in jeopardy the certainty of energy supplies.

The motion fails to take account of the maturity of the North sea and the certainty that we will soon be dependent on imports of gas. There is only one deep mine in Scotland, and it is experiencing geological difficulties. The SNP pays lip service to renewables, but in virtually every constituency where renewables issues arise, SNP activists campaign against them. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State pointed out at the Scottish Grand Committee that the proposal for Dailly in his own constituency is opposed by SNP activists on the not in my backyard principle once so loved by the Tories. The SNP's position is illogical, ill thought out and incompetent.

The new SNP leader John Swinney has said that he would

> "not approve plans for any new nuclear power stations in Scotland—not now, not ever".

Tonight, we have heard the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan admit that he would be prepared to use civil disobedience to stop nuclear power stations being built. The SNP is gambling with the energy needs of Scotland.

Mr. John MacDougall (Central Fife): Does my right hon. Friend share my concern about the programme proposed in the SNP's indigenous resource strategy? I recently received a letter from the chief executive of Shell regarding the petrochemical plant at Mossmorran. Does my right hon. Friend agree with the chief executive that such a policy, and the loss of access to the rich Norwegian gas fields, would have a catastrophic impact on Mossmorran? Is not that another example of the loss of jobs that would result from an ill-considered policy?

Mrs. Liddell: My hon. Friend is correct and raises an issue of real concern to real people about real issues of policy. The SNP will long live to regret the sloppy drafting of the motion. SNP energy policy is a leap in the dark. Last weekend, it launched its "Talking Independence" campaign, and I wonder what its friends in Plaid Cymru have to say about that. We are told that SNP members will take presentations round the boardrooms of Scotland to persuade Scottish industry that its separatist policies will work.

Let us ignore for a moment the questions that the SNP will have to answer about how uncertainty, high taxation, insularity in the global marketplace and increased expenditure on defence, foreign embassies and re-fighting the cod war could possibly be good for Scottish business. Let us consider instead how its energy policy would radically hamper Scotland's competitiveness. While the rest of Europe seeks liberalised energy markets and the lower energy prices that would result from that, the SNP would take us back to tallow candles and gas lights.

Mr. Salmond: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Liddell: No.

Today's debate has exposed SNP energy and economic policy for the sham that it is. Rather than widen options for Scottish business, the SNP wants to narrow them. Rather than looking outward to seize the opportunities of energy liberalisation throughout Europe, the SNP wants to retrench, isolating the energy industry in Scotland, threatening security of supply, endangering the low energy prices enjoyed in this country and narrowing the range of energy suppliers available.

The SNP's energy policy is also—surprise, surprise—uncosted. The SNP has failed to spell out how it would pay for its policy on Dounreay and on the decommissioning of other nuclear facilities in Scotland if it were to lead Scotland to separation. In spite of the pledge in its 2001 manifesto that Dounreay would be

"supported as an international centre of decommissioning"

the SNP has not explained where the money would come from to cover the multi-billion pound price tag that UK taxpayers are currently picking up.

In a separate Scotland, the SNP would not only have to take on decommissioning costs for Dounreay, but pay for the closure and clean-up of other facilities at Rosyth and Faslane. Neither has the SNP given us the bottom line on unemployment. Not once have SNP Members talked about the consequences of their policies for ordinary people. They prefer to avoid concentrating on issues concerning the real people of Scotland, and revert, as the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan is proving as I speak, to the school debating chamber.

The SNP has blown this opportunity to try to play a constructive part in building a modern Scotland. It has set out for all to see the poverty of its ideas, the shallowness of its policies and its outdated obsession with constitutional wrangling. It is easy to see why the SNP was rejected by the people of Scotland. It will continue to languish on the fringes of the body politic.

The Government's amendment recognises the strength of the partnership between the Government and the Scottish Executive—a partnership endorsed by the people of Scotland and one that is making devolution work. I commend the Government's amendment to the House.

8.29 pm

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): When I was first appointed as shadow Secretary of State for Scotland, a Labour Member, after a Westminster Hall debate, said, "Welcome back to the bear pit of Scottish politics." I have to say that listening to what has gone on this evening reminds me more of a family quarrel, because most family quarrels are characterised by long-standing lines of argument that everyone knows, everyone has heard before, and everyone thoroughly enjoys, even though no one outside has the first clue what they are about. That certainly characterised the exchanges that we have just heard.

I congratulate the Scottish National party on securing this debate, although I slightly agree with the Secretary of State that it is a great shame that its annual outing should come down to the equivalent of a spat between two Ministers. I congratulate the SNP none the less. We were told that the terms of the debate were set in such a way that the Conservatives would be able to support them. Some hon. Members may have noticed the absence of the word "nuclear" from the motion, yet the first subject to be brought up was nuclear power, followed swiftly by an admission from the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) that he believed in civil disobedience. I cannot think of a quicker way of ensuring that the Conservatives would be unlikely to support the motion.

Mr. Salmond: I am puzzled as to why the hon. Lady thinks that this subject is not of sufficient importance. Only last Thursday, the sole Conservative Member of Parliament representing a Scottish constituency described this as a developing crisis at the heart of government. Was it a developing crisis last Thursday? Is it still a developing crisis? Has the hon. Lady changed her mind? She cannot disagree with her only Scottish representative.

Mrs. Lait: If the hon. Gentleman had possessed his soul in a little more patience, he would have recognised that I was going on to say, having listened carefully to the Secretary of State's explanation of the situation, that it raised more questions in my mind than the original alleged disagreement between the two Ministers. That is what I would like to explore tonight.

If I understand the right hon. Lady correctly, I do not think that there is any disagreement that section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 is devolved, and that the Scottish Executive would have the authority under the current planning structure to make a decision on a nuclear power station entirely on planning grounds.

Mrs. Liddell: There is a fundamental misunderstanding at the heart of what the hon. Lady is saying. The section 36 power is executive devolution; power to legislate remains with this Parliament.

Mrs. Lait: Yes, I accept that entirely. I am glad to have had clarification on the matter. I do not want this speech to turn into a dialogue, but it may well do so, because I am trying to extract the precise details of the situation.

As I understand it, under executive devolution, the Scottish Executive would have the power—entirely on planning grounds and no others—to agree or disagree on a new nuclear power station. If that is so—I accept the Secretary of State's point about the other part of the

[Mrs. Lait]

Electricity Act stating that the DTI would also have responsibility for related consents—and the UK Government had a strategic need for a new nuclear power station in Scotland, given that it would be a good thing for the Scottish Economy and the Scottish energy production industry to renew its nuclear power stations, and if the Scottish Executive were to turn down the consent for such a power station entirely on planning grounds, would there then be a continuing stream of applications from British Energy or any other company that wished to build a nuclear power station, based on the UK Government's strategic need for a nuclear power station in Scotland, or would Westminster insist on overriding the Scottish Executive?

Mrs. Liddell: I have heard of polyparenthetical sentences, but that one should probably take its place in "The Guinness Book of Records". The point to which the hon. Lady is referring is the very point that my hon. Friend, the Minister of State, Scotland Office, raised. There are issues, particularly in relation to large infrastructure projects, which are the subject of discussion at the moment.

Mrs. Lait: Right. Discussions—consultation exercises, whatever—are going on at this very moment between a Labour Government and a Labour-led Scottish Executive. What would happen if different political parties were running the UK Government and the Scottish Parliament? If there were a fundamental disagreement in those circumstances, which Government would take precedence? My understanding of what the Secretary of State has said is that, when push comes to shove, the UK Government would make the overriding decision. If that is the case, the fears expressed by the Scottish National party have some substance, because the final decision-making power right at the end of the system would rest with the UK Government.

Schedule 9 of the Scotland Act 1998 implies that there is a legal recourse only if Scottish Executive Ministers exceed their powers. There would be no legal recourse if the UK Government Ministers exceeded their powers. This brings into play the new planning review and the role of the UK Government in deciding on planning issues through the House of Commons. The statutory instrument procedure, which appears to be the procedure referred to in the consultation document, takes an hour and a half, as we all know. If the planning procedure comes into effect, how would it affect strategic decisions in relation to the Scottish Executive? It seems to me that it would override the Scottish Executive's planning powers under the Scotland Act 1988 and the executive devolution of the Electricity Act 1989.

I come inescapably to the conclusion that, however friendly the current UK Government are with the current Scottish Executive, should there ever be a conflict between the two Governments—we look forward to that happening sooner rather than later—there would be no legal recourse to a solution to such a conflict. That is precisely the point that came out of the debate between the Minister of State, Scotland Office and the Minister for Industry and Energy. That is why this debate is crucial; it goes way beyond the triviality of the motion tabled by the SNP and straight to the heart of the devolution settlement.

Mrs. Liddell: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way again, and I shall certainly not seek to interrupt her further. The best way that I can answer her point is to quote my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Scotland Office in a recent BBC interview, which has been the subject of discussion this evening. He said:

> "Well this is why we have to look at it to make sure that it is absolutely clear now in the context, not of a specific application but in the general context of public policy, important to determine what the position is."—

His syntax was not terribly good.

> "Because if it came up in the context of a specific application then clearly other factors would be brought in to bear and wouldn't necessarily be considered in an objective way. I think it is very important to establish the position absolutely clearly at an early stage so that we know who had the ultimate responsibility, and that obviously has to take account of the responsibility of Westminster for reserved areas."

It is specifically that that my hon. Friend seeks to clear up.

Mrs. Lait: That is as clear as mud. The right hon. Lady is wriggling on the reality that Westminster retains control over the final decision on new nuclear power stations in Scotland. It is useful to have that clarification. It will be fascinating to see how the Government's consultation develops and what the reaction will be not just in the Scottish Executive but throughout the Scottish Parliament.

Scottish Executive Ministers could be overridden unless they set up a planning procedure similar to the one that the Government are suggesting for England and Wales, in which case there may be even more confrontation. The Government have yet again dodged some of the issues raised during the passage of the Scotland Bill in this House when we pointed out its inherent difficulties.

It will be interesting if the right hon. Lady does as it is rumoured she will and seeks to amend the Scotland Act with regard to the number of MSPs. That will require primary legislation, which might be a good opportunity to consider the responsibilities of the UK Government with regard to overriding the Scottish Executive on planning issues such as those relating to nuclear power stations.

I too want briefly to refer to Wales. Like the Secretary of State, I do not for a moment profess to any specific expertise in this area, but I want to draw her attention to the way in which, as far as we can make out, the Government overrode and took no account of the views of the National Assembly for Wales on wind farms. I simply ask whether that would be the approach to any nuclear power consents in Wales? Would the Minister for Industry and Energy override and ignore the National Assembly for Wales?

Mr. Simon Thomas: I believe that the wind farm to which the hon. Lady referred is Cefn Croes in my constituency, which was approved by the Department of Trade and Industry without reference to a public inquiry. I should say on the record that I supported that wind farm, but I felt strongly that there should be a public inquiry. The hon. Lady is right that that is a poor precedent for what might happen in terms of nuclear power development. I understand that the Conservative party supports nuclear power, but does the hon. Lady agree that it is vital that the people of Wales should decide what and where any such new energy development should be in Wales?

Mrs. Lait: That is a point with which I could only agree. It is crucial that the voice of local people and the

National Assembly for Wales is heard. I do not wish to become directly involved in a constituency issue of the hon. Gentleman's, but as I understand it no account whatever was taken of the views of local people on Cefn Croes and, if that is so, apart from anything else, that overrides the basic planning approvals, and probably all hon. Members would agree that that is not the best way to proceed.

Conservatives, as many have already said, want to see balanced energy provision. Scotland produces 50 per cent. of its energy from nuclear power and exports 25 per cent. of its total production to other parts of the UK, so bringing income into Scotland. But Dounreay and Hunterston A are being decommissioned, Chapelcross is due for decommissioning in 2008, Hunterston B in 2011, and Torness not until 2023. As I understand it, there is no way that the Government's ambitious hopes for renewable energy could meet the gap if all those power stations were decommissioned.

Therefore, there is a need to ensure continuity of supply, particularly—the point made by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell)—given our increasing reliance on imported gas, the price of which is increasing on the continent, which will inevitably mean a price increase in the UK sooner rather than later .

We welcome the initiatives and commitments by Scottish Power and British Energy to renewables, but we also welcome British Energy's recent agreements to look at the potential for new nuclear power plants. It would seem sensible—this is the point that my MSP colleagues made to the PIU review—for nuclear power plants in Scotland to be sited at Hunterston and Torness where there is already an understanding of the benefits of nuclear power and where the infrastructure is in place. That may save the Secretary of State's bacon because there may be more understanding of nuclear power issues in areas where nuclear power stations already exist.

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): The hon. Lady mentioned Hunterston and Torness, but what about Chapelcross?

Mrs. Lait: Chapelcross will be decommissioned in 2008. If British Energy and Scottish Power want to make a planning application for Chapelcross, that is their commercial decision. That is the basis on which I would want matters to proceed; I would not want Government interference.

Mr. Salmond: What is the position of the hon. Lady's party on the development of further combined cycle gas stations in Scotland? Only 15 per cent. of our capacity derives from combined cycle gas, but—according to the Government's own energy review figures—it costs a quarter as much as nuclear power. Does the hon. Lady think that its use should be extended?

Mrs. Lait: I hope that the hon. Gentleman heard me say that we believe in a balanced energy policy. If the private sector believes that that is the way forward and commercial reasons exist for pursuing it, the private sector should put forward proposals on ensuring the provision of sufficient energy at a reasonable price.

Mr. Salmond: Is the hon. Lady saying that she is content to let the market decide? Will the market control people's choice of gas or nuclear power, or does she envisage an ongoing Government subsidy for nuclear power?

Mrs. Lait: The problem is that the hon. Gentleman's argument is based on a very left-wing political stance that does not understand the market and the need to meet its requirements. *[Interruption.]* I do not want to get involved in a dialogue on this issue, but one must take account of the fact that science moves on. Some interesting developments are taking place in the provision of nuclear power and/or other forms of energy, which will transform the economics of power provision in the coming years.

We need to break free from parallel lines of thinking—whereby only one form of nuclear power provision exists—and develop new forms. We must look to those who are dedicated to providing decent energy for the UK at the lowest possible cost to offer suggestions on how to develop power provision. That is what we Conservatives support. Labour Members' support for privatisation and references to the market provision of energy is a major change in Labour's energy policy that we can only welcome. I want Scotland to continue to develop and produce energy, but I am concerned that the SNP's policy would limit Scotland's opportunities rather than enhance them.

8.48 pm

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): I welcome the opportunity to participate in this vital debate on energy. A constructive debate is necessary, and it is a shame that our discussion has so far been based not on future energy requirements but on the SNP's anti-nuclear stance. The performance and innovation unit's report makes it clear that many questions need to be answered, and it is absolutely essential that the consultation process be based on that report. The consultation process should not be restricted by the dogma of a particular party, but should range as widely as possible. We must consider how best to deliver a balanced energy policy, whether in Scotland or in England.

It is true that, at the moment, Britain is self-sufficient in energy, but that is coming to an end. The fact is that, according to current predictions, we will be a net importer of natural gas within three or four years.

If our present policy remains unchanged, as my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) said, gas will supply 70 per cent. of our electricity needs by 2025, and 90 per cent. of that will come from Russia, north Africa or the middle east. That is why we must seriously consider how we move forward, and recognise the social implications as well as addressing the economic and environmental issues.

Public consultation on the report must be wide-ranging. It will lead to the publication of a White Paper some time in the autumn, and I hope that the debate on it is comprehensive. Unfortunately, tonight's debate is based on the froth that we have come to expect from the Scottish National party.

The SNP says that there is an adverse reaction to nuclear energy in this country. Much has been said about Holyrood having the final say, but we could have avoided this debate if SNP Members had spoken to one another.

[Mr. Bill Tynan]

The hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir) put a parliamentary question on nuclear reactors, and the reply from the Minister of State, Scotland Office said:

> "Consent is required for new power station developments under the Electricity Act 1989. In Scotland, the power to grant consents is a devolved matter and the procedures are the responsibility of Scottish Ministers."

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): Can the hon. Gentleman explain how that ties in with what the Secretary of State has just told us about the ultimate responsibility for decisions? She seemed to say that the ultimate responsibility lies in this place, which is at variance with what the hon. Gentleman has just read out.

Mr. Tynan: There is a danger that, if we try to perpetuate a lie, people may come to accept that as a truth. The position is quite clear. The reply to the hon. Gentleman from the Minister of State stated clearly that

> "the power to grant consents is a devolved matter and the procedures are the responsibility of Scottish Ministers."—[*Official Report*, 6 November 2002; Vol. 374, c. 173W.]

SNP Members should have spoken to one another.

Mr. Alan Reid: If an application to build a nuclear power station in Scotland was turned down by the Scottish Executive, but the Government promoted legislation in this House to overturn that decision and grant planning permission, would the hon. Gentleman support that legislation?

Mr. Tynan: My position is quite clear: I do not expect that situation to arise, and I cannot answer a hypothetical question. The answer is the one that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave. The hon. Gentleman should accept it, as it suits his argument.

The SNP would rather be involved in splits and create division between the Scottish Parliament and Westminster than accept the fact that those two bodies work well with each other in the interests of the people of Scotland.

Mr. Peter Duncan: The hon. Gentleman rightly points out that the SNP is trying to create splits and division. I accept that, but as a Scottish Conservative who has a genuine interest in creating unity in the United Kingdom, I do not understand it. Before we began the debate, the confusion seemed to be whether this issue was the responsibility of Holyrood or Westminster. It now seems that either it is the responsibility of Holyrood or we do not know whose responsibility it is. That is my understanding, but perhaps the hon. Gentleman knows better.

Mr. Tynan: I do not want to go down that road, because I have already made it clear that I do not intend to speculate on what might happen in the future. However, as the Minister of State said to the hon. Member for Angus, it is clear that the Scottish Executive are able to grant planning permission for a power station.

I want to examine the SNP's energy policy, which is a shambles. The sooner we acknowledge the need for a balanced, integrated energy policy including coal generation, wind and wave generation and nuclear power, the sooner we can consider how best to develop that policy.

I think every Member is in favour of renewable energy. That is why the Government have invested in research and development relating to sources of such energy. Not only are they exempting them from the climate change levy; under the renewables obligation, they are pumping some £260 million into alternative energy sources.

Mr. Simon Thomas: I am interested in what the hon. Gentleman has said about the money that the Government are spending on renewables. Will he tell us how much was spent on renewables in 1999-2000, and how much was spent on nuclear energy research?

Mr. Tynan: As a Minister might say, I do not know the answer but I will write to the hon. Gentleman.

Even British Energy, a private company, is currently prepared to invest £600 million in wind farms off the Isle of Lewis that have the potential to produce 600 MW. But our position would be untenable if we ruled out nuclear power per se; if we did so, we would end up without a policy to meet the requirements of our people.

Angus Robertson (Moray): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He has been generous with his time.

The hon. Gentleman said that it would be dangerous to rule out the decommissioning of nuclear plants. Like me, he is interested in the pursuit of policies in other European countries. It may not be well known that, in Germany, our allies in Europe are in government along with the hon. Gentleman's allies in Europe. Both parties, the Social Democrats and the Greens, have passed policy in favour of decommissioning all Germany's nuclear power stations. If that is right for Germany, why is it so wrong for us in Scotland?

Mr. Tynan: Whatever Opposition Members may think about the demise of nuclear power, 31 reactors are being constructed in 11 countries. Finland is on the verge of ordering a new nuclear power station. Moreover, 35 per cent. of the European Union's electricity comes from nuclear power stations, which makes nuclear power the largest single source of electricity in Europe. We must look again at nuclear power stations, and decide whether we are prepared to become dependent on other nations for our electricity.

I believe that the policy presented to us today would pose enormous problems. The Scottish National party needs to get its energy policy together, and I hope it will do so sooner rather than later.

8.58 pm

John Thurso (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): When I first read the motion, I considered it rather light—a bit of a Woolton pie, lacking in meat. As the debate has progressed, however, it has become clear that far from being a Woolton pie, it is something of a Beef Wellington. SNP members certainly seem to have found something pretty interesting below the crust.

Initially I concluded that the motion posed a pretty simple question, and that there ought to be a pretty simple answer. The pretty simple question was "Who is responsible for saying yes or no to planning for a nuclear plant, or any other power generation plant, in Scotland?". Was it Holyrood, or was it Westminster? The simple answer, I thought—having consulted the Scotland Act

1998, and having heard what the Minister for Industry and Energy had to say—was that planning permission was a matter for Holyrood, and that that was where the decision would be made. Matters relating to generation and so forth would be dealt with at Westminster.

I have listened to this evening's debate, and believe that it amounts to the longest "don't know" in history. It is perfectly clear to me now that I do not have a clue whether it was a simple question with a simple answer.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) has quoted already the comments of the Minister for Industry and Energy. However, he left out a sentence. The Minister said, "The position is unambiguous", but he also said:

> "All of the relevant powers are devolved to Holyrood."

Certainly, that was my understanding, and I think that that probably is the position, but I suspect that the Government do not really know. I hope, therefore, that the consultation will sort out where we are going.

Of course, Westminster Governments are always able to revisit the Scotland Act 1998, and the devolution settlement. Clearly, the concept of devolution is based on this Parliament remaining sovereign, with certain powers devolved to the Scottish Parliament. It is possible for any Government to propose to go back on the powers that have been so devolved. However, all supporters of devolution and of the settlement finally enacted by this House would find it unacceptable if a Government were to go back on the current settlement.

On countless happy evenings in another place, my noble Friends and I sat opposite Lord Sewel, trying to get the Government to accept a variety of amendments that would have widened the powers of the Scottish Parliament on a range of issues. In each case, the Minister knocked us back. We were told that we had to be careful and to ensure that what was put in place was right. We were told that the mechanism had to be workable, without ambiguity.

For many who took part in the debates in the other place—and I am sure that the same applies to those who took part in the debates in this House—the devolution settlement that we got was the minimum. It was really quite conservative, with a small "c". We were happy to get it, but we believed that, if anything, it was a settlement that could be taken further in the future. We did not think that the Government could go back on it, but there is a worrying undertone that the Government are considering bringing powers back to Westminster. I sincerely hope that the Government will not go down that road, and that the devolution settlement will be honoured.

Mr. Foulkes: The history of the past two and bit years has not been as the hon. Gentleman has described. The Government have introduced one executive order after another under section 63 of the Scotland Act, giving more devolution and power to the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament. Most recently, that has happened in relation to the ferries running between Rosyth and Zeebrugge, and between Campbeltown and Ballycastle. The picture is entirely different from the one that the hon. Gentleman has painted.

John Thurso: I welcome all that the Government have done in that regard. I did not accuse them of going back on the devolution settlement. I said that the worrying undertone to the debate causes me concern. My hope is that the process that the Minister described will continue, and that devolution will advance rather than retreat.

There are only so many ways in which a question can be asked and still secure a "don't know" for an answer, so I shall move on from a matter that I think has been done to death. I turn now to Wales, which my party believes would be better served with a devolution settlement that more closely resembles the settlement for Scotland. Such a settlement would give Wales a Parliament with the ability to enact primary legislation. People who believe in devolution, as I do, do not understand why it should not be right for the Welsh to have the same devolution settlement as the Scots. One day, the English may be able to have it too. We live in hope.

I hope that the Government will listen to the voice of the people of Wales—although, in that respect, the power clearly lies here in Westminster. I hope that the Government will accept the spirit of what is meant by the phrase "listening to the Assembly".

It seems to me that the real substance of what I had hoped would be debated this evening under the motion—I did not anticipate what was debated earlier, so I should learn to read Scottish National party motions more carefully—was energy policy generally for Scotland. To be perfectly honest, I thought that I would not find it too difficult to support the motion in the name of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) and his hon. Friends. However, I have read part of it reasonably carefully, and its defect is that it does not refer to the sustainability of energy. It refers to a strategy for developing indigenous sources of energy, and it refers to coal, gas and renewables. The key point missing, the inclusion of which would have made the motion perfect, was that the strategy should be one of sustainable energy.

Ultimately, sustainability is the key in terms of producing energy and—lying behind this whole debate—our commitment to Kyoto. We must reduce emissions—CO_2 emissions are one of the biggest dangers that we face.

Mr. Salmond: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that one of the misconceptions of the debate is that to conform with Kyoto one would have to go down the nuclear route? Clearly, renewables conform with Kyoto, as does combined cycle gas if it moves to 60 per cent. efficiency as has been achieved at Peterhead. Clean technology coal also has a much more beneficial environmental impact. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is a fallacy to say that the only way to conform to Kyoto is to be forced down the nuclear route?

John Thurso: May I say to the hon. Gentleman what has been said before? I urge him to have a little patience, as I hope to deal with that point later.

A consideration of carbon dioxide emissions is crucial, so we must examine some of the facts. I am lucky that I have in my constituency a scientist, Dr. Eric Voice, who was formerly at Dounreay but who now works independently as a consultant on emissions. I asked him to consider a number of factors with regard to carbon emissions in Scotland. The information that he gave me is extremely interesting, and may be helpful in this debate.

The last year for which reliable figures are available was 1998, when Scotland produced 72,300,000 tonnes of carbon emissions. Of that, 17 million tonnes—or, roughly,

[John Thurso]

24 per cent.—were produced by electricity generation. We must recognise that only a quarter of emissions in Scotland are from that source. Of that generation, 19.7 terawatt hours are currently from nuclear power. If that were replaced by clean coal—medium sulphur bituminous coal—it would require 6,100,000 tonnes of coal, which would produce 20 million tonnes of CO_2. That would double the CO_2 emissions currently produced by our electricity industry. If gas were to be used, the figure would be about 12 million tonnes of CO_2.

David Hamilton (Midlothian): Does that mean that the hon. Gentleman and the Liberal party oppose the expansion of the coal industry?

John Thurso: No, I do not think that that follows. I am merely trying to set out the scale of the problem. I shall then consider what we should do to deal with it.

Given the scale of the carbon emissions problem, those of us who are in favour of renewables—the use of which has support on both sides of the House, and of which the Liberal Democrats have always been strong supporters—should pose exactly the same question. What are the problems in achieving, for example, those 19 terawatt hours? If we were to use a 3 MW turbine, which is probably slightly better than the best currently available, and to assume a load factor of installed capacity of about 25 per cent., which is better than any turbine is currently producing, that turbine would produce about 6,570 MW per annum. That broadly means that we would require 2,891 turbines to produce the same generating capacity that is currently produced by nuclear energy. It is all perfectly possible, but the disadvantage is that one would require 2,000 sq km for those turbines. Clearly, that would present equal problems of which those of us who support renewables must be aware. It is more honest to say that we support renewables knowing what we seek to achieve.

The figures quoted mean that if we are to have a genuinely balanced approach and a genuine reduction in carbon dioxide, it is vital to work on our hydro schemes; they are a great asset in Scotland, and we must have new ones. We have to invest in renewables and the level of investment in them must be similar to that which we put into other technologies. We must also look at the way in which we use our energy, which means thinking a little bit out of the box. Scotland, particularly my constituency, has an ability to generate an immense amount of renewable energy but there is a difficulty in transporting it to the jobs and factories in the deep south. Perhaps we should be thinking about moving the jobs and factories up to where the energy is. Perhaps that will be part of the new reality of the future.

Our policy on nuclear energy is perfectly straightforward—to decommission nuclear stations when they come to the end of their useful lives. The current nuclear capacity buys time to make the investment required in renewables so that that they can become a proper and sustainable part of our energy future.

Mr. Peter Duncan: What is the hon. Gentleman's response to the statistic that the entire wind capacity in Scotland comes to only 20 per cent. and that that capacity would be lost if Cockenzie power station closed and was not replaced?

John Thurso: I am not sure that I completely understand the hon. Gentleman's question. I have been careful to talk about renewable energy, which is not just about wind—it is onshore and offshore. The Pentland firth has a tidal race that is consistent, not constant. We have wave power and biomass—indeed, a whole range of renewables. We must work out which renewable works at which time in the best way so that we can put the information together.

When the energy review is accepted, or rejected, by the Government—from what I have seen, I hope that they will accept much of it—I hope that we will have an energy policy that is designed to make the necessary investment and create a future energy market using our renewables. Despite all the "don't knows", I hope that the Scottish Parliament will take decisions on planning matters in Scotland.

9.14 pm

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): I notice from the clock that between my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) and myself, we will probably have had some 26 minutes of Back-Bench speeches in a three-hour debate. I appreciate that you endeavour, as best you can, to control the situation, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but it is somewhat disappointing that we may have only two Back-Bench speakers this evening.

I have been trying to determine whether the debate is about devolution issues such as the planning processes undertaken by local authorities, or whether it is no more than another opportunity for Scottish National party Members to state their views and their case against the nuclear industry and nuclear power generation.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland suggested earlier, section D4 of part II of schedule 5 of the Scotland Act 1998 makes it clear that nuclear energy is a reserved matter. Schedule 4 of the Act spells out that the Scottish Parliament is charged with the duty to legislate on planning and reserved matters. Why should that be? It is simply in order to ensure that there is consistency as regards devolved and reserved matters.

Whatever the nature of today's debate, I want to consider the issue that causes the SNP the most difficulty: nuclear power. The performance and innovation unit's energy review document issued in the middle of last month ruled nothing out. The longer-term role of nuclear power in energy policy was examined in the review, and the report merely recommended that the options for new nuclear investment need to be kept open.

What was the reaction to that? Regrettably, there was nothing but the usual SNP paranoia. The party saw that recommendation as a signal for new nuclear build. However, let us be clear: if new nuclear plants are to be constructed, the market will bring forward the proposals.

Mr. Salmond: When the hon. Gentleman says that the market will bring forward proposals, does that mean that the huge nuclear subsidy currently in the legislation will be ended? Is he talking about the market or about the rigged market?

Mr. Brown: I am talking about the market, and it is not rigged, as the hon. Gentleman has claimed on many occasions.

The Government fully believe that the existing nuclear stations should continue and naturally they must operate at the current high safety and environmental standards that we expect.

Over the next 15 years or so, nuclear plants will continue to make significant contributions. During the next 20 years, we shall see the scheduled closure of the three Scottish stations—the two advanced gas-cooled reactors at Hunterston and Torness, and the British Nuclear Fuels Magnox facility at Chapelcross, in my constituency, which produces 196 MW of power. That amount may seem small and insignificant but it has some importance in our local area, although I shall not elaborate on that point.

It is important to remember the contribution made by nuclear power in the daily life of each one of us: 25 per cent. of the power generated in the UK is nuclear based and twice that amount—50 per cent. of electricity in Scotland—comes from a nuclear source. When those three stations close, a significant gap will have to be filled. Who can tell what replacement source will be found? I have to point out to Scottish and Welsh nationalist Members that it will not come just from renewables.

John Robertson: My hon. Friend may share my concerns about nuclear power. However, I am also concerned that if we do not consider all forms of energy we may be left with no energy at all in future.

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend makes an important and interesting point. Secure energy sources will be vitally important.

I may not have searched hard enough, but I have yet to find anyone who is opposed to renewable sources of energy. None the less, despite the enthusiasm on all sides and the efforts that will be made in the years to come, I firmly believe that in no way can renewables replace our current levels of nuclear power generation.

Mr. Connarty: Some of us in Praseg—the all-party group on renewable and sustainable energy—are concerned that in Denmark, for example, a major wind farm proposal has just been withdrawn, and it is now admitted that there are problems with intermittent supply from sources such as wind power. The wind power strategy in Denmark is backed up with a punitive energy tax, which no one ever mentions when they talk about renewables. Renewables are attractive if energy is so expensive that people have to turn to other sources, as they do in Denmark.

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend has a great deal of experience in such matters. As we all know, there is a price to pay for renewables.

UK-wide we have 15 operational nuclear stations and the effect of those stations is to reduce carbon emissions by 11 to 22 per cent., or 12 to 24 million tonnes of carbon. The figures vary widely, depending on whether we would replace that form of generation by gas or coal.

We should consider what is being said elsewhere about energy supply and energy policy. The House of Lords Select Committee on the European Union, in its report on the security of energy supply, recommended that the EU should aim at least to retain its present proportion of nuclear power and, importantly, that it should examine what is necessary to achieve that. The Select Committee also stated that it should be recognised that nuclear power is a key component of energy security and environmental performance, and provides more than one third of Europe's electricity. It will reduce the EU's CO_2 emissions by more than 300 million tonnes in 2010.

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East): Does my hon. Friend accept that the growing involvement of the EU, as evidenced by the Green Paper published a year ago, means that the issue of consent on a national and regional basis may be circumvented by the need for the European Union to take powers to ensure the security of energy supply in future for the whole of Europe, on an individual nation basis?

Mr. Brown: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. He is right. There is much happening out there. We cannot remain in isolation. I hope that we in the House will look at the matter UK wide. Our perspective needs to be much wider than that of the nationalists.

Annabelle Ewing: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: Of course.

Annabelle Ewing: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way so graciously. Does he not agree, then, with his hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy, who said:

> "The position is unambiguous. If anyone wants to build a power station of any kind in Scotland it will be a matter for the Scottish Executive to determine. End of story"?

[Interruption.]

Mr. Brown: The murmurings from the Front Bench are a noise to reckon with.

The House of Lords Select Committee recommended that the Government should maintain the UK's ability to produce not less than 20 per cent. of electricity from nuclear.

In its report on energy policy, the Select Committee on Trade and Industry made it clear that nuclear has a significant role in maintaining the security and diversity of electricity supply. It recognised that nuclear makes a key contribution to environmental objectives such as the reduction of greenhouse gases, and it urged the Government to make a clear statement on the future of nuclear energy as quickly as possible. It is that security of supply which means so much to the public.

At a local level, the nuclear power station in my constituency, Chapelcross, was the location of an incident in July last year, as some hon. Members know. The hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir) saw fit to table an early-day motion on 18 July last year, part of which stated

> "That this House . . . is extremely concerned that 12 fuel rods apparently remain unaccounted for and that there appear to have been attempts to cover up the incident."

Frankly, that is politics at the lowest level. Had the hon. Gentleman checked with the site, he would have been told that all 24 rods were accounted for the previous day. At no stage did that company attempt to cover up the incident.

[Mr. Brown]

I do not suppose that the hon. Gentleman will apologise to the House but, more importantly, he should apologise to the work force at the site.

A number of the hon. Gentleman's colleagues visited the site. Before their arrival, there was great talk in the Scottish press of the need to shut down the plant which, during the visit, developed into a need to close it at the end of its lifetime. They walked away from that site visit stating that position clearly

Mr. Weir: The hon. Gentleman knows that it has always been the policy of the Scottish National party to close the plant at the end of its technological or economic life. I am not responsible for what is said in the press, locally or nationally, but at no time have we called for the immediate closure of Chapelcross.

Mr. Brown: Although I do not believe everything I read in the press, I have some confidence in the trade unions at the site which picked up that message from the SNP.

At the time of the incident, British Nuclear Fuels began to shut down other reactors on the site so that it could concentrate its efforts on examining the problem in detail. However, that action caused Scottish Power considerable anxiety because it threatened its security of supply, and there was serious concern that there would be blackouts and power cuts.

At the end of last year, the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets issued a consultation document on access to the Scotland-England interconnector. That is so vital to the economic viability of the Chapelcross site that a local petition was organised within the community which collected more than 5,000 signatures in a weekend. In addition, a number of individuals made representations on the matter, including politicians at a local and national level. If the SNP supports stations operating until the end of their lifetime, why was no support offered by the two list SNP Members of the Scottish Parliament from the south of Scotland, Christine Graham and Mike Russell? Mr. Mike Russell had previously visited the site, but those MSPs showed no support for it or its work force.

The Ofgem consultation closed on 21 January and it was due to issue its findings 10 days later. I want the House and the SNP in particular to be aware that Ofgem did nothing more than issue a holding statement last Friday, some four weeks late. Lying behind that delay is the fact that Ofgem has listened to the anxiety expressed by the work force, the company and local people, who are worried that the inability to use the interconnector will cause the site to close and the loss of 450 jobs.

In last week's statement, Ofgem said:

> "Ofgem has taken on board the concerns raised. It is prudent, in the light of these concerns, for Scottish Power Transmission Ltd. to review its criteria to address system security issues"—

in other words, security of supply. A station that generates 196 MW may seem insignificant to many people, but it is fairly significant for the locality and greatly significant for Ofgem, the organisation that ensures that people receive a supply of electricity. Although the non-nuclear bandwagon sounds promising to those who want to climb aboard, once the lights are out it is not so easy to turn them on again.

9.29 pm

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): The one thing that has become clear in this debate is why the Minister for Industry and Energy chose not to be present to hear it—he was here earlier, but has decided to make himself scarce. When we strip away all the obfuscation and unpeel the Secretary of State's excuses and dancing on pin heads, it is clear that he was incorrect and that he did not know who was responsible for planning permission for nuclear power stations in Scotland. Frankly, that is a deeply frightening thought.

It seems clear, as eventually emerged from the Secretary of State, that she believes that Westminster, not Scotland, will ultimately make the decision. That flies in the face of what the Minister for Industry and Energy said not only last week, but in his letter to my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) and the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd). He made clear time and time again his belief that the ultimate decision lay in Scotland. It appears, however, that the Scotland Office is now overriding the Department of Trade and Industry on these matters. Again, that is deeply worrying.

The debate was opened by my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan, who set out, in a typically powerful speech, its context, which relates not only to nuclear aspects and energy resources but to the whole constitutional position. With regard to that context, the Minister of State said:

> "It would look a wee bit daft if, in reserved areas, decisions were being made north of the border which had a very significant impact south of the border."

Will he tell us whether that means that, if the Scottish Parliament makes a decision that has an impact in England—I can think of several such decisions that might be on the way—Westminster will try to take back the powers from it? That is the subtext of what is happening, leaving aside the whole energy matter.

Mrs. Liddell: Will the hon. Gentleman tell the House whether he agrees with his parliamentary leader on the use of civil disobedience?

Mr. Weir: The Secretary of State seems to be hung up on that issue. The question of what will happen if Westminster decides to overrule the democratically elected Scottish Parliament will be decided when that happens. I agree with what my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan said on the matter. He clearly answered the right hon. Lady's question and I have nothing to add. I say to her that there is a long history. I will make an admission in that regard: way back in the 1970s, I visited Torness, which did not have a nuclear power station at the time, but was being occupied as a protest against the building of such a power station. It is sad that, 20 years later, we are having to advance the same arguments yet again.

It was interesting that the Minister of State seemed quite happy to be described as the Baldrick of Scottish politics. I seem to recall that Baldrick's only friend was a turnip, so perhaps the description is fairly appropriate.

John Robertson: Does not the hon. Gentleman think that there may be a slight conflict in what he is saying? On the one hand he is talking about democracy, while on the other, he is talking about civil disobedience. Will he tell me how those ideas marry up, and perhaps give us some of the nationalist policies that seem to be missing from every contribution we have heard from those Benches?

Mr. Weir: Democracy also extends to the Scottish Parliament. We have a devolution settlement that has been overridden unilaterally from Westminster. That is the implication of what has been said, and that is why the Scottish people are prepared to protest. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman, who I believe has a long history in the trade union movement, is opposed to such use of civil disobedience, which has played a large part in the history of the labour movement and, indeed, in parliamentary democracy. I would therefore ask him to think again. *[Interruption.]* Unlike Labour Members, I am capable of writing my own speeches and I do not pass them around.

We must examine our position in view of, for example, our undertakings under the Kyoto protocols. The performance and innovation unit report lumps nuclear power together with renewables as low carbon producers. It treats nuclear power in the same way as renewable resources. The hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso) made a good point about sustainability, which we ultimately seek in energy supply. However, since the advent of the Kyoto protocols, the nuclear industry has absurdly pushed itself as environmentally friendly. It conveniently forgets that, although we might reduce carbon emissions, we would store up a huge problem of nuclear waste which would take generations to tackle. Perhaps we could never deal with it.

The hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) mentioned the market. We are considering a nuclear industry that will create a problem that will last not for years but for generations. We have witnessed all too clearly what can happen even to large energy companies.

The Government appear to have swallowed the nuclear argument hook, line and sinker. The latest spat between Ministers is simply another straw in the wind. The creation of the assets management agency was announced recently. It is an expensive excuse to make nuclear generators more acceptable to investors by removing their historical liabilities. However, they will continue to accrue if new stations are built.

The Scottish Parliament's planning powers present a substantial road block in the way of the nuclear industry in Scotland. I believe that the Government's attempt to remove it has led us to our current position. The SNP's policy is clear. We have consistently called for investment in renewables. I have done that in this Chamber and in Westminster Hall. Different forms of energy are available in Scotland.

David Hamilton: An energy policy should be a British policy. Does the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that the Department of Trade and Industry has invested between £40 million and £50 million of subsidy in Scottish Coal? Could the Scottish Parliament have done that? It would not have had the money; a British Government had to do it. Energy policy should be left not to Scotland but to Britain. We should discuss a British energy policy. I shall not mention nuclear power or civil disobedience, but I strongly believe that we should consider an energy policy that covers Britain and is devised by a British Government.

Mr. Weir: On money, it was announced last week that the Scottish Executive underspent by more than £200 million. That is interesting, because they also underspent last year.

We must invest in a basket of different sorts of energy. Nuclear power has no place in it. We have discussed the cost of nuclear power, but the Government's advisory group for the PIU's energy review mentioned the cost of different forms of energy. It stated that, without Government subsidy, the cost of nuclear power was approximately 6.5p per kW. The cost of current new-build designs was down to 3.9p per kW, but onshore wind costs less than 2p a kW and offshore wind, between 2p and 3p a kW.

Nuclear energy is much more expensive in the first instance than other forms of energy, especially renewable energy sources. That has been mentioned in the Select Committee on Trade and Industry report on the security of energy supply, but when the Committee took evidence from representatives of the nuclear industry, they clearly stated that financial assistance was required to bridge the gap—that is, to make nuclear power more acceptable economically. They talked about a subsidy of about 1p per kW. So going down the nuclear energy route is much more expensive than the renewable and sustainable route.

The hon. Member for Beckenham is correct to say that the nuclear power stations are due to come off stream in the next few years. As I have said on numerous occasions in this Parliament, if we are to bridge the gap that will be created, investment must be made now in all the renewable sources. Although the Government always talk about renewable energy sources, they have not made that significant investment.

Let us compare the investment in the nuclear industry with that in renewable sources. For example, in 1999 alone, £26 million was investment in research and development in the nuclear industry. Some £3.7 billion will be needed to cover the liability of the Magnox stations, which have been mentioned already, and United Kingdom electricity consumers have already paid some £2.6 billion to fund nuclear energy through the non-fossil fuel levy. So there has been massive investment in the nuclear industry over the years, and it will continue to need a subsidy if we are to go down the nuclear route.

The hon. Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) clearly made a pro-nuclear intervention. He talked about an integrated coal, wind and wave system, but the point is that, to have an integrated system, investment is needed now, and we have been trying to make that point. There is nothing strange or hidden about the SNP policy on energy; it has been made clear, particularly by me, on many occasions.

Mr. Connarty: The hon. Gentleman has not mentioned the policy on the present state of Scottish Coal. The last deep mine is in trouble; it needs £5 million to get through a major fault, but it has not been mentioned by the SNP. Is the SNP abandoning Scottish Coal and the last deep mine in Scotland?

Mr. Weir: Coal is mentioned in the motion, but not in the Government amendment. I responded to the

[Mr. Weir]

hon. Member for Midlothian (David Hamilton) on the coal industry, and I have spoken about it previously, as well as the need for clean coal technology. The Government ultimately say that their policy is pro-nuclear. That is what we clearly hear from Labour Members, but I wonder whether that policy will be persuasive even to the current Scottish Executive.

I remind hon. Members that, when announcing new targets for renewable energy sources in a speech on 19 February, Jack McConnell, the Scottish First Minister, said:

> "Scotland has an enormous resource of renewable sources . . . we already expect to exceed our initial target of generating 18 per cent. of our electricity by 2010 from renewables.
>
> Today I want to signal our intention to increase that target . . . we will consult on it . . . but I hope we can work towards 30 per cent. of our electricity coming from renewable sources by 2020."

That figure is much higher than this Government have suggested, and it is a clear signal that even the current Scottish Executive—let alone the next—is more committed to renewable sources than the Government. I hope that, if they truly represent the views of the Scottish people, they will oppose any new nuclear stations that this Government try to foist on them.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Weir: I am sorry, but I am running out of time.

I remind hon. Members that the Scottish Executive commissioned a study by Hassan Consulting which pointed out that Scotland could supply its energy needs from renewables. It said:

> "The scale of this potential is illustrated by one stunning statistic: there is enough potential energy from onshore wind power alone to meet Scotland's peak winter demand for electricity twice over. In all, the total resource amounts to 75 per cent. of the total UK existing generating capacity."

Scotland can meet its energy needs from renewable resources. It does not need nuclear; it does not want nuclear; and it will oppose nuclear.

9.45 pm

The Minister of State, Scotland Office (Mr. George Foulkes): I congratulate the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir) on his enormous generosity in absolving anyone else of responsibility for his speech. I am sure that SNP researchers in particular will be deeply grateful that their reputation has been restored.

A number of hon. Members have made the point that one of the most astonishing things about today's debate is that, given the opportunity of a once-a-year, three-hour debate on the Floor of the House, the SNP chose to discuss an apparent difference between the Minister for Industry and Energy and me about a hypothetical decision that might be taken a number of years from now. Let us think of the topics that it might have chosen. It could have selected the whole energy review as it affects Scotland. We have drifted on to that subject, but it could have been the main focus of our discussion. It could have selected the implementation of the Proceeds of Crime Bill, which aims to crack down on drug dealers and money launderers—issues of real concern to my constituents and the rest of Scotland.

The SNP could have spoken about the Scottish economy, but we know now why it dodged that subject. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) has made dire predictions and accused my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State of talking up Scotland, and he has fervently hoped and prayed for a downturn in the Scottish economy, but his predictions have been proved entirely wrong. Output has risen sharply in the service sector, according to the Bank of Scotland report published yesterday, and manufacturing output is at last on the turn.

Mr. Salmond: At last.

Mr. Foulkes: Indeed. Given last week's seismic event in Perth, one would have thought that the SNP would jump at the opportunity to debate its now explicit commitment to independence and separation—but of course that represents the policy of the Swinney wing of the party, rather than the Salmond wing.

As we are on the subject of energy, let us examine the hon. Gentleman's credentials to talk on the subject. Where better to look than at his weekly column in the *News of the World*? The Register of Members' Interests shows that the hon. Gentleman receives between £10,000 and £15,000 per annum for the column, so it must be good, it must be accurate and it must be authoritative. He says:

> "The problem for London Labour"—

he always calls us London Labour, no matter that we come from Glasgow, Dundee and elsewhere—

> "is that they are looking to create a new generation of nuclear power stations"—

wait for it—

> "when existing ones like Dounreay reach the end of their life."

Dounreay? An existing nuclear station? As my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Mr. Brown) pointed out, the existing power stations are Torness in East Lothian, Hunterston in Ayrshire and Chapelcross in Dumfriesshire. Dounreay is a prototype fast breeder reactor, as the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso) knows only too well. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan referred to Dounreay reaching the end of its life. There is something else he should know: Dounreay is currently being decommissioned.

Mr. Salmond: I may be one of the few Members to have visited every fast reactor in the world, with the sole exception of one in Russia. I am sure that the Minister has not done that.

Let us get to the nub of the matter. The quote from the Minister for Industry and Energy is important and has been well advertised. He said:

> "The position is unambiguous. If anyone wants to build a power station of any kind in Scotland, it will be a matter for the Scottish Executive to determine. End of story."

Forget all the fluff and flannel: does the Minister support that? Is it correct, or is it not?

Mr. Foulkes: The hon. Gentleman's authoritative column in the *News of the World* includes a picture of Dounreay, next to which appears the caption, "Atomic dud". It is not Dounreay that is the atomic dud. I think we all know who that is.

If we had had a substantive debate on the energy review, we could have talked about the Prime Minister's vision in setting the PIU to consider energy policy for the next 50 years. That review was chaired by my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy. I was there to represent the interests of Scotland and closely consulted Ministers and officials in the Scottish Executive to ensure that Scotland's views were properly known. The review had the important remit of ensuring security and diversity of supply. Several Members have mentioned security of supply, particularly for gas imports. Diversity of supply means providing more than one, or one and a half, areas of supply.

Annabelle Ewing: Let me return to the central point of the debate. Does the Minister stick by what he said in answer to me at the Scottish Grand Committee on 13 February? He said then that responsibility for agreeing on new power stations was devolved to the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament, which accords with what the Minister for Industry and Energy said. Does he agree with that, or does he now adopt the new view expressed in his recent BBC interview?

Mr. Foulkes: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State dealt with that point extremely well.

If we had discussed the energy review, we would have been able to discuss what the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross rightly called our important commitment to hitting our Kyoto targets. The review recommends a major expansion of energy efficiency.

Mr. Salmond: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Foulkes: No, no, no. The hon. Gentleman had 32 minutes, and he spent half of them attacking me. I have only eight minutes in which to reply, so he can sit down.

The energy review recommended hugely increased, challenging targets for renewables, which will not be easily achieved. SNP Members deceive people if they lead them to believe that the renewables obligation can be easily kept.

Mr. Alan Reid: Will the Minister tell us who has the final say on whether a nuclear power station can be granted to Scotland? Is it a Scottish Minister, is it a United Kingdom Minister, or does the Minister not know?

Mr. Foulkes: I love multiple choice questions. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has explained the position. Since the hon. Gentleman represents the provisional wing of the Liberal Democrats and is an unreconstructed Luddite, perhaps he might come and talk to me afterwards.

Let us do the SNP the courtesy of examining its energy policy and taking it seriously, no matter how difficult that may be. Let us go back to the words of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan, not this time in the *Press and Journal*, the house journal of the SNP, in a weekly column for which he also receives between £5,000 and £10,000, but from his column in the *News of the World*.

> "Gas, clean coal technology and renewables—that would be a sensible, cheaper and Scottish energy policy",

says the tabloid tipster. Let us be honest, as, to give her credit, the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) has been on this point. Nuclear power stations will come to the end of their lives over the next few decades. Our coal power stations will also come to the end of their lives, as my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (David Hamilton) knows only too well. Of course, coal is still an important energy source. One third of the UK's electricity needs were met by coal last year. Apart from Longannet, however, Scotland now has no indigenous deep-mined coal, yet the Scottish National party opposes all open-cast applications. That would mean that we would have to rely even more on imported coal, and that there would be more CO_2 emissions, even with the clean coal technology that this Government support.

Mr. Connarty: Will my hon. Friend, unlike SNP Members, answer the question that Scottish Coal is asking at the moment? Will our Government look seriously at the problems involving the fault that Scottish Coal has found? It will require at least £5 million to tide it over until it gets back into production. Will we look at the matter seriously, unlike the SNP, which has refused to talk about it this evening?

Mr. Foulkes: Yes, we have already given Scottish Coal £41 million. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have had discussions with Scottish Coal's management and with the unions, and we are looking at the issue very seriously. This is an important matter.

As my right hon. Friend said, oil and gas reserves are being extended by the pilot initiative that she started, which is now under the stewardship of my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy.

Mr. Key: Where is he?

Mr. Foulkes: He is in Scotland, fulfilling a long-standing engagement.

Mr. Salmond *rose—*

Mr. Foulkes: The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan has had many opportunities to speak.

Oil and gas reserves are finite, even when we take into account all the work that we are doing with carbon sequestration. That leaves us with renewables, which the Government strongly support. The renewables obligation will mean that there will be a £1 billion market for renewables by 2010, which will represent a very significant part of our energy sources. There are problems of transmission, however. Power lines and under-sea cables are expensive, and they are not popular, as we know from the Northern Ireland interconnector.

Furthermore, all these developments need planning approval, and that is not a foregone conclusion. So, over the next few decades, we could be faced with having to decide between agreeing to an application for a new nuclear power station, and having increased electricity costs, more CO_2 emissions and seeing the lights go out all over Scotland at peak times. None of us would be very popular if that were to happen. That will not be an easy decision, and I am not sure that whoever has to make it will welcome the responsibility. Surely, however, it is right that we should attempt to clarify now exactly who will be making those decisions.

[Mr. Foulkes]

I confess to the House that I made one mistake. The mistake was to believe that, if I raised an important issue in public—open government at work, if you like—the SNP Opposition would be willing to have a sensible debate about it, instead of the Pavlovian reaction that we have seen today. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross has rightly pointed out that it was I who raised the issue. Every time an issue is raised, however—be it on energy policy, immigration policy or defence policy—the nationalists are never prepared to discuss its merits properly. Instead, they claim that everything would be better if it were decided in Scotland. That is the magic bullet that will solve every problem.

The nationalists are obsessed by the constitution, because their only political aim in life is to break up Britain—people, especially Conservative Members, should recognise that—to tear the United Kingdom apart, and to lead us into a constitutional confrontation. *[Interruption.]* I was just trying to wake the hon. Member for Beckenham up, Mr. Speaker. At the weekend, the nationalists had to admit that a separate Scotland would not automatically be a member of the European Union. It could reject policies such as the common fisheries policy, raising the spectre of a new cod war. This is only one of the many uncertainties we would face if Scotland were ever duped into a divorce from the rest of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Salmond *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 43, Noes 303.

Division No. 182] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Allan, Richard
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Burstow, Paul
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Cotter, Brian
Ewing, Annabelle
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Hancock, Mike
Heath, David
Holmes, Paul
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Moore, Michael
Öpik, Lembit
Price, Adam
Pugh, Dr John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tyler, Paul
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Simon Thomas and
Pete Wishart.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Beard, Nigel
Beggs, Roy
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burnside, David
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry
(B'ham Hodge H)
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Hermon, Lady
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald

Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kelly, Ruth
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda

Picking, Anne
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David

Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*

Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Heppell and
Jim Fitzpatrick.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 299, Noes 44.

Division No. 183] **[10.11 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burnside, David
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael

Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry
(B'ham Hodge H)
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen

Hermon, Lady
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca–Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kelly, Ruth
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Sawford, Phil
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Heppell and
Jim Fitzpatrick.

NOES

Allan, Richard
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Brake, Tom
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Burstow, Paul
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Cotter, Brian
Ewing, Annabelle
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Hancock, Mike
Heath, David
Holmes, Paul
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Moore, Michael
Öpik, Lembit
Pugh, Dr John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tyler, Paul
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Younger–Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Pete Wishart and
Mr. Simon Thomas.

Question accordingly agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House has confidence in the process of granting planning consent for new nuclear power stations in Scotland and Wales; notes the benefits of addressing issues relating to energy policy within a UK framework; welcomes the contribution of the recent PIU Energy Review to the debate on energy policy; and welcomes the intention of HM Government and the devolved administrations to work in partnership in implementing an energy policy to ensure energy supplies are secure, competitively priced and sustainable.

10.22 pm

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Have you had a request from the Secretary of State for Health to allow him to come to the House and apologise for letting 1,000 written questions go unanswered by his Department since the start of the Session? Written questions are one of the few ways in which hon. Members can hold the Government to account. How can we have confidence that Ministers who can preside over such a fiasco will deliver relevant and helpful answers on time?

Mr. Speaker: Often, on behalf of the House, I have complained to Ministers from the Chair that they should always come to the House when any difficulty arises to do with their Departments. The Secretary of State for Health, to whom the hon. Gentleman referred, has come to the House and answered a parliamentary question. Therefore, I have absolutely no complaint about him.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

That the draft Local Authorities (Conduct of Referendums) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2002, which were laid before this House on 7th February, be approved.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

Question agreed to.

Euro

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

10.23 pm

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): I am glad to be able to raise an issue of great importance to the Government's economic policy, and I am pleased that the Economic Secretary is in her place this evening. I am sure that she is eager to engage in the matters that we are to debate, which have to do with the five preliminary economic tests for joining the euro. Those tests are famous in this Parliament, but little debated.

That there have been so few opportunities to debate a matter so important to the country's economic and political future is unfortunate, not least because Conservative Members seem to have lost some of the enthusiasm for discussing the matter that they showed at the end of the previous Parliament. However, I am delighted that one representative of the Conservative party at least is with us this evening. The presence of the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) is most welcome.

It is a great surprise that the Government should be so reticent about discussing some of the issues to do with the five economic tests for joining the euro, given their importance for the Government and the future of the country's economy. In particular, I draw the House's attention to a series of written questions that have been tabled over the past few months. The Economic Secretary replied to many of them, but many of the answers—no doubt through the fault of the civil servants involved rather than the Minister—have not been as full as one might have hoped. I therefore hope that she will use this debate to clarify the Government's position on a number of issues and shed more light on an extremely important issue.

To make it easier for the Economic Secretary to respond to some of the major issues, I thought that I would put to her five simple questions about the five tests and the work that has been done to evaluate them. I hope that it will be possible for her to respond to those questions in her reply. I look forward to that.

First, when did the Government start the preliminary work that is now under way on the economic tests for the euro? It does not appear to have started at the end of the last Parliament. We were told earlier in this Parliament that the work had suddenly begun. It would be useful to know when it began and, in particular, when it is due to be completed. We know that the evaluation of the five economic tests will not be completed until June of next year, but at the moment—I am sure that the position will change later this evening—we are at a loss as to where we are on the evaluation of the preliminary work on the tests.

My second question relates to an issue about which it has been difficult to flush out information from the Treasury. Who precisely is involved in evaluating the five economic tests? That appears to be relatively straightforward, yet it has proved to be astonishingly difficult to get answers out of the Government about which Minister is responsible for the preliminary work, which units within the Treasury are involved in it and how many officials are engaged on it. I hope that the Economic Secretary can shed some light on those issues.

[Mr. David Laws]

My third question relates to the fact that it is obvious that any evaluation of the five tests must embrace the Bank of England because of its responsibility for monetary policy. We are aware from the Governor of the Bank of England that at least one bank official has been seconded to the Treasury to help with this work. Unfortunately, the Governor's correspondence with me on this point suggests that he is not sure of what the official is doing at the Treasury and what contribution he or she is making to the work. It would be most welcome to me and, no doubt, to the Governor, to know what the official is doing in relation to the five tests and the preliminary evaluation.

Fourthly, perhaps the Economic Secretary can also tell us what parts of the preliminary work have been evaluated to date. Which bits of the work are complete and which still need a significant amount of work?

My final question is about the work that the Government may or may not have done in judging what the sustainable long-term exchange rate for the pound is in relation to the euro. We have to resort largely to the newspapers to find out what the Government are doing on this important issue, and we understand from the *Financial Times* that they are using a variety of economic models from the private sector and some advisers and economists from the private sector to allow them to evaluate the tests and, in particular, make a judgment about the long-term sustainable exchange rate. That is vital in determining whether we have met the five tests. Perhaps the Economic Secretary will also reflect on that point in her speech.

What are the Government doing not just to test whether we have met the five economic tests, but to achieve them? As we know that the Government want to join the euro and therefore presumably want to meet the five tests, we presume that they are doing something to achieve them. We know that, over recent years, our interest rates have been above those in the eurozone and that there is a convergence issue. We also know that the Governor of the Bank of England and the Chancellor consider the current rate of sterling against the euro too high and would seek a devaluation of the pound against the euro before we contemplate joining it.

It would be immensely interesting to know what the Government intend to do and how they are co-ordinating their fiscal and monetary policies to achieve a lower exchange rate and lower interest rates. When the Governor of the Bank of England came before the Select Committee on the Treasury last week and was questioned on this point, he said that there had been no discussions with the Treasury's representative on the Committee, Gus O'Donnell, about this issue and that he was unable to factor any decision about the euro into the Bank of England's forecasts for inflation and the economy because he had no idea of the Government's intentions in this regard. He suggested that the Committee had as much idea as he did about what the Government were intending to do.

Surely that is of great concern if the Government are seriously trying to converge in relation to the euro and meet the five economic tests. We expected at least some discussion between the Chancellor and the Bank of England about how to achieve the five economic tests and the convergence. Surely there would be some discussion about the way in which monetary and fiscal policy can work together to allow the Government to achieve those tests. It seems astonishing that there appears to have been no discussion between the Governor of the Bank of England and the Treasury or even within the Monetary Policy Committee about this issue. I hope that the Economic Secretary can not only tell us what work has been done on the tests to date and answer my five questions but explain how the Government are seeking to ensure that we meet those tests.

The final major issue relating to the euro, which was aired, to some extent, by the Chancellor last week in relation to the new Treasury White Paper involved structural and political reform within Europe and the way in which that may contribute to us meeting—or not meeting—the five economic tests. It has been no secret for some time that the Government are concerned about some of the structural aspects in Europe, such as how the European Central Bank operates, the lack of political accountability of its inflation target, and its unaccountability to politicians. Indeed, we understand that Mr. Gus O'Donnell has aired those concerns with undergraduates at various universities, although not in this place, unfortunately.

We know that the Government consider their own inflation target and the way in which the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of England is established to be a far superior model to the European Central Bank. However, we have no idea about what the Government intend to do to reform the ECB or whether that is a condition of joining the euro. We would be grateful for the Economic Secretary's insight.

Of particular importance to the Government's agenda for structural reform in Europe is the growth and stability pact. It was specifically aired in the White Paper "Realising Europe's Potential", which was released by the Government last week. For a long time, the Government have expressed concerns about the operation of the growth and stability pact and the fact that it is not consistent with their fiscal policies, which allow them to borrow money to invest in capital items in this country—sensibly, in our view. It is well known that the pact does not offer the Government that flexibility in economic policy and that that might therefore be a problem—a sixth test, as the Chancellor put it the other day—in getting this country into the euro. For a long time, the Government have seemed to think that they could get away with what they described in the pre-Budget report last year as a prudent interpretation of the growth and stability pact. That is an odd use of "prudent" as it is clear that the Chancellor's view of the word is that it means less rather than more prudent.

Until now, the Treasury's position appeared to be that there was sufficient flexibility in "prudent" to allow the Government to sign up to the existing growth and stability pact while retaining the flexibility to borrow money for capital purposes. We know that this is a vital issue for the Government because in the last pre-Budget report they said that they were planning to

> "borrow modestly to fund increased investment in the country's capital stock."

The Government's fiscal policy relies upon borrowing to fund the investment that Liberal Democrat and Labour Members believe is important for the country's future, yet we know that that is not consistent with the growth and stability pact.

The paper issued by the Government last week was a movement away from their reliance on merely a prudent interpretation of the pact towards its reform. The Chancellor spelt out that change of policy last week at Treasury questions although he failed to recognise that it was a change. He said that the growth and stability pact needed improvement in three areas: the economic cycle, public investment and debt sustainability.

If the Government's position is now that the pact is in need of improvement and reform rather than merely a different interpretation, is their policy that there should be a sixth test before we contemplate joining the euro? Will the Government suggest to the country that we should sign up to the euro in the absence of reform of the pact? That extremely important point was highlighted by the Government's announcement last week, and I hope that the Economic Secretary can shed some light on it.

There are other considerations in Europe, such as drawing up a constitutional settlement for the European Union that would define and limit some of its powers. As Liberals, my party and I have no problem with that. We believe that Europe should be able to focus on issues such as trade, environment, foreign policy and even perhaps defence, but it should not meddle unnecessarily in matters such as tax, social and spending policies or borrowing.

Will the Economic Secretary tell us more about the Government's policy on the constitutional convention? Will there be input from the Treasury on matters such as tax policy and spending and social policies? Will there be a Treasury obligation to obtain agreement on flexibility in those matters before we consider signing up to the euro? Will any of them form part of additional tests that the Government might impose, or are they embedded in the famous five economic tests that few people outside the Treasury seem able to remember?

Bob Russell (Colchester): Name them.

Mr. Laws: I shall not rise to the bait offered by my hon. Friend. The tests are in my notes, but I do not want to detain the Minister.

I shall conclude my remarks soon so that the Economic Secretary has the longest possible time in which to respond and give us as much information as possible. I welcome the Government's suggestion last week that the growth and stability pact is in need of reform. The greatest hurdle against Britain's joining the euro is people's anxiety about some of the constitutional and political issues rather than the economic issues. That is almost directly opposed to the Government's view: they say that there are economic tests to be met, but no constitutional objections.

If we can deal with issues such as the growth and stability pact, the lack of accountability of the ECB and the dangers of unnecessary tax harmonisation rather than tax competition, we shall be more successful in persuading people that they need seriously to consider the prospect of joining the euro. I hope that the Economic Secretary will respond by saying more about the important preliminary technical preparations, by explaining how the Government are going to meet the five economic tests and by telling us how they will pursue their reform agenda in Europe to persuade the British people of the economic advantages of the euro.

10.38 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): I should like to take the opportunity provided by this important and useful debate to address some of the issues raised by the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) and, of course, to restate the Government's policy on United Kingdom membership of the single currency.

The hon. Gentleman has raised a considerable number of issues. I shall attempt to deal with as many as I can during the short time available. The question that he seemed to put most often related to the number of tests and I hope to make that clear during my response.

Europe is fundamental to the UK economy. About 3 million jobs are directly affected by our economic ties with Europe. More than 50 per cent. of our total trade is with the European Union. The EU is our largest trade and investment partner.

In his statement on economic and monetary union in October 1997, the Chancellor said:

> "The potential benefits for Britain of a successful single currency are obvious in terms of trade, transparency of costs and currency stability."

The Chancellor also said that

> "a successful single currency within a single European market would be of benefit to Europe and Britain".—[*Official Report*, 27 October 1997; Vol. 299, c. 583.]

That is why, in principle, the Government are in favour of UK membership of EMU; in practice, the economic conditions must be right. That is the Government's policy, as it was set out by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in October 1997, and repeated by him in the House last week.

The determining factor underpinning any Government decision on membership of the single currency is the national economic interest and whether the economic case for joining is clear and unambiguous. We have consistently said that if that is the case, there is no constitutional bar to joining.

As the Chancellor said in his October 1997 statement, the five economic tests will define whether a clear and unambiguous case can be made. In the same statement, the Chancellor set out the five tests. These are, first: are business cycles and economic structures compatible so that we and others could live comfortably with euro interest rates on a permanent basis? Secondly, if problems emerge, is there sufficient flexibility to deal with them? Thirdly, would joining EMU create better conditions for firms making long-term decisions to invest in Britain? Fourthly, what impact would entry into EMU have on the competitive position of the UK's financial services industry, particularly the City's wholesale markets? Fifthly, in summary, will joining EMU promote higher growth, stability and a lasting increase in jobs?

The Chancellor said in his Mansion House speech in June 2001 that

> "to join in the wrong way or on the wrong basis without rigorously ensuring the tests are met, would not be in the national interest. Such a course would risk repeating past failures, would prejudice our stability and would be damaging for investment, business and jobs generally."

The International Monetary Fund stated in its 2001 article IV report on the UK economy that the five tests were

> "consistent with the economic considerations which would be important for the decision to join a monetary union."

[Ruth Kelly]

The Chancellor repeated only last week that the Treasury will complete an assessment of the five tests within two years of the start of this Parliament. The Government remain committed to that.

Once the Treasury has completed the five tests assessment, a recommendation will be made to Cabinet. The Government will then make a decision on UK membership of EMU. If the Government recommend UK entry, it will be put to a vote in Parliament and then to a referendum of the British people.

The hon. Gentleman called this debate because he is interested in the preliminary and technical work. The Government have been nothing but open about the nature of this preliminary and technical work. I am happy to respond to the hon. Gentleman by once again setting out the nature and content of the that work.

Mr. Laws: The Minister and her abilities are renowned in this place. May we take as read much of the Government's standard position on the euro, so that we have time to address some of the substantive issues raised this evening, in particular the Chancellor's comments last week about the economic growth and stability pact? Can the Economic Secretary say whether the Government would be willing to recommend that we join the euro without reform of the growth and stability pact?

Ruth Kelly: I will come on to the growth and stability pact, but I believe that the hon. Gentleman welcomed the full answer that the Chancellor gave to his question at Treasury questions last week. As he knows, the Chancellor is committed to a prudent interpretation of the growth and stability pact which recognises the full role that public investment should play, as well as sustainability of the debt. He has argued strongly for that at ECOFIN and will continue to do so.

On 4 November 2001, in his speech to the Confederation of British Industry, the Chancellor said:

> "While the assessment has not yet started, the necessary preliminary analysis—technical work that is necessary to allow us to undertake the assessment within two years as promised—is underway."

The Chancellor once again made it clear in his reply to the hon. Gentleman at Treasury oral questions last Thursday that

> "after the first detailed assessment of the five economic tests in 1997, we said that our policy was to prepare and decide and to make an assessment early in the Parliament. The assessment of the five economic tests has not yet started, but last year we set out the necessary next stage of preliminary and technical work."—[*Official Report*, 28 February 2002; Vol. 380, c. 823.]

As I repeated in the Westminster Hall debate in January, the scope of the necessary preliminary and technical work was set out in the original October 1997 assessment. Although there have been new developments since then, the underlying issues to be analysed remain the same and the five tests themselves are unchanged.

The Treasury released a paper in November last year entitled "Preliminary and technical work to prepare for the assessment of the five tests for UK membership of the single currency". Hon. Members can find a copy of that in the Library of the House. It sets out some of the key parts of the preliminary and technical work, although it is by no means an exhaustive list as the preliminary work continues to evolve to take account of the latest technical research and analysis.

Let me give some details of the work taken from the paper, as the Chancellor did at Treasury questions last week.

Mr. Laws: How much of the preliminary and technical work has been done so far and when will it be completed?

Ruth Kelly: The Chancellor said that the preliminary and technical work is necessary to inform the assessment of the economic tests. We have committed ourselves to completing the assessment within the first two years of this Parliament, as the hon. Gentleman is aware. I have just stated that the nature of the preliminary and technical work is evolving to take account of the latest research and analysis. It would not be meaningful or right for us to give a running commentary on what stage that work is at, and I am not about to do so.

However, it is worth setting out what the work attempts to achieve. It updates the analysis on the cyclical behaviour of the UK economy relative to the euro area and the relative responses to economic shocks; on the mechanisms by which product, labour and capital markets adjust, and how well and how quickly they work; on the impact of the single currency on the cost and availability of capital; on the effect of the single currency on financial services; and on the impact of the single currency on trade, competition, productivity and employment. As I noted in the Westminster Hall debate on the five tests in January, the Government have no intention of entering into a running commentary on the preliminary and technical work. However, we are committed to finishing the assessment within the first two years of this Parliament.

The hon. Gentleman raised several questions about the nature of the preliminary and technical work. For instance, he asked who is involved in it. The Treasury is in regular contact with outside economists, the Bank of England and other Departments on a range of issues, including aspects of the work. However, it is clear that the assessment will be a Government assessment and that the work will be undertaken by the Treasury. There is no intention to contract out any part of the assessment.

The hon. Gentleman also tried to ascertain how many Treasury officials are working on the preliminary and technical work. I am sure that he received my recent letter to him in which I stated:

> "It would not be meaningful to quantify the numbers of Treasury management units involved in this work, since this would be only a number with no real indication of the resources allocated to the work".

As each management unit is involved to a differing extent and in a variety of ways, to indicate the number of Treasury teams involved in the work by simply listing names would be misleading. The work is constantly changing and is updated to take account of the latest research and analysis. So the number of officials and the nature of the management units involved changes as the work evolves. Even if I could carry out a meaningful calculation to disclose the names of the teams and individuals involved, it would be only a snapshot which would be even less representative as the work progresses.

Mr. Laws: I am very grateful to the Economic Secretary for giving way again. She reminds me of one of those graceful ships in the second world war whose job was to put up a big smokescreen so the convoy could escape—but she does it in a very glamorous and effective way. Before she finishes, will she tell us whether we will be informed that the preliminary technical assessment has been completed before we find out the result of the five economic tests? In other words, will we be told that the preliminary work has finished and then that the work on the tests has started, or will the results suddenly land on us from on high, perhaps on the front page of *The Times*, as happened in the previous Parliament?

Ruth Kelly: The hon. Gentleman knows that the Government have committed themselves to completing the assessment of the five economic tests within the first two years of this Parliament. We remain committed to that and nothing has changed, so in the remaining few minutes, it would be useful if I tried to answer some of his other questions.

The hon. Gentleman was interested in the White Paper on European economic reform and asked whether economic reform was in some respects a sixth test for entry into the euro. It is not. We have always underlined the importance of economic reform in its own right; it is crucial to Europe's future success. The Government are determined to play a positive and constructive role in Europe, helping to deliver that reform. All member states now recognise the importance of such reform.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to the European Central Bank and our views about the nature of its workings. We share the ECB's primary objective of ensuring price stability as a platform for high and stable growth and employment. We agree that the ECB must ensure that decisions are as transparent as possible and we welcome the efforts that it has made so far. We think that openness and transparency are key to ensuring that the ECB gains the trust of the European public and financial markets, and that that will ultimately help to provide the credibility that is needed to deliver a more effective monetary policy. We would not, however, somehow make reform of the ECB an additional test to our five economic tests or a precondition of the euro decision. We have set out our policy clearly: the five economic tests should be assessed and must be judged clearly and unambiguously before any recommendation is made to Parliament and the people.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned the growth and stability pact. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said in oral questions last week, we support prudent interpretation of the operation of the pact, but yet again, we would in no sense move away from the five economic tests that have been set out. It is clear what those tests are and we remain determined to assess them.

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at seven minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 6 March 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON DEVELOPMENT AGENCY BILL *(BY ORDER)*

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on 13 March 2002.

Oral Answers to Questions

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Micro-credit Agencies

1. **Paddy Tipping** (Sherwood): What support her Department gives to micro-credit agencies in south-east Asia. [37315]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Hilary Benn): Micro-finance services play an important role in enabling families to earn a living and reduce their vulnerability to poverty. In south-east Asia, working through the Women's World Banking programme and the Consultative Group to Assist the Poorest, we are supporting micro-credit programmes in the Philippines, Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia and Thailand. We are also directly funding a project in Vietnam working with a number of non-governmental organisations.

Paddy Tipping: I am grateful for that reply. Will my hon. Friend confirm the importance of micro-credit agencies in helping to create sustainable infrastructure, especially when resources are focused on women and the poorest members of the community?

Hilary Benn: My hon. Friend is entirely right. Micro-finance is all about spreading the risk and helping people to earn income from a variety of activities. The average loan is very small—the smallest is about $30, the largest about $300—and between 70 and 80 per cent. of users of micro-finance are women, so it plays an additional role in improving their position in society.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): I agree with the Minister that micro-credit agencies are an excellent way in which to spur economic development in poor countries. There is no doubt that Afghanistan is one Asian country in dire need of economic development. Given that that country is faced with starvation, does he share my exasperation at reports of poppy growing increasing again and our apparent impotence in the face of that problem? What ideas other than micro-credit to get farmers to diversify production has the Department come up with to tackle that pernicious trade?

Hilary Benn: The hon. Lady is right to draw attention to the problem of the recurrence of poppy growing in Afghanistan. The whole House knows that the ultimate solution to that problem is to enable farmers for whom that is a source of income—for some, the only source—to find an alternative livelihood. Micro-finance and other methods of support offer ways in the long term to enable farmers to depart that trade and earn a living, as the whole House wants.

Cameroon

2. **Mr. David Chaytor** (Bury, North): What plans she has to assist poverty reduction programmes in Cameroon. [37316]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): In Cameroon our development efforts are focused on the forestry sector, which is crucial to Cameroon's overall economy and the livelihoods of a majority of poor people. We have worked in this sector for a considerable period and hope to provide support for a long-term forestry and environmental programme that is part of a strong poverty reduction strategy. That will require a greater effort by the Government to combat corruption.

Mr. Chaytor: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply, but is it not the case that 40 per cent. of Cameroon's population live below the poverty line and 29 per cent. are malnourished; and only 1 per cent. of gross domestic product is spent on health care, whereas 6 per cent. of GDP is spent on debt repayment? Will she argue the case for greater help from the international community for debt relief for Cameroon at the Monterrey conference later this month?

Clare Short: Cameroon has been grossly misgoverned. Although there has been a lot of improvement recently, there was terrible corruption and misuse of own resources resulting in extremely poor health and education programmes for poor people. Such is the history of the country. Recent improvements include a better election, better management of the economy and better economic growth.

Cameroon has qualified for considerable debt relief. I do not understand why those who lead the campaign for debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries do not celebrate the fact that 25 countries have now qualified and more than $50 billion of debt has been written off. That is a considerable achievement which in all the countries involved has leveraged much better economic management and social expenditure. That is what is happening in Cameroon. Things are improving, but there is a long way to go.

Mr. John Baron (Billericay): Given that Poland receives twice as much aid from the European Union overseas aid package as Latin America and Asia combined, and that the top 10 beneficiaries are all countries that border the EU, I put it to the Secretary of

State that the Government could do far more to support the poor people of Cameroon by stopping the EU playing petty politics with the poor of the world, and by redirecting the £800 million a year we send to the EU to those countries that really need it, such as Cameroon.

Clare Short: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. European Community total aid spending keeps turning further and further away from prioritising the poor: 70 per cent. went to the poorest countries a few years ago; that fell to 50 per cent., and it will be 38 per cent. this year. That is a disgrace and an outrage. That failure was not attended to in the past, before 1997. I have made it an absolute priority to expose how bad the position is and to secure a commitment to a reform agenda that is rolling through the EC, but we need stronger support from Foreign Ministers who like to use aid money for immediate political priorities, which is not the best use of the money. It should be invested in creating systems of government that improve countries' economies and provide services to their people. The hon. Gentleman is right: we still have a considerable problem.

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): May I say that I think that there is agreement between my right hon. Friend and people campaigning for more debt relief? There is a celebration of everything that this and other Governments have achieved but, like her, those people believe that more has to be done.

On Cameroon, does my right hon. Friend agree that in the time between decision point and completion point for heavily indebted poor countries there are particular problems which even the International Monetary Fund and World Bank have recognised? Changes in commodity prices mean that the help that Cameroon was to get has been reduced. At Monterrey will she push for flexibility to be built in for HIPC so that countries such as Cameroon benefit more and real poverty can be addressed?

Clare Short: I certainly agree that the continuing fall in commodity prices is a serious problem for many heavily indebted poor countries, as was the rise in oil prices, although they are now going down. Long before Monterrey, we agreed at previous World Bank and IMF meetings that when countries complete their reform process and get their debts written off, we need to re-examine the formula for debt sustainability. If they have had a problem with falling commodity prices, they will need extra help to exit from their debt burden.

Many people are saying that debt relief has failed, but it has not. The next tranche of countries that need assistance are largely in conflict—Sudan, Burma and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The capacity to deliver that relief might help to incentivise the making of peace. We must drive on with that, not start calling for debt relief for middle-income countries that do not need it.

Tanzania

3. **Mr. Stephen O'Brien** (Eddisbury): If she will make a statement on the steps her Department is taking to help reduce poverty in Tanzania. [37317]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): The UK is one of the major development partners of Tanzania, which has made significant advances in recent years. For example, the Tanzanian economy is growing at 5 per cent. annually and primary school enrolment is set to double this year.

Mr. O'Brien: I join the Secretary of State in celebrating the qualification of a number of countries to the HIPC community. I think that the right hon. Lady would agree with me that Tanzania is one of the best examples of good governance and a commitment to democratic institutions, thus justifying our aid and trade incentives and debt relief to help health and education programmes. If we look nearby in Africa at the appalling example of Zimbabwe, how can we justify continuing to give aid to countries ruled by tyrants and dictators? The aid does not get to the people through their health and education programmes and is given at the cost of being able to continue to support countries such as Tanzania which have done what is required to justify that aid.

Clare Short: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman has not been concentrating; Tanzania is making considerable progress but has had problems of governance and democracy in Zanzibar. As well as its serious corruption problems, its public financial management systems need strengthening, and we are trying to help in that regard. It is moving forward, but I do not agree that it is an example of perfect governance—it is an example of progress where more needs to be done.

Zimbabwe is, of course, a total tragedy for all its people, with negative economic growth and terrible brutality in attempts to distort the election outcome. We have modified the way in which we provide aid to make sure that nothing is provided to the Government—we give help to the people of Zimbabwe. There is hunger in that agriculturally rich country and through the World Food Programme and other organisations we are helping to provide food aid to stop people going hungry.

Zimbabwe also has a terribly high HIV/AIDS infection rate, affecting one in three adults. Zimbabwe's Government have not taken action, but we have a fairly big HIV/AIDS programme operating there. I do not think that the people of Zimbabwe should be sentenced to infection by HIV/AIDS because of their Government's neglect, or that the international community should do nothing.

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough): I am sure that my right hon. Friend is aware that in Uganda, for example, the programmes referred to by the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) are in place and there is a direct link between debt relief and improving primary education. In meeting those millennium goals, is it possible to tie together more closely future debt relief programmes so that they link directly to the appalling state of public services such as health and education? We are leading by example, so will my right hon. Friend play a key role in ensuring that world partners meet the fantastic goals that we have managed to achieve? What steps can she take to encourage them to match our targets and bring their targets up to the same speed?

Clare Short: My hon. Friend is right. Uganda set up a fund for its debt relief to make sure that it was spent on the poor. We have done better than that in the enhanced HIPC initiative. In order to qualify for debt relief, it is now an absolute requirement on every country that it puts in place a poverty reduction strategy on which it consults all its people. That will combine the management of the macro-economy to make the economy grow and reduce poverty, and all the country's aid revenues and debt relief spent on bringing proper public services to the poor. The debt relief is thus leveraging massively better economic management and public sector programmes to help the poor, and doing that extremely well.

It is true that the UK's programme is focused on helping countries to meet the international development goals. The Scandinavian countries are with us in that. We could increase by 50 per cent. the value of the $50 billion of aid that there is in the international system if everyone would focus it on the poor and back reformers. There is a lot to do.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Does the Secretary of State feel vindicated by the World Bank report on the air traffic control project in Tanzania, as that report suggests that she was right and her Cabinet colleagues were wrong, and suggests that the project was poor value for money and bad for Tanzania's development? Will she now try to re-open that issue in order to get the contract cancelled?

Clare Short: The UK Government decided not to refuse a licence for the British Aerospace air traffic control system on the grounds that buying it would affect the sustainable development of Tanzania. There was a difference of view within the Government about that, but that is not the end of the matter. Before that, the Tanzanian Government had given a written undertaking to the World Bank board to review the contract in the light of an International Civil Aviation Organisation report which stated that the technology was extremely expensive and old, and that Tanzania does not have any military aircraft and could get a much cheaper modern civilian air traffic control system. The Government of Tanzania are still committed to that review, so the fact that the UK has issued a licence does not mean that Tanzania will necessarily buy the system. The contract is at present frozen and Tanzania must honour its commitment to the World Bank board. That was a condition of it completing its debt relief programme.

Mr. Piara S. Khabra (Ealing, Southall): Will my right hon. Friend tell the House what contact she has had with EU member states in order to tackle world poverty?

Clare Short: I have frequent contact with EU member states about how we might better tackle world poverty. We have discussed how we might combine to improve the use of EC aid resources. Of course, the EU took a leading position at Doha on improving trading rights for developing countries. All of that is important. The money that we put through the Commission and the member states in development aid is 60 per cent. of worldwide overseas development aid, and the EU is the biggest market destination for the exports of developing countries. By doing better, the EU could transform the prospects of developing countries. We are making progress but there is a lot left to do.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): It was brave of the Secretary of State to say publicly that if it were up to her, she would not have issued a licence for the sale of the air defence system to Tanzania. Does she agree that such a dispute at the heart of Government will discourage further private investment in places such as Africa? Does she also agree that it has undermined the credibility of the Government's policy of relieving debt in order to refocus those resources on health and education?

Clare Short: One person's bravery is another person's recklessness, but I am grateful for the hon. Lady's comments. Disputes at the heart of Government are entirely healthy. Ministers holding different views and arguing them out is what Cabinet Government is all about, and long may it continue.

I took a certain view on whether the licence should have been issued, but the hon. Lady might want to note that the power to refuse a licence because an arms contract might affect the sustainable development of a poor country was not in place under the Government whom she supported. It is a new provision introduced by our Government. I took the view that I did; Tanzania will make its decision in its own interests, but I do not believe that that argument in our Government undermines the prospects of investment in Africa.

CDC Capital Partners

4. **Mr. Peter Duncan** (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): What proportion of the investment of CDC Capital Partners last year was in poor countries. [37318]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): All of CDC's investment last year was in developing countries and 73 per cent. in poorer developing countries. CDC also met the investment policy targets in 2001. I remain strongly convinced that the conversion of CDC to a partnership dedicated to mobilising more private sector investment in developing countries is the right way forward and I strongly support the work of Alan Gillespie and his leadership team. This policy was of course fully endorsed by Parliament when the Commonwealth Development Corporation Act 1999 was passed with all-party support, although *The Times* journalist did not appear to know that the matter had been endorsed by Parliament and therefore put it on his front page.

Mr. Duncan: The Secretary of State will recall that the Opposition said that investment in the poorest countries would decline and it gives us no pleasure to point out that, sadly, that has borne fruit. What will she say to the poor and vulnerable farmers in sub-Saharan Africa who see investment programmes in agriculture cancelled and replaced by investment in shopping malls and mobile telephone companies?

Clare Short: I visit Africa frequently and I have many discussions with poor communities and villages as well as elected Ministers, and they are all anxious to attract inward investment that will bring about the transfer of technology in telecommunications, electricity, sanitation, water and transport that is needed for improved economic performance. The purpose of CDC's restructuring was to encourage more private sector investment of that kind and to show that there can be returns on responsible and beneficial investment in Africa which will attract the private sector. Some agricultural investments with low rates of returns have been sold on to their African managers, and that is the right policy and we intend to continue with it. *[Interruption.]*

It is incredibly noisy, Mr. Speaker and difficult to hear the questions from the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker: I agree with the right hon. Lady. It is only fair to the Minister and to those asking questions that hon. Members should be silent.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Despite the Secretary of State's answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Duncan), does she not recognise that there is great concern in many countries in southern Africa that the result of the Government's policy, ignoring the warnings of Opposition Members, has been significantly to reduce investment in countries such as Malawi? What has been the specific effect on countries such as Malawi and others in southern Africa?

While we are on the subject of southern Africa, have the right hon. Lady's Department and other parts of the Government any contingency plans in case there has to be a mass evacuation following the Zimbabwean election?

Clare Short: The hon. Gentleman might not have noticed, but my Department is not responsible for any such evacuation. Obviously, the Government have plans for such matters. The hon. Gentleman can take that as read. On this question, as on so many others since his new appointment, the hon. Gentleman is wrong. Africa desperately needs increased investment in electricity and sanitation. Half of humanity has no sanitation, and the lack of clean water causes constant illness, ill health and the death of children. Electricity and telecommunications are needed so that the people can be part of the internet and the knowledge economy. The restructuring of CDC to encourage more of such investment is welcomed by all who take a serious interest in improving investment in Africa.

Botswana

5. **Ms Candy Atherton** (Falmouth and Camborne): What recent representations she has made to the Government of Botswana regarding access to water by the San bushmen of the central Kalahari. [37319]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Hilary Benn): The policy of the Government of Botswana is that the San bushmen should move from their traditional settlements in the Central Kalahari game reserve to locations where the Government feel that they will have better economic opportunities and access to services. We have made representations about the need to maintain water supplies for those San remaining in the reserve, but our high commissioner in Botswana has today reported that water supplies have now been withdrawn.

Ms Atherton: What action will the Government take now that the Government of Botswana have dismantled the water pumps and drained the water tanks of the San bushmen in order to force them out of the central Kalahari? Is not that a form of ethnic cleansing?

Hilary Benn: I understand my hon. Friend's concern because I know that she has taken a close interest in the welfare of the San bushmen for a number of years. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Once again, the House is far too noisy.

Hilary Benn: It is precisely for that reason that we have made representations about the decision to stop funding water supplies. Those San remaining—the estimates vary from between 20 to 100 people—now have to obtain water supplies either from those that they have conserved, or from those that have been brought into the reserve, or from the mine site at Gope. A legal case against the Government, arguing that the withdrawal of water supplies is unlawful, is scheduled to be heard next Wednesday and we should await the outcome.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): The Minister will be aware that elections will take place in Botswana's neighbour, Zimbabwe, next weekend. Whatever the result, refugees may try to cross the border into Botswana, thus affecting the welfare of the bushmen of the central Kalahari. What discussion has he had with Botswana and other countries that may be affected to ensure that the borders stay open and that adequate financial help is given for food, water and shelter for the refugees?

Hilary Benn: I have not had such discussions with the Government of Botswana. If those problems were to arise, they would have to be dealt with at the time. The one thing on which the whole House would agree is our wish that the elections in Zimbabwe should be free and fair so that the people of that country can choose the Government for their future.

Universal Primary Education

6. **Mr. Bob Blizzard** (Waveney): What steps she is taking in pursuit of the goal of free universal primary education in developing countries by 2015. [37320]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): We are working hard to mobilise the international development system to focus more sharply on the delivery of the commitment to universal primary education by 2015. We have made clear in all forums our view that this goal can be achieved only if primary education is free. We are also working in 29 countries to support delivery of this policy and, since 1997, we have committed £650 million to that work. We will do more.

Mr. Blizzard: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Poorer countries are supposed to have developed education-for-all plans by September, and richer countries have pledged that those plans will not fail through lack of financial support. What is the international position in relation to the deadline and the pledge, which are very important if we are to overcome the problem of charging for basic education in developing countries?

Clare Short: My hon. Friend is right. Through UNESCO and the high-level group co-ordinating implementation, we are trying to drive a country-by-country review across the world to make sure that reformers are helped and backed up. Tanzania has double the number of children entering primary school this year because charging has been dropped. Despite moves forward across the world, some countries are not making progress, and more pressure must be put on them. Money alone cannot achieve our aim—Governments must be committed to the objective and willing to put in place the reforms and then the international financial support will follow. We have made some progress but more is needed. We are trying to focus the international effort so that countries that are failing to make progress feel that they are under more pressure to do so.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): The Secretary of State is absolutely right to say that money alone will not do the job. She will be aware of huge corruption in some of the countries in the third world and in developing nations. What steps are she and her colleagues taking to try to stamp out such corruption and ensure that money directed at education goes to the very people that she and her Government are trying to help?

Clare Short: I have said to the hon. Gentleman before that something comes over him when he puts on his red tie—he starts talking sense. He is right that aid is useful and powerful in driving reform and advance where there are a lot of poor people and where there are reformers. It can speed up economic development and health and education provision, which in turn moves countries forward. Corruption, which wastes those resources and blocks progress, has been neglected in the past as an embarrassing question, but no more. We now focus with others on cleaning up financial management systems, on making sure that public finances are run transparently, on proper procurement and on strong anti-corruption authorities. That is the only way to ensure economic development. We are driving that policy as hard as we can.

Disease Prevention

7. **Chris Grayling** (Epsom and Ewell): What actions she is taking to combat *(a)* HIV/AIDS, *(b)* TB and *(c)* malaria in the developing world. [37321]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): Approximately half of infectious disease deaths in developing countries can be attributed to three diseases: HIV, TB and malaria, which cause more than 5 million deaths per year. My Department is working to strengthen developing countries' health systems and we have committed more than £1 billion to that purpose since 1997. The UK has also taken an active role in establishing the global fund to fight AIDS, TB and malaria, which is designed to improve provision of drugs and commodities to treat those diseases. I have pledged $200 million from my budget over five years for the fund.

Chris Grayling: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer. Does she share the view held by those on the Conservative Benches that the United Nations global health fund should be using some of its resources to ensure that AIDS and HIV sufferers in Africa have access to the drugs that they need?

Clare Short: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. The fund's purpose is to make drugs and commodities available. That includes, for example, HIV testing; most people with HIV do not even know that they have it and do not take action to protect themselves and to ensure that they do not infect others. Many people with HIV get TB, become unable to work and then become impoverished, and so on. The fund is meant to supply drugs and commodities, get the prices down by making big orders, ensure reliability of supply and exert leverage in developing countries to ensure that they have better systems to deliver. HIV/AIDS prevention is better than the use of anti-retrovirals to keep people alive, so that is our major focus, but lower priced anti-retrovirals are now available from pharmaceutical companies where delivery systems are in place.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [37345] **Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 6 March.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I returned from the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting. I shall make a statement on it later today, in addition to having further meetings.

Mr. Jack: The Labour-controlled Lancashire county council is proposing to close 37 of its elderly persons care homes and the associated day care centres. May I ask the Prime Minister on behalf of the vulnerable elderly in Lancashire if he can persuade the Department of Health to discuss this matter with Lancashire county council, with a view to withdrawing the proposal? All Lancashire's Conservative and Labour MPs oppose the proposal, which will do nothing for the quality of life of elderly people in the county and presents a threat to their homes.

The Prime Minister: I understand that Ministers in the Department have asked to be kept fully informed of the situation, and they will no doubt discuss it with the county council. However, I have to say to the right hon. Gentleman that, as he will know, under this Government, spending on social services has increased by about 20 per cent. Of course, throughout the country, councils are considering how best to care for elderly people. As a result of the extra investment that we will be putting in in the next three years, we will have an additional

£1.4 billion going into care for the elderly. However, as I said, in respect of these particular plans, the Department will be in touch with the county council.

Q2. [37346] **Mr. David Stewart** (Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the key economic role that is played by the British film industry. For example, my constituency has been the location for blockbusting films such as "Braveheart", "Rob Roy" and, more recently, "Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone". Does he share my view that the planned multi-million pound highland film studio will be vital in ensuring that the film industry in Britain can compete on the world stage?

The Prime Minister: I congratulate my hon. Friend and the Scottish film industry on the strength of Scottish film production. As he said, it is renowned throughout the world. It is true, of course, that as a result of measures introduced by the Chancellor, the British film industry as a whole has enjoyed considerable success in the past few years. I wish the proposal well. Obviously, it is an important matter for the Scottish Executive as well, but I understand that about £20 million of private sector money could also come in. I hope very much that his constituency will see the benefits.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Given the wholly unacceptable decision of the United States to impose steel tariffs, will the Prime Minister stand by his statement of a few weeks ago, when he said of Mr. Mittal's firm, LNM:

> "I am delighted that a British-based company has succeeded"?—[*Official Report*, 13 February 2002; Vol. 380, c. 199.]

The Prime Minister: Of course, the British Government stand by the policy that we have outlined, which is to oppose the tariffs introduced by the United States. They are unacceptable and wrong, and they affect not only Britain but the European Community and other countries throughout the world. In our view, the problems of the American steel industry are best solved by restructuring that industry, not by imposing arbitrary and unjustified tariffs.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Well, of course they are, but we have a problem here, because the company that the Prime Minister celebrated as a British company spent $600,000 on lobbying the United States Government to impose tariffs on steel imports. Those tariffs will, of course, affect the United Kingdom steel industry. As one chief executive put it this morning:

> "The only measure we have had out of 10 Downing Street on steel is their support for a non-UK steel manufacturer."

It took the Prime Minister 30 seconds to write a letter supporting a non-British company producing anti-British policies, yet it takes him months to write a letter to the US President to stand up for British interests. Will the Prime Minister now apologise to the British steel workers who may lose their jobs?

The Prime Minister: First, in relation to the British steel industry, let us take no lessons from a Conservative party that destroyed 100,000 British steel jobs while in government. Secondly, in relation to the American Administration, this matter was first raised by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry last July, and it has been raised with the American Administration at every level of this Government. It is important that, together with other European countries, we now pursue the right remedies through the World Trade Organisation.

Mr. Duncan Smith: In case the Prime Minister has not noticed, he has been in power for almost five years, during which time nearly 400,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost. Ten thousand of those were steel jobs, so we do not need any lectures from him, either. When will he understand that his Government's misconduct affects people outside Westminster? What he arrogantly dismissed as "Garbagegate" some weeks ago will affect the lives and work of thousands of people who look to him for protection. It seems that the only mistake that the steelworkers and the steel industry made was not to give more money to the Labour party, because we now know that the Prime Minister always puts the interests of his friends before the interests of the British people.

The Prime Minister: First, let me repeat that this is a decision by the American Administration in respect not only of Britain but of imports into the United States from all countries. It is, therefore, absurd to suggest that it is somehow directed only against Britain. In respect of the decision, we have made representations at every level of Government and will continue to do so through the European Union. In respect of manufacturing and steel jobs, however, some people remember the two recessions under the last Conservative Government, and the millions of jobs that were lost when manufacturing output declined by somewhere in the region of 10 per cent. It is under the Labour Government that economic stability has been achieved, delivering—instead of 3 million unemployed—more than 1 million extra jobs in this country.

Mr. Mike Wood (Batley and Spen): I know that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will share the horror felt throughout the House at the sectarian violence in Gujerat, which has so far claimed the lives of at least 500 people, including my constituent Mohammed Aswat in an incident that also led to the disappearance of two more of my constituents—of whom nothing has been heard for five days—and the leaving for dead of another. Will my right hon. Friend agree to see a delegation of hon. Members, such as myself, who have constituents in Gujerat, where the violence persists, to discuss how those British nationals can safely and quickly be repatriated? Secondly, will he make every effort to have my two missing constituents, Sakim and Saeed Dawood, found, and to have those responsible for the attack on them, and for the death of Mr. Aswat, brought quickly to justice?

The Prime Minister: I understand that the Foreign Secretary is to meet my hon. Friend and other colleagues involved, and if they wish to meet me after that, I shall be happy to meet them. Secondly, we express our deep sympathy and condolences from all parts of the House to those who lost their lives in Gujerat. We are in close touch with the Indian authorities and will do everything that we can to assist them to bring this distressing violence to an end.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): This time last week, the Prime Minister told me that the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions should be judged on his record. Since then, the Strategic Rail Authority has discovered a £8 billion hole in the Transport Secretary's proposed budget. Today City fund managers have signed a round-robin letter to the Chancellor in which they say that the way in which the Railtrack administration was handled will severely dent future investor confidence. What does that say about the Transport Secretary's record in the past week?

The Prime Minister: On the first point, something over £60 billion of public and private money will go into the railways. I should have thought that the right hon. Gentleman would welcome that. As for the decision to put the company into administration, I thought we had explained on many occasions—indeed, I thought this had some support from the Liberal Democrats—that the reason for its being put into administration was the huge losses that it had suffered. We simply could not continue with those losses.

As for the letter from the fund managers, these are fund managers who are also investors and shareholders in Railtrack. Therefore they are, as it were, in dispute with the Government in their role as shareholders. The best answer I can give them is that some £6 billion has already been committed as part of the private-sector investment in the railways, and we have no doubt that there will be more.

Mr. Kennedy: It is not just a question of the loss of confidence among City fund managers; it is a question of the loss of confidence among the travelling public, the loss of confidence in the Department, and—remember—the loss of confidence in the Labour-dominated Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

Let me return to the question that I asked this time last week. Just what does it take for the Prime Minister to lose confidence in his Transport Secretary?

The Prime Minister: I entirely support the decision to put Railtrack into administration. As I said, I thought the Liberal Democrats understood the reasons for that very well. I suspect that we are witnessing something of a piece of opportunism in their turning round afterwards and saying that it was not right—*[Interruption.]* I agree, of course, that that would be highly unusual in the case of the Liberal Democrats.

The plain fact is that, as I pointed out, the fund managers who wrote today are the fund managers who are investors and shareholders in Railtrack. They are therefore currently negotiating with the Government over the amount of compensation. The best answer I can give is that the private-sector investment is coming in. As I said, £6 billion has already been allocated. Between July last year and March this year, some 44 different private finance initiative and public-private partnership contracts had been agreed. There is no shortage of private-sector involvement in these projects.

Mr. Gwyn Prosser (Dover): My right hon. Friend will be aware that today is the 15th anniversary of the sinking of the Herald of Free Enterprise, in which 193 crew and passengers perished. He will also know that this morning we held our annual memorial service at the port of Dover. Will he join me in extending sympathy to the friends and families of those who were lost, and in paying tribute to the bravery of those who gave their lives that others might live? Will he also ensure that the United Kingdom Government continue to take the lead in promoting higher international standards of safety at sea, so that the effects of an appalling 140 losses of ships at sea every year do not continue?

The Prime Minister: On the anniversary of a tragic event that I think all Members will remember, let me express our sympathy to the family and friends of those concerned, and also pay tribute to their bravery and to the selfless courage exercised by many of the victims in helping those in distress at the time of the accident. As for improving the safety standards of ro-ro ferries, my hon. Friend may know that we are pursuing that in the International Maritime Organisation, and also urging the European Union to take it up. I agree that the level of accidents is currently unacceptable, but we are working in every possible forum to bring it down.

Q3. [37347] **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): Has the Prime Minister had a chance to look at the report of the Royal College of Radiologists, which explains why many of our constituents who have been diagnosed with cancer are now having to wait at least two to three months for radiotherapy? As the national health service is the Prime Minister's top priority, and as cancer is the top priority within that top priority, can he explain why the Government have been so slow to address the issue of retention and recruitment of key staff, and why the situation is still deteriorating?

The Prime Minister: We are, of course, training more staff. One reason why there have been longer waits for radiotherapy is precisely because of the additional consultants, additional investment in machines and other investment in the health service and cancer services. More and more people are being referred for radiotherapy, but the numbers in radiotherapy are increasing. The hon. Gentleman will know that the audit was carried out some time ago, and I think that he will find that we are managing to improve the situation for radiotherapy services across the country.

Q4. [37348] **Mr. Bob Blizzard** (Waveney): Is my right hon. Friend aware that it is costing the taxpayer £400 million a year to clear up the millions of tons of litter dropped on our streets and in our open spaces? Although we have litter laws, only a few hundred prosecutions are made a year. As my private Member's Bill seems unlikely to find parliamentary time—[HON. MEMBERS: "Aah!"]—will he introduce legislation to allow councils to keep the money raised through fixed penalty fines, so that they can employ people to enforce the litter laws? That way, we can clear up this country and make the polluter pay.

The Prime Minister: I am aware of my hon. Friend's ten-minute Bill. The Government in principle support the proposal to allow local authorities to spend the money that they get from fines on improving the litter situation in their area. As one part of that, we have recently increased—indeed, doubled—the penalties for litter, and it is important that we continue to make every effort that we can to deal with a problem that may seem trivial, but which is very important for people in their local communities.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): Does the Prime Minister remember assuring the public during the campaign for a "yes" vote, following the Belfast agreement, that the early release scheme would not be an amnesty? In particular does he recall the following statement, issued by the Northern Ireland Information Service:

> "There will be no amnesty."?

Indeed, the word "amnesty" was underlined. That was part of the basis on which people voted for the agreement. Does the Prime Minister realise that for a lot of good people who have stuck with the agreement through thick and thin, and who have had to put up with quite a lot recently, the Government's going back on their word and breaking faith with them will be the last straw?

The Prime Minister: First, it is of course right that people released under the early release scheme as prisoners be released on licence. Should they breach the terms of that licence, they can be readmitted to prison. Secondly, we made it clear at Weston Park that this was an issue to be dealt with. We will deal with it, but how we do so is open to discussion.

Q5. [37349] **Valerie Davey** (Bristol, West): Fair trade fortnight encourages all of us to support producers of tea, coffee and cocoa, yet the processors of those products in the developed world are still getting the greatest profit. What can the Government further do to develop fair trade and to open the common European Union markets to processed goods from developing countries?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend that this is a very important and serious issue. It is being raised in the context of the World Trade Organisation negotiations, which began at Doha last year. Of course, she is absolutely right to say that, for many of the poorest countries in the world, what is more important even than aid is access to western markets. I very much hope that—as part of the partnership agreement with Africa, which we hope to conclude at this year's G8 summit, in Canada—the developed world will give a clear steer and sense of direction that we are prepared to ensure that our markets are indeed open, not just to goods that are raw materials, but to processed goods.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): I do not want to frighten the Prime Minister, but I agree with him on one thing: although the Liberal Democrats supported his programme to take over Railtrack, they did not support the minority report of the Committee. They are probably the only people in history to try to jump on a bandwagon, only to roll under it. Perhaps he can answer the real question: will raising private investment in public services prove more or less expensive as a result of the actions of his Secretary of State?

The Prime Minister: As regards the investment that we can get into the railways, the only decision that we could possibly have taken was to secure additional private investment by putting Railtrack into administration, then bringing it out in a restructured form. There was no way in which we as a Government could have carried on pouring billions of pounds into a failed company. That would have affected our ability to raise the money.

Therefore the answer to the right hon. Gentleman's question is no, I do not believe that it is more expensive. We will only ever get proper investment into our railways by halting privatisation, which did so much damage, restructuring the company and relaunching it on a proper footing.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister is wrong. It is now well known that under the 10-year plan he expects to raise £35 billion, but the Government's credit rating has been so downgraded that it is calculated that it will cost at least £1 billion extra to raise that money. The group of investors who wrote today in *The Times*,

> "This will increase the cost to the taxpayer",

were absolutely spot on. Must not the Prime Minister now make a clear choice between getting private sector investment into his railway programme or getting rid of his Transport Secretary?

The Prime Minister: No, Mr. Speaker. As I pointed out a moment ago, we have already committed £6 billion. Indeed, there was a recent commitment for extra private sector investment in the Chiltern line.

The difference between us and the right hon. Gentleman is that he would have carried on with Railtrack as it was—a privatised company siphoning off billions of pounds from the Treasury. We believe that it should have been put into administration; he would want us to pay £1 billion in compensation to the shareholders, including the 20 fund managers who wrote to *The Times*. That money should be going into our railways, but the right hon. Gentleman would give it to the shareholders. That is the difference between us.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The one thing that is absolutely certain about us is that we would not have such a Transport Secretary, who, according to the letter and to every single commentator, has lost the trust of business and of the civil service, and is now going to make the public pay through more delays and extra costs in raising the money for public services. The real price of the Prime Minister's weak—I repeat, weak—refusal to sack the Transport Secretary is that the public will have to pay more tax for less service.

The Prime Minister: Of course, Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Government had a Transport Secretary who privatised Railtrack in the first place and left us in this situation. Not only was that botched privatisation allowed to take place, but—according to the Public Administration Committee when it was headed by the right hon. Member who is now chairman of the Conservative party—the way in which it was sold meant that the public lost billions of pounds on the sale. The Conservatives were responsible not only for that botched privatisation, but for losing public money on it.

The plain fact of the matter is that we have set aside public money for extra investment in the railways. That will result in billions of pounds going in over the next few years, along with money from the private sector.

We support that investment and the right hon. Gentleman opposes it. That is the true test of commitment to Britain's railways.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Is the Prime Minister aware of the growing concern in the country that we may be moving by degrees towards war with Iraq? Does he accept that in the event that British troops are sent into action, there should be a debate and a vote on the Floor of the House?

The Prime Minister: Of course, were we ever to take action in respect of Iraq there should be an opportunity for the House to express its view, as indeed it has in respect of Afghanistan. However, I have to say to my hon. Friend that no decisions have yet been taken about any possible action in respect of Iraq.

I remind my hon. Friend that two days after 11 September I made a statement in the House in which I said that the issue of weapons of mass destruction was an important issue that we would have to tackle; and we do have to tackle it. Iraq is plainly in breach of the United Nations Security Council resolutions on the accumulation of weapons, and we must deal with that. How we do so is a matter for discussion and consultation.

Q6. [37350] **Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome): When the Prime Minister next returns from overseas, will he forget the official car and instead take the train into Paddington? As he does so, will he reflect that we still do not know whether 41 recommendations from Lord Cullen on safety after the Paddington rail crash have yet been implemented, despite the deadline being three months ago? The Prime Minister says that his priority is rail safety. Can he guarantee that those safety improvements are now finished? If not, why on earth does he have confidence in his Transport Secretary?

The Prime Minister: We are taking forward the proposals on safety recommended by Cullen, but if the hon. Gentleman looks at the safety record of the British rail industry overall, he will see that it is not declining, but improving. I would have thought that he recognised that. He will know that, according to the recent figures, the degree to which there have been incidents involving a lack of safety has declined and not increased. I agree that much more needs to be done, but Lord Cullen made many proposals. We are taking them forward in consultation with the industry, which is the best way to do it.

Margaret Moran (Luton, South): Is the Prime Minister aware that, over the last few years, 15 children have been murdered as a result of courts granting contact to violent parents? Is he also aware that courts are continuing to grant unsupervised contact to schedule 1 offenders, resulting in violence and sometimes death to children? Will he ensure that we hold inquiries into such circumstances where there are domestic violence murders? Will he do everything he can to ensure that there is an amendment to the Children Act 1989 to protect our children from this kind of violence in future?

The Prime Minister: First, on the specific point about the amendment to the legislation, we will give serious consideration to the point that my hon. Friend makes. Secondly, I should say that there is an interdepartmental ministerial group specifically to look at how we co-ordinate work in this area and she will be aware that the Government have tightened legislation in recent years.

Q7. [37351] **Mr. Julian Brazier** (Canterbury): The Government's solution to the desperate overcrowding in east Kent hospitals is a £200 million investment programme. Does the Prime Minister understand that 15,000 people have marched against the proposed plan, that consultants are saying that it is medically unsafe and that the Royal College of Nursing has come out against it? Will he give us some extra beds for patients now, or will he engage in this ridiculous and extravagant exercise in empire-building; the kind of empire on which the sun never shines?

The Prime Minister: The decisions on the reconfiguration of the service in east Kent, which were taken by the health authority board, will be referred to Ministers after proper consultation. The points that the hon. Gentleman makes will be taken in account. In relation to the service as a whole, we recognise that there have been real and specific problems in east Kent but, as he has just implied, we are putting millions of additional investment into the services. It will take some time for that investment to go through, but in terms of accident and emergency, the numbers of beds and cancer services in east Kent, we are making additional investment available. As for the reconfiguration of those services, that is a decision by the health authority board and Ministers will consider it after due consultation.

Q8. [37352] **Dr. Stephen Ladyman** (South Thanet): When the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) asked his question, he forgot to remind my right hon. Friend of the tens of millions of pounds already spent on modernising east Kent hospitals, the £2 million accident and emergency modernisation programme at Margate that is just completed and the £180 million that is about to be spent? Does my right hon. Friend agree that still much more needs to be done in the NHS? Does he share my concerns about waiting times for heart patients? What does he intend to do about that?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right that there is a great deal more to do, but the answer to the problems of waiting times or the additional numbers of consultants and nurses needed in the health service cannot be to cut the investment going to the health service, which is the position of the Conservative party.

On cardiac services, as a result of the additional funding that the Secretary of State for Health has announced today, we will be able to cut substantially cardiac waiting times. That is in addition to increasing by 45 or 50 per cent. the number of cardiologists within the NHS. These are important changes and investments, and the Government will carry on making necessary investments in the NHS. The single biggest dividing line in the House lies between Labour, which wants investment in public service, and the Conservatives, who are against it.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): The Prime Minister will doubtless recall the promise made in the 1997 Labour party manifesto to end waiting for cancer treatment. When will he fulfil that promise?

The Prime Minister: The latest figures indicate that referrals for cancer treatment within two weeks have risen from just over 60 per cent. when we came to power to more than 90 per cent. now. As a result of additional investment, not only in increasing the number of cancer specialists but in extra cancer equipment throughout the NHS, there is no doubt that cancer services have been enabled to improve.

The hon. Gentleman's question brings us back to what I have already said. *[Interruption.]* If Conservative Members do not accept that, they do not accept the reality of their position. After years of cuts in beds, cuts in training places and cuts in the number of nurses, the Government are investing in the national health service.

Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting

3.31 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting that took place in Coolum, in Queensland, Australia, from 1 to 4 March. I pay warm tribute to Prime Minister John Howard and the Australian Government for the excellent arrangements for the meeting, and to John Howard personally for his patient and skilful chairmanship.

I also want to record how much the presence of Her Majesty the Queen meant to all the Heads of Government in this, her jubilee year. It provided an opportunity for us all to reflect on her remarkable contribution to the Commonwealth over the past 50 years. I shall be pleased to join Her Majesty for the observance service to celebrate Commonwealth day on Monday 11 March.

The Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting was due to take place last autumn. It was postponed because of the atrocious terrorist attacks in the United States on 11 September. It was therefore entirely fitting that one of the major items of business at this week's meeting was the adoption of a Commonwealth plan of action on terrorism. That focuses on how to help member states, particularly smaller states, to fulfil their international obligations in fighting terrorism, including those provided for by United Nations Security Council resolution 1373.

The Commonwealth Heads of Government also adopted the report of the high-level review group established at the previous Heads of Government meeting in Durban in 1999. That report broadens the remit of the Commonwealth's ministerial-level watchdog, the Commonwealth ministerial action group, beyond the overthrow of democratically elected governments so that it will in future be able to examine crises other than those provoked by a coup d'état. It strengthens the good offices role of the Commonwealth Secretary-General, and streamlines the secretariat's structure.

The Heads of Government also established a high-level expert group to report on globalisation to the 2003 Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Nigeria. The high-level group report and the plan on terrorism are covered in the Coolum declaration, which was agreed by Heads of Government at the conference. I have arranged for a copy to be placed in the Library of the House.

Those useful developments strengthen the Commonwealth as an organisation committed to promoting democracy and good governance, economic development, and tolerance and racial harmony among its members. It is all the more deplorable therefore that one of those members, Zimbabwe, should have a President and a Government who are so clearly violating those core Commonwealth values.

The current crisis in Zimbabwe was extensively discussed. The violence and intimidation unleashed by President Mugabe in his desperation to prevent an Opposition victory in next weekend's presidential elections is totally unacceptable. So is the way in which he made it impossible for European Union observers to monitor next weekend's elections, obliging them to withdraw from Zimbabwe so that they could not document the abuses of the election campaign. There is no doubt about those abuses: those who are witnessing the campaign and who are still in Zimbabwe, detail horrific acts of violence and intimidation.

President Mugabe pretends that the current crisis has been prompted by the issue of land reform rather than by his determination to stay in power no matter what the verdict of the electorate. That is nothing more than a pretext. Successive British Governments have made clear their commitment to supporting land reform in Zimbabwe. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary repeated that commitment at the Abuja meeting in Nigeria last September. Indeed, since independence Britain has provided over £40 million specifically for land reform, and over £0.5 billion in development assistance.

However, our efforts, and those of the wider international community—including the United Nations Development Programme—have been thwarted by the political intransigence, and indeed corruption, of President Mugabe and his Government. Make no mistake, Mr. Speaker: if President Mugabe had wanted an orderly and just land reform programme at any stage in the past few years, we would have been keen to work with him. He did not. Instead he has used the land reform issue as an excuse for undermining Zimbabwean democracy; and more than this, the actions have now provoked a grave economic crisis in a country that has the potential to be rich and successful. This is a tragedy for all Zimbabwe's people. The victims of Mr. Mugabe are not primarily white; they are the ordinary black citizens fed up with years of decline and corruption.

President Mugabe's behaviour was denounced by a very large number of Commonwealth countries at Coolum. Again we should make it clear that this included outspoken and courageous condemnation by African leaders who understand very well that the damage that President Mugabe is doing harms not only Zimbabwe but Africa as a whole. Despite President Mugabe's mob propaganda, this is not an issue that divides the Commonwealth on racial lines—not one that divides Africa from the other Commonwealth members.

Although there was a strong current of criticism running at Coolum, decisions need to be unanimous at the Heads of Government meeting, and in a body representing more than 50 separate nations there was no realistic prospect of a consensus for suspending Zimbabwe from Commonwealth membership in advance of the elections this coming weekend. But we did agree a statement on Zimbabwe that expressed deep concern about the violence surrounding the current election campaign, and called for free and fair elections. That statement makes provision for Zimbabwe's suspension, if the report of the Commonwealth observers currently in Zimbabwe is adverse.

If the observers' report does indeed find widespread evidence of intimidation and violence, the fudging will have to stop. The credibility of the Commonwealth itself is at stake. The procedures laid down in the Harare Commonwealth declaration and the Millbrook Commonwealth action programme are clear, and action must follow, up to and including suspension. Let me add that it is a remarkable tribute to the strength of democracy in Zimbabwe that the Opposition retain even a chance of

[The Prime Minister]

winning those elections at all. Again, let us be clear: if they do win, President Mugabe must accept the result and hand over power.

The Coolum meeting provided an opportunity for me to meet a number of African leaders to discuss the New Partnership for African Development. We need to work with Africa, through the G8 and through a wide range of international organisations, to grasp this opportunity for a new start, and new hope for Africa. On aid, trade and conflict I believe that we have a real chance for progress, with commitment and leadership on both sides. We will continue to make that a major priority of British policy.

Coolum also allowed me to meet the Heads of Government of Commonwealth Caribbean countries. We discussed ways of developing the United Kingdom's relations with them, and ways of helping them to confront the challenges that they face, particularly in countering drugs and terrorism, and in the economic and trade fields. There will be a further opportunity to develop that dialogue at the meeting of the UK/Caribbean Forum in Georgetown, Guyana, next month.

Finally, I co-hosted with John Howard the Commonwealth sports lunch, where we looked forward to the Commonwealth games in Manchester this summer and then in Melbourne in 2006.

I wish to conclude with thanks to my right hon. Friend the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary for the work that he did in preparing for the Coolum meeting, particularly in the Commonwealth ministerial action group. It was a great sadness that, for personal reasons, he was unable to attend the meeting itself, but I wish also to record my thanks to my noble Friend Baroness Amos for the valuable role that she played at Coolum.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): May I join the Prime Minister at the outset in recording my pleasure at the presence of Her Majesty at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting during her jubilee year? As the Prime Minister so rightly said, the leadership and service that she has given to the Commonwealth over the last 50 years is admired and respected by very many people around the globe, and I, like him, look forward to the observance service on 11 March. I also welcome the adoption of the action plan on terrorism, and that part of the Coolum communiqué that reaffirms the principles of working to reduce poverty through the Commonwealth institutions.

However, no hon. Member can be satisfied with the outcome of the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting regarding Zimbabwe. What the Prime Minister said in condemning Mr. Mugabe is quite right, and I associate myself with all those statements criticising him and accusing him of all the things that he has done. This is not about black versus white in Zimbabwe, and it never has been; it is about everyone in Zimbabwe suffering under a tyrant who has thrown out the rule of law and democracy. However, the suggestion that the Commonwealth might in due course merely voice "collective disapproval" at the actions of the Zimbabwe Government is only the latest in a litany of laughable and inadequate responses that have too often let Mr. Mugabe off the hook.

Last October, the Prime Minister publicly told his party that there must be "no tolerance" of

"the activities of Mr. Mugabe's henchmen in Zimbabwe".

Those were rightly tough words, yet, sadly, the Government have in their actions too often appeared to tolerate his activities. The Abuja agreement did nothing to stop the violence and intimidation practised by Mr. Mugabe's regime, yet it was greeted by the Foreign Secretary as "a positive step forward" and, despite evidence that Mr. Mugabe was ignoring it throughout, no action was taken.

We were not alone in voicing our concerns. In September last year, the leader of the Movement for Democratic Change, Morgan Tsvangirai—a very brave man—called for Zimbabwe to be suspended from the Commonwealth if Mugabe breached the law on land reform. The British Government never publicly set any such benchmark. In fact, it was a further three months before the Commonwealth declared that the situation in Zimbabwe was a "serious and persistent violation" of its fundamental principles.

Why did it then take the Foreign Secretary and the Government another three weeks after that long delay finally to recommend that Zimbabwe should be suspended from the Commonwealth? In the four months taken to get to that point, Mr. Mugabe's regime of terror continued unabated and very well reported, yet my concern was that the Government dithered: they seemed to hide behind the claim to be working within the European Union, yet Europe, too, was dragging its feet.

It was not until 28 January—only five weeks ago—that the Foreign Secretary was able to say that the EU's position on sanctions was "clear, unambiguous and unanimous". Even then, it took another three weeks and the expulsion of the head of the EU observer mission for sanctions to be imposed. People such as Mr. Mugabe clearly feed off that kind of indecisiveness. It is no wonder that—despite the Prime Minister's best efforts, which we support, in Brisbane—he could not persuade his Commonwealth colleagues to take action against Zimbabwe. As far as they were concerned, the British Government only decided to support suspension just under two months ago.

It could all have been very different. If there had been real leadership throughout, from whatever source, the Commonwealth would have sent a much stronger message, and one that we would have done well to learn.

The lesson is that we must not repeat that failure, and the Prime Minister therefore needs to answer some important, key questions about the future action that the Commonwealth may or may not take.

First, will the Prime Minister guarantee Morgan Tsvangirai the full support of the British Government—whether he wins or loses—not just now, but in the difficult months ahead? Secondly, will the right hon. Gentleman make it clear to the House that the transparency of Sunday's election will be judged on the criteria laid down by the Southern African Development Community in March last year? Thirdly, does he agree that, if those forces opposed to democracy continue their terrible destruction of Zimbabwe, an international coalition composed of the United Kingdom, the United States, Europe and the Commonwealth should take all necessary steps to secure a safe future for Zimbabwe?

The Commonwealth's statements on Zimbabwe and Mugabe this past weekend have been weak and ineffectual, and we must ensure that a much stronger and clearer message goes out to Zimbabwe. I served in Zimbabwe when we brought about the transition to the current Government back in 1979–80—so I need no sedentary lectures from Labour Members, who have done nothing but mouth off—and the high hopes of those days are now being destroyed. The Government's policy and those of the Commonwealth now read like a text book on how not to deal with a tyrant. The Government talk a lot about leading in Europe and leading in the Commonwealth. They have not yet done so—perhaps now is the time for them to pull this situation back before it is too late.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman has the ability to exploit any situation to make absurd points. The idea that the problem in Zimbabwe is a result either of the Government's failure to condemn Mr. Mugabe, whom we have condemned right from the very beginning, or, even more absurdly, of the European Union, which I fear marks a return to the Conservative party's obsession with the European Union, is ridiculous. The truth is that we have made it clear throughout that we wholly condemn Mr. Mugabe. However, decisions have to be unanimous in order to get action through the Commonwealth at the Heads of Government meeting. In other words, every country has to agree. There was never a realistic prospect of getting some of them to agree to sanctions now. The Government's position, however, has been utterly clear throughout.

In respect of the three points the right hon. Gentleman demands we answer, we have already done so many, many times. Yes, of course it is the case that if the observers' report indicates that the election has been rife with violence and intimidation—as I am sure it will, given the emerging evidence—suspension should follow under the criteria agreed by the Commonwealth. There is no question in those circumstances of collective disapproval alone being satisfactory. However, that is again something that Britain alone cannot decide. With the greatest of respect, when we analyse what the right hon. Gentleman asks us to do, we have already done it. The idea that, by some miraculous power, he would have managed to persuade all the Heads of the Commonwealth to go along with something heavier stretches his credibility a little beyond what it will bear.

In respect of the other points that the right hon. Gentleman raises, it is important that we ensure that firm action follows. The one part of the Commonwealth statement that I can say I am happy with is the notion that a mechanism should exist that depends not on all 50 members of the Commonwealth, but on the past, present and future Chairmen of the Commonwealth Heads of Government who will take a decision on the basis of the recommendation of the Secretary-General. That gives us a far more streamlined way in which to reach a quick decision. I very much hope that they come to the right decision. It is at least a small step forward, and I am surprised that the right hon. Gentleman did not acknowledge it.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): In thanking the Prime Minister for his statement, hon. Members should acknowledge that it is an unusually strong statement for any Prime Minister who has returned from such an international summit meeting to make to the House of Commons, and deservedly so given the circumstances and the primary topic of international concern and discussion. In recognising that fact, I think the Prime Minister would concur that the one thing the House of Commons, as much as the Government, can do at this juncture is to speak with a united voice on Zimbabwe and the international implications. Given that the Conservative party lacks the self-confidence to believe that it could persuade a dozen and a few more members of the European Union, is it not bizarre that it should think that it could have flown to Australia to dictate the passage of actions to dozens of members of the Commonwealth?

If the bad news from Zimbabwe worsens over the next few days as we witness the conduct of the elections and their outcome, will the Prime Minister confirm that our country will take a lead on a Commonwealth basis to ensure that suspension or expulsion from the Commonwealth, which we would all have preferred to happen at this stage, proceeds as fast as is politically possible? I hope that he can reassure us on that. If the situation continues to deteriorate and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees has to deal with the migration of refugees across borders into neighbouring countries, will the Prime Minister confirm that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office will give its full support to whatever endeavours may have to be anticipated and dealt with, although of course we hope that they will not arise?

Finally, does the Prime Minister agree that in the court of public opinion, where Robert Mugabe is concerned, it is one thing for politicians to disagree, but when any head of state has moved to the extent that broadcasters and journalists, including those from the BBC—some of the most impartial and authoritative journalists in the world—are excluded or thrown out of a country, that in itself is an admission of guilt?

The Prime Minister: I agree entirely with the right hon. Gentleman. Indeed, one of the most eccentric happenings at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting was the sight of the Information Minister of Zimbabwe coming to Australia to talk to the BBC, which had of course been thrown out of Zimbabwe during its coverage of the election.

Of course we will do our very best to secure the right outcome in light of the Commonwealth observers' report. I should just add to what I said a moment ago that all three members of the group that will take the decision, on the recommendation of the Commonwealth Secretary-General, have made it clear that if the observers do detail violence and intimidation, they will take the appropriate action. Giving that assurance is different from delivering on it, but we will do our best to hold people to that position.

What the right hon. Gentleman said about refugees is true. There are already hundreds of thousands, if not more, Zimbabwean refugees flooding into neighbouring countries. One of the tragedies of what Mugabe has done to Zimbabwe is that the income of its people has literally halved in the past few years, but it is a potentially wealthy country. It could have been a leader in southern Africa, instead of which Mugabe has turned it into a country

[The Prime Minister]

where industry feels uncomfortable, where people are in a state of oppression and where the economy is unable to function properly.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): In view of what the Prime Minister is reported to have said about Iraq to the Australian media, and following his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) at Question Time, could he, at his convenience, glance at the report of this morning's Westminster Hall debate on military action against Iraq and reflect on whether he ought not to come and make a very full speech—as Prime Ministers used to do—on the Iraq situation before it is contemplated committing British troops? Is it not right that in a situation where there is, so to speak, an optional war, the House of Commons should have a formal endorsement by vote?

The Prime Minister: As I pointed out at Prime Minister's Question Time, we have not agreed any action in respect of Iraq at the moment, so it is important that before anyone takes a position condemning it or supporting it, we see what the Government propose we should do. On the point about coming to the House, most people would have to acknowledge that after 11 September, not only did I make several statements to the House, but so did other Ministers, and we have had no fewer than five different debates on the subject, so I really do not think that it can be said that we have been committing British forces without proper consultation with the House. When decisions do have to be taken on Iraq, of course we will come and consult the House properly as we should.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Will the Prime Minister take the earliest possible opportunity to impress on the Commonwealth Heads of Government that the partial attitude towards Mugabe shown by far too many of them undermines the respect and support, in this country and elsewhere, for the Commonwealth as an institution?

The Prime Minister: It is correct that I found some of the contributions at the meeting hard to understand in light of what is happening. I believe that, especially when the whole world is trying to put together a partnership for Africa based on us providing more aid, better access to our markets and help with good governance, it is all the more right and appropriate that strong and good governance in Africa is upheld.

The one qualification that I would make to that, however, is that there were reports that Africa en bloc was against strong action on Zimbabwe; that is not correct, and it is not fair to African countries. Many African leaders, including some from that region, spoke very strongly against what Mr. Mugabe is doing. There are those who feel that we should wait until the election until we make the decision to suspend. I can understand that, even though I do not agree with it. I think that it means that if the Commonwealth observers' report is adverse, there is an obligation on the Commonwealth to retain its credibility by acting against Mugabe.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Does my right hon. Friend accept that those of us on the Labour Benches—I emphasise, the Labour Benches—who urged the strongest economic sanctions against the illegal regime in what was then Rhodesia need no lectures from anybody, certainly not Mugabe and his thugs, about racism? I speak as one who is perhaps not considered to be the biggest admirer of the EU, but is it not the case that if any EU member country had come anywhere near what Mugabe has done, that country would have been suspended very quickly? Perhaps the Commonwealth should learn from that.

The Prime Minister: I agree entirely. In those circumstances, the EU would of course suspend a country. That is why it is all the more important that we ensure that the Commonwealth, if it is to retain its credibility, acts. However, to answer those shouting out from the Opposition Benches, that has to be done at 50 at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting. The advantage of the mechanism that we have agreed is that because three countries will take the decision, we have a better chance of getting the right result.

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): It is hard to disagree with a single word that the Prime Minister has said about Zimbabwe. He spoke out robustly. However, the train of events in Zimbabwe is not new: it is not a feature of the past few months, but has been going on for two years, since Mugabe lost his referendum in February 2000. Yes, it has become worse over that time, but there has been a consistent pattern of intimidation, brutality and subversion of the rule of law. In that time, some of us have called for targeted action against individuals—members of the gang of hoodlums who support Mugabe in office and in power and Mugabe himself—and for targeted sanctions, but we have been pushed away by the Government, the current Foreign Secretary and his predecessor. The only Minister who consistently spoke up robustly along those lines is the current Minister for Europe, who, as soon he did so, was slapped down and moved out of his job. Does the Prime Minister agree that the lesson of all that is that when a dictator starts to behave in a tyrannical manner, robust action taken early on makes the difference? We should by now have learned that appeasing tyrants does not work.

The Prime Minister: I simply disagree totally. The Government made their position on Mugabe plain right from the outset. Whether we act in the EU or in the Commonwealth, we have to get other countries to join us. The right hon. Gentleman knows that when the issue was first raised a couple of years ago, close consultations took place with the opposition movement in Zimbabwe, the Movement for Democratic Change, about the right response. The idea that we have not sought firm action against Mugabe is absurd, but we have to get that action agreed at European level and at Commonwealth level, and that is best done by working with other countries.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): You dithered!

The Prime Minister: In response to the shadow Foreign Secretary, may I say that the notion that the Conservative party, with its attitude towards Europe and the Commonwealth, could have got further is more than a little absurd?

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): I welcome my right hon. Friend's report that there was a discussion about Angola. Given the recent events affecting UNITA, can he assure us that that discussion was positive and that Angola's prospects are better than they have been in recent years?

The Prime Minister: I think that that is true—there is a greater prospect of stability in Angola. That emphasises, as my right hon. Friend correctly identifies, the importance of ensuring that we establish proper systems of conflict resolution in Africa. The single biggest problem for countries in many parts of Africa is conflicts lasting for years that have made it absolutely impossible for those countries to develop properly. That is what we want to achieve as part of the deal for Africa at the G8 summit. Whether in Congo, Angola, Sudan or Somalia, there is a real prospect of getting the right conflict resolution systems in place so that stability can be restored. I believe that the situation in Angola today is more hopeful than it has been for some time.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I warmly welcome the Prime Minister's statement this afternoon, particularly the large section of it that referred to Zimbabwe. Does he agree that poverty in many central African countries is exacerbated by the chaos in Zimbabwe? Unfortunately, the Commonwealth monitors are not generating confidence among the opponents of Mr. Mugabe, particularly the Movement for Democratic Change. I receive e-mails by the day from Zimbabwe highlighting the monitors' inadequacy.

I know that the Prime Minister must be careful in saying so, but does he agree that the Commonwealth has not enhanced its credibility by not taking a decision at least to suspend Zimbabwe? Is he not worried that after the election on Sunday, the votes will be counted by those who are in hock to Mr. Mugabe?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is right to raise concerns about the way in which the poll will be conducted. I should have preferred the Commonwealth to go further. The real test of its credibility will come after the weekend's election. The hon. Gentleman is also right to say that as a result of the instability in Zimbabwe, problems are being exported to other African countries in the region. That is, in my view, why it is all the more important that they speak out and speak up.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): I fully endorse everything that the Prime Minister has said this afternoon with regard to Zimbabwe and President Mugabe. Did the Commonwealth Heads of Government look at the situation in Pakistan, whose membership of the Commonwealth is suspended, giving due regard to what President Musharraf has boldly and courageously done about terrorism over the past few months and recognising that he is working towards achieving democracy later this year? Should not the Commonwealth be addressing what it can do to help Pakistan return to democracy and return to the Commonwealth, I hope later this year?

The Prime Minister: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. I hope very much that Pakistan keeps to the road map to democracy that was set out by President Musharraf last year. That is important, and I pay tribute to his leadership of his country over the past few months; the strong position that he has taken in respect of international terrorism; and his recent speech that takes on the extremists who would abuse the religion of Islam for the purposes of political extremism. I know that the Commonwealth will want to work with Pakistan to make sure that that road map to democracy is fulfilled and that Pakistan can come back as a full member of the Commonwealth.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): The Prime Minister's persuasive powers have obviously not been enjoying success with the Commonwealth or, for that matter, with President Bush on steel. If President Mugabe rigs the elections or refuses to accept the result and executive action follows, as the Prime Minister indicates, does the right hon. Gentleman believe that that action will be sustained by a consensus of Commonwealth heads of state?

European Union sanctions have attempted to target leading figures in ZANU-PF so that they do not impact on ordinary people in Zimbabwe. Does the Prime Minister envisage any way of toughening up European Union action that will not impact on the ordinary people of Zimbabwe, whose conditions are fairly desperate already?

The Prime Minister: We will certainly look at what further European action can follow, although, as the hon. Gentleman rightly says, it is important that that does not impact on the ordinary people of Zimbabwe. However, the benefit of the mechanism that we have outlined is that it restricts the decision making to the three countries, not the 50. If they make that recommendation, we will be able to sustain it. As I said earlier, that is the one point of hope to come out the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): Can my right hon. Friend confirm that, in the very difficult situation in Zimbabwe, the Government have responded largely along lines approved of by the Movement for Democratic Change? If the worst comes to the worst after this weekend, what, besides any action taken by the Commonwealth, may be done at a United Nations level to ensure that there is true democracy in Zimbabwe and that we set in train efforts to restore prosperity there?

The Prime Minister: First, I thank my hon. Friend for his supportive comments. He is right. We have tried to maintain close contact with the Movement for Democratic Change in terms of what it is sensible for Britain to pursue. There are points in time—this is why I think that some of the remarks made by the Opposition are silly—at which Britain's role in Zimbabwe, if it is not handled with care, can help Mugabe rather than hinder him. We have been sensitive to that throughout. In respect of my hon. Friend's point about the United Nations, we would pursue that at every level and in every forum, but we will have to wait to determine the precise nature of that.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): I, too, welcome the Prime Minister's conversion to the Opposition's view about Zimbabwe. His memory is not entirely accurate. Morgan Tsvangirai was calling for targeted sanctions long before a response came from the Government. Like the rest of us, the Prime Minister knows that it is not just Zimbabwe that is suffering from what is going on in that country; the surrounding countries

[Mrs. Cheryl Gillan]

are suffering too. If some miracle happens and Mugabe loses the election—as we all know he should if the election were free and fair—will the Prime Minister undertake to talk to all his colleagues in the Commonwealth and in the EU and put together a rapid package of aid so that we can get Zimbabwe back on its feet very quickly?

The Prime Minister: Of course we will look at what we can do to assist Zimbabwe, at European level and in respect of the Heads of Government as well. With regard to the hon. Lady's earlier remarks, it is a feature of Opposition parties destined to remain Opposition parties for a long time that they seek to make political capital out of anything.

Paul Farrelly (Newcastle-under-Lyme): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is important to take action where we can against those friends of Mr. Mugabe who make violence and repression possible, not least arms dealers based here in the UK? Those include Mr. Mugabe's main supplier, Mr. John Bredenkamp, whose name I have brought to the attention of the House several times. I am aware that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development has been pursuing investigations into that individual. Over several months, I am sorry to say, my questions to the Foreign Office in that respect have simply hit a brick wall. Will my right hon. Friend undertake to ensure that the Foreign Office and the Department of Trade and Industry work closely with the Department for International Development to do their utmost to close down the activities of those UK-based arms dealers?

The Prime Minister: I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will have heard what my hon. Friend said and will be in touch with him about that. My understanding is that the European Union has made it clear that the export of arms to Zimbabwe is unacceptable.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): Would not our country have more credibility countering the propaganda of the Zimbabwe Government Information Minister, Mr. Jonathan Moyo, if our Government Information and Communications Service and its officers and £150 million budget did not answer to the Prime Minister's political appointee, Mr. Alastair Campbell?

The Prime Minister: It is extraordinary that on a serious subject for millions of people in Zimbabwe, and when it is obvious, as the leader of the Liberal Democrats said a moment or two ago, that the best message to send out from the House is a united one, some parts of the Conservative party have done nothing today but try to make political capital out of the situation in Zimbabwe and suggest that there is some magic resolution of it that the Government could have secured. That is nonsense. What is happening in Zimbabwe is a disgrace. The whole House should be united in condemning it, and points such as those made by the hon. Gentleman only give succour to those who support the Mugabe regime.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): Does the Prime Minister accept that many of us strongly support his comment in his statement that the fudging must stop? The indecision of the Commonwealth conference has left a dreadful stain on the Commonwealth which will last for a long time to come. On the assumption that the election on Sunday will almost certainly be violently rigged by Mugabe, will the Prime Minister do everything in his power to ensure that smart sanctions are introduced as quickly as possible by as many countries that are our allies as possible?

The Prime Minister: We will, of course, do everything we possibly can. On the first part of the right hon. Gentleman's question, the test for the Commonwealth will come once the election takes place. I should have preferred action to be taken before then, but that is the chance for the Commonwealth to show that the principles that it agreed—ironically, in Zimbabwe, at Harare—10 or so years ago will be maintained in this situation. The United States has already indicated the action that it will take, as has the European Union. We will fight for action at every international level.

David Burnside (South Antrim): The Prime Minister knows better than any of us how important international unity has been following the national unity in this House in the international fight against terrorism, whether through the UN, the Commonwealth or the EU. As the Prime Minister has recognised through his international travel that terrorism is terrorism wherever it comes from and wherever it takes place, whether the Twin Towers, Canary Wharf, the Baltic Exchange or Enniskillen, could he foresee a time when Osama bin Laden, if he were still alive and not convicted, would receive a national and international amnesty similar to the amnesty that he and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland are about to announce in Northern Ireland?

The Prime Minister: No, Mr. Speaker. I understand the hon. Gentleman's strong feelings, but the situation in Northern Ireland is different because a peace process is under way there. Whatever the difficulties, the hon. Gentleman would have to accept that the Belfast agreement has considerably improved the situation in Northern Ireland, whether with regard to jobs, investment or security, and it is important that we sustain that agreement. However, as I say, I understand why the hon. Gentleman expresses the views that he does.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): If, as is widely expected, the outcome of this week's election in Zimbabwe is to unleash yet further violence against Mr. Mugabe's enemies, can the Prime Minister assure the House that every possible contingency plan has been taken to protect the lives of the 25,000 UK passport holders who at present reside there?

The Prime Minister: We shall obviously do everything that we possibly can. Of course, we have given considerable thought to what we could do to protect the people there, but I very much hope that it will not come to that.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk): The Prime Minister was right to point out in his statement that, remarkably, it is still just possible that Mugabe could be toppled from power this weekend, such is the scale of his unpopularity there, as shown by what polling evidence there is. If that happens, unlikely as it may be, can the Prime Minister confirm that plans are in place to provide immediate assistance next week to help to stabilise the new President and the country and to help the reconstruction process get under way?

The Prime Minister: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that, if the Opposition were to win and the democratic will of the people were to prevail, we would do everything that we could to ensure that Zimbabwe was given the fresh start that it needs.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): The Prime Minister has said that his preference would be for action before the election on Sunday, not after. There is one thing that he could do that would send a clear signal now. Will he make it clear today that if Mugabe remains in office after Sunday, Zimbabwe will not be welcome at the Commonwealth games in Manchester this summer?

The Prime Minister: I shall certainly consult on that in the light of what happens at the weekend.

Mr. Speaker: The next business was to be a statement from the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. However, the statement reached the Opposition only 10 minutes ago, so in order to allow the Opposition time to study the statement I shall take the ten-minute Bill first.

Criminal Evidence (Prohibition of Sale)

4.13 pm

Mr. Parmjit Dhanda (Gloucester): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to prohibit the sale of evidence gathered during criminal investigations or used during criminal proceedings.

In 1994, a series of murders committed over a number of years came to light in my constituency of Gloucester. During that time, the city became the focus for the country's, and indeed the world's, media. It soon became apparent that 25 Cromwell street had been the venue for some of the most appalling acts of sexual abuse, torture and mass murder that Britain has ever seen. During a number of agonising weeks, many people discovered the fate of their missing loved ones. It was an extremely painful time for many people, and how victims' relatives and the surviving victims can even begin to rebuild their lives is almost beyond my comprehension. I know that many have done so, however, as many of them reside in my constituency. I am introducing this Bill because their healing process was to be rudely interrupted.

In 1996, Fred West committed suicide in jail while still awaiting trial. He died intestate and the Official Solicitor made a deal with a television company for the documentary television and video rights to the archive material from his estate. That evidence included recorded interviews that the police had conducted with West, West's personal photographs, home video footage and witness testimonies—evidence that would have been covered by Crown copyright had West not committed suicide pre-trial. Essentially, all the evidence that the police had gathered during their investigations was being sold on by the Official Solicitor to a television company. That television company was the creative consortium working with Channel 5.

When the police interview a suspect such as Fred West, they give the defence counsel copies of their evidence under the disclosure rule. They do not expect evidence for a court case then to be sold on to the media to produce a salacious television documentary. Channel 5 commissioned a programme on Fred West and broadcast not just transcripts of his confessions but his voice—he described his crimes in great detail. Unsurprisingly, the Gloucestershire constabulary was aghast. The victims, many of whom live in my constituency, turned to me because they could not believe that trial evidence could be traded in such a way.

Prior to the broadcast, I wrote to or had meetings with representatives of the Home Office, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Broadcasting Standards Commission, the Independent Television Commission and the Attorney-General to convey the concerns of the police and those of the victims and their families. The Attorney-General told me that an application for an injunction would not be successful, and that a court could not be expected to prevent a broadcast as it would contravene article 10 of the European convention on human rights. The police argued that taped interviews and other material were covered by Crown copyright and asked the Attorney-General to block that material being broadcast on the basis that not to do so would be a contempt of court. That request was turned down. The BSC and the ITC then told me that they could only act retrospectively—after the programme had been shown.

[Mr. Parmjit Dhanda]

Indeed, the Broadcasting Act 1990 explicitly excludes the possibility of the ITC being able to preview such a programme.

By maximising the estate of Fred West in such a way, the Official Solicitor had made it impossible for the Government or the regulators—the ITC and the BSC—to prevent footage of a mass murderer talking about his crimes in his own voice from appearing on our screens.

Channel 5 showed its documentary. Throughout the campaign to block the broadcast, Channel 5 consistently gave reassurances that the programme would be tasteful and predominantly investigative. Indeed, shortly before the broadcast, Channel 5's chief executive stated:

> "This documentary is of the highest possible calibre. It is not in any way salacious."

None the less, the programme showed Fred West describing his crimes in great detail. It showed pictures of victims faded in and out against pictures of their skeletal remains, and it showed Rose West undressing in front of the camera and in bed with her clients

Some may argue that censorship is an issue in this matter, and a reason to object to the Bill. However, it has never been my intention to prevent the making of a programme about Fred West. I do not have a problem with crime documentaries. Two other documentaries about Fred West are in the public domain at present. They were made with the co-operation of surviving victims, the police and people in the legal profession. My Bill would not prevent the media from covering or documenting such cases, but the sale of evidence and the screening of the film have significant implications for future police investigations.

The police officer who led the investigation, former Detective Superintendent John Bennett, said on the eve of the Channel 5 broadcast:

> "Police promises of confidentiality are rendered useless if every tape and every piece of evidence can be turned over to TV companies on the whim of some legal bureaucrat."

If this programme has set a precedent and more programmes of this nature are made, how long will it be before detained prisoners, aware that their confessions could soon be in every living room in the country, simply refuse to talk to the police? How long will it be before witnesses, who already face enormous difficulties in even talking about their experiences, are simply unable to open up to the police?

Furthermore, once evidence is in the public domain, there is also the danger that convicted criminals will have easy access to witnesses' testimonies once they have served their sentences. How long will it be before a convicted criminal is able to access everything that a prosecution witness has said?

This Bill does not introduce censorship. It does not undermine the media. However, it will ensure that, if surviving victims of crime or the families of murder victims object to the sale to the media of evidence that was meant for a trial, the Official Solicitor will have to seek permission from the Attorney-General.

Fred West is dead. Through the sale of evidence from his trial by the Official Solicitor to the media, his surviving victims, many of whom are my constituents, have been tormented by him again. The police and the justice system have felt undermined. In similar cases up and down the land, that could happen again. This Bill can change that. It may be too late for some, but it is not too late for others

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Parmjit Dhanda, Mr. David Drew, Mr. Nigel Jones, Mr. Tom Watson, Ms Candy Atherton, John Mann, Mr. Simon Thomas, Mr. George Osborne, Patrick Mercer, Jim Knight, John Robertson and Valerie Davey.

CRIMINAL EVIDENCE (PROHIBITION OF SALE)

Mr. Parmjit Dhanda accordingly presented a Bill to prohibit the sale of evidence gathered during criminal investigations or used during criminal proceedings: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 10 May, and to be printed [Bill 109].

US Tariffs (Steel Imports)

4.24 pm

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a statement about the announcement made last night by President Bush on his decision to impose a range of tariff measures that would severely restrict United States imports of steel products from the rest of the world. These measures will impose additional tariffs of between 8 and 30 per cent. on products that account for some three quarters of US steel imports. They will effectively close the American market to many products.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I are extremely disappointed that President Bush has taken this action in the face of united international opinion. It is wholly unjustified at a time of falling American imports and rising prices. In our view and that of the European Commission, it is a clear breach of the United States WTO obligations. As well as having an international effect, steel import restrictions will raise costs for American industry to the detriment of consumers and the American manufacturing sector overall. Import restrictions will also only delay much-needed steel restructuring and hurt the American manufacturing sector just at a time when it appears to be rallying from the economic downturn.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, myself and a number of other Ministers have been in frequent touch with the highest levels of the American Administration since last July, when the investigation by the US International Trade Commission was announced. That has continued throughout this week, when I have twice spoken with the American Commerce Secretary, Donald Evans. We have all made it very clear that measures restricting imports would be quite the wrong response to problems that are faced by parts of the American steel industry. We have also stressed to the American Administration that this is more than an issue between the European Union and the United States. The American action, in clear disregard of international opinion, risks undermining the good work that was done a few months ago to achieve the Doha launch of a new round of trade liberalisation. Why should developing countries commit to free and open markets when the United States closes its domestic market to address a problem that many see as largely of the American industry's own making?

Of course, there are also real issues in the global steel trade market, including excess capacity and market-distorting subsidies, but they are best addressed multilaterally through the discussions that have been convened by the Organisation for European Co-operation and Development with our full support. Until now, those discussions have been making good progress, but although we hope that that effort can continue, the American action risks jeopardising that progress.

Most of all, however, I am concerned—as every Member of this House will be—about the impact that these American measures will have on the British steel industry and steelworkers. We have one of the most efficient and productive steel-making industries and work forces in the world. That achievement has been a very painful process. Some 86,000 steel jobs have been lost in Britain since 1980 and some 10,000 have been lost in the past 18 months. All of us in this House know how tough that has been for workers who have lost their jobs and for their families and communities. We also know what the Government have done to see them through those difficult times. But the outcome is an efficient and productive industry that is able to compete effectively in world markets. We are not prepared to allow the United States to try to dump its problems on the rest of the world instead of facing up to the challenge of modernising and restructuring its industry.

The steel curtain that the American Administration have brought down threatens our industry in two ways. First, it will directly affect some of our exports. Three quarters of all UK steel production is sold in the European Union, including the UK. About 9 per cent. of our total production is exported to the United States, and about 4 per cent. will be affected by the American tariffs. One especially significant UK export product—hot-rolled bar and cold-finished bar—will be subject to a prohibitive 30 per cent. tariff. Given the current state of our steel industry, that will have a devastating effect on many of our companies and their workers. Secondly—this is potentially even more damaging to UK and other European industry—there is the proposed 30 per cent. tariff on flat steel products. There is a serious risk that when the tariffs take effect on 20 March, the British and European markets will be flooded by exports of these products from third countries, mainly in the far east, that would otherwise have sold to the United States.

We will stand by our steel producers in combating this unjustifiable and deeply regrettable action. I therefore fully support today's announcement by EU Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy that he will request immediate WTO dispute settlement action. Indeed, he has already done so. The first step in this is a 60-day consultation period with the United States, but, unless the American Administration are prepared to rethink their action, a WTO disputes panel will follow. Realistically, this case—which I am confident the European Union will win—will take some considerable time, perhaps up to two years. We are not prepared to stand by while British industry and jobs are put at risk for that length of time.

I can confirm that Commissioner Lamy, to whom I have just spoken, is already considering appropriate and urgent action to be taken to safeguard British and European steel producers and workers against a flood of steel imports. Indeed, we were already pressing the Commission last week to be prepared to take such action in the event that the Americans took protectionist measures of this magnitude.

Let me stress that safeguard action is allowable under WTO rules, where it is intended to protect countries from surges in imports that cause, or threaten to cause, serious injury. That does not mean that we are simply copying the American actions of which we are so rightly critical. We would much prefer not to have to take any action. Our trade policy is to promote open and fair global markets, but, in circumstances in which the British and European marketplace could be flooded by steel imports as a result of American action, we are forced to consider appropriate and proportionate action to protect our own industry and its work force.

I very much regret being forced into safeguard action. This would be the first time that any safeguard action had been taken by the European Union since the present regulations came into effect eight years ago. I particularly

[Ms Patricia Hewitt]

regret that it is the United States that will have prompted this action. Only four months ago, we were working closely with America, and with developing countries, to launch a new round of world trade negotiations. We will continue to work for free and fair trade around the world, because it is in all our interests—those of the developed countries and the developing countries alike—to achieve that. We will also continue to stand up for the interests of the British economy and British workers at home and abroad.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford): Although I extend the usual thanks to the Secretary of State for letting me have a copy of her statement in advance, may I express regret that she did not see fit to apologise for the fact that it did not arrive until 10 minutes before the Prime Minister sat down? May I ask you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to convey my thanks to Mr. Speaker for making it clear, by bringing forward the ten-minute Bill, that that kind of discourtesy is unacceptable to the House?

Having said that, I welcome the fact that the Secretary of State has come to the House to make this statement, in contrast to her failure even to attend the debate that took place here on this issue last night. First, I would like to make it clear that the Conservatives join the Government in condemning the action taken by the United States Administration. The import tariffs that have been announced will do nothing to help the steel companies in the United States that are suffering from competition from more efficient producers at home, and they will also push up raw material costs for many more American companies that use steel. However, although this action may prove damaging to the American economy, there is no doubt that the effect on the steel industry in this country will be devastating, putting at risk yet more jobs, on top of the thousands of redundancies that have occurred in the last two years.

We therefore support the action taken by the European Union to lodge an immediate complaint with the World Trade Organisation, which must be the right place to resolve disputes of this kind. Does the Secretary of State agree that, while it is right to take action to protect the steel industry from a further flood of cheap imports that have been displaced from American markets, it would be entirely wrong for us now to impose retaliatory measures that could lead to an escalating trade war? Will she remind President Bush of the commitments that he has made in the past to the cause of free trade?

I join the right hon. Lady in expressing great concern that this latest action might put in jeopardy the achievement of a new world trade agreement, after the encouraging start that was made at Doha. However, although she is right to say that this matter will be dealt with by the WTO, she is also correct to say that we simply cannot afford to wait the two years that it usually takes for that organisation to reach a judgment. Will she therefore make every effort to ensure that the matter is dealt with as quickly as possible, and, even at this eleventh hour, press the United States Government to hold back from implementation of the tariffs? If that cannot be achieved, we will reluctantly support the taking of safeguard action, but will she confirm that that action will be measured and permissible under WTO rules?

Will the Secretary of State explain why, during the many conversations that have taken place between the Prime Minister and President Bush in the past six months, the Prime Minister did not raise this matter with the President until last week? It has been clear since July, as she said, that the American Government intended to take this action, yet it was seven months before the Prime Minister wrote to President Bush to press him to reconsider.

Is the Secretary of State aware of the glaring contrast between the lack of urgency shown by the Prime Minister in defending the steel industry in this country, and the alacrity with which he was willing to write to the Romanian Prime Minister to promote the interests of an overseas company which happens to be owned by a major donor to the Labour party? Is she aware of the anger felt today by steelworkers in Britain about the fact that the Government have been helping Mr. Mittal, a foreign-based competitor who has been actively campaigning against British interests by giving $600,000 to the campaign that is lobbying for tariffs in the United States?

On the radio this morning, the Secretary of State tried to claim that the American subsidiary of Corus had also supported that campaign. Does she now accept that that is completely untrue? Does she accept that the president of Corus Tuscaloosa wrote to the American Iron and Steel Institute making it clear that the firm was totally opposed to the introduction of tariffs, and would not support the AISI in the matter?

Is this not another instance in which the Government's attempt to justify their actions has been shown to be wholly incredible and based on a complete distortion of the facts? Will the Secretary of State therefore apologise to Corus, and to all who work in the steel industry in this country, for the support that her Government have given to a company whose actions may directly contribute to the loss of their own jobs?

Ms Hewitt: Of course I regret the fact that my office was unable to give the hon. Gentleman a copy of my statement any earlier this afternoon, but I know he will understand that my first priority was to ensure that we understood precisely the details of what the American Administration are proposing, how that would affect our industry and how we could best deal with the situation. As for yesterday's debate, my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy was present throughout.

I welcome the hon. Gentleman's support for the action that we and the European Union are already taking in response to the American action. There will be no tit-for-tat retaliation. We will not respond to the American Administration's flouting of the WTO rules by flouting them ourselves. We will of course continue to press the American Administration, even now, to back off from the actions that they have announced, just as we will continue to press for exemptions of products that are of particular significance to the British steel industry. We will, however, also start urgent discussions with the European Commission and our European colleagues to ensure that we do, if necessary, take the appropriate safeguard action—as permitted by the WTO rules—to protect our industry and our workers from a flood of imports.

The hon. Gentleman asked when the issue was pressed with the American Administration. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made clear this afternoon, I first raised it at senior Administration levels last July. It was not at all obvious at that point that the Administration would pursue this course, and for many months—through me, through other Ministers and through the embassy—we continued to try to persuade the Administration that they should not risk the consequences of this retreat into protectionism. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister confirmed this afternoon, when it became more likely that the Administration would take this action, he raised the matter directly with the President.

On the enormous pressure that trade unions and trade associations in the United States have put on the American Government, all companies operating in the American steel sector are in fact members of the trade associations that lobbied for those tariffs. Indeed, I made precisely that point this morning. Corus and Corus UK in particular have made it very clear that they are against that action.

We hear synthetic anger from the Opposition about donations and job losses in the steel industry, but they did not care about such losses when they were in government and devastating the British steel industry. Let me make the matter clear once again: donations to political parties have nothing whatsoever to do with Government policy. At any rate, they have nothing whatsoever to do with our Government's policy. We have no idea what influence political donations had on the policy of the previous Conservative Government, for the simple reason that they and the Conservative party flatly refused to publish any information on donations, whether British or foreign. We will therefore take no lessons from Conservatives on party political funding. It is this Government who have made party political donations transparent.

We will continue to support the Romanian Government's efforts to open up their economy and modernise their industry because it is in Britain's interest for Romania and other candidate countries to join the European Union and become more prosperous themselves. I suspect, however, that the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) is unaware that America has exempted Romania and the other candidate countries from those tariffs precisely because their exports to the United States—like those to the European Union—are too small to be of any significance.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Ochil): Does my right hon. Friend agree that there can be no winners in a trade war involving the imposition of tariffs, and that we must try as quickly as possible to stop it? Let us not forget that there are 30 days in which a great deal of work can be done. I urge her to ensure that the European Union carries a big stick, and wields it if necessary. In circumstances such as this, the Americans must be made to understand that we are not a soft touch, and that the WTO will come down on them like a ton of bricks. It will not be the workers of Ohio or West Virginia who will benefit from such action.

Ms Hewitt: I entirely agree with the points that my hon. Friend has made. Of course, neither the United Kingdom nor the European Union will be a soft touch on this matter. We have supported the strengthening of the WTO, and we believe in a proper framework of rules for free and fair trade, and in the use of WTO procedures when concerns exist about imports. We completely reject the actions of the American Administration in flouting WTO rules. They have put at risk a new round of trade liberalisation, which, if successful, could benefit the entire global economy. We will stand up vigorously for the interests of our workers and companies.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I echo the comments of the Secretary of State and the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) about the American action. It was indeed reckless and stupid in economic terms, and it threatens to contaminate the international trade negotiating process. The Americans are sending the message, "Don't do as we do, do as we say." That combination of hypocrisy and bullying will do much damage to international trade.

However, I want to part company with the Secretary of State and the hon. Gentleman on the issue of retaliation, and in that regard I totally endorse the comments of the hon. Member for Ochil (Mr. O'Neill).

If the 30-day period expires without any sign of reasonableness from the American Administration, is the Secretary of State aware that under the article 19 action, which the Americans have taken—so-called selective safeguard action—it would be entirely legitimate for countries damaged by that process to take retaliatory action? She has seen the impact of smart sanctions from the US in the form of the so-called carousel that they operated in the banana dispute, so I wonder why she and the EU are not preparing a list of comparable sanctions to take against specific American targets, if they do not back down in this dispute.

I also part company with the Secretary of State and with the Conservative spokesman—

Bob Spink (Castle Point): The Opposition.

Dr. Cable: Yes, I part company from both of them on the issue of safeguard action. Will she accept on reflection that that is potentially a dangerous and counterproductive approach? Introducing safeguard action against all steel coming into the EU would do nothing to hurt the US, and would penalise steel-using industries in Britain, which would create unemployment because they are more labour intensive than the steel industry. It would be a reflex action that would be economically damaging.

The Secretary of State said a few moments ago that the Americans had exempted east European products from their action. Would that exemption also apply to the EU safeguard action, because the east European countries are directly in the line of fire? The Secretary of State may recall that the Sidex plant is underwritten by a European Bank for Reconstruction and Development loan, on the basis that eastern European producers will continue to have access to the European market. Can she confirm that she has checked out that point?

Ms Hewitt: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his general support for the stance that we have taken, but I confirm again that, unlike the American Administration, we will act in conformity with the WTO rules. The hon. Gentleman may recall that at the time that the American Administration were engaged in carousel retaliation we strongly expressed the view that that retaliatory action was contrary to the WTO rules. We will act within those rules, which explicitly allow countries to take action to

[Ms Hewitt]

protect their markets against an unforeseen and sudden surge in imports. It is ironic, as the hon. Gentleman implied, that President Bush has relied on the same clause in an attempt to justify his action, when of course steel imports into the US fell by 21 per cent. last year and are considerably lower than they were even four years ago.

We will of course look in detail at the points that the hon. Gentleman raises about the precise nature of the safeguard action that we will be forced to take if the Americans decide to persist in this action. At this stage, before we have had detailed discussions with the European Commission and other European member states, it is too early to say exactly what form that safeguard action will take.

Dr. Jack Cunningham (Copeland): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, whatever the nature of the anger from the Conservatives, real and genuine anger will be felt in steel-making communities in Britain at the American action? Is not it insufficient to express regret at the American action, which is intolerable in the circumstances? Is not it dishonest of the American leadership to call for more open markets and more free trade while, at the same time, cynically resorting to classical protectionism of its industries, and not for the first time in recent years? Should not we therefore use every weapon at our disposal under the WTO rules to protect European and other continental markets that will be affected by that disgraceful action, and at the same time, search quickly for actions that we can legitimately direct against the US, while talks with them continue? I hope that my right hon. Friend will believe me when I say that that is exactly what British workers and their families will expect us to do.

Ms Hewitt: I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend's comments about the enormous anger that is felt today in the steel communities throughout our country. Their anger is justified; they are right to be angry about the action that the American Administration will take.

It is a tragedy that the American Administration, who played such a crucial role in securing the launch of the Doha development round and a new round of world trade negotiations, and signed up to negotiations that are designed to slash tariffs and import quotas around the world, have resorted to naked protectionism with no justification or legal basis.

I sympathise with my right hon. Friend's points about the need for action that is directed against America. I stress again that we shall consider what action to take, but will act within World Trade Organisation rules. That is in the interests of our country, of free and fair world trade and of the developing as well as the developed world.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Will the right hon. Lady ask the Prime Minister to speak gently but firmly to President Bush, and to tell him that many friends and admirers of America, who strongly supported the way in which the Government stood by our ally in recent months, will perceive the cynical and appalling action that we are discussing in the context of British-American relations? They will not regard that action as proper treatment of America's foremost ally, with which it always claims a special relationship.

Ms Hewitt: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will doubtless express his disappointment and views on the action directly to President Bush. However, it is important to understand that there is no connection between the action on steel and the global coalition against terrorism. We stand with the Americans and many other countries around the world in the global coalition against terrorism because that is the right thing to do and it is in our interests to do so. In the same way, we will stand with our steelworkers and steel producers against the American Administration, who have taken such completely unjustified action, because the Americans are wrong about that matter.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Does my right hon. Friend believe that the Americans will take a blind bit of notice of what she does?

Dr. Ashok Kumar (Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East): They should.

Mr. Dalyell: Of course they should. I believe that my right hon. Friend is wrong and that the Americans will not take any notice unless we link the global connections with what has happened to the steel industry. Should not we tell the Americans that we are not with them in their proposals on, for example, Iraq?

Ms Hewitt: Although I understand the strength of my hon. Friend's feelings on the matter, he is wrong to try to link the deeply unfortunate action on the steel industry with other foreign policy matters, which the Government should and will judge on their merit.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): May I tell the right hon. Lady that the anger on our Benches today, yesterday and the day before is anything but synthetic? Will she confirm a couple of small points? First, when did the Prime Minister become involved? There is an impression that that happened last Thursday—a bit late in the day. Secondly, when will she meet Pascal Lamy to discuss the way forward? Will she keep the House updated every week or 10 days about what is happening? The UK steel industry is going down the tubes.

Ms Hewitt: Of course I shall continue to keep hon. Members informed about the action that we are taking. I spoke to Commissioner Lamy a few minutes before making the statement to the House this afternoon. There will be meetings and further telephone calls between officials and Ministers in the next few days and weeks as we decide on the appropriate and lawful action to take. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will continue to support the interests of British steelworkers.

Dr. Hywel Francis (Aberavon): I thank the Secretary of State for her unequivocal and clear statement of support for the steel industry in the United Kingdom. Steelworkers in my constituency appreciate the Government's work on the matter.

Will my right hon. Friend make it clear that the safeguards that she has described will be introduced immediately? That will reassure steelworkers and their communities throughout the United Kingdom and the new all-party group on steel.

Ms Hewitt: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those remarks and I very much appreciate the work of the new all-party parliamentary group on steel, with which I will continue to work closely.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): As it is now clear from the letter published by the American chairman of Corus that the Secretary of State misled the British public on the "Today" programme this morning and has slurred Corus, will she now apologise? On three occasions, she has failed to answer a simple question, which is this; when did the Prime Minister first get involved in making representations to the American Administration and the President on this unfortunate matter?

Ms Hewitt: The statements that I made on the "Today" programme this morning and in other interviews during the day were, like the statement I made this afternoon, all factually accurate. I briefed my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on the situation in July last year. He has remained closely involved and recently raised the issue personally with President Bush.

Mr. Ian Cawsey (Brigg and Goole): In the north Lincolnshire area that I represent alongside my hon. Friends the Members for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) and for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac), we have seen tremendous changes in the steel industry. Back in 1979, there were more than 22,000 people on the works; there are now fewer than 4,000. Those steelworkers have taken those changes on the chin every time because they have been told that they would secure a long-term future for UK steel. This ludicrous decision from the American Government once again puts their jobs in jeopardy. Will my right hon. Friend give an assurance that at a UK, EU and worldwide level she will do everything she can to get assistance for the industry and, moreover, that she will base all her decisions on the simple criterion of protecting British steelworkers' jobs?

Ms Hewitt: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend, and of course I can give him that assurance.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): I very much hope that the Secretary of State does not feel that our anger at the loss of British steel-making jobs would be, to use her word, "synthetic". Is it her intention to approach the European Commission with a view to exempting from the safeguard procedure the steel industry of Romania?

Ms Hewitt: I have already told the House that steel exports from the candidate countries have been exempted by the American Administration from their proposed tariffs. The reason for that is simple; it is because the exports from all those candidate countries are so small, whether those are exports to America or to the EU. The threat of diversion of imports, which is what we are concerned about, arises in the case of countries to whom the Americans are applying the tariffs, not the countries to whom they are not applying the tariffs. It will be in that context that we will consider the appropriate and lawful action that we will take through safeguard measures to protect our own steel industry and workers.

Alan Howarth (Newport, East): Will my right hon. Friend reject at very short order the proposal from the Liberal Democrat spokesman, which is that she should, in effect, write off the UK steel industry? Is she aware that the determination that she has expressed on behalf of the Government and the EU to act urgently to challenge the legitimacy of American actions in the WTO and to prevent dumping in Europe of steel displaced from the market to the USA will be very much welcomed in steel-making communities in south-east Wales, where it is understood—in a way that the Conservative party and Plaid Cymru seem entirely unable to grasp—that the policy of the Government to assist Romania to prepare its steel industry to operate within the rules of the EU so far from being detrimental to the interests of the British steel industry, will be beneficial to it, in that it will bring to an end subsidies and unfair trading practices in that quarter?

Ms Hewitt: I entirely agree. My right hon. Friend is standing up for the interests of the steelworkers whom he represents. We will of course do all we can and will work extremely closely with our European allies to ensure that we protect as far as possible his constituents and other steelworkers around the country against an utterly unjustified and unlawful action.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): It might surprise the right hon. Lady and the House to hear me say that the steel industry is hugely important to Ryedale. Some of our major employers and manufacturers are among the biggest customers for steel made in the United Kingdom. In particular, Ward Building Components, which is part of the Kingspan group, is important given its purchase of steel manufactured in Wales. The Portakabin and Portastore factories on the outskirts of York also purchase huge amounts of steel. Those companies need a consistent supply of high-quality steel at competitive prices.

The market has already been destabilised over the past two or three years, as the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey) said. I foresee the situation becoming worse. We risk the loss of jobs both in steel manufacture and in firms that use steel as a major component of their manufacturing processes. The Secretary of State said that she will consider safeguard action that may cause serious injury. In doing so, will she keep in mind the serious injury that may be caused to companies that rely on the supply of steel?

Ms Hewitt: Safeguard action under the WTO rules is designed to deal with a flood of imports that would cause serious injury. I entirely share the hon. Gentleman's concern, however, about the impact on our manufacturing industry of destabilisation in the steel market. Our steel industry includes some of the most productive steel companies in the world and companies at the leading edge of creating high value-added and innovative steel products of enormous importance to manufacturing industry.

The irony of what the Americans have done is that, by effectively banning from their market the high value-added products in which Britain and other European countries excel, they will damage their own steel industry, the restructuring of which will be delayed, and parts of

[Ms Hewitt]

their manufacturing industry, including the aerospace industry. I hope, even at this late hour, that the serious implications for the American manufacturing sector might persuade the American Administration to moderate the stance that they took last night.

Dr. Ashok Kumar (Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East): Will my right hon. Friend tell President Bush that his draconian measure is a foolish and stupid idea that should be buried immediately? There is a great deal of anger in the House and in our constituencies. I represent a steel constituency that has lost several thousand jobs in the past year. I associate myself strongly with the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), who said that our people seek strong action and want their jobs to be defended. Now that Turkey and South Korea may dump their steel over-capacity not on America but on this country, what action will my right hon. Friend take?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend is a staunch defender of his constituents who work in the steel industry. He is absolutely right to draw attention to the threat to their jobs posed by the diversion of imports from countries such as Turkey and Korea, which will be directly affected by the tariffs that the American Administration propose to impose. That is precisely why, with Commissioner Lamy and colleagues in our fellow European member states, we seek to take safeguard action to protect my hon. Friend's constituents and other steelworkers against a flood of imports from countries locked out of the American market.

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): Will the Secretary of State tell us exactly when she and the Prime Minister first became aware that Mr. Mittal was funding the protectionist lobby to the tune of $600,000? In light of the success of that lobby, will she and her colleagues take the only honourable course of action available to them and return the £125,000 that they took from Mr. Mittal?

Ms Hewitt: I notice that the hon. Gentleman has not asked me to do anything at all to help steelworkers in this country. That is a mark of the nature of his interest in the subject. It is a trivial question and it insults the steelworkers about whom I am concerned.

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): Has my right hon. Friend been able to make an assessment of the effect of the outrageous 30 per cent. tariff that will be placed on exports of some products, many of which are manufactured in south Yorkshire, and of the likely effect on manufacturers in the US who currently rely on those products, which come from our area?

Ms Hewitt: We are in the process of making precisely that assessment, but I am sure that my hon. Friend will understand that, given the number of different companies involved at this end, the number of different purchasers involved in the manufacturing sector in the United States, and the number of different products involved—we and others have been seeking exemption for over 1,000 products during these discussions—it is not possible to arrive at an instant assessment.

As I said in my statement, some 4 per cent. of total British steel output will be affected by these tariffs if they go ahead on the basis of last night's statement, but obviously that will affect some companies, which specialise in those products, much more than it will others. We are looking to do that assessment very quickly. We are of course already working with the steel producers, the steel trade association and the steel trade union, to ensure that we have an accurate assessment of the damage that could be done not only to our producers, but to American manufacturing industry. On that basis, we will decide on the appropriate safeguard action that should be taken.

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): After the end of the American love affair—after Kyoto, the Enron debacle and now this—I am not sure that we should be so surprised that this has happened. However, given the global economy, global systems and global communications, is 60 days now an appropriate time scale in which to consult the WTO? Might we work in future to make the consultation period much shorter than 60 days? Would it be possible to invite Pascal Lamy and the president of the WTO to this place before the recess—not to the Chamber because we cannot, but to the House of Commons—so that we may express our concerns forcefully to those two people?

Ms Hewitt: Of course I will look at that possibility, but let me assure my hon. Friend that, having just spoken to Commissioner Lamy, I am in no doubt—and I hope that hon. Members will be in no doubt—about the anger that is felt by him and the Government about the American action and this defiance of World Trade Organisation rules. On my hon. Friend's other point, we will continue to try to strengthen the World Trade Organisation as an institution and to ensure that it has effective dispute resolution mechanisms that can be used by member states who have a complaint rather more speedily than they can at the moment.

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): I begin by declaring an interest as a member of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation trade union. On that point, may I urge my right hon. Friend to consult fully and keep informed the leaders of all those who represent and work in the British steel industry? May I ask her to reject out of hand those calls for action that will be tantamount to a transatlantic trade war, which is certainly not in the interests of the British steel industry, or of the British economy and British jobs? Finally, while I appreciate that it is best to try to seek a cross-European approach on the matter, my right hon. Friend will be aware that such agreements can take an awfully long time to reach. May I ask her to ensure that the process is expedited and, if necessary, to retain the right to take action, as urged by my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey), that would be primarily focused on protecting British jobs and the British economy?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the important role of the ISTC and of course we are in touch with the union and with others representing steelworkers. I am very glad to say that today the ISTC has welcomed our Government's commitment to support the referral of America to the World Trade Organisation.

Let me stress to my hon. Friend that that referral to the WTO dispute procedure has already been initiated. Similarly, Commissioner Lamy has already initiated the work required to invoke the safeguard clause of the European Community rules. As I have stressed repeatedly to the House, we will continue to work in line with the WTO rules, which do give us precisely the basis on which we can take speedy action to defend our steel industry against this appalling action.

Mr. Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich, West): I thank the Secretary of State for her statement and welcome the actions that are proposed to be taken with the WTO. In addition, I particularly welcome her comments about pressing for an exemption for producers of specialised steel exports during those negotiations with the WTO and others. May I bring to her attention the plight of a company in my constituency, Firth Cleveland—a small, specialist producer of high value, high quality cold strip steel? It has maintained a constant—I emphasise the word "constant"—export market in the United States, and has not flooded it. I understand that there is no domestic alternative for its products in the United States. May I ask her to ensure that interests such as those of that company, are adequately represented when we press for exemptions?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend has already drawn my attention to that company in his constituency, and we are already ensuring that we understand fully its position. The point that he makes about the high-value-added products that are being exported at a steady rate—no sudden surge of imports there—to the United States precisely underlines the point that I made earlier that the American action risks damaging its own manufacturing sector, precisely when that sector is beginning to emerge from the recession in America. Although it may seem ironic, we may well be acting in the interests of American manufacturing industry, as well as his and other steel producers, when we seek—I hope, successfully—the exemption for which he presses.

Points of Order

5.12 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. During last evening's debate in the House on whether this Parliament or the Scottish Parliament is responsible for approving new power stations in Scotland, especially nuclear power stations, Opposition parties tried eight times to elicit an answer from the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Minister of State, Scotland Office.

Simultaneous to that debate, the Minister for Industry and Energy was answering that question outside the House. Further confusion arises because most hon. Members understood the Ministers in that debate to say that Westminster would take the final decision, while the Minister for Industry and Energy was saying that it would be taken in Scotland. What protection is there for hon. Members who are involved in a debate in the House when Ministers of the Crown make contrary statements elsewhere? Does not that involve an element of discourtesy? How do we proceed now? Does a form of arbitration between Ministers exist? Do we toss a coin? Better still, could a statement be made to clarify the position once and for all?

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I add my voice as one who is fervently pro-nuclear power stations? There should be clarification; this is an important issue.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): May I tell both hon. Gentlemen that the occupant of the Chair is not responsible for ministerial statements? The point made by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) is, in a sense, a continuation of yesterday's debate. The principal point is that the occupant of the Chair is not responsible for Ministers' statements on such matters.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Would it be appropriate for the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to come to the House to explain why he chose to disregard London Transport's advice not to publish the Ernst and Young report on value for money at London Underground because that would undermine the only competitive leverage left in negotiations? Would it be appropriate for him to come here to set out what assessment he has made of the commercial damage caused by his actions?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is not for the occupant of the Chair to judge whether those matters are appropriate or inappropriate, and I have no knowledge of such a statement.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of which I have given the Chair notice. Yesterday afternoon I received a letter from the BBC signed by Michael Hastings CBE, who is described as head of political and parliamentary affairs. He has previously been brought to the attention of the Chair for his activities in the House.

[Mr. Gerald Kaufman]

The letter relates to the proceedings on which we are about to embark. It says:

> "An inappropriate level of attention has been focused on the BBC and its regulation throughout the Second Reading and Committee stages in the Commons."

Mr. Hastings goes on to say:

> "It is our hope that this Wednesday's debate will be more constructive".

Referring to amendments that have been tabled for the House to discuss on Report, he says:

> "Amendments have again been tabled which seek to bypass the White Paper and propose an alternative model. The BBC rejects these options."

What can one do about the impertinence of a lobbyist who writes to the Chairman of a Select Committee on such matters in an offensive way? Could it be drawn to the BBC's attention that it has no power either to reject or to accept options that are laid before the House, because they are for us to debate and to decide? Is it not particularly unsatisfactory that the House of Commons should be treated in such a way by someone whose organisation is funded by the taxpayer through the licence fee, whose job is funded by the taxpayer through the licence fee and whose letter to me was funded by the taxpayer through the licence fee? Is it not a fact that that person has a vested interest in those amendments being rejected because they would affect not only the BBC, but himself? What can we do to deal with offensive communications of such a nature from a vested interest?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Chair has no control over communications of that kind made by people outside the House. I have no doubt, however, that the BBC will have noted the right hon. Gentleman's comments. I am sure that the House, too, will bear them in mind when it debates the amendments.

Orders of the Day

Office of Communications Bill *[Lords]*

As amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

New Clause 4

OFCOM OFFICES IN WALES AND SCOTLAND

'OFCOM shall establish an office in Wales and an office in Scotland in order to ensure that Welsh and Scottish needs are considered.'.—*[Mr. Simon Thomas.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

5.18 pm

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 15, in clause 1, page 1, line 11, at end insert—

'(3A) The Secretary of State shall—

(a) ensure that the membership of OFCOM includes a member to represent Welsh and Scottish matters, and

(b) in appointing this member, shall consult the National Assembly for Wales and the Scottish Parliament.'.

No. 16, in page 1, line 15, at end insert—

'(4A) In appointing members of OFCOM, the Secretary of State shall consult with the National Assembly of Wales and the Scottish Parliament in order to ensure that Welsh and Scottish needs are considered.'.

No. 17, in schedule, page 11, line 34, at end insert—

'(4) As soon as possible after the end of each financial year, OFCOM shall also prepare and send to the National Assembly of Wales and the Scottish Parliament a report of how OFCOM is ensuring that Welsh and Scottish interests are being adequately met.'.

No. 18, in page 12, line 9, at end insert—

'(1A) OFCOM shall establish—

(a) a Welsh Advisory Committee which shall advise OFCOM on the carrying out of its functions in Wales, and

(b) a Scottish Advisory Committee which shall advise OFCOM on the carrying out of its functions in Scotland;

and in appointing these committees, OFCOM shall consult the National Assembly for Wales and the Scottish Parliament.'.

No. 19, in page 12, line 25, at end insert—

'(5) The membership of every committee established by OFCOM must contain at least one representative for Wales and one representative for Scotland; and in appointing these representatives, OFCOM shall consult with the National Assembly for Wales and the Scottish Parliament.'.

Mr. Thomas: We debated the Office of Communications in Wales and Scotland in Committee and the new clause gives hon. Members an opportunity to revisit the issue, no doubt to the great joy of Ministers. Hon. Members have had the chance to think about the import of the new clause and the amendments and how they would assist the work of Ofcom. I hope that the Minister has also thought about the wonderful job that he can do for Welsh and Scottish broadcasting and communications, which no doubt he does every day, by accepting them.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): I know that the hon. Gentleman will make some powerful points and I will be interested to discover how the Minister will counter them. Does not the Independent Television Commission have representatives for Wales and Scotland, as it did when it was the Independent Broadcasting Authority? Given that it is Ofcom's role to embrace the powers of existing bodies, the lack of such representation is an omission and marks a deterioration of their function to exercise control.

Mr. Thomas: I concur with that powerful point, although it takes me away from my argument. In light of the earlier point of order, I add that amendments tabled by Conservative Members seek to extend to the BBC board of governors some of Ofcom's powers. Of course, the BBC itself has representation for Wales and Scotland. There is a national governor for Wales on the board, and there is a broadcasting council for Wales. Much of the industry that we seek to regulate through Ofcom has a distinct representation for Wales and Scotland. That will be lost under the Bill, unless my amendments are carried and the Bill says more about how the content of communications will be regulated in Wales and Scotland.

It may help the House if I explain how my proposals would achieve that aim.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Again.

Mr. Thomas: Yes, again.

The new clause seeks to ensure that Ofcom will

> "establish an office in Wales and an office in Scotland in order to ensure that Welsh and Scottish needs are considered."

That proposal was debated in Committee, and, to be fair, the Minister pointed out that in December 2000 the then Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport stated clearly that Ofcom would have offices in Scotland and Wales. I was pleased to hear that in Committee, but on reflection I think that it would be worth stating it in the Bill.

If it is intended that Ofcom should have offices in Wales and Scotland—of course, this may also be an issue for Northern Ireland—I do not see why that should not be firmly stated in the Bill so that people in Wales and Scotland who are interested in these matters know that it will happen. We have a promise from the previous Secretary of State, but not from the present one, so it would be useful if she repeated that promise in today's debate. The new clause would ensure not only that the offices were established but that they were not ersatz or virtual offices that open only every other Wednesday when there is an R in the month. We need a real office dedicated to the needs of communications in Wales.

Amendment No. 15 seeks to ensure that the membership of Ofcom includes a member to represent Welsh and Scottish matters and that in appointing that member the Secretary of State consults the National Assembly for Wales and the Scottish Parliament. We debated in Committee whether that member should be a representative directly elected or selected by the Assembly and the Parliament. I have not tabled such an amendment on Report. The Government were very dismissive of the proposal in Committee, which is unfortunate because it is the request of the Assembly.

It is worth repeating that the Assembly Cabinet report of 24 January 2001 said:

> "We recommend that the Board of Ofcom should likewise include a member representing the interests of Wales. We suggest that that Member for Wales should be appointed by the National Assembly."

It is true that those are only recommendations and suggestions, but the Government have not sought to implement them. The Minister nods to confirm that; I suspect that he takes a different view from the Assembly because after all he, not the Assembly, is responsible for broadcasting and communications in Wales.

Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East): The Bill is about more than broadcasting, which is what the hon. Gentleman has referred to. He argues that the board should be representative. Will he explain why? What vested interests should it represent? Should only Scotland and Wales be represented or should every other vested interest, legitimate or otherwise, also be represented?

Mr. Thomas: I have a sense of deja vu from the Committee proceedings. I have been very careful in referring to communications throughout the debate, and although broadcasting is an important part of the Welsh fabric, communications are very important, as I hope I shall shortly demonstrate. The hon. Gentleman asked a serious question about why there should be representation. I promise to answer it, although he might not be happy with my answer. First, let me finish exploring why there is no representation in any shape or form for Wales and Scotland on the proposed Ofcom.

The amendment differs slightly from that which I tabled in Committee. It would simply ensure that, whoever the five or six members of Ofcom to be appointed by the Secretary of State are, and whatever the interests, such as broadband, that they bring with them—they are unlikely to be geographical interests, as the Government have made clear; I do not accept that, but I do accept reality—a member of Ofcom should have the specific additional interest of ensuring that Welsh and Scottish interests are looked after.

That is the minimum that we can expect within a devolution settlement. Anything less begs the questions how on earth devolution is to work, and how the National Assembly for Wales and the Scottish Parliament are supposed to relate to Ofcom given that progress and evolution are occurring within devolution.

I hope that the Minister will carefully consider my fairly new suggestion. I am encouraged by some of the responses received after our debate in Committee from commercial companies such as Vodafone. They see no problem in my suggestion. They want a small, concentrated—non-dilute, if one likes—Ofcom comprising a small but powerful body of people who know exactly what they are about, but those companies foresee no problems arising if, in addition, some of the individual members of Ofcom have a responsibility to look after Welsh broadcasting interests, or Scottish communications interests, or the disability interests covered by a later amendment.

It is important that the Government explain how, if there is to be no dedicated person, those aims are to be achieved within Ofcom—or are Welsh and Scottish interests merely to be subsumed in the overriding UK-wide interests? Any such subsumption—if that is the right word—of Welsh and Scottish needs in a UK-wide body would be damaging to Wales and Scotland.

[Mr. Thomas]

Amendment No. 19 would ensure that every committee established by Ofcom contains at least one representative for Wales and one for Scotland, and that in appointing those representatives, Ofcom should consult with the National Assembly for Wales and the Scottish Parliament. If we are to have a small concentrated Ofcom, I see no reason why the various interests should not be represented on the consultative committees that it sets up.

I remain to be convinced, but if the Government are right that Ofcom can work with a role that is not representative but relates to the communications sector as a whole, they have to accept that Ofcom will need roots—it will need information and some means of consulting surrounding bodies and the wider public. Six people cannot do that. They may be experts in their field and the ideal people to advise and inform the Government and to regulate the industry, but they cannot undertake the wider accountability role.

Let us think about what we are doing. We heard in the point of order about the role of Parliament. We are abdicating our regulatory role—it is right that we do so, because we in Parliament cannot control everything, but it is rightly our role—to a quango, a non-departmental public body, a new body called Ofcom. There is nothing new in that because we have already ceded that role to the bodies that the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) mentioned. However, in doing that, we should have one eye on wider accountability.

We know how much say we as individual Members of Parliament will have in the workings of Ofcom and how few opportunities we will have to debate the matter. Perhaps there will be an annual debate, or a debate in Westminster Hall, or the occasional parliamentary question, but our day-to-day ability to hold Ofcom to account for its actions in the name of our constituents and our nations will be extremely limited. It is therefore incumbent on us to say now that Ofcom should have a good working relationship with the industries, with the people of the UK as a whole, and with the people of Wales and Scotland. It is valuable to think of the advisory bodies for Ofcom playing that important role. I have no doubt that the Minister will say, as he said in Committee, that this is only a paving Bill and that we should not bother the Government with details as they are about to set up this lovely little body. However, the devil is in the detail and the details show whether Ofcom can deliver communications needs in Wales and Scotland.

5.30 pm

I hope that the Minister will accept that whatever else the advisory committees might do for Ofcom and whatever other subject they might cover, there should be geographical representation for Wales and Scotland. I hope that he will put that on the record tonight, even if he is not prepared to accept the amendment.

What is different about Wales and Scotland? What sort of matters need to be addressed by Ofcom? Why do we need, if not representation, at least an avenue—the triangle of office, individual and advisory body—so that the average person in Wales, or anybody involved in any of these industries in Wales, knows where to go and who is accountable for decisions that will impact on the communications industry in Wales?

Let us first consider the analogue switch-off and the move to digital. The Government have said that that will happen when we have achieved 95 per cent. digital television coverage. There is a danger that Wales and Scotland will lose out because that is a UK figure. If one thinks about the natural geography of Wales and Scotland, it becomes clear why a UK figure of 95 per cent. coverage could easily mean a figure of 80 per cent. in Wales and 85 per cent. in Scotland. That would be hugely disadvantageous.

The Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting (Dr. Kim Howells): The hon. Gentleman is kind to give way. As the Member for Pontypridd, unable to receive anything beyond four channels, let me tell him that over my dead body will my constituents and I not be able to receive everything through terrestrial, digital or some other platform.

Mr. Thomas: I accept that. Unfortunately, I am not concerned about the hon. Gentleman's constituents but about mine. My constituents, who live in a rather more remote area, may be the last on the line. I am pleased that the Minister makes that promise, but I would like Wales and Scotland to reach that target of 95 per cent. coverage as well before switch-off. That would be Ofcom's job. At present, the Government promise only a UK figure. Ofcom could change that and ensure that the figure was 95 per cent. in the constituent parts of the UK. Would it do that, however, if it did not contain sufficient Welsh or Scottish representatives?

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher and Walton): The hon. Gentleman triggered my intervention by talking about being "on the line". Of course, his constituents could receive satellite distribution of digital television. Admittedly, that is a subscription service, but it carries the free-to-air broadcast. In my judgment, the rural areas will have to depend on satellite distribution if we are ever to have switch-off.

Mr. Thomas: The hon. Gentleman's knowledge of these matters informed the Committee. I do not quite agree with him, however, although I agree that it is de facto. For anyone living in Aberystwyth or anywhere along the west Wales coast, the choice if they want digital, de facto, is satellite. *[Interruption.]* Indeed, perhaps even in Pontypridd.

The 28 gigahertz broadband fixed wireless access did not get sold off in Wales. I shall return to that shortly, as there is an opportunity to make more of it.

Michael Fabricant: There will not necessarily be universal access by satellite. On the north side of a steep incline, the satellite angle of elevation is quite low. If a geostationary satellite over the equator cannot be looked at, it will not be possible to pick up satellite television. The topology of Wales—even that of Pontypridd—is known for its north faces, so I suspect that satellite distribution will not be universally available.

Mr. Thomas: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has been for a walk up the Graig recently, but he might have seen the topography of Pontypridd if he had. My notes refer to a mountainous area with intense interference, which I think is what he was referring to in a more technical and understandable way.

I accept the hon. Gentleman's point. These are matters that must be ironed out. Whether we can get to 100 per cent. take-up is a moot point, but the 95 per cent. target should apply to Wales as well as to the UK as a whole. In fact, take-up in Wales has been a little faster than in the rest of the UK, which might seem to underline my argument. The take-up has been faster, up to a point. That point is reached when the choice is not available and take-up is not possible.

My contention is that full potential take-up of digital services and the digital communication revolution will not be possible in Wales until we have an adequate broadband network in Wales. The issues of technical interference, satellite, and take-up from analogue are all related to the overriding need for the economy of Wales to create a broadband network. One answer would be to create a range of local transmitters. Such an experiment is taking place in my area with the Maran broadband network, which Ceredigion county council, Powys and, I think, Carmarthenshire have worked together to achieve.

That points the way, but there are drawbacks to local transmitters. There is much local opposition to radio transmitters. People worry that they are dangerous, the Stewart report has raised concerns about them, and of course the transmitters are visually intrusive. Nevertheless, in the short term that is one of the best ways of delivering broadband to rural areas.

The National Assembly for Wales recently invested in ensuring digital take-up for every school throughout Wales. That will bring a broadband link, in theory at least, into virtually every village and community in many parts of rural Wales. The question is whether we can get the short hop from those transmitters to businesses to bring about the potential economic growth that can follow from broadband communication.

I do not want any area of Wales to miss out on the revolution in digital communications that broadband promises—for example, the ability to sell directly and to interact over broadband. That is available in only a limited way through satellite. Selling through satellite has largely been a failure. I understand that several companies are pulling back from direct marketing in that way, as it simply does not work. Scrolling through an Argos catalogue by satellite takes far too long and no one is interested, now that the internet is available. The challenge is to link the two, and broadband is that link.

Paul Farrelly (Newcastle-under-Lyme): May I bring the hon. Gentleman back to the subject of the amendments? As a fellow Celt of Irish extraction, I had lunch yesterday with S4C. It was made clear to me that S4C considers itself not just a Welsh broadcaster, but a British broadcaster and was keen to be regulated from London. Coming back to the subject of the amendments, has the hon. Gentleman any comments on that stance?

Mr. Thomas: I am not the Member for S4C, I can assure the hon. Gentleman. I am pleased that S4C gave him lunch because that obviously underpins its UK-wide remit. It is good to hear that. As he has accused me in a roundabout way of straying from the subject, I remind him that the amendments are about how Wales will benefit from the digital revolution which is to be regulated by Ofcom. I am trying to set out for the benefit of the House—

Michael Fabricant: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Labour Members say that the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) has been wandering off the subject of the amendments. If that were the case, surely you would have called him to order?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely correct.

Mr. Thomas: With that vote of confidence, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall conclude the argument about broadband and its relationship to the regulatory system which Ofcom is set up to implement. At present we do not have a very good story to tell about broadband communication in the UK. According to the figures that I have for the UK's broadband connectivity, we are in 22nd place in the world league. That is a poor result for the Government. We are behind Portugal and Spain, for example. I regret to say that if the figures for Wales were disaggregated, we would be bottom in the UK in broadband access. Broadband infrastructure is essential for the development of the Welsh communications industry.

Brian White: The hon. Gentleman has obviously not taken account of BT's announcement last week. That will be the platform under which broadband will develop extensively in Britain because it is exactly what everyone has been asking for at a low wholesale price. He should bear that in mind when he is making his comments.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have been reasonably tolerant with the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) so far, but he must address his remarks to the new clause.

Mr. Thomas: I simply say briefly that the BT announcement does not take into account the cost of bringing broadband to rural areas. I do not believe that broadband access for rural areas will come through BT; it will come by other means.

I come now to why Wales needs to be represented on Ofcom. The public service role of broadcasting is particularly relevant. Programming in Wales is different from that elsewhere in the UK. The situation is unique. The hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly) met S4C—SpedwarC—and knows that it is a public service broadcaster, established after many years of campaigning in Wales, which provides a hugely valuable service to television viewers in Wales in the Welsh language. That is a unique feature not found elsewhere in the United Kingdom that needs to be looked after and protected within a regulatory environment. If that regulatory environment is to be Ofcom, there surely needs to be someone within Ofcom, whether an advisory committee, a member of Ofcom itself or someone on the office side, who understands what S4C and Welsh language broadcasting is about, and what English language broadcasting in Wales is about. That is why some form of representation for Wales and Scotland within the proposed Ofcom body is so important.

If Scotland and Wales, as peripheral countries in terms of economic development—*[Interruption.]* In terms of economic growth we lag behind. I do not know the Scottish figure but my hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) backs me up. Wales has 80 per cent. of the UK's GDP, so we cannot be described as anything other than lagging behind. We are told that broadband can bring us together, that it cuts the distance between markets and that it will be part of the answer

[Mr. Thomas]

to bringing rural areas of Wales and Scotland into the mainstream of economic development. If that is to happen, Ofcom must regulate it. It must set up the structures and the fabric that will allow it to happen. It will not do so if it does not pay proper attention to Welsh and Scottish needs, and it will not do that if there is no way of them being effected in the constitution of Ofcom. That is why we need to decide the matter now in a debate on the membership of Ofcom, not afterwards in a debate on the communications Bill.

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): For those of us who are used to the hon. Gentleman's friends in the Scottish National party in their usual sectarian mode of address in the House or in Grand Committee, it was a pleasure to hear the more constructive tone with which the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) addressed the House today. I do not wish to pursue that line much further because I would no doubt be ruled out of order and I in no way wish to cause a division between the hon. Gentleman and his SNP colleague, the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart), who has joined him belatedly.

Although his manner may have been constructive, I suspect that beneath the fine words of the hon. Gentleman and his SNP friends there is still the same nationalist agenda, which is to undermine the devolution settlement and reopen the question of responsibility for broadcasting between the UK Parliament, the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales.

Mr. Thomas: Not undermine the devolution settlement, build on it.

Mr. Lazarowicz: It is a matter of opinion how that is best to be done. Had the hon. Gentleman not intervened at that point he would have heard me move on to say that beneath the nationalist agenda pursued by him and his SNP friends on occasion after occasion, sometimes there are points which have some merit. Although the agenda that he is promoting today undoubtedly pursues his nationalist objectives, there are also those within Scotland, and no doubt within Wales, who are concerned about the way in which Scottish and Welsh interests will be represented within Ofcom, so it would be helpful if the Minister would restate the Government's commitment to ensuring that Scottish and Welsh interests are taken on board in the eventual structure of the new regulatory arrangements.

5.45 pm

Concerns about Scottish and Welsh representation have come from bodies such as the Scottish Consumer Council. I urge the Government to make clear, either at this stage or some future one, how such interests will be taken into account. In its report on the issue, the Scottish Consumer Council made the vital point that in the interests of Scottish consumers it is essential for Ofcom and its consumer panel to have a physical presence in Scotland and for both bodies to have clear effective policy relationships with the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament and with a range of stakeholders within Scotland. I endorse those comments.

I welcome the commitment that has already been made to having an office in Scotland and I urge the Government further to expand upon the ways in which they envisage such links with the Scottish Parliament, the Executive and stakeholders in Scotland being set up. During the past few weeks, as a member of the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, I have heard evidence from several organisations concerned with current affairs broadcasting in Scotland, and the relationship between Ofcom and Scottish interests after the new regulatory arrangements have been set up has been raised in passing by several bodies. I therefore hope that the Government will today be able to give some indication of the ways in which they hope to address these concerns.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): I assume from the hon. Gentleman's remarks—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Is the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) giving way or has he completed his remarks?

Mr. Lazarowicz: I was about to complete my remarks, but I am happy to give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Pete Wishart: Given the evidence of those representations, will the hon. Gentleman join Plaid Cymru and the SNP in the Division on the new clause?

Mr. Lazarowicz: I regret that I shall have to disappoint the hon. Gentleman. The way in which the new clause has been drafted is not helpful or practical. Given the size of the organisation involved, the arrangements set out are not the right way forward. However, I accept that there is a need to make clear how these concerns will be dealt with and I hope that in that respect at least the Government will be able to say how they will take such interests into account in future.

Michael Fabricant: I rise in general support of the new clause. I do so as an Englishman and a Conservative Back Bencher, but also as someone with strong Welsh connections. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) is being as unclear as ever from a sedentary position. The hon. Gentleman could not be bothered to listen to the arguments advanced by the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) about broadband—something that he himself constantly prattles on about—and arrived late. It ill behoves the hon. Gentleman to appear late and start shouting from a sedentary position.

Dr. Howells: Get on with it.

Michael Fabricant: I am happy to talk at some length if there are to be sedentary interventions from the Minister. The hon. Gentleman made many such interventions in Committee, as a direct result of which our proceedings were elongated.

Mr. Bryant: Arrant hypocrisy.

Michael Fabricant: Hypocrisy?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We ought to settle down, and the hon. Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant) should address the new clause.

Michael Fabricant: I shall not pursue what I heard the hon. Member for Rhondda say, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is not a question of what the hon. Gentleman hears or does not hear. The occupant of the Chair decides these matters. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will now address the new clause.

Michael Fabricant: I shall ignore the fact that the hon. Member for Rhondda just said that I was being a hypocrite.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman should now address the new clause. Those were not the words that were used. He should get on with his speech.

Michael Fabricant: I hear what you say, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It is absolutely right that Wales and Scotland should have an Ofcom office to provide symmetry with existing provision. The Minister will know that the Independent Television Commission, and, previously, the Independent Broadcasting Authority, had regional offices and offices in Scotland and Wales as well as in England. Of course, they also had offices in Northern Ireland, and I am not quite clear as to why Northern Ireland was not included in the new clause. As devolution has taken place in Wales and Scotland, it seems absolutely right that Ofcom should represent the interests of Wales and Scotland.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion has already raised the question of analogue switch-off, which is a moot point at the moment. The Government say that analogue switch-off should take place, but no date has been set. As I understand it, analogue switch-off will occur when 95 per cent. of the population have access to digital television. As the hon. Gentleman pointed out, because of topography, 99 per cent. of the population in England might have such access, while much less than 95 per cent. of the population in Wales and Scotland might have such access. There must be a voice in Ofcom, first, to ensure that analogue switch-off does not happen before adequate coverage has been achieved in Scotland, Wales and—I shall add—Northern Ireland. Secondly, there must be a voice in Ofcom to promote the provision of digital services in Wales and Scotland.

As I said in an intervention, we cannot necessarily rely on satellite transmission for the provision of digital television. I am sure that the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Brian White) will rightly say that this an issue not just about television but about interactivity. Interactivity is not available from geostationary satellites over the equator, although it may be available from low earth-orbit satellite constellations. I do not think that such satellites are currently up and running, although I stand to be corrected by the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East. Microwave facilities could be made available, but as the hon. Member for Ceredigion rightly pointed out, health concerns exist about microwave provision, although they may not be justified. Concerns also exist about the looks of such antennae, with which I have every sympathy.

Mr. Ian Taylor: This is the second time that such concerns have been raised. Will my hon. Friend note that, this week, scientists have again made it emphatically clear that emissions from masts are at a fraction of the safety levels that have been set? The scare tactics perpetrated by some newspapers and some of the so-called environmental groups in this country are nothing short of a scandal. We must lay this ghost quickly.

Michael Fabricant: I am happy to acknowledge that point. I am—dare I say it—a fellow of the Institution of Electrical Engineers, which produced a similar report five or six months ago. It is surprising that the main media in this country are not doing much to put this lie to bed. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to make that point. Nevertheless, my point was that there is a perceived danger, albeit that that perception is wrong, as I tell my constituents.

The third reason why we need to have a representative on the main board of Ofcom from Wales and Scotland is the provision of broadband. In all fairness to the hon. Member for Rhondda, he has consistently argued for that. As the hon. Member for Ceredigion said, Britain does not have a great deal to boast about when it comes to the distribution of broadband in the United Kingdom. Although we have one of the highest levels of internet penetration in the world, we are 22nd in terms of the provision of broadband, and the level of provision in Scotland and Wales is far lower. It is particularly vital to make broadband available in Scotland and Wales if satellite communication is not available for the reasons that I gave earlier.

I support the points made by the hon. Member for Ceredigion. Wales and Scotland will suffer a technical deficit if someone does not fight their corner. The best way to have someone fighting their corner is to have representatives from Wales, Scotland and—yes—Northern Ireland on the board of Ofcom.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I remind the House at the outset of my pecuniary interest in BT. I congratulate the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) on securing this debate. I am sure that those hon. Members present who were members of the Committee will recall that we discussed this matter at length.

As we said in Committee, new clause 4 calls for an Ofcom office to be set up in Wales and Scotland. The amendments grouped with it suggest that the membership of Ofcom should include a representative of Welsh and Scottish interests and that, in appointing those representatives, the National Assembly for Wales and the Scottish Parliament shall be consulted. Amendment No. 19 suggests that the membership of every committee established by Ofcom—which seems excessive, if the hon. Member for Ceredigion does not mind my saying so—will include a representative for Wales and a representative for Scotland, and that Ofcom shall consult the National Assembly for Wales and the Scottish Parliament in making those appointments.

[Miss Anne McIntosh]

The House will recall that the White Paper dealt at length with the relationship between Ofcom and the devolved Assemblies, and the need for the regulators to

"develop good links with the relevant committees of the devolved assemblies".

The hon. Member for Ceredigion will recall that when we discussed this matter in Committee I favoured the approach whereby the amendments could have reflected some kind of formal consultation with the Committees of the devolved Assemblies, which was closest to that envisaged by the White Paper. I am therefore disappointed that the hon. Gentleman did not follow my suggestion, which would perhaps have enabled us to support his amendments more vigorously. Members got to know each other a little better in Committee, and the Minister may want to take this opportunity to reply to my question. Why is the Bill silent on this and many other aspects that were set out in detail in the White Paper, particularly in relation to the development of good links with Committees of the devolved Assemblies? Does the Minister agree that such an approach would be far preferable?

The hon. Member for Ceredigion, with his usual eloquence, also talked about the impact in his homeland of analogue switch-off and the switchover to digital. It is regrettable that we cannot discuss that in the context of the United Kingdom, but perhaps we can return to that on Third Reading.

6 pm

I enjoyed the contribution from the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz). Perhaps the Committee was the poorer for the lack of such contributions.

As ever, my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) demonstrated his knowledge of Wales, which is greater than mine. My hon. Friend the Member for Esher and Walton (Mr. Taylor) intervened briefly to speak about the vexed question of telephone masts and scaremongering. All hon. Members receive constituency mail on the subject. I have had cause to raise the matter with BT, which assumed that I was talking about a mast for mobile telephones. Most of the problems in Wales and the rest of the United Kingdom relate to such masts. I know that that is a matter of great consequence in your part of East Anglia, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and in the Dedham vale. One of my constituents has been fitted with a pacemaker, and real concerns have been raised about what could happen.

Michael Fabricant: The average strength of signal at a mobile telephone mast is 80 watts, compared with 40 million watts at an ultra-high frequency television mast, yet people near Sutton Coldfield or Crystal Palace have not dropped dead because their pacemakers have stopped.

Miss McIntosh: That has not happened that we know of. My hon. Friend raises an interesting point.

The official Opposition understand the strength of feeling of the hon. Member for Ceredigion and the other hon. Members who support the amendments, but we do not share their enthusiasm for them. I do, however, support the White Paper proposal that formal consultation with Committees of the devolved Assemblies could be possible. I wait with anticipation to hear the Minister explain why, as so often, the Government have not followed up a White Paper commitment.

Dr. Howells: New clause 4 would require the establishment of Ofcom offices in Wales and Scotland. I am happy to confirm what I and my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), when he was Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport, have said on the matter. I reassure the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) that Ofcom will have a presence of the sort that he wants, and I confirmed as much when the Bill was discussed in the Standing Committee. Indeed, some of the existing regulators already have offices in the nations and regions. No doubt, Ofcom will want to consider how that resource might best be utilised.

New clause 4 is, of course, limited to Wales and Scotland, and I suspect Ofcom will also wish to consider what presence will be necessary elsewhere—in Northern Ireland and, I imagine, in the English regions, given the importance of broadcasting and of other telecommunications industries in other parts of the country. The precise size and nature of any presence in the nations will be a matter for Ofcom to decide, as there will be direct cost and manpower implications for the new organisation.

Amendment No. 15 would ensure that Ofcom has a single member to represent the interests of Wales and Scotland. As I said previously, the Bill provides Ofcom with one function—to prepare itself for taking on other functions once Parliament has considered the main communications Bill. During this initial phase, Ofcom will deal only with practical issues relating to the transfer of the staff, property and other assets and liabilities of the existing regulators.

At this stage, therefore, I cannot envisage any matters of a specifically Welsh or Scottish nature that would warrant ensuring that the interests of Wales and Scotland should be represented on the Ofcom board. That applies equally, of course, to the interests of Northern Ireland and the English regions, as well as to the interests of the many other groups who may have a stake in Ofcom's activities.

It will be important to ensure that legitimate interests should be properly reflected in the structure of Ofcom. The communications Bill will set out how we propose to ensure that the interests of the nations and regions are to be represented in Ofcom.

I turn to amendment No. 16. Honourable Members must bear it in mind that, in the main, telecommunications, broadcasting and spectrum issues are reserved matters. It is not therefore appropriate for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to have to consult the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament on every appointment to Ofcom that she proposes. Those appointments will reflect the need for the Ofcom board to have particular skills and expertise. Indeed, an appointment may result from the need to have a board member who reflects the exact nature of broadcasting and telecommunications in Wales. However, my right hon. Friend will decide such matters on merit.

Mr. Simon Thomas: Will the Minister give way?

Dr. Howells: No. We have spent many minutes discussing the matter, and I am going to move on.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be able to ensure that those general requirements are properly met.

With regard to amendment No. 17, the Bill provides that Ofcom should prepare an annual report of its proceedings and submit it to the Secretary of State, who must then lay a copy before each House. There is no reason why the report should not include matters relevant to the interests of the devolved nations. I am sure that there will be areas of Ofcom's activities in which the National Assembly for Wales and Scottish Parliament will have legitimate interests. I believe that it would therefore be appropriate for Ofcom's annual report to be made available to the Assembly and to the Scottish Parliament in order to facilitate debate; but that should be a subject for concordats rather than a matter to appear in the Bill.

Amendment No. 18 proposes establishing specific Welsh and Scottish advisory committees. The Bill contains provisions that allow Ofcom to set up committees as it sees fit. There is nothing to stop it establishing advisory committees on national or regional issues if it considers that there is a specific need. I see no need for Ofcom to be required to set up specific Welsh and Scottish committees during the initial phase, when it will only be undertaking preparations for its future role.

I also believe that requiring a Welsh and Scottish member to be appointed to every committee established by Ofcom, as amendment No. 19 suggests, goes much too far. Where devolved nations have legitimate interests in the work of the committees that it may establish, Ofcom will, of course, want to ensure suitable arrangements for those interests to be properly heard. However, there may well be cases where Ofcom sets up committees on matters in relation to which there are no discernable Welsh or Scottish interests. It would be entirely wrong in such cases for Ofcom to be placed under an obligation to appoint Welsh and Scottish representatives to them.

For all those reasons, I oppose the amendments.

Mr. Thomas: I want to reply briefly to the Minister's remarks. I am grateful for the support that I have received for some of the amendments from the hon. Members for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) and for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh). I was interested in the Scottish perspective provided by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz), and especially in the comments from the Scottish Consumer Council. I was not aware of those comments, and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving the House that information.

Two central principles are at stake. As the hon. Member for Vale of York said, the White Paper made it clear that there should be some form of consultation between the devolved bodies and Ofcom. In addition, the National Assembly for Wales made it clear that it wanted more than consultation. It said that it wanted representation, and that it wanted to choose its representative on Ofcom. I point out that the Assembly in controlled by Labour.

The hon. Member for Vale of York asked why I had not changed my proposals. The reason is that, as I said, the National Assembly for Wales wanted representation as well as consultation. I hope that she accepts that explanation of why I was not able to accede to her arguments in Committee.

The Minister has not promised representation, or that the National Assembly will be able to select or appoint Ofcom members. He has not even offered consultation, and he has not promised any connection between Ofcom and the devolved bodies in Wales and Scotland. He has said clearly that, because the matters involved are retained and not devolved, there should be no formal arrangements such as those proposed in the amendments.

I point out that the Strategic Rail Authority has formal arrangements with the Scottish Parliament and with National Assembly for Wales. *[Interruption.]* I must tell the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant), who has been making sedentary comments throughout the debate but does not see fit to take part, as always, that railways are not devolved to the National Assembly for Wales, so the new clause explores a very important principle—a principle more important than the question whether Ofcom has X members or whether a member represents Wales or bits of Scotland and so on. The important principle is this: when we now set up UK-wide bodies, post devolution, how do they relate to the National Assembly for Wales and the Scottish Parliament? The Minister's response to that question was totally inadequate, so I shall seek to press the new clause to a Division.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 62, Noes 301.

Division No. 184] **[6.10 pm**

AYES

Baker, Norman
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Hermon, Lady
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Moore, Michael
Öpik, Lembit
Pugh, Dr John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Spink, Bob
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trimble, Rt Hon David
Tyler, Paul
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Pete Wishart and
Mr. Elfyn Llwyd.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Wood, Mike

Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Fraser Kemp and
Mr. Graham Stringer.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am most grateful to you for allowing me to interrupt the proceedings. I would like to ask you whether the Secretary of State for Health has asked your permission to make a statement to the House about the decision by Greenwich hospital to take out an injunction preventing my local paper from publicising a health risk to patients. Could you also tell me whether the hospital would require the permission of the Secretary of State to issue such an injunction?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): I am grateful to the hon. Lady for intimating to me that she wished to raise that point of order. I think that she will know that the Chair cannot opine on the second part of her question. The answer to the first part of her question is no. She has, however, put the matter on the record and attention will, no doubt, be paid to her anxiety.

Clause 1

THE OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Simon Thomas: I beg to move amendment No. 14, in page 1, line 6, at end insert—

> '(2A) The Secretary of State shall ensure that the membership of OFCOM includes a member dedicated to ensuring that the needs of people with disabilities are represented.'.

Amendment No. 14 is a slight rehash of what was discussed in Committee, but it is an important amendment none the less. We need to be seen to have debated this issue on the Floor of the House, and to hear the response from the Minister. The amendment seeks to ensure that the membership of Ofcom includes a member dedicated to ensuring that the needs of people with disabilities are represented. It is important to emphasise at the outset that I am not seeking to ensure that there is a representative from one of the disability groups in Ofcom. That would be difficult to achieve. One cannot conceive of the kind of structures that might be necessary to give rise to an election—or whatever it might be—to get such a representative into Ofcom. It is important, however, to recognise how Ofcom will meet the needs of disabled people as it is being established by the House.

It was argued in Committee that all members of Ofcom should deal with the needs of disabled people, and that this is not an issue that we can hive off to one individual. I accept that, as a central premise and as a general way of working, it would be good for the whole of society to operate along those lines. Nevertheless, if we do not flag up clearly at the legislating stage just how the needs of disabled people are to be looked after by Ofcom, we are in danger not of having every Ofcom member look after them but of having none.

There are about 9 million disabled people in the United Kingdom, and the 2 million of them with serious sight problems are of particular relevance to the Bill. There is an obvious link there to broadcasting, and we are all aware of the campaign for subtitles in the broadcast media. That is one important example. A second example relating to sight problems is the use of the internet and the communications revolution related to it. We increasingly see the need to adapt the services available, and most internet products now have special accessibility facilities in their software to help people with disabilities to use that software to its best advantage.

People with disabilities are now increasingly accessing the full benefits of our society through the communications revolution. The question we must ask is how we can ensure that their needs are represented on the body responsible for regulating that revolution.

Mr. Bryant *rose—*

Nick Harvey (North Devon) *rose—*

Mr. Thomas: I shall give way first to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant).

Mr. Bryant: I thank the hon. Gentleman enormously for giving way. He made very cogent arguments in Committee on this point. I am still concerned, however, because I do not see why putting all the responsibility for looking after the rights and interests of disabled people on to one person on the board is better than ensuring that the whole board has that responsibility. I point to the example of the BBC. None of its governors has special responsibility for the disabled, yet it has probably the best record of any broadcasting company in the world, not only because of legislation but because of the voluntary action of the governors in ensuring that the vast majority of its programmes are subtitled. It has also taken into consideration the needs of the disabled in the development of its internet services.

Mr. Thomas: The hon. Gentleman knows that I do not really disagree with him. I could point to S4C—SpedwarC—as another example of a service that is heavily subtitled, both for linguistic reasons and for reasons of access. I shall use another example, however, slightly to counter his argument.

In a school, each governor is responsible for ensuring that the needs of children with special needs are met. One govern[illegible]wever, is specifically charged with that duty. I do not necessarily disagree with the hon. Gentleman, but I fear that unless we discuss the matter properly and—even if we cannot include a measure in the Bill—secure a response from the Minister, rather than one person being responsible for the needs of people with disabilities, no one will be responsible.

6.30 pm

Nick Harvey: The hon. Gentleman is making some good points about the needs of disabled people in the context of the technological revolution, but what does he intend "dedicated" to mean? If he is suggesting that one member of the board should be designated responsible and should go about the task in a dedicated way, I am sympathetic to his proposal, but I suspect that he wants one person to carry out the task to the exclusion of all else. Given that the board might comprise only three people, there could be a chairman and a chief executive, and a third member dedicated solely to safeguarding the

[Nick Harvey]

interests of disabled people. I doubt whether that is what the hon. Gentleman intends, but I think it is what his amendment says.

Mr. Thomas: It is certainly not what I intend, but I do not think the amendment says it either. I do not have Roget's thesaurus to hand, but I am sure that requiring that one member be dedicated to meeting the needs of people with disabilities does not mean that that member cannot be dedicated to other matters as well. The amendment does not use the phrase "solely dedicated". I think that the hon. Gentleman's argument is rather tendentious.

I say to the hon. Gentleman, and to the Minister, that if my drafting abilities are flawed after a couple of years here, I am happy for the Government to exercise their full power and produce a better example—but they have not done so yet. No doubt the Minister will say that this is yet another issue for a communications Bill rather than an Ofcom Bill.

The Towers Perrin report is an important independent report to the five current regulators, which considers how Ofcom would work and how different groups would be represented—or, at least, would have a say and an input. It states that Ofcom should

"actively promote clear links with, and understanding of, all OFCOM's key stakeholder categories."

Surely people with disabilities constitute an important stakeholder category. There are 9 million disabled people in the United Kingdom, 2 million of whom have sight problems. If we do not say in this paving Bill exactly how their needs will be met, we are in danger of forgetting those needs.

I hope that my amendment will entice the Minister to say a little more than he said in Committee. He was sympathetic—I think that was the word he used then—but I want a fuller explanation of how the needs of people with disabilities will be met by Ofcom. If they are not to be met by a person who is designated, dedicated or whatever, how will the Ofcom structures meet them? I should like the Minister to say a little more about that before the publication of the communications paper and the communications Bill.

Given the lobbying by disability organisations and the requests of people with disabilities—fair lobbying and fair requests—I think it incumbent on us to provide maximum access to communications of all kinds. That means that before passing any legislation we should pause to think about how it will meet the needs of disabled people, to debate the issue, and to give the Minister an opportunity to give what I hope will be a cogent and coherent explanation.

Michael Fabricant: Again, I shall speak briefly.

I support at least the principle of the amendment, although I too have doubts about the draftsmanship. I think I got the hint from what the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) said at the outset that he would not press the amendment to a vote, but we shall have to wait and see.

Nevertheless, as the hon. Gentleman said, we ought to debate the matter here, and the amendment provides a mechanism for us to do just that. A large proportion of those in the United Kingdom suffer from disabilities of one form or another. I have received an excellent briefing from the Royal National Institute for the Blind, which makes some interesting points. I would tell the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly), if he were present, that I did not have to go out to lunch with its representatives.

The hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) rightly pointed out that the BBC has already done much to support people who are hard of hearing, by providing subtitles. I stand to be corrected, but I believe that the BBC provides a higher proportion of subtitled programmes—or closed-caption programmes, as they would be called in the United States—than any other broadcasting organisation in the world. That is commendable, although the same is done by other UK broadcasting bodies.

There are other issues, however. There is, for instance, the whole question of what the RNIB calls digital exclusion. We heard about that earlier in the context of the inability to provide broadband in certain parts of Scotland and Wales, and in some rural areas in this country, but there are other forms of digital exclusion, some of which affect blind and partially sighted people. Such people could be watching, or at least enjoying, television programmes with their families if only audio descriptions were available.

Mr. Bryant: I think we all agree on the absolute necessity of putting disabled people's interests at the heart of discussions about the future of information technology in the communications industry and broadcasting, but I still do not understand why what strikes me as ghettoising those issues by relegating them to a single member of the board constitutes an advance rather than a retrograde step.

Michael Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman makes a powerful point. As the hon. Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey) said, if one person out of only three performed the task, there would be a very odd ghetto in the shell Ofcom organisation to be set up by this paving Bill. However, while I cannot put words into the mouth of the hon. Member for Ceredigion, I think he tabled the amendment not because he particularly wanted it to be passed today, but because it could serve as a mechanism—a gadget, if you like—enabling us to debate an issue that would not have been debated without it.

Mr. Simon Thomas: The hon. Gentleman is right, and on this occasion I do not mind his putting words into my mouth. Let me also say, however, that what we really need is an explanation from the Government of how the words of the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) can be made flesh. If the needs of people with disabilities are to be at the heart of Ofcom, how is that to be achieved? We cannot take it for granted. My amendment may be flawed, but at least it tries to explore that question.

Michael Fabricant: Indeed—and, after this brief debate, the Minister will have an opportunity to sum up. I hope he will tell us then what specific measures will be taken. I warn him that I shall ask some questions in a few moments, which I hope he will be able to answer despite the short notice he will have been given.

There is the danger of what the hon. Member for Rhondda described as a ghetto within families, when a family is watching television and a blind or partially sighted family member cannot join in. The technology is now available to enable them to do just that—there is equipment for audio description—but in the whole United Kingdom only 45 households that include blind people have been given that equipment. Furthermore, there are no plans to produce more such equipment.

I raise these issues because the disabled—including the blind and partially sighted—need a voice in Ofcom. Whether such issues should be discussed by one "dedicated" person, as the amendment states, or by several people is a moot point, but what is important is that they be discussed.

Brian White: The hon. Gentleman's argument underlines the problem with the amendment. Although it and the previous amendment would establish on the Ofcom board a representative for those interest groups, they would not necessarily create a board that can respond to such issues. Surely the important question is how Ofcom will respond to the valid issues that need to be addressed, rather than whether a "dedicated" board member should put the arguments of such interest groups.

Mr. Thomas: Let us hear the answer.

Michael Fabricant: As the hon. Member for Ceredigion says—putting words into my mouth—let us hear the answer, and I hope that we will indeed hear it from the Minister at the end of the debate. I repeat that Plaid Cymru—I do not know why I am defending that party—was right to table the amendment, because without it the whole question of disability would not have been debated in the Bill's remaining stages.

Discussing the amendment enables us to put on record the fact that both sides of the House are concerned about this issue. Without such discussion, we might give out the wrong signal—namely, that Parliament is not concerned about such issues—and at a time when the technology is available to overcome many of the problems associated with digital exclusion.

Before I finish, I should like to ask three or four brief questions of relevance to the amendment, which I hope the Minister can answer. Have Ministers had high-level discussions with disability organisations, and do they plan to have such discussions in the next few months? Those organisations need to be reassured that, if the amendment is not pressed to a vote, Ofcom will nevertheless promote the interests of disabled people. Will arrangements be made to ensure that alternative programming formats are available, and will such formats be publicised effectively, so that people with visual impairment or other disabilities will know about them? Time and again, this Government and past Governments introduced beneficial initiatives, yet the very people who could have benefited from them did not because they did not know that such initiatives existed.

Will the consultation process involve proactively seeking the opinions of visually impaired people? That is an important issue. Will fully accessible regional meetings, which the hon. Member for Ceredigion would probably welcome, be organised? Of course, this issue concerns not only blind people, but deaf people and those with other disabilities. Technological solutions exist to enable people with disabilities to play a more active role—not just by watching television or listening to the radio, but by participating in interactivity through the provision of broadband. That technology should be made available, and one of Ofcom's roles should be the promotion of it.

Miss McIntosh: The White Paper referred at length, in the context of the communications sector, to those with disabilities. It is regrettable that the Bill is silent on how the needs of people with disabilities will be met. Once again, I congratulate the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) on raising the issue of people with disabilities through the amendment.

It is right to discuss the issue of whether the Secretary of State should ensure that membership of Ofcom includes a "dedicated" or designated member, so that the needs of the disabled are represented. However, I am mildly surprised that the amendment is exactly the same as that tabled in Committee. As my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) recalled, several powerful written representations were made, notably by the Royal National Institute for Deaf People and the Royal National Institute for the Blind. Responses to the White Paper went further than the amendment. They referred not only to those with disabilities, but to the elderly, those on low incomes and those living in rural areas.

6.45 pm

In asking whether Ofcom will reflect the needs of those with disabilities, I remind the Minister of my particular interest in equal opportunities. Sometimes, those of a different gender can also be regarded as disabled. Will that issue be reflected in the composition of Ofcom and through the work of its committees? As the hon. Member for Ceredigion will recall, I suggested a slightly different wording for his amendment. Rather than referring to a single "dedicated" member of Ofcom, it should have stated that, in the working and decision making of the committees, regard will be had to such interests. I am disappointed that the hon. Gentleman did not succumb to my alternative wording. None the less, I pay tribute to Standing Committee members and to other hon. Members for working to meet the very real needs of the deaf and the blind.

I want to deal in particular with subtitling, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield alluded. I expect that Ofcom will consider subtitling and encourage broadcasters to extend its use as far as possible. Contrary to the wishes of the RND, the Bill is silent on subtitling and signing on television. I draw the Minister's attention to my hon. Friend's eloquent comments concerning making state-of-the-art technology available to the disabled. Even though my original plea fell on deaf ears, the Minister will doubtless take this opportunity to amend the clause.

Hon. Members will probably agree that Ofcom's committees would have been a better forum in which to deal with such issues. I am sure that the Minister will respond positively to the idea of helping disabled people, regardless of their disability, and that he will explain exactly how Ofcom will achieve precisely that.

Dr. Howells: The hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) made an intriguing comment. She said that, sometimes, being of a different gender is a disability. Was she referring to women or to men?

Miss McIntosh: That is an open question, which we can debate on another occasion.

Dr. Howells: Amendment No. 14 seeks to ensure that a member of Ofcom is responsible for representing the needs of people with disabilities. I have a great deal of sympathy with the aim of ensuring that Ofcom can properly take into account the interests of the disabled. However, we made it clear during lengthy discussions—we had a half-hour debate in Committee on this one issue—that we want the Ofcom board to remain as small as possible, commensurate with carrying out its responsibilities effectively, as laid down in the Bill. During the initial period before the main communications legislation obtains parliamentary approval, Ofcom will simply be preparing for the assumption of its regulatory functions.

In paragraph 14 to the schedule, the Bill provides that, once Ofcom is operational, it can establish committees that may be advisory or that have an executive function. Such committees can include lay representation, and we will expect Ofcom to ensure that legitimate interests are properly represented within those structures. As I have said, it is not possible to find a place on the board for every group with an interest in its activities, however worthy or vital. Having said that, the communications White Paper made it clear that Ofcom as a whole must have regard to the special needs of people with disabilities, as well as to those of groups such as the elderly. It will be possible to represent such interests on any relevant committees that Ofcom may decide to establish. That is a better way to ensure that those needs are taken into account by Ofcom in all its activities than by charging a single board member with the responsibility for representing those needs.

Mr. Simon Thomas: The Minister mentioned how he expected the committees of Ofcom to take into account the needs of the different interest groups. It would be beneficial for the House if he could say explicitly that he would expect the committees to take into account, in whatever way is thought appropriate, the interests and needs of people with disabilities.

Dr. Howells: I can say that unequivocally. As my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) made clear, we have a good and healthy tradition of so doing among broadcasters in this country. I would expect that to continue and, on that basis, I will oppose the amendment.

Mr. Thomas: I am encouraged by what the Minister said in response to my intervention, because that was a more explicit recognition of the need for Ofcom to take account of the needs of people with disabilities through the working of its committees. I can tell the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) that that is why I did not change the amendment. She addressed her argument to the committees and I addressed mine to Ofcom, and I suspected that the Minister would say that this Bill is only the paving Bill for Ofcom and that the issue is for the future and is not debatable now.

We have had a useful debate. It is especially useful to debate the matters on the Floor of the House, because it sends the signal to people with disabilities that we are not letting matters slip. In the light of the Minister's response, especially on the role of the committees of Ofcom, and the opportunity to debate the issue under the next communications Bill, I beg to seek leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 2

Initial function of OFCOM

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): I beg to move amendment No. 6, in page 3, line 2, at end insert—

'and

(c) any proposal by the Secretary of State to bring within the remit of OFCOM the BBC Board of Governors.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 7, in clause 6, page 5, line 28, at end insert—

'(aba) the BBC Board of Governors.'.

No. 8, in schedule, page 7, line 22, at end insert—

'(aba) a member of the BBC Board of Governors'.

Mr. Yeo: The amendments in this group, especially amendment No. 7, go to the heart of the only surviving political controversy in the Bill. Why are the Government persisting in excluding the BBC from the remit of Ofcom? The structure that Ministers have proposed for Ofcom is anomalous, irrational and likely to work against the interests of viewers, listeners, licence fee payers, other broadcasters and the BBC itself.

It is absurd for Parliament to approve the creation of a new super-regulator for the industry and, at that very moment, leave outside its responsibilities the largest single broadcasting organisation in the country. The BBC has more than half the national radio audience and a substantial share of the total television audience—although the latter is gradually reducing. The chance of primary legislation does not come along very often. After the communications Bill in the next Session, it may be a decade or even longer before another opportunity occurs.

To those who say that we should not prejudge the forthcoming debate about the renewal of the BBC charter, I say that that debate should start with a recognition that the BBC is increasingly one of a number of broadcasters, albeit a large, special and important one. Its role will be less dominant in future. The BBC's public service obligations are much more stringent than those of other broadcasters and its governors have a primary duty to see that those public service obligations are met. However, so do the boards of Channel 4 and the ITV companies. If the ultimate responsibility lies with Ofcom for all those other broadcasters, so it should for the BBC, especially as it continues to enjoy such a uniquely privileged funding status.

The Government will eventually have to concede this argument and I urge them to do so today. If they do not, the only remaining chance will be in the communications Bill in the next Session. That Bill is due to be published in draft form soon—perhaps the Minister can enlighten us on when we can expect to see it. We could have the absurd situation of the Government publishing a draft Bill that contains an amendment to this Bill, perhaps even before it receives Royal Assent.

The amendment is designed to save Ministers from that embarrassment—I am ever helpful. I also give the Minister notice that we will seek to press amendment No. 7 to a vote and I hope that we will enjoy the support of all those hon. Members who have expressed support for the principle in the amendment.

Mr. Bryant: My problem with the amendment is that it seems to suggest that the issue of the BBC's regulation and how it relates to Ofcom is simply a matter of wholly in or wholly out. The hon. Gentleman was not able to join us in Committee, so he will not have heard all our debates—perhaps he has read all eight of them—but the point was often made that the BBC is already regulated by third parties and therefore will, in large measure, be regulated by Ofcom. The problem with the amendment is that it might make it impossible for the governors and the BBC to have any accountability directly to this House.

Mr. Yeo: I assure the hon. Member that nothing I propose will affect his rights, should he be a member of the BBC's pension fund from his time there. I did read the reports of most of the Committee's debates with interest and I was pleased to see that the issues were addressed. I seek to put the BBC on a par with the other broadcasting organisations that will ultimately be regulated by Ofcom. That will still leave the governors with a substantial and important role, to which I shall refer in more detail presently.

The idea that the amendment, by placing the BBC within Ofcom's remit on the same basis as other organisations, would put the governors out of a job is wrong. As to the question of how accountable the BBC is to this House, that is a matter on which hon. Members will have a variety of views. However, many of us have felt over the years that the existing system falls short of being satisfactory.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): The whole point about the BBC being established under a charter is that it is not accountable to the House of Commons. If it operated under an Act of Parliament, it would be accountable in the same way that Channel 4 is accountable to this House. I well recall that when the Select Committee asked the chairman of the BBC to delay a planned change until the Committee had reported on the matter, he said that that would be yielding to political interference with the BBC. It was a simple request for a delay. As I shall seek to say if I am fortunate enough to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the real problem with the BBC is that it is accountable to no one.

Mr. Yeo: The right hon. Gentleman speaks with great authority and expertise on this subject and I know that he has studied it carefully for a long time. I entirely accept everything he says, particularly the point about the charter and the obstacle that it represents to direct scrutiny by the House. He cited an example in which a wholly reasonable request was denied. Now is the time to address that difficulty.

7 pm

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): The hon. Gentleman may care to know that I once asked the Table Office whether I could table an amendment about the BBC. The Speaker, who is now in another place, wrote to the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State could not make up his mind so he wrote to the chairman of governors, who wrote to the Speaker to say that it was up to her. Clearly, Parliament has no way of holding the BBC to account.

The question of whether the governors want to be included in Ofcom arises because the board of Ofcom might define, once and for all, what a public service is, then ask the governors to behave by holding the BBC to that remit. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that is what they fear and why they do not want to be included?

Mr. Yeo: That is another example of the difficulties faced by hon. Members in trying to call the BBC to account.

I do not know the motives of the governors who are apparently resisting the inclusion in Ofcom. Certainly, if Ofcom can produce a definition of public service broadcasting that commands broad agreement, it will have achieved something that has eluded many people over many years. The need to make that definition is growing increasingly urgent, for several reasons.

My motive in moving the amendment—apart from a general sense of fairness to the other players in the broadcasting industry—is to benefit the BBC. I have no wish to damage the BBC's governors, staff, management or programme makers; and certainly not its viewers, listeners or licence fee payers. The BBC would be strengthened if it were to be so regulated in future. The present situation may have been justified a long time ago, but no longer: it is now anomalous.

The right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) has come round to that viewpoint. He spoke impressively on Second Reading, explaining his conversion by saying that his concern for the future of public service broadcasting had led him to share our view that the BBC should have the same relationship with Ofcom as other broadcasters.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The issue goes even wider than that. The BBC's problem is that it operates in an increasingly multi-channel digital age with different delivery platforms. It may therefore decide that it wishes to reinforce its position not only by using the internet, cable, satellite, and other delivery mechanisms, but by taking an interest in the production of programmes that compete with the commercial sector. If the BBC is to be able to make effective investment plans, it needs to be part of an organisation that has an overview of all those matters—that is, Ofcom.

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend speaks on these matters with great expertise and authority. I entirely agree that we are moving into a world that is wholly different from that of even a decade ago. Many of the opportunities presented to the BBC and other broadcasters were not conceived of at that time. Our comments are not intended as a criticism of people who in the past did not require such a regulatory arrangement. Today, the Government have an opportunity

[Mr. Yeo]

to acknowledge the extent of the changes that have occurred by accepting what has become a widespread view.

Brian White: Having watched the launch of BBC4 the other night, I agree with the sentiments behind the hon. Gentleman's proposal. However, does he appreciate the danger that, if the amendment were to be accepted, the establishment and initial months of Ofcom would be dominated by discussions about the BBC? The most important matters with which Ofcom will deal relate to communications, but they would be lost in a controversial political debate about the BBC.

Mr. Yeo: The best way to ensure that the debate about the establishment of Ofcom is not dominated by arguments about the BBC would be to accept the amendment. That would largely put the matter to rest.

Mr. Bryant: The hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Mr. Taylor) seemed to suggest—and the hon. Gentleman seemed to agree—that Ofcom should decide on the future investment pattern of the BBC. That would be a dangerous route to take.

Mr. Yeo: I am sure that that is not what my hon. Friend was suggesting, and it is certainly not what I was agreeing with. He was suggesting that the investment decisions that are made by the BBC and bodies regulated by Ofcom will be affected by a whole range of completely new factors and that it would be all the more anomalous if the BBC alone, among the bodies making those decisions, was not subject to a regulatory regime that could take account of all the new considerations.

I want to refer briefly to the views of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), although I know that he will speak later. His opinions on the subject, and those of members of the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport, which he chairs, have been consistent for some time. This is not an issue that has just loomed over the horizon.

Throughout the passage of the Bill, and in the debates that preceded it, Ministers and others who tried to defend their insistence on a special exemption for the BBC, have increasingly struggled to make a coherent case. Recently, even since the conclusion of proceedings in Standing Committee, the BBC has contributed to the discussions with the publication of the document, "BBC Governance in the Ofcom Age". I welcome that document, which is quite revealing in more ways than one. It frankly acknowledges some of the shortcomings inherent in the present situation. That is a useful step forward, although it begs the question why some of the issues were not dealt with before. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) says from a sedentary position that we did not change the law when we were in power. As I said, we are in a rapidly-changing environment. Even in the five years since Labour took office, the background to the whole media industry has changed fundamentally.

I am not criticising people who have not taken such decisions before. I am saying that, in the light of our present knowledge, and given that after the passage of the communications Bill next Session we may not have another chance to legislate on these issues for many years, we must ensure that we react to the situation as it is today. Trying to make cheap points about what the Conservatives did or did not do is completely out of keeping with the spirit of this debate.

Mr. Ian Taylor: As the Minister responsible for science and technology in the previous Conservative Government, I can assure my hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Rhondda that at that time the BBC was put on notice that in the multi-channel digital environment that was already becoming inevitable, the definition of public service and the role of the BBC would need to change, perhaps well before the next review of the BBC's charter. The situation has arisen not as a result of failures by the previous Conservative Government, but because of the rate of progress since 1996 in the whole broadcast and internet technology sector.

Mr. Yeo: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that information. In a spirit of consensus with the hon. Member for Rhondda, I should say that I am usually the last person to defend the record of the previous Conservative Government.

Mr. Kaufman: Not quite the last.

Mr. Yeo: If the right hon. Gentleman is offering to take over that role, I am sure that my Front-Bench colleagues will be glad of his assistance.

Page 3 of the recently published BBC document reveals that a unit is to be established to ensure that the Government

> "are furnished with performance information, gain a proper understanding of audience behaviour and needs, and can access relevant expertise".

That is interesting. If the BBC has lacked those things for all these years, one wonders how it has managed to do its job.

The document also sets out why the BBC believes that oversight by Ofcom, in the manner of all other broadcasting organisations, would be wrong. I am afraid that some of the arguments advanced are very unconvincing. It is claimed on page 6:

> "Taking back-stop powers over the public service remit of the BBC would make Ofcom's effective early operation much more difficult."

Because something is difficult does not mean that it is wrong. The remainder of Ofcom's very considerable tasks will scarcely be a doddle. I do not see how it should not be able to accept the difficulty—if, indeed, it is one—of dealing with the BBC at the same time. It would be much easier to deal with it from the outset than to have it imposed at a later date, spatchcocked in when Ofcom already has operating procedures in place.

Equally odd is the argument advanced in favour of continued internal BBC regulation. The document states:

> "Unlike an external regulator, the Governors can take direct action if they believe that the BBC is not serving the public interest. They can change the management, and they can alter the BBC's budget allocation. In other words, they can ensure that the BBC must adhere to their judgement of what is in the public interest"

Nothing proposed in the amendment would prevent the governors from doing that in future. In my view, they would and should continue to have exactly those powers and to exercise them on a regular basis. Sadly, the reforms proposed in the document do not add up to a great deal. The first of the four aims of the reform plan, as it is described, is said to be

> "To ensure that the distinction between the Governors' role and the management's is clearly understood inside and outside the organisation."

That is a worthy enough aim, which, after more than 70 years, it might have been hoped would have been addressed already. However, it is certainly not an aim that reduces in any way the case for bringing the BBC fully under Ofcom; nor, indeed, do the other three aims of the so-called reform plan.

The document sets much store on the improved support that the governors will receive in future, enabling them to discharge their duties in what they describe as "the Ofcom age". This restructuring may or may not help the governors; that is not for me to judge. However, it does not answer this question; why should not the BBC now be regulated on the same basis as the rest of the industry?

I will not stray from the subject matter of the amendment, but before leaving the document—which I commend to hon. Members as a worthwhile study, and something that will be useful when we discuss the future of the BBC in the context of the debate about charter renewal in the future—I should point out that it refers to the licence fee payers as shareholders. I was interested to pick up on that. I had not noticed that before in a BBC publication, although I have not studied them for as many years as some of my colleagues. I do not know whether that is a pointer to a secret agenda existing somewhere within Broadcasting House.

On page 2, the chairman's foreword claims:

> "But nor do we have any desire simply to replicate services which could be provided equally well by the private sector."

I wonder whether he cleared that with the director general before he included it in his foreword. Certainly that is something else that I look forward to returning to when we scrutinise some of the new proposals and the existing activities of the BBC.

I happened to be in the shadow Cabinet meeting when the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) raised a point of order at the start of our proceedings, but I agree with what I believe to be the thrust of his point. I was surprised today to receive a letter from a BBC employee, saying that this House has spent too much time considering this issue and that Parliament should now debate the subject in a more constructive way. The person concerned is fully entitled to his view, but whether it is for the BBC to use licence fee payers' money to employ a member of its staff to act as a lobbyist who then writes to Members of Parliament to say that we are spending too much time debating a particular issue—suggesting that it has been discussed in a way that is not constructive—seems highly questionable.

The BBC is a powerful organisation with a distinguished history. I hope that it has a successful future. In a multi-channel world and an increasingly global industry, its role in the future will be very different from in the past. When it started as a small organisation operating a monopoly radio station—a pioneering organisation—the role of the governors was totally different from what it is today.

Today, the BBC enjoys immense privileges. It is funded, uniquely in our national life, by a more than inflation-proofed, guaranteed compulsory levy on consumers; a levy that is highly regressive in its impact on households and which leaves consumers with no alternative but to pay. Against this background, to leave the BBC as a self-regulating organisation in an industry where no other organisation enjoys that status is wrong.

The time for the BBC governors to be judge and jury in their own affairs has ended. Those governors will still have an important function in the future, but it will be a different one. It is clear to me that most of the media world believes that the BBC should be fully within Ofcom's remit. It is clear that many hon. Members on both sides of the House believe that as well—it is clear, I suspect, even to many within the BBC. Eventually—sooner rather than later, I hope—it will be clear to Ministers. They can save themselves and Parliament a great deal of time if they accept the amendment, which I commend to the House.

7.15 pm

Mr. Kaufman: May I make it clear that, in the remarks that I offer to the House, I am expressing my personal view and not speaking on behalf of the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport? The Committee is considering these matters at the present time. Later in this Parliament, it will no doubt consider what will happen with the BBC when its charter ends in June 2006.

I also make it clear that while I have a great deal of sympathy with the argument of the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), I cannot sympathise with the terms of his amendment, which would entrench the role of the BBC board of governors. I am on record as opposing the existence of the BBC board of governors, for reasons that I shall advance as I proceed.

The hon. Gentleman deserves great credit for having studied with care the document that the BBC has issued and which Mr. Davies has sent to a number of us. The hon. Gentleman spotted a reference to all of us who pay the licence fee as "shareholders". If we were shareholders, there would be a company meeting. If there were a company meeting, we would have the right to state our views and, what is more, the chairman and the governors would have to respond to them.

In my experience, both as an individual and as Chairman of the Select Committee, the BBC is not interested in the views of the public or of Members of Parliament. I intervened on the hon. Member for South Suffolk to refer to one episode, when the Committee was considering the BBC proposal—not yet then implemented—to remove "Yesterday in Parliament" from FM, which was a violation of the spirit, if not the letter, of the charter. The chairman of the BBC, Sir Christopher Bland, said that for him to yield to the request that the BBC delay removal would be political interference in the BBC. It did so happen that the BBC later—not much later—decided, because the audience had fallen so much, to transfer the programme back again. We were right all along, and if the chairman had listened to us, he would not have made that mistake.

I have previously raised, from the very spot where I stand now, the deplorable BBC programme "The Big Ticket". I have always argued that the BBC is behaving anomalously in paying Camelot for the rights to broadcast lottery results rather than being paid, as Radio Telefis Eireann is paid. When the BBC decided to stage that programme, I pointed out firmly that that clearly violated

[Mr. Kaufman]

the charter in that the BBC was promoting commercial activity by a privately owned company. I was ignored. I received correspondence demonstrating that the BBC seriously regretted the line that I had taken. Then, the BBC board of governors accepted that it was wrong to broadcast that programme and abandoned it.

For that reason, among others, I agree with the argument of the hon. Member for South Suffolk but do not agree with his remedy. The BBC board of governors was sufficiently supine not to interfere in either of those matters. The reason for that is that the board is not a professional group of people who have knowledge of communications. The people on the board are picked at random. They were picked at random by the hon. Gentleman's party when it was in office, and I cannot say that my party has done a great deal better.

There is a great deal of tokenism in appointments to the board of governors. I am sure that all the people who sit on it are extraordinarily worthy individuals, but I cannot understand why, for example, the chief executive of Lambeth borough council was regarded as a person who should participate in the running of the biggest broadcaster in the United Kingdom and one of the most important broadcasting organisations in the world.

During the past two weeks, there have been two blatant violations of the watershed. First, there was the breakfast programme in which Ali G participated, regaling a 9 am audience with a stream of filth and obscenity. The BBC apologised, but so far as I know not a single member of the BBC board of governors has taken any view on that matter—certainly not publicly. Next, Stephen Fry compered the British Academy of Film and Television Arts awards the other Sunday. The broadcast started before the watershed, and again we had a stream of inexcusable obscenity. It went over the watershed, but began before it. We have heard not a peep out of the BBC board of governors on either episode, or on a range of other matters.

I do not believe in censorship. Before and since coming to the House, I have campaigned against it. I am against theatrical censorship. I am against censorship of the cinema. I am against censorship of broadcasting, except in the sense that I believe that the protection of children is a duty of adults until those children are old enough and mature enough to think for themselves. The only activities in which I have ever participated in regard to censorship, including when the House dealt with film when the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) was Home Secretary, have related to children.

If the BBC board of governors cannot even perform a role in protecting children, what on earth is it for? It does not—heaven help us—run the BBC, because that is run by a partnership of the chairman and the director general. It cannot even exercise that role to make the BBC accountable for what it is supposed to be doing.

Michael Fabricant: It is clear that some of the right hon. Gentleman's views must be shared by the chairman of the BBC, who, if I may put words in his mouth, recognises that the board of governors may, on occasion, have been supine. Nevertheless, Gavyn Davies has introduced the document "BBC Governance in the Ofcom Age", in which he seeks to persuade us that the board of governors will become proactive in governing the BBC and its board of management. Does the right hon. Gentleman believe that that will be achieved?

Mr. Kaufman: I am sure that Mr. Davies means well and understands that there is a problem. I am sure that he is doing his best to address himself to that problem in an effort to save the way in which the BBC is governed at present. I am afraid that those efforts will not work. He was good enough to send me a copy of the document, but what we have is a series of regulatory rules for the BBC board of governors, laid down on its behalf by the chairman. The regulation is not external in any way. It is internal—so much as, and no more than, the BBC itself feels it needs.

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde): My right hon. Friend's argument is interesting, but there is a common misconception that the BBC falls totally outside the scope of Ofcom. He will correct me if I am wrong, but my understanding is that the BBC would be subject to the rule of the Broadcasting Standards Commission on issues of obscenity. A complaint could be made to the BSC or to Ofcom. Ofcom would have no powers in relation to ITV or Channel 4 that it did not also have over the BBC.

Mr. Kaufman: My hon. Friend is highly knowledgeable about these matters, but I do not need to be reminded of what the White Paper said or of what the proposals are.

The situation is simple. If, under the Independent Television Commission—soon to be absorbed into Ofcom, which will subsume its powers—there is a violation of, say, the statute governing Channel 4 or of the watershed, the ITC can take action against the broadcaster. When "Brookside" dealt, well before the watershed, with incest, the ITC intervened. When, under Mr. Dyke, ITV wanted to shift "News at Ten" to allow it free evenings to broadcast more adult material, the ITC stopped it. When ITV tried again and succeeded, the ITC, having caved in, came back and forced the programme back into place.

Not only the terrestrial channels, but all commercial channels are under the ITC, and will come under Ofcom. In the case of a broadcast on MTV to which the ITC took exception, the ITC imposed a heavy fine on MTV for violating the watershed. There is no external sanction of any kind on the BBC, and under the Bill there will be no external sanction of any kind. Last week, representatives of the Broadcasting Standards Commission came before our Select Committee and told us that they were looking into the Stephen Fry episode, but all that they can do is to administer a slap on the wrist.

7.30 pm

I shall tell my hon. Friend one reason why the present regime is entirely unacceptable. I am not in favour of fines and castigations, but if there is a regime of regulation that is enforceable, it makes those who are responsible for the programmes—with whose freedom I do not wish to interfere—aware that there is a sanction, which causes them to be slightly more wary. Let us face it: people broadcasting on the BBC do not give a damn when they violate the watershed. Nothing happens to them. There is no external regulator to say that something should have happened to them, so they will go on violating the watershed with impunity and the BBC spokesperson will say that the BBC received, say, only six complaints.

If there is an external regulator, even if that regulator is not heavy-handed, there is an awareness within the organisation that external regulation exists. There is no such awareness at the BBC, because all my experience in all the time that I have been in the House is that the BBC board of governors lies flat and allows itself to be walked over by whichever director general is in power at the time.

I cannot support the amendments tabled by the hon. Member for South Suffolk, not because I do not believe that the BBC should come within the scope of Ofcom—which I do—but because all his amendments are about the BBC board of governors, and I regard it as anomalous and antiquated that in 2002, in a multi-channel environment, with convergence a factor, with huge competition, and when the BBC can spend £20 million on a channel watched by 11,000 people, the BBC's governance should be based on the duopoly of the chairman and the director general, with a supine, inexpert board of governors. It is utterly against the interests of the BBC.

Mr. Bryant: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Kaufman: I will give way in a moment.

By contrast, all the other broadcasting organisations are run—efficiently or inefficiently—by experts in their field. It could very well be said that, given the current travails of ITV, the people in charge are not running it all that well, but at least they are subject to the sanction of the market. Indeed, the breakdown of negotiations between Granada and Carlton was due to the fact that a leak led to a leap in Granada shares and there was not time to get the agreement as speedily as was necessary to satisfy stock exchange regulations. No one in this world, whatever they think of what is broadcast by Sky Digital—although I consider that a great deal of it is high quality, and its news has just won two awards when the BBC's news is faltering and ITN is in a sad state—could say that Sky Digital is not aware of market requirements. The constant technological advances on Sky, such as the advance of Sky interactive, and many other forms of convergence, are being made because those broadcasters know that they must cater to a market.

The BBC is not immune to such pressures, but it is utterly immune to the necessity for awareness of such pressures. That is why the view that I have held for a considerable time, and from which I do not regard—

Brian White: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Kaufman: If my hon. Friend will allow me for a moment, I should like to make progress.

I cannot support the amendments because I believe that the present structure of the BBC is utterly out of date in the world in which we are living, let alone the world in which we are about to live. The BBC should have an executive chairman instead of the type of chairman that it has—I am not commenting on Mr. Davies as an individual. It should have a chief executive—not a director general, who is an unanswerable boss. Instead of this tokenistic board of governors, it should have a board—

Mr. Bryant: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Kaufman: I will give way to my hon. Friend soon.

The BBC should have a board of directors consisting of people who know about broadcasting, technology and convergence. When, as the hon. Member for South Suffolk said, we have further discussions approaching the charter, the Government must address themselves to such matters, because we cannot go on as we are.

Mr. Bryant: I thank my right hon. Friend enormously for giving way, and it is a delight to hear such a nuanced and moderate set of views on the BBC.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): And understated.

Mr. Bryant: Indeed, understated views on the BBC.

Mr. Alasdair Milne, the former director general of the BBC, who was, as I understand it, sacked by the governors of the BBC, would be surprised to hear of their supine nature. Would my right hon. Friend like to suggest ways forward to enable broadcasters to prevent people from saying on live programmes things that they might not want to have said? Is it not difficult to regulate after the event?

Mr. Kaufman: I am astonished at my hon. Friend because he is an expert on these matters. I knew Mr. Alasdair Milne very well because I worked with him on "That Was The Week That Was". He was not sacked because the board of governors suddenly decided to be a board of governors but because, as so often in the BBC, his face did not fit. That is what happens in the BBC. If someone's face fits, that is okay; if not, they are out.

I cannot begin to tell the House what respect I have for my hon. Friend, and it amazes me that he seems to be unaware that on a considerable number of programmes "live" does not mean live. The former editor of *The Sun*, Mr. Kelvin MacKenzie, wrote to me last week about his station, where they run live programmes but create a seven-second delay, to ensure that any unacceptable material can be stopped. If my hon. Friend, who is an intellectual and may not devote himself to these matters, watched the live transmissions of "Big Brother" on E4 last summer, he will know that that programme had a similar delay, so that the casual obscenities used by some of the inhabitants of the house were not broadcast during the pre-watershed period. There is a thing called technology, and that technology—

Mr. Bryant: A popular beat combo, m'Lud.

Mr. Kaufman: Now, now; just because I have squashed my hon. Friend, he should not heckle.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Kaufman: No; I will not give way because I have spoken for too long already. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] I want to conclude.

[Mr. Kaufman]

Of course there are ways of dealing with these matters. One way, if one is running a breakfast-time programme, is not to ask Mr. Ali G on to the programme because everyone knows what he gets up to. Another way, when the BBC broadcasts the BAFTA awards live, is to read Mr. Stephen Fry's script in advance and tell him that certain things that he is planning to say are not acceptable before the watershed.

I regard my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) as someone whose expertise far surpasses my amateuristic views on all these matters and I am sad that he should intervene in a way that does not allow me to agree with him.

Miss McIntosh: Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will agree with me. He will know that BAFTA also had slight delay with the problems that came to light with Russell Crowe's poem not being broadcast, so why the expletives were not removed is a question for the BBC.

Mr. Kaufman: I accept what the hon. Lady says, although I wish that I had been able to hear Russell Crowe's poem; it may well be the best performance that he has ever given.

Mr. Gavyn Davies has proposed, with some desperation, that the BBC should find a new way to regulate itself, but that is an example of "quis custodiet ipsos Custodes?". That is not acceptable to me, so I very much hope that, between now and when the main Bill is introduced, the Government will consider the anomaly into which the BBC might be placed. I ask them to reread the report, issued by the Select Committee on towards the end of the previous Parliament, in which we clearly advocated the subsumption of accountability for the BBC in what is now to be called Ofcom, which we proposed four years ago, and consider a way to remedy the situation, which is not acceptable.

Nick Harvey: Until the draft communications Bill is published, until a Joint Select Committee has had a chance to grill witnesses on the Bill's proposals and until Parliament begins to debate the Bill next Session, the White Paper that was published about 15 months ago remains the most definitive statement of Government policy on the issue. It is worth remembering that the White Paper's proposals did not put the BBC outwith Ofcom's remit. What the White Paper referred to as tier 1 and tier 2 regulation involved putting significant aspects of the BBC's operations under Ofcom; what it referred to as tier 3 predominantly involved self-regulation.

The backstop powers on self-regulation remain an issue, and a separate issue is who will approve future proposals that the BBC may have to develop new services. I am absolutely clear in my mind that Parliament—or, in a practical sense, the Secretary of State—should retain the authority to allow the BBC to develop new services. The BBC will continue to be funded by the licence for the foreseeable future, so it is an absolutely unique institution in that sense. I do not believe that Ofcom should make decisions on the creation of new services—its responsibilities are predominantly competition and protecting consumer interests, which I shall distinguish from the public interest.

I am absolutely clear in my mind that the authority to allow new services should remain with Parliament and the Secretary of State, so the remaining issue is who should oversee—the backstop powers—the tier 3 self-regulation of the BBC. It could be argued that Parliament and the Secretary of State, the BBC governors or Ofcom should have those powers.

I share many of the reservations expressed by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), the Chairman of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, about leaving the powers with the BBC governors. I am not prepared to take a view on whether those powers should be given to Ofcom until we have resolved what its nature, characteristics and purposes will be, and under what broad remit and instructions it will act.

7.45 pm

For that reason, we would prejudge this issue if we were to put the cart before the horse with this relatively minor paving Bill and assume that the powers will be given to Ofcom. The official Opposition spokesman was wrong to suggest that we were in the last-chance saloon—nothing could be further from the truth. It is perfectly obvious that the sensible time to deliberate on that issue will be when we debate the communications Bill in the next Session.

Mr. Bryant: I broadly agree with the hon. Gentleman, but I have a niggling concern about the process of confirming any new service that the BBC governors may like to propose. I am still uncertain whether the Secretary of State should decide and Ofcom provide advice, or whether it should be the other way round, but the more substantive issue that we need to consider for the future is what constitutes a new service. It is easy to say that BBC3 or BBC4 is a new service; it is a new channel in a traditional system that we understand. However, I have been troubled for a long time about one of the gaps in the market: the fact that religion is one of the drivers for internet use. Religion is relatively low in the list, but it is a driver none the less. The BBC has a reputation for independence, yet is has no religious—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's intervention is developing into a mini speech.

Nick Harvey: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman is right to suggest that the impact of new BBC services will not be quite so predictable as in the past, because of the speed of technological change. That is the basis on which creating a single regulator has been proposed, but we have not, as yet, thrashed out very clearly what Ofcom's character will be.

There is a slight culture clash between the regulation that the Department of Trade and Industry has traditionally sponsored and that which the Department for Culture, Media and Sport or, before it, the Home Office has tended to favour. I am concerned that Ofcom may be very much more a creature of regulation as the DTI understands it than of regulation as the DCMS or, before it, the Home Office has understood it. If that were to prove correct and if Ofcom were much more concerned with economic considerations, with theoretical models of competition policing and with a narrow definition of the consumer interest, I would have grave misgivings about it being responsible for taking some of the decisions now under discussion.

There is a difference between the consumer interest and the public interest. It can be argued that the consumer interest is served by things that are popular with consumers being on offer at all times, whereas, to return to the point that was being made by the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant), the public interest might be better served by having more religious broadcasting. Those interests are simply not one and the same thing. If Ofcom is to have wide responsibilities for determining what constitutes the public interest, that needs to be written into the legislation that establishes Ofcom far more explicitly than anything in the White Paper led me to believe the Government envisaged or intended.

The development of broadband internet services is an example of the consumer interest and the public interest diverging. Oftel has got the regulation of that issue horribly wrong and has completely lost sight of the public interest because it has taken a very narrow economic view of what constitutes the consumer interest. It has been so concerned to get the economic model of competition theory precisely right that it has significantly held back the development of broadband internet communications in the United Kingdom.

If Ofcom is to get deeply into matters of public interest, that needs to be stipulated not only in terms of what powers it might have over the BBC, but how it will ensure that ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5—or channels 6, 7 and 8 if they are established—perform under whatever remit they are given. I will not decide whether Ofcom is the right body to have backstop powers for the BBC until we have hammered out some of the arguments and know much more about the colour of Ofcom.

I am not saying that I will die in the ditch to defend the status quo. The BBC is far from perfect. Some of the regulatory mechanisms that govern the BBC are self-evidently flawed, and the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton gave examples of that. The BBC is more inclined to be impervious to criticism than commercial broadcasters because their regulators have had the power to instruct more remedies. In the new regime that we anticipate, the BBC must be more susceptible to instructions from external regulation.

Mr. Wyatt: I can get the BBC on my computer, but as I do not have a television licence for that I should be arrested and locked up.

Mr. Bryant: So the law says.

Mr. Wyatt: Indeed, and there are many women in Holloway who have not paid the licence fee. However, to return to my substantive point, convergence means just that. We need to consider how the licence fee gets collected and the fact that under the current regulatory system there is no one to whom the BBC can complain. It needs to be covered by Ofcom. Its funding needs to change because it cannot collect the fee if people can receive its transmissions through broadband. It is an issue.

Nick Harvey: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. The BBC will be covered by Ofcom in a considerable sense. The material issue of concern relates to the backstop powers that determine whether it fulfils the statement of programming that it proposes as part of the tier 3 regulation. The issues to which the hon. Gentleman refers can be taken to Ofcom under the proposals as laid out in the White Paper.

If the BBC and its regulation is far from perfect, so is the system of the BBC governors. I found myself agreeing with the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, who spoke for longer than I expected. However, it makes no sense to put all that right in a paving Bill. I am not even convinced it would make sense to crack open that nut in the communications Bill, although I am open to persuasion. It would probably make more sense to hammer out who has the backstop powers and get Ofcom up and running for two or three years before we resolve the problems to which the right hon. Gentleman rightly referred when we deal with the charter renewal in 2006.

The BBC has a proud heritage and a strong position in the world. Of course the rest of the broadcasting sector wants the BBC regulated by Ofcom—you bet they do! It is delighted at the thought that the BBC, unique though its history and position are, will be put into the hands of a regulator whose views may be fashioned entirely by economic rather than public interest considerations.

Mr. Kaufman: The hon. Gentleman exposes one of the hypocrisies of the commercial sector, but there is another. The one aspect of the market in which commercial broadcasters do not want the BBC to be involved is advertising. They fear that the BBC, which is a popular broadcaster even now with its dwindled and dwindling audience, will take advertising away from them. Apart from the hon. Gentleman, myself and a few others, no one else who is engaged in the debate is totally objective.

Nick Harvey: The right hon. Gentleman makes a good point about advertising. In addition, commercial broadcasters would take exception to my suggestion that Ofcom should have written into its remit more explicit public interest powers than the White Paper anticipates. The last thing the commercial sector wants is for its activities to be regulated by Ofcom with reference to a more widely defined public interest consideration. It cannot have it both ways. If the BBC is not going to invade its advertising market but remain essentially a public service broadcaster with a public interest objective and a public service remit, it cannot be treated and regulated in the same way as the commercial sector.

There are big issues to resolve before it makes sense to do what the amendments suggest and set the cart before the horse. Let us hammer out what Ofcom is going to be and determine that it will be fit to take on the powers. Let us not prejudge the issue and throw the BBC to the wolves.

Brian White: The hon. Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey) has obviously read my speech, 90 per cent. of which I have had to cut because I agree with him entirely.

I tried to make it clear in Committee that this is a communications Bill, not a broadcasting Bill, but we are none the less falling into the same trap on this occasion. I fear that the amendment could perpetuate the argument about the BBC to the detriment of the communications industry and the establishment of Ofcom. That would do major damage. Ofcom would become dominated by arguments about the BBC and the role of the board of governors. Although my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) may be right about the deterioration of the BBC's standards in its terrestrial news broadcasts, he should recognise the innovative and

[Brian White]

superb work that it has done on its web pages and on BBC news online, which marks a tremendous step forward.

Ofcom's role is a real issue in this paving Bill, but it should not become dominated by arguments about regulation of the BBC. The key issues—Ofcom's relevance to the European Union framework directive; how it will interact with existing regulators and the European regulatory group; and market dominance, to which the hon. Member for North Devon referred—will be subsumed by arguments about the BBC.

I do not agree with the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) who argued that the way to kill the argument is to cover the BBC in the Ofcom paving Bill. It is important that consultation and pre-legislative scrutiny identify that as a key issue for public consultation as part of the communications Bill, but to address it now will cause the problems that the hon. Gentleman wants to avoid. We must not deal with that problem at the expense of the rest of the communications industry.

Michael Fabricant: The hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Brian White) has been a powerful advocate for the other elements to which Ofcom will have regard. As he rightly says, broadcasting is not the only one to consider. However, I disagree with him and the hon. Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey) when they say that now is not the time to debate whether we include the BBC under the auspices of Ofcom.

Amendment No. 7 relates to clause 6, which sets out what is meant by the "existing regulator". The clause refers to

"the Broadcasting Standards Commission . . . the Director General of Telecommunications"—

otherwise known as Oftel—

"the Independent Television Commission . . . the Radio Authority".

My hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) has argued long and cogently, as has the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), that there is an omission, and that the BBC and its governors ought to be included. They are right.

8 pm

The hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East says that to include the BBC would result in continuing arguments within Ofcom about BBC issues, but that is not the case. The big argument is whether Ofcom would control the BBC in the sense of the third tier having access to the BBC. Once the BBC came under the auspices of Ofcom, there would be no further argument because, as several hon. Members have said, on the whole the BBC does a pretty good job. At times, of course, the BBC has shown itself to be a bad governor of its own operations, and the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton gave two recent and powerful examples of that. But the BBC has a unique role in British broadcasting, and indeed in world broadcasting, and bringing it under the auspices of Ofcom would strengthen it, not weaken it.

This is the very time at which we should be debating that matter. The hon. Member for North Devon is utterly wrong when he says that this is not the time and place to be discussing the BBC, but he is certainly right when he says that we will be discussing it when a communications Bill comes before the House in a year or so, if indeed it appears.

Why should the BBC be included? Recently, the Scottish Media Group made submissions to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and to the Select Committee about the method of measuring the degree of cross-media ownership. How does one compare the radio listener with the television viewer? Does one equal the other? The formula that the Scottish Media Group came up with is simple—it uses overall revenue. Of course, the BBC's revenue comes from the licence fee, and not from the sale of advertising time. It receives a small degree of revenue from the world sales of programming, but only to the tune of a net profit of £50 million. The point is that its total revenue is about £2.5 billion; it is a major player. To say that it should be ignored is an insult not only to the BBC but to its listeners and viewers.

The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton began to paint a picture of how the royal charter came about. Let me briefly add to that and remind colleagues that the BBC started as the British Broadcasting Company in 1922. It operated five separate radio stations around the United Kingdom. One was just down the road at Savoy Hill 2LO in London, and there were others in Bournemouth, Leeds and Birmingham. At that time, the BBC was the only broadcaster, and the idea behind the royal charter was to create a unique monopoly position for it. The royal charter was wholly appropriate at that time. It was advocated by the then managing director of the company, Sir John Reith, who later became Lord Reith.

What was appropriate in 1926 is not appropriate now. Indeed, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk said, what might have been appropriate five or six years ago is not appropriate now because of the changes in technology, in delivery and in the many different platforms by which television and radio can be delivered to viewers and listeners.

Mr. Kaufman: The hon. Gentleman was present at a sitting of the Select Committee the other day when I made a point that I think it may be useful to place on record in the Chamber. The BBC is the only organisation in this country, in either the private or the public sector, which is organised and governed in precisely the same way as it was 75 years ago. No other public sector organisation—not the NHS, which is not as old as the BBC, nor the pension system, nor the income support system—is administered as it was only a few years ago. The private sector changes all the time. The BBC says, "Stick to the way in which we were organised and financed on 1 January 1927."

Michael Fabricant: The right hon. Gentleman is correct. It is not only a question of the length of time during which the structure has remained static; what is even more extraordinary is the background of the degree to which the broadcasting environment has changed. Even if one compares the BBC with the NHS, established in 1948, one finds that the needs and structure of the NHS have changed less than the broadcasting environment because of all the technological changes in broadcasting. The idea that what was suitable when the BBC had a monopoly in 1927 is suitable now is risible and has to be addressed. As the right hon. Gentleman said, if it is not dealt with now, it will have to be tackled by Parliament some time, because in June 2006, when the BBC charter has to be renewed, surely that will not be done yet again by a compliant Government.

That would be wrong, primarily because of perception. It is utterly wrong that the BBC should be perceived to be its own judge and jury in so many different issues. The chairman of the BBC clearly recognises that point. By publishing the document, "BBC Governance in the Ofcom Age", he seeks to give greater independence and more muscle to the board of governors.

The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton rightly points out that the whole history of the BBC—and to anyone who argues with this point I commend the excellent books on the subject by Lord Asa Briggs—shows that the board of governors tends to be compliant to the director general and the board of management. Perhaps the changes proposed by the chairman will help somewhat, but I do not think that they will be a complete solution. They will certainly not give the appearance of the BBC being accountable to an outside body, and that is the whole point.

Two areas are addressed in "BBC Governance in the Ofcom Age". One is programme content and the other is fair trading. There have been numerous claims in the past few years that the BBC has used its unique position, funded by the licence payer, to trade unfairly against commercial organisations that have to operate in the real world, where their revenue is generated by sales. Those claims may or may not be true, but people who make them continue to believe that the BBC is not addressing the problem. My God, if I were chairman of the BBC, I would welcome Ofcom's independent scrutiny and judgment on that issue. But what can the chairman do? What can the director general do? All he can say is, "We have had an internal inquiry, and it found us innocent." Well, innocent they may be, but people do not believe it because they do not believe any organisation that is its own judge and jury.

Nick Harvey: The hon. Gentleman comments on how those commercial activities might be perceived to work directly against the interests of other commercial organisations, but surely it is anticipated that Ofcom will be given precisely the relevant powers in the lower tiers mentioned in the White Paper.

Michael Fabricant: No, the hon. Gentleman is wrong. It is for that very reason that the issue is now being addressed by the BBC. The BBC perceives that fair trading does not come under tiers 1 and 2, which is precisely why it is making changes to the board of governors to address that issue. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman has not seen the letter by Gavyn Davies, which appears to have been circulated quite widely—

Nick Harvey *indicated dissent.*

Michael Fabricant: I see that he has not, perhaps because his is a minority party. After the debate, I shall photocopy the letter and put it on the Board for him, so that he can see that fair trading is an issue of which the BBC is conscious, because it has been criticised in the past on that ground. I think that the BBC would welcome coming into the ambit of Ofcom—and it ought to be so. Given that BBC revenues total £2.5 billion and it represents a major proportion of British broadcasting, it would be anathema were it not to come within Ofcom's ambit.

The BBC gives many reasons why it should not become a part of Ofcom. One such reason is that it occupies a unique position—but no one here today has argued that the BBC should not continue to occupy a unique position. I half expected the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton to argue about the way in which the BBC is funded, but he chose not to do so today. I shall not do so either, because for all sorts of economic reasons I do not believe that the BBC can be privatised, nor do I believe that British broadcasting would be assisted if it were.

No one is arguing that the BBC's unique position should be weakened in any way. In fact, as I said, I believe that the BBC's position would be strengthened by its becoming a part of Ofcom. The BBC says that its position is unique because it is a public service broadcaster—but as the right hon. Gentleman rightly says, so are Channel 4 and S4C, and many would say that many aspects of ITV broadcasting constitute public service broadcasting, yet they willingly come within Ofcom's ambit.

Time has moved on since 1 January 1927. Even Parliament in its procedures is changing; perhaps the next few months hold radical changes to the way in which we operate. It seems to me that only one organisation, uniquely in the United Kingdom, has not changed: the BBC. The BBC is unique not because of the way in which it is funded, nor because of the fact that it is a public service broadcaster, but because since 1 January 1927 it has succeeded in not changing its structure, despite the fact that it exists in a dynamic and changing world.

Mr. John Grogan (Selby): My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) said that there were two objective people in the Chamber tonight: himself and the hon. Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey). I shall take up and reinforce three points made by the latter.

First, the hon. Gentleman said, and I agree, that this is not the last opportunity Parliament will have to determine the relationship between the BBC and Ofcom. My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton will see to it that in years to come we spend many happy hours discussing such matters. Not only is there the prospect of the communications Bill, but there is to be a pre-legislative scrutiny Committee on that Bill and further opportunities during the run-up to charter renewal.

The hon. Member for North Devon is right to say that the character of the Ofcom regulator and its relationships with not only the BBC but other public service broadcasters cannot be determined until the main Bill is produced. It is not clear what powers Ofcom will have in tier 3 regulation—the backstop powers he mentioned—in relation to ITV, never mind the BBC.

8.15 pm

The chairman of the BBC has appeared before the Culture, Media and Sport Committee since Second Reading. My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton refers to himself as an amateur; perhaps he is, but he is also a class act who draws in the crowds. I could hardly get into the room that day—it

[Mr. John Grogan]

was heaving. I just managed to squeeze into the corner. The chairman of the BBC began by saying that he agreed with much that my right hon. Friend had said on Second Reading. He said of the BBC:

> "In fact, if anything, it should be regulated rather more robustly"

than other broadcasters,

> "given its unique access to the licence fee."

He added that on

> "one or two issues of detail . . . I think there are nuances of difference between us"—

that is, between my right hon. Friend and the BBC. Nevertheless, the BBC accepts that it will be subject to more regulation under Ofcom than at any time before.

It is worth running through the three tiers. The hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) mentioned economic regulation. The chairman of the BBC was unambiguous, telling the Select Committee:

> "In the case of economic regulation, basic standards and quotas (Tiers 1 and 2) the BBC will be treated just like any other broadcaster and will be fully within OFCOM's remit . . . that is only right and proper and we welcome this change."

For the first time, the BBC will be subject to regional programme quotas and to ensuring that news is in prime time. In terms of its economic responsibilities, it will be very much under Ofcom's wing. The hon. Member for North Devon put his finger on the issue when he referred to Ofcom's backstop powers and any role it may have in the creation of new channels. I, too, feel suspicious. My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton mentioned advertising: it is not only commercial broadcasters who do not like the idea of the BBC advertising—parents dislike the idea as well. They welcome new BBC children's channels because of the absence of excessive advertising during programmes that are specifically for children. That is one of the great attractions of the BBC. Many listeners to Radio 1 and Radio 2 hope that the Opposition do not decide to adopt a policy of privatisation of those stations. People like to listen to radio programmes and watch sport on television without interruptions from advertising.

Ofcom will primarily be an economic regulator and a light-touch regulator of public service broadcasters other than the BBC. Can it combine the skills needed for light-touch regulation of ITV and Channel 4, which will be far more unregulated than ever before, with the very different skills needed to ensure that our main public service broadcaster continues year on year to produce the public service programmes on which its reputation depends and on which its support in the House and the country depends? Can Ofcom really combine those two roles?

As I said, the House will spend many happy hours discussing those issues. There is no need at this stage, during the establishment of the shadow Ofcom, to tear up the broadcasting ecology that has served our nation for many years. Changes will have to be made, and the White Paper mentions measures that will fundamentally change the way in which the BBC operates, and its relationship with the regulators affecting it, but we should preserve all that is good in the BBC. I am glad to see that many hon. Members acknowledge that there is much that is good and that must be preserved.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I will not detain the House long. I oppose the amendments, essentially for the reasons put forward by the hon. Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey), my hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). It seems to be putting the cart before the horse to attempt to introduce that kind of regulation under such a small paving Bill.

I leapt to my feet essentially to take issue with the idea that the BBC is a unique organisation on any level other than the way it is funded. It is no longer unique as a public service broadcaster. Previous speakers have referred to the BBC's capacity to introduce new channels. The BBC is not introducing new channels; it is introducing additional programmes. I regret that I feel impelled to repeat what my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton has said. I find it outrageous that the BBC has seen fit to introduce its new, fourth channel which has been funded by everyone who has to buy a television licence in this country and yet is accessible only to that minority who have digital television. I do not exclude the commercial operators of the service when I say that the quality of the programmes is execrable in the main. They tend to be based on repeats—certainly that is true of the programmes that the BBC is broadcasting—and remarkably banal.

Regrettably, in this country, culture, art, intellectual practices and expertise are still in many instances regarded as minority interests. I believe that the BBC's new channel will mean an even greater reduction in such programmes and a reduction of interest in its existing channels. For the BBC to be able to avoid what I understood was one of the central planks of its existing, supposedly unique, nature—that of serving minority interests—seems to highlight how over the past decade, if not longer, it has believed that it meets its unique situation exclusively by virtue of the way it is funded, and increasingly forgets its public service broadcasting responsibility.

The BBC used to be an international byword for quality programmes. It gives me no pleasure to say that I think that reputation has been lost in leaps and bounds, not least in respect of its news broadcasts. As someone said to me, "If you want to know what has happened, you turn to Sky." It is almost impossible to get any kind of up-to-date news on the BBC. It spent an absolute fortune on introducing the 24-hour news broadcasting programme which, on its own analysis, is watched internationally and nationally by such a small audience that it does not even come up on the percentage scale. I strongly agree about the backstop for how the BBC adapts to the future, when we will see ever greater convergence between broadcasting and communications.

I was particularly grateful that the Government introduced free licences for 75-year-olds because of the litany that I inevitably heard from my pensioners. They objected to paying the licence fee because they were categoric that they never watched any BBC programme on any of the BBC channels. I would hate to see the day dawn when that feeling was more general across the country.

For the past decade, the BBC seems to have lost belief in its own identity. It believes that it has to compete with commercial stations so that it is not unique but similar in its competitive activities and programming to the commercial sector.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

We have in television—one aspect of broadcasting and communications—a unique medium that has never been exploited to the full. It has never brought the greatest possible benefits to the millions of people who watch it world wide. The BBC could, perhaps, begin to forge a new path. I may be maligning the director general and the board of governors, but I think they would love to be able to have advertising in their programmes. However, if they are increasingly forced into a corner so that the process takes longer, more people are involved and the product is produced by someone else more speedily and economically, it will lose its position as the great pinnacle of broadcasting excellence. The BBC is no longer in that position, and I would hate to see it slide even further down that slippery slope. I sincerely hope it will rise again, and the amendment will do nothing to encourage the BBC to aim higher.

Dr. Howells: We have had a wide-ranging debate about how a relationship between Ofcom and the BBC might look after the scrutiny and debate by Parliament and the Joint Committee of both Houses of a substantive communications Bill. We devoted a number of hours to this subject in Committee, and I have no doubt, as my hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) put it, that we will spend many more happy hours discussing this in the communications Bill. I am not one to throw a wet blanket over such enjoyable occasions, but the Bill is not about that—it is about setting up Ofcom.

Taken together, amendments Nos. 6, 7 and 8 would make the BBC an "existing regulator" for certain purposes in the Bill, alongside the other regulators. The amendments are the same as those put forward in Committee, so they have been discussed at great length. I made it clear then that the purpose of the Bill is only to set up Ofcom and its initial functions. At that time, I circulated a detailed briefing note to hon. Members so that they were clear on the Government's policy on the BBC and Ofcom, as set out in the White Paper. I appreciate that the BBC's place in the new regulatory structure and its relationship with Ofcom is the subject of much debate, and so it should be. However, the appropriate time for a detailed discussion on the issue will be when the draft communications Bill is published in the spring.

I resist the amendments because clause 2 gives Ofcom the power that it needs to facilitate or secure the modification of any proposals concerning the BBC. Under subsection (1), Ofcom has the power to do whatever is appropriate in preparing for its task. The BBC's charter will allow it to prepare for implementing our legislative proposals. The phrase

"whether by transfers from the existing regulators or otherwise"

has been included in subsection (3). That means that Ofcom's power is not limited to transfers from existing regulators, as defined in the Bill, but can also include transfers from the BBC. I am satisfied that the powers in the Bill are sufficient to cover the points that have been debated. They will allow Ofcom and the BBC to make preparations for implementing the new regulatory regime. They do not prevent proper debate of the exact relationship between Ofcom and the BBC when the time comes, nor do they pre-empt the outcome of that debate. I therefore oppose the amendments.

Mr. Yeo: This has been an excellent debate, and I am grateful to all those who have taken part in it.

I should like to reply to the Minister's comments. We have not brought forward the amendment at this stage because it is the last opportunity to do so. The hon. Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey) was wrong to claim that I said it was. It clearly is not, as the Minister has explained. There will be an opportunity to do so under the forthcoming communications Bill. However, this seems to be the most appropriate opportunity, not least because this paving Bill lists the regulators whose functions are to be taken over by Ofcom and because it will be much more sensible to have the debate about Ofcom's functions when we know what organisations it will be responsible for. I am afraid that it is those who are resisting the amendment who are in danger of getting the cart and the horse the wrong way round, not those who share our views.

8.30 pm

I am sorry that we seem unlikely to have the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) with us in the Lobby. He is a powerful advocate of the merits of an external regulator, and he was right to question the effectiveness of the present accountability arrangements of the BBC. He made it clear that he does not want the BBC to be ignored by Ofcom—far from it. The difference between the right hon. Gentleman and me is one of means, rather than ends. In due course, perhaps, there will be opportunities to try to reach a shared position.

I am sorry also that we will not have the support of the Liberals this evening. The hon. Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey) seemed unable to decide what the party's view should be. He said that that would have to wait until Ofcom had been debated in more detail, but that misses the point. The question is one of principle: whether we believe that the BBC should be regulated in a manner similar to the other organisations operating in the field. The Liberal party clearly does not. It wishes to preserve a privileged position, for whatever reason, for the BBC. The clue to the Liberal position was in the dying phrase of the hon. Gentleman's speech, when he said that putting the BBC within the remit of Ofcom would be throwing it to the wolves. That did not suggest to me that he would approach the future debates in an open-minded manner.

On the contribution of the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Brian White), I entirely accept that there are many other issues in the Bill, but this is the one that is before the House. That is why I have been addressing it. There will be a chance to address or return to some of the others later.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) is a powerful advocate of the case that I have tried to advance. When I listened to his views, it made me think that on this issue I had been right to say what I had said earlier.

The hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan), like a number of those who oppose the amendment, seemed to assume that including the BBC within Ofcom would somehow stop the governors carrying out their function of scrutinising how the BBC was meeting or failing to meet its public service obligations. It would do nothing of the sort. The governors would still have that function. They would be the first stop and Ofcom would be the backstop, to use the language that others have adopted.

The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) criticised the way the BBC is moving away from a strict public service role, perhaps in pursuit

[Mr. Yeo]

of higher ratings. I am sure that that is a widely held concern. My only regret is that the hon. Lady does not conclude from it that some change in the present regulatory arrangements is needed, and needed urgently.

As I explained at the outset, amendment No. 7 is the crucial amendment in the group. I therefore beg to ask leave to withdraw amendment No. 6.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendment proposed: No. 7, in page 5, line 28, at end insert—

'(aa) the BBC Board of Governors.'.—*[Mr. Yeo.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 121, Noes 308.

Division No. 185] **[8.33 pm**

AYES

Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
(Rushcliffe)
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Prisk, Mark
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Trend, Michael
Trimble, Rt Hon David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Charles Hendry and
Mr. Desmond Swayne.

NOES

Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, Kevin
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry
(B'ham Hodge H)
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Ewing, Annabelle
Fisher, Mark
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike (Weaver Vale)
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*

Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret

Morgan, Julie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Price, Adam
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon

Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)

Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Mr. John Heppell.

Question accordingly negatived.

Schedule

Further Provision About OFCOM

8.45 pm

Miss McIntosh: I beg to move amendment No. 22, in page 11, line 3, at end insert—

> ', up to a maximum of £10 million in any one financial year.'.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 32, in page 11, line 6, leave out "and at such rates".

No. 21, in page 11, line 7, at end insert—

> '(3) The rate of interest on any sums advanced under this paragraph shall be the same as the lowest rate determined by the Treasury under section 5 of the National Loans Act 1968 (c. 13) in respect of similar loans made out of the National Loans Fund on the day the advance is made.'.

Miss McIntosh: It gives me great pleasure to speak to these amendments, which arise from a debate that we had late in the day during our happy hours in Committee, to which the Minister has referred. The Government should address several of the issues that arose.

Amendment No. 22 would set a maximum of £10 million of projected expenditure by Ofcom in any one financial year. That is important because it is not guaranteed that the main communications Bill, for which we wait with anticipation, will reach the statute book. We may, therefore, find ourselves in the regrettable situation in which Ofcom may have to be disbanded. The Bill does not make sufficient provision for that. Amendment No. 32 is purely consequential—the Secretary of State would not set such rates because, under amendment No. 22, a maximum of £10 million would have been set.

Amendment No. 21 enshrines what the Minister helpfully set out in a letter for the attention of my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) on 8 February 2002 about what the rate of interest on a loan should be. It is our fervent desire that the rate of interest on sums advanced under this paragraph of the schedule should be the same as the lowest rate determined by the Treasury under section 5 of the National Loans Act 1968 in respect of similar loans made from the national loans fund on the day of the advance.

[Miss McIntosh]

These amendments are important because of the gap left by the helpful comments about clause 5 made in Committee by my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield. He said:

> "Subsection (6) deals with the procedures that will apply in relation to the shell Ofcom's assets if . . . it were to be wound up."

He continued:

> "Paragraph (b) refers to the power to provide for the property rights and liabilities of Ofcom to be divided between different persons."

The Minister responded:

> "I have told the Committee on a number of occasions that the only source of funding will be loans made to Ofcom by the Secretary of State on behalf of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport."

At column 249, my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield said that

> "the end of the story is that it will be a loan that must be repaid."

He went on to point out that

> "clause 5 makes absolutely no reference to who will repay the loan that will undoubtedly arise from the operating costs of Ofcom."

He added:

> "How are the operating costs to be dealt with? The assets and liabilities are dealt with in detail, but the operating costs are not."

He finally asked:

> "Why not, and who will be liable?"

The point is that, in giving his explanation to the House, the Minister raised more questions than the Bill answers. At column 250, he claimed that

> "Clause 5 will provide precisely what Opposition Members were arguing for"

and

> "gives the Secretary of State the power to wind up Ofcom."

He also said:

> "Other provisions allow property, other assets and liabilities to be transferred to the Secretary of State from Ofcom, the existing regulators or other specified persons."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 5 February 2002; c. 248-50.]

In my view, those provisions are not at all clear, which is why I tabled the amendments.

Dr. Howells: We debated in some detail in Committee how it is proposed that Ofcom should be funded. It may help the House—and, I hope, the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh)—if I set out again what those arrangements will be.

As hon. Members will know, the general approach for sectoral regulators is that the cost should be borne by the sector concerned. Indeed, industry recognises that that is part of the cost of doing business and is generally content with that. That arrangement applies to the existing broadcasting and telecommunications regulators, although, in the case of the Broadcasting Standards Commission, half the costs are met by grant from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

At the start, when Ofcom is preparing to take on its later functions, it will have no fee income from industry. It is the Government's view that the extra cost associated with creating Ofcom should be borne by the sector, but it makes sense for the businesses that are in the sector once the new regime comes into force to finance that cost rather than those which are in the sector today. We therefore envisage that all—or virtually all—of the cost of transition should be financed by a loan to Ofcom made by the Secretary of State. It is intended that that loan will eventually be repaid by Ofcom out of the fee income that it will start to receive when it takes on its regulatory functions.

I do not believe that a limit should be set in primary legislation on the maximum amount that the Secretary of State can advance to Ofcom, as amendment No. 22 suggests. At this early stage, there is too much uncertainty about how long Ofcom's preparatory stage might last and what practical steps it will need to take to prepare to receive its regulatory functions. Obviously, we all want the transition to the new regulatory regime to be as smooth as possible for all concerned, but it is only when the Ofcom board is in place later this year that it will be able to take decisions on the practical steps.

It is not necessary to set out in the Bill the level of interest payment on any advance that might be made to Ofcom—the subject of amendments Nos. 32 and 21. As I explained in Committee, in answer to a question from the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant), to which the hon. Member for Vale of York referred, the level of interest charged on any advance made by the Secretary of State to Ofcom would be made on the presumption that it should reflect the cost to the Government of borrowing. I therefore oppose the amendments.

Miss McIntosh: I am grateful to the Minister for clarifying the position. Although I resist his arguments, I believe that we may be able to explore the matter at a later stage. My hon. Friends and I believed that this was the best opportunity to consider the provisions in question, but as the Government are not minded to accept my temptations and agree to the amendments, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Miss McIntosh: I beg to move amendment No. 12, in page 12, line 25, at end insert—

'*Consumer Panel*

14A(1) It shall be the duty of OFCOM to establish a Consumer Panel of 10 members, comprising persons who are neither members nor employees of OFCOM.

(2) Members will be appointed for four year terms and shall serve a maximum of two consecutive terms.

(3) Paragraphs 17, 18, and 19 of the Schedule shall apply to the proceedings of the Consumer Panel, but paragraphs 15 and 16 shall not apply and the Consumer Panel shall make other such arrangements for regulating their own procedure as they think fit.

(4) The Consumer Panel shall—

- (a) research consumers' views and concerns on issues relating to OFCOM's functions,
- (b) publish its advice, conclusions and reports to OFCOM, and
- (c) take due account in its work of the views of consumers with special needs, including those on low incomes or with disabilities.

(5) The Consumer Panel shall be funded by means of grants from OFCOM.

(6) The Consumer Panel shall make an annual report of its proceedings and financial position to each House of Parliament.'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 13, in page 12, line 25, at end insert—

'Radio Committee

14B It shall be a duty of OFCOM to establish a Radio Committee to provide advice to OFCOM about, and carry out functions in relation to, the radio sector.'.

No. 20, in page 12, line 25, at end insert—

'Deregulation Committee

14C It shall be a duty of OFCOM to establish a Deregulation Committee to provide advice to OFCOM about how relevant proposals about the regulation of communications could be modified to deregulate the communications industry.'.

Miss McIntosh: I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to this group of amendments, particularly amendment No. 12, which relates to the role and constitution of a consumer panel. We wish to see Ofcom establish a consumer panel of 10 members, who would not be members or employees of Ofcom, and who would serve for a maximum of two consecutive four-year terms. In our view, Ofcom should have a duty to have regard to the work of such a panel. The fact that the panel would provide an annual report of its proceedings and financial position to each House of Parliament would ensure its accountability to Parliament.

Under the provisions of the amendment, the consumer panel would be funded by grants from Ofcom, and would research consumers' views and concerns on issues relating to Ofcom's functions. The panel would publish its advice, conclusions and reports to Ofcom, and its work would take account of the views of consumers with special needs, including those on low incomes or with disabilities. I regret that the amendment on disabilities tabled by the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) met with such a lack of response from the Government. In light of that amendment's failure, this amendment takes on additional importance. It would be the rightful role of the consumer panel to have regard to those with special needs and, in particular, those with disabilities. The Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport supported such a move in its report on the White Paper on communications.

The White Paper refers to Ofcom's consumer protection role in paragraph 7.4 on page 72, which states:

> "Ofcom will have a principal duty to protect the interests of consumers and will have powers to take action if the industry does not develop an effective consumer protection regime."

The White Paper makes many other references to consumer protection, and I must ask the Minister why the Bill makes no mention of a consultative panel.

I also want to speak briefly to amendment No. 13, which invites Ofcom to establish a radio committee to provide advice to Ofcom and to raise issues and problems that are very different from those of television, having regard to the fact that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) so eloquently pointed out in Committee and in the House today, the radio sector is of huge importance to the communications and broadcasting industry. A radio committee established under the auspices of Ofcom would be able to consider and advise on all those issues.

On amendment No. 20, it is the wish of the official Opposition to see a deregulation committee established. Such a committee would advise Ofcom about how the regulation of communications could be modified so as to deregulate the communications industry. If Ofcom is to achieve anything, it must deregulate. It is to replace five existing regulators, if we include the BBC—we would like it to replace six—and will, therefore, be essentially deregulatory in nature. We believe that placing a duty on Ofcom to establish such a deregulation committee is the best possible way to monitor Ofcom's deregulatory activities.

Michael Fabricant: I welcome all the amendments, but especially the one that deals with radio. As my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) and others will know, I have the gravest concern about the possibility of our reverting to the position that obtained in the days of the Independent Broadcasting Authority when the radio division was confined to a few bleak offices in the Brompton road.

It being Nine o'clock, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER, *pursuant to Order [14 January] put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

Amendment negatived.

Order for Third Reading read.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.—[*Dr. Howells.*]

9 pm

Miss McIntosh: I feel a certain sadness at this stage. As the Minister said, we have spent many happy hours debating the Bill in Committee and this evening. Despite the sad conclusion that those happy hours have reached, I welcomed the opportunity to consider its remaining stages. Obviously, Opposition Members are disappointed by our failure to carry any of our amendments. We shall have opportunities to return to some of the issues involved but others need to be raised now.

I remind the House that I have a pecuniary interest in BT, albeit a small one.

The composition of Ofcom should represent all forms of the media and communications. That applies to board members, officials and staff. We think that appointments should be approved by a parliamentary Committee such as that chaired by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), or alternatively by the Joint Committee that the Government intend to request the House to set up.

For the reasons given by my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), our fervent desire—eloquently expressed by many Members on both sides of the House: I think it struck a chord with certain Labour Back Benchers—was that the BBC's board of governors should have been included in every respect. As my hon. Friend said, it is important that we recognise the public service broadcasting obligations of the BBC's board of governors. It is a bizarre omission that, as we speak, the BBC has no parliamentary accountability. I am sorry that the opportunity offered by the Bill for discussion of that was turned down.

As I have said, we believe that Ofcom should be a deregulatory organisation with a light touch. We shall monitor developments over the next month, especially in view of the Minister's promise of a communications Bill in the spring. No doubt the pre-legislative scrutiny Committee will work carefully to ensure that the organisation has a light touch and a deregulatory mandate.

[Miss McIntosh]

We shall also take the opportunity to ensure that consideration is given to the needs of those with special requirements and disabilities—the deaf, the blind and many others—and to precisely how the commitment in the White Paper to liaison with the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly will be achieved.

We are especially keen for the particular needs and interests of the radio sector to be reflected through a radio committee. We had a good discussion in Committee about the needs and concerns of religious broadcasters, although we did not have an opportunity to discuss them this evening. A greater range of frequencies would enable greater choice in religious broadcasting, which both sides of the House would welcome. Other media and forms of communication—such as mobile phones, broadband technology and the internet—should properly have been referred to. Those who represent Ofcom should have regard to those special interests.

On financing, loans should be set at the interest rate referred to by the Minister in his letter to my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant), and the Secretary of State should set a limit on the expenditure that Ofcom can incur. The Minister should also offer a commitment that, if the main Bill never appears and Ofcom is wound up, the somewhat complicated procedure that he set out in Committee will be simplified so that even hon. Members can readily understand it and explain it to all concerned outside this House.

I consider the BBC one of the finest British institutions. It holds a special place of affection in the hearts and minds of the British people, including me. However, as I have said, it is our fervent desire that, if one regulator is to replace existing regulators, it should replace all six, including the BBC board of governors. As my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk said, initially the board of governors will monitor all first and second-tier responsibilities. However, in the light of its public service obligations, there should be one rule and a one-size-fits-all regulator. For that reason, the BBC should be included.

I make a special plea for the ongoing delivery of regional programming and news editions by the BBC, ITV and other companies. As Members of this House, we are keen that such programming be improved, and that the high standards that we enjoy across the United Kingdom be maintained. I recognise only too clearly that we are in the midst of perhaps the longest and deepest recession for some time. Advertising revenues are down, which has put especial pressure on the delivery of regional programming and news editions.

As we have said at various stages in the Bill's consideration, it is the fervent desire of all Opposition Members that parliamentary accountability be paramount. Ofcom's committees, its annual report and the preparation and presentation of its annual accounts should be considered by the relevant body of each House of Parliament. Its annual accounts should be considered by the Public Accounts Committee, and its annual report should be considered by the relevant Select Committees.

Mindful of a possible Government reshuffle this Easter, may I take this opportunity to wish the Minister a fair wind? Perhaps he will be transported to another Department, or to a more elevated position.

In its lengthy, considerable and interesting deliberations, the Culture, Media and Sport Committee's report on the communications White Paper raised the question of merging the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Department of Trade and Industry. There are many merits in that argument, and I could think of many people who were less fit for that position than the Minister.

I hope that the Minister will take account of our plea for the Ofcom committees to meet in public when possible and for us to be able to deliberate on their work and recommendations.

There was a glaring omission in our debate and we were unfortunately unable to reach the amendment that dealt with it. We failed to consider the measure's competition aspects and their implications for the communications sector. Consequently, there will be two competition authorities: Ofcom and the Office of Fair Trading. I fervently believe that the Bill should declare that, in cases of any doubt about which body should be the ultimate arbiter on competition matters, the OFT is the right body to rule on them.

Nick Harvey: We all agree with the hon. Lady that Ofcom should be a light-touch regulator. However, she is keen for the regulation of the BBC—a complex task—to be transferred to Ofcom and, if a competition issue arises, for Ofcom to defer to the OFT. In the world that she envisages, the BBC would barely be regulated and, if it deigned to do anything in competition terms that was deemed to conflict with anyone else, the case would simply be rolled over to the OFT.

Miss McIntosh: Those comments are interesting, but I believe that the hon. Gentleman confuses two matters. By "competition aspects", I mean, for example, media ownership. I served an apprenticeship in the part of the Commission in Brussels that deals with competition, and I am therefore mindful of the means that competition lawyers will employ if they believe that an uncompetitive practice is occurring. The hon. Gentleman confuses a true competition aspect, which the OFT should tackle, with my earlier comments about the BBC's public sector broadcasting obligations. I apologise to him if I did not make myself sufficiently clear.

We have had the opportunity this evening to consider many points in some depth. It therefore gives me great pleasure to support the Bill, with the proviso that I am disappointed that many of the issues that we wanted to include remain open for discussion when we consider the main communications Bill.

9.13 pm

Brian White: I am pleased that the Bill is receiving a Third Reading and that it will move us forward. However, a lot of nonsense was talked on Second Reading, in Committee and again tonight. That does not move the debate forward.

As was said earlier, changes are happening all the time. Indeed, British Telecom's announcement on broadband wholesale prices shows that change has occurred since the end of our deliberations in Committee. I plead with the Minister to publish the communications Bill by the end of April or the beginning of May, even if all the i's have not been dotted. It is important to get it into the public domain and have a debate, even if Ministers have not made every decision. It is more important for the pre-legislative scrutiny Committee to be up and running than for Ministers to do everything that they normally achieve before presenting a Bill to the House. There is a need to consider regulations, the EU framework and the work of the existing regulators and their relationship to the shadow Ofcom, and how that develops during the pre-legislative scrutiny of the communications Bill. Those are real issues.

There is also a serious issue about the BBC. We must debate the BBC, its licence fee and its relationship to Ofcom. There is also a need to debate cross-media ownership, but these matters must not be confused and, in the communications Bill, must be tackled separately.

I conclude with two heresies. There has been an awful lot of talk about convergence. Things are converging technically, but socially and in the way that people use technology, they are not. It is important that we understand how people use, or do not use, technology. We should not just assume that because it is technically possible to converge technologies, it will automatically happen. There is a danger that the policy assumptions of the Bill and the communications Bill are not solid in terms of the way in which people use technologies. I urge the Minister to understand what is happening in the real world, and not just the whizz-bang technological stuff.

The second heresy concerns the role of regulators and whether existing models can cope in a world that is changing so fast. The economy is speeding up and changing. Ofcom will need to be adaptable, flexible and quick in its decision making, which is why the Minister was right in regard to the composition of the board. Things will need to be done quickly and, in setting up Ofcom, such imperatives will need to be recognised. The Minister recognises that it is important that when Ofcom is set up, the right people are chosen and that they understand the issues.

Is this a step forward? The debate on the communications Bill will show a lot of areas of agreement, but it will also show some fundamental problems and disagreements. I hope that we concentrate on the disagreements and get the bits where we do agree into Ofcom as soon as possible.

9.17 pm

Nick Harvey: On Second Reading, my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) asked what Ofcom is actually for and what the regulation of the communications industry is supposed to be all about. Do we need to have a specialist regulator for the communications industry, or could it just be regulated by the OFT and the other bodies that regulate industry and competition within industry?

I believe that there is a justification for the communications industry having a specialist regulator and that Ofcom, in the shape proposed, is more or less the right way to go forward and certainly is the basis on which we can debate what this regulatory body ought to be.

It is essential that Ofcom is allowed to take a view on what constitutes the public interest. The OFT is explicitly prevented from introducing into its considerations aspects of what constitutes the public interest. As I understand the Government's reforms, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry's ability to enter into the chain of decision making in competition issues is forced back. The regulator—set up without a brief to take account of the public interest—makes competition decisions against what I referred to earlier as very dry economic criteria.

If Ofcom, which is obviously going to need technical expertise relevant to this sector—and will also, rightly, have to consider competition issues—is not allowed to go beyond that and consider public interest issues, it will not achieve some of the purposes that are being envisaged for it. It certainly will not be fit to be the sole and total regulator of the BBC. I have misgivings about some of its other anticipated roles.

When the communications Bill is published and we debate what Ofcom is for, we must decide either to give it explicit public interest powers or to retain for Parliament or the Secretary of State some ability to introduce considerations of public interest; otherwise, it would be virtually pointless to set the body up. All that it would add to the existing regulatory framework would be some specialist technical know-how. The question of what the body is for is so fundamental that we have probably expended too much time and endeavour on the paving Bill, which contains just seven clauses and a schedule and merely empowers the setting up of Ofcom and the hiring of offices and staff. The sooner we get on with the real debate, which publication of the draft Bill will begin, the better it will be.

9.20 pm

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): I, too, was a member of the Standing Committee that met for the many happy hours referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) to discuss the establishment of an Office of Communications. Our debates centred on the size and composition of the new body and its initial functions in preparing for the regulatory duties across the broadcasting and telecommunications sectors that will be imposed on it by the communications Bill soon to come before the House. We also debated the vexed question of the relationship between Ofcom and the BBC, to which I shall return later.

Clause 1 proposes that the membership of Ofcom should be determined by the Secretary of State and should be not fewer than three people and not more than six. Ofcom is to become an umbrella organisation replacing the existing regulators—the Independent Television Commission, the Broadcasting Standards Commission, Oftel, the Radio Authority and the Radiocommunications Agency. Concern remains that a body that may be comprised of as few as three people will be able to ensure that the interests of so many different services, groups and organisations are represented fully. I have received from a wide range of those organisations representations that certainly echo those concerns.

Inclusion of the necessary range of professional expertise and divergence of experience and view will be extremely challenging. The appointment of a chairman and the members of Ofcom will rest with the Secretary of State. There should also be a chief executive and other executive members, but there is a question about that. Clause 1(5) states:

> "It shall be for the members of OFCOM . . . to determine whether there should be any executive members"

and

> "to make any appointments".

[Angela Watkinson]

That will be an interesting exercise. Given that the maximum and minimum numbers for membership allow little flexibility, an Ofcom of three members would include a chairman, one member and a chief executive. Even an Ofcom of six members would include only a chairman, between one and four members and a chief executive. Clause 1(7) states:

> "The Secretary of State may by order made by statutory instrument modify the numbers".

I hope that that opportunity will be taken.

Much debate in Committee concentrated on whether the Bill should be concerned with Ofcom's future functions—it is, after all, only a paving Bill. I submit that the establishment of Ofcom cannot be readily separated from those functions or from the existing functions of the five regulators that it will replace. Representations have been received from a wide range of interest groups, all expressing individual concerns. For example, the Royal National Institute for the Blind is particularly concerned about the special requirements and circumstances of individuals who are disabled and those of pensionable age. It has requested that an advisory committee be set up for disabled people.

As my own mother was blind, I am aware from personal experience of the importance of both radio and television to blind people. Very few sight-impaired people are totally blind, and they often watch television in the company of sighted people. For those viewers, audio description is an important new technology. It adds to the existing soundtrack and enables blind people to build a better mental picture and understanding of the action. Currently, fewer than 50 people are receiving digital terrestrial television audio description—I apologise for that long title—as part of a trial. I hope that Ofcom will give high priority to supporting the development of that service, to enable a large number of people to benefit.

There are 8.7 million disabled people in the United Kingdom, including 2 million with serious sight problems, who are more dependent on radio and television than most people, and many of whom have unsuitable equipment. That is an area where Ofcom could take the lead and ensure that the future needs of disabled people were met, but it will need specific expertise to do so.

There is currently an obstacle to Christian and other religious broadcasters in applying for a UK broadcasting licence in the same way as their secular competitors. There is a call to remove the ban against religious persons and bodies applying for licences for national and regional analogue and digital terrestrial TV services and national analogue and digital and local digital radio services. I would urge Ofcom to look sympathetically at that area of demand.

Even those already in possession of a licence are not without their problems. Premier Radio, London's Christian radio station, has been given a yellow card by the Radio Authority. That means that if the station does not mend its ways it could lose its licence. Premier Radio had 14 programming complaints and one advertising complaint lodged against it, which is far more than any other station listed. Every single complaint was from the Mysticism and Occultism Federation. Its website states that it has five part-time unpaid volunteers who monitor the media. Irony of ironies, the pretext for the group's monitoring and complaining is in fact pluralism. The group that seems determined to remove Premier Radio from the airwaves claims that it is actually committed to valuing and respecting the beliefs of others.

Mr. Simon Thomas: I have a lot of sympathy with what the hon. Lady is saying. I do not see why the radio frequencies should not be opened up more to a diverse range of stations, as long as they can remain within the law and the regulation that Ofcom might seek to lay down, but that may well lead to the establishment of radio occult. Would the hon. Lady welcome that?

Angela Watkinson: I thank the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas), if only because it gives me the opportunity to try to pronounce the name of his constituency. I just wonder how large an audience such a station would attract.

One is surprised to learn just how seriously those complaints were taken by the Radio Authority. The authority, or its future incarnation Ofcom, must be kept more accountable by the Secretary of State to expose vexatious complaints. Specific expertise is needed to overcome such problems.

I shall now discuss the future status of the BBC. Currently, the BBC answers only to itself or to the Secretary of State. It would be far better for any future regulatory dispute to be decided between Ofcom and the BBC rather than with an elected politician.

The BBC's public service remit will be largely self-regulation but with back stop powers resting with the Secretary of State. If the governors fail in that task, the Secretary of State may act to remedy the situation. The Secretary of State would also retain the power to approve new BBC licenced fee-funded services and material changes to existing services, although Ofcom will give formal advice on the market impact of such proposals. It is essential that the BBC retains public confidence and credibility in its editorial independence as an impartial public broadcaster, and that role would be more appropriately carried out by an independent Ofcom.

A huge responsibility will rest on Ofcom in having control of the nation's communications—those conveyors of ideas, information and culture. The Orwellian opportunities are obvious. We must ensure that this new all-encompassing regulatory body has a light touch and transparent procedures, which will meet the continuing fast-moving developments and challenges facing the communications sector and take a balanced and fair view across the spectrum of media platforms. To succeed, it will need to be efficient and innovative and have an explicit commitment to providing first-class services to all sections of the viewing, listening and communicating public.

9.30 pm

Mr. Simon Thomas: I, too, served on the Committee that considered the Bill, and its proceedings were very interesting and informative. On the whole, it considered the Bill at a reasonable pace and discussed issues that were worthy of debate. There were one or two examples of certain hon. Members perhaps taking up time in a dilatory way, but on the whole it was a model of how a Committee should work and the right amount of time was devoted to a Bill of this length.

I cannot accept [illegible] have discussed any issue that should not rightly [illegible] considered in Committee or even on Report. It was right and proper for hon. Members to try to explore the Bill's paving element and its less welcome elements. Paving is a useful substance when it is put down to walk on—it opens the way—but it becomes a barrier if it is stacked up. When we started to consider the Bill, we were not quite sure whether we were looking at paving that would provide a nice, flat way forward or at an obstacle, and I am still not convinced which of those this Bill represents.

On the whole, this is a genuine paving Bill, but it has always had a slightly worrying aspect: clause 2, which relates to Ofcom's initial function, states that

> "the function of OFCOM . . . is to do such things as they consider appropriate for facilitating the implementation of, or for securing the modification of, any relevant proposals about the regulation of communications."

That clause gives powers to Ofcom very early in its existence, and we were right to explore in Committee how those powers may be used and to consider Ofcom's membership because it will set the tone for the forthcoming, fully fledged Ofcom, to which we now look forward.

We await with interest the draft communications Bill that the Minister said he would introduce. In Committee, he clearly said that it would come in the spring. When he was pressed to say when spring time was, he said that it was a time of flowers and warm air. I have to tell him that the snowdrops are out, even in Ceredigion; that the daffodils are out in London; and that I saw frogspawn on my walk up the Nedd Fechan in Pontneddfechan on Sunday, so it is important to recognise that spring is on its way.

I agree with the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Brian White) that we now need to see that draft communications Bill. It does not matter whether it is complete because we have been promised pre-legislative scrutiny in both Houses, so we shall have plenty of time to consider it. I fear that, if we do not see that Bill early enough to continue some of our arguments, the suspicion will grow that the Government have sought to establish Ofcom as a nice, tidy way to deal with these things while further distancing themselves from accountability and responsibility for them.

The matters of most interest to me are representation not only for Wales and Scotland, to give us a voice in Ofcom in whatever way that is arranged, but for disabled people, as well as the interesting issues raised about the number of people at Ofcom and the length of their service and how the body will be constituted. All those valid and valuable issues were raised in Committee, and, on the whole, the Minister dealt with them reasonably effectively, but one issue remains outstanding.

Plaid Cymru and the Scottish National party are concerned that there is still no representation for Wales or Scotland or a method to consult them, as promised in the White Paper. There is no mention of having a member for Wales. We have extracted a promise that Ofcom will have an office in Wales, but we must be aware that it replaces five regulatory bodies, most of which already have in place a method for representing Wales as well as contacting and consulting the National Assembly on such matters. That is why the Assembly Cabinet made it clear that it wanted to choose a Welsh member of Ofcom. It has long been my party's policy that we should have a regulatory body for communications in Wales—Ofcom Cymru, or Ofcom Wales if hon. Members prefer. I accept that that was never on the agenda and have not pursued it. It is perhaps better addressed in a bigger political fight. Nevertheless, we are extremely disappointed that the Bill has fallen so far short of reflecting Welsh and Scottish needs.

Despite the powers not being devolved to the National Assembly, it has a huge interest in communications, and in broadband in particular, because they do relate to the economic development of Wales. It funds broadband expansion in Wales and is a partner with the European Union in much of what is best in broadband in Wales. That is obvious to anyone who has ever pressed the fourth button on a television in Wales and seen the Welsh language channel, SpedwarC. The Assembly is charged by the Government of Wales Act 1998 to discuss such matters. They do not have to be devolved for it to have an interest and want to have a say.

Unfortunately, it is not clear how discussions in the Assembly or thoughts in Wales on how the communications revolution should continue will be taken up by Ofcom and fed through to the decision-making processes in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and, to an extent, in the Department of Trade and Industry. That is a disappointing aspect of the Bill. We will of course explore such issues more thoroughly when we debate the communications Bill, and I look forward to advancing the case for Welsh and Scottish communications needs to be taken into account by the Government.

9.37 pm

Michael Fabricant: We have come to the end of a long period of deliberation on what is a fairly small Bill. However, it was right to spend that time establishing the structures and, where possible, to discuss what needs to be put into place when the communications Bill is introduced.

The hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Brian White) is often right on technological matters. He was certainly right to say that what might be possible technically need not necessarily dictate the future. Studies in the United States show that people operate personal computers differently from the way in which they watch television. Convergence might mean that the PC and the television use the same screen, but in practice, as the hon. Gentleman said, that will probably not be the case because we watch television at a distance and operate a PC close up.

Nevertheless, as I said when I argued that the BBC should be involved in Ofcom, time has moved on. There is greater convergence. Technology means that the BBC's position cannot be sustained. My hon. Friend the Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) rightly explained that we are in a sustained period of recession, certainly as far as advertising revenue is concerned. The Independent Television Commission recently sent me some information. Between 1994 and 2000, the annual growth in independent television net advertising receipts was 8.6 per cent. That is a massive annual growth. Yet during 2001, ITV suffered losses in net advertising revenue that were larger than the average for the industry as a whole. Carlton reported its advertising revenue down by 13 per cent. for the year ending September 2001. Granada posted similar losses of 12 per cent.

[Michael Fabricant]

Those losses are partly due to the fact that the BBC has shown itself to be an excellent and competitive broadcaster. Since the birth of independent television in 1955, the BBC has managed to capture a larger audience share than ITV. However, the real reason for net advertising receipts falling is the fragility, as people see it, rightly or wrongly, of the economy in the future. That is even more reason to set up an Office of Communications, and that is why my Front-Bench colleagues and I welcome its introduction.

However, we do not want Ofcom at any cost. We do not want a body that is flawed. I am not convinced that the shell organisation set up by the Bill will be flawed: it will exist only until a communications Bill goes through Parliament and is enacted. Incidentally, over the years the Government have promised to introduce legislation in many areas, but the legislation never appeared, so I want to be convinced that a communications Bill will be announced in the next Queen's Speech. It is important for the sake of the industry that a communications authority be established. It is terribly important that we get that right so that the BBC is not seen to be its own judge and jury, as I said earlier. Furthermore, it must be seen to be controlled in the best interests of the viewers and listeners, who after all pay for it.

It is important also for the industry as a whole that we get this right. I do not want news corporations such as Berlusconi or Bertelsmann to take over the media in the United Kingdom and worldwide. Britain has so much to be proud of, including not only the BBC, which is the largest individual producer of radio and television programmes in the world, but stations such as Granada and Carlton, which have sales worldwide. British broadcasting has to be promoted, and we must have a structure that enables us to do that.

The hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East would chide us with the fact that this is not only a question of controlling broadcasting bodies: we must also ensure that there is an expansion in digital technology in this country. It is a sad indictment of this Government that despite all the boasts made in the White Paper a year ago and in earlier White Papers, broadband has failed to expand in the UK, to such an extent that we are now 22nd in the world league.

I hope that when the communications body is established it will manage to speed up that expansion; otherwise we will see a digital deficit, not only in regard to disabled people, as I said earlier, but in the nation as a whole, and that will cost us dear. I have no doubt that the will of the Government is to see that everyone becomes computer literate and has access to a PC on a broadband network so that they can apply their literacy. However, that requires a great deal more than the Prime Minister visiting a school and playing on a computer; a structure needs to be established.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas)—I call him my hon. Friend because we became great allies in Committee—is right to call for interests in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to be represented in Ofcom, and not only because of the question of languages that exists in Wales. Incidentally, I had to smile wryly when he talked about the work of S4C, because while many people enjoy watching S4C, plenty of other people build tall aerials on their roof so that they can pick up Channel 4 from England—but that is not to say that I want to deprive Welsh viewers of S4C. I would like viewers in Wales to receive both S4C and Channel 4, and that may well be possible in future.

Mr. Simon Thomas: Not only will it be possible in future—it is possible now. The whole point of digitalisation is choice. What is important is getting the whole of Wales switched on to the digital revolution and making sure that there is someone to represent Wales and ensure that it is switched on, rather than relying on general, UK-wide figures. I hope that the hon. Gentleman supports me in that.

Michael Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. I believe that the aim even of digital terrestrial television is to give people access to S4C and to Channel 4. That is what the Bill is all about—diversity and digital access, not digital disability.

The Minister's position of insisting that the BBC should not be encompassed by Ofcom is unsustainable. If he does not grasp the nettle now, he will have to do it in 2005 or 2006, when the royal charter comes up for renewal—unless there is a general election in the meantime, in which case the task will fall to those who now sit on the Opposition Benches but who will then sit on the other side of the House.

The BBC enjoys a unique position. I have resisted quoting the famous letter from Michael Hastings. It is arrogance in the extreme for the head of the political and parliamentary affairs unit of the BBC, which is a publicly funded body, to write to Members of Parliament saying:

> "An inappropriate level of attention has been focused on the BBC and its regulation through the Second Reading and Committee stages".

I almost wonder whether it is a breach of privilege for someone to describe the legislative process as "inappropriate". Can hon. Members imagine civil servants at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport writing to tell me that it was "inappropriate" of me to mention in Committee the comment made by the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) to the effect that their Department is "dysfunctional"? They probably thought it was inappropriate of me to say so, but they would never write to me about it, because it would be improper.

It is equally improper of the BBC to write to Members of Parliament as Mr. Hastings did, and that is part of the problem. Some cogent points are made in other parts of the letter, but they are ruined by the arrogance that permeates the BBC because it is ultimately answerable to no one—and because it is answerable to no one, it thinks that it can get away with it. As I said, if the BBC fell under the auspices of Ofcom, it would find that Ofcom provided protection.

I wish the Bill a fair wind, but I hope that the main communications Bill will be scrutinised seriously. I hope that during that scrutiny the Government will listen and be prepared to accept amendments to that Bill. They certainly were not willing to do so in the Committee on this one.

9.49 pm

Miss McIntosh: With the leave of the House, I shall sum up for the official Opposition. I would hate to disappoint the Minister, who I am sure wants to keep the dialogue going a wee while longer.

We have heard some interesting speeches on Third Reading. It is always a pleasure to hear the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Brian White), who speaks with such authority and high regard for the technological ability of the industry. I regret that the hon. Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey) has again confused the role of the Office of Fair Trading in dealing with competition matters and the BBC, whose public sector responsibilities we want to be brought within Ofcom's remit.

Despite the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant), I hope that we have made Mr. Michael Hastings, for whom I have considerable affection, happy this evening, and that we have satisfied his

"hope that this Wednesday's debate will be more constructive and will give due regard to the central, positive and creative role the BBC plays in the nation's cultural and education life."

As I mentioned earlier, I continue to have the highest regard for the BBC, which can only be enhanced when we succeed in bringing its public sector provision, as well as its other provision, within the remit of Ofcom

My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) spoke eloquently on the role of television and radio for the visually impaired. As the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) also said, although this is a paving Bill, it would have been opportune this evening for us to have regard for those with special needs.

In summing up, let me express the clear disappointment felt by more than one party. We should not only have considered the composition of Ofcom but have had the opportunity to consider its functions. It has been extremely difficult in Committee and during the Bill's remaining stages to consider Ofcom's composition and functions separately. Perhaps the Minister could now admit his regret that the Government did not make that possible.

9.52 pm

Dr. Howells: With the leave of the House, Mr. Speaker. I thank the hon. Members for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh), for North Devon (Nick Harvey) and for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) for being such courteous and erudite spokespersons for their parties. I agreed with almost nothing that they said, but they said it very nicely. The hon. Member for North Devon is a fount of common sense—most of the time, anyway.

It has been a real joy to watch the warmth and glow of the fraternal friendship that has developed between the Tories and the Welsh and Scottish nationalists. What a ménage à trois! I am only glad that it is after 9 o'clock and the watershed, such has been the passion with which they leapt into each other's arms.

The Bill was introduced in another place, where it was thoroughly scrutinised and debated, in July 2001. That thoroughness has been continued as the Bill has progressed through the House. Discussion of it has covered a wide range of issues and given us a foretaste of some of the variety of topics that are likely to be debated in much greater detail when the communications Bill is published in a few weeks' time. I am grateful to all right hon. and hon. Members who have participated in the debates, and look forward to their future contributions.

The Bill is in excellent shape and I commend it to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 287, Noes 6.

Division No. 186] **[9.53 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, Kevin
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
  (NE Fife)
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cotter, Brian
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack
  (Copeland)
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry
  (B'ham Hodge H)
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Fisher, Mark
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca–Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*

Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McIsaac, Shona
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Anne McGuire and
Dan Norris.

NOES

Ewing, Annabelle
Llwyd, Elfyn
Price, Adam
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Weir, Michael
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Simon Thomas and
Pete Wishart.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

CONTRACTING OUT

That the draft Contracting Out (Local Education Authority Functions) (England) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 7th February, be approved.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

Question agreed to.

Operation Lancet

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

10.8 pm

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): By my reckoning, this is the fifth Adjournment debate on Operation Lancet. However, it is the first to be held consequent upon a partial conclusion—that is, the 14 guilty pleas and the forced resignation of former Detective Superintendent Mallon from Cleveland police. Although Operation Lancet is not terminated, it might be said that, for the first time and with facts available, the House is able to have a reasoned—if short—debate.

Operation Lancet has gone on for four and a half years. What has it been about? In part, it has been about allegations that a group of Middlesbrough detectives gave inducements such as drugs to criminals in order to gain information. There were suspicions that close personal relationships existed between some Cleveland police officers and people believed to be drug traffickers. Even if only a fraction of the complaints were true, the officers involved had behaved in a regular and systematic fashion, apparently safe in the knowledge that compromised colleagues would not betray their activities. When Mallon pleaded guilty to 14 disciplinary charges arising out of Operation Lancet, he converted these allegations in relation to drugs into facts.

Operation Lancet has highlighted a culture among some Middlesbrough police officers who traded with drugs as their currency—a fact again confirmed by Mallon's guilty pleas. It found that drugs taken into police custody were not properly recorded or handled, or correctly disposed of by destruction. What happened to the unaccounted for drugs? They were given to prisoners in police cells in exchange for information, and they were used by police officers themselves. All of that is confirmed by Mallon's guilty pleas.

Mallon based his entire policy of zero tolerance on one officer who was himself a known drug abuser and another who had already been removed from the CID for disciplinary reasons. According to the West Yorkshire police report on which Mallon relies, those two individuals were

> "the right tools to do the job".

Having chosen the tools, it was hardly surprising even to the West Yorkshire police that he became less forthcoming in dealing with allegations about them. Even the West Yorkshire police accept that he dealt with those allegations in an unprofessional way.

The facts are simple. Mallon failed to investigate an allegation that a female prisoner had been given heroin by a detective in his force. An employee of a firm of Middlesbrough solicitors told a civilian custody officer on 7 April 1997 that her client had indeed been supplied with heroin. That information was passed on to an inspector who informed Detective Superintendent Mallon. However, Mallon made no effort to investigate this allegation and indeed raised it directly with the detective concerned. He thus thwarted any operation to ascertain the truth or otherwise of the allegation. He has now pleaded guilty that between March 1997 and May 1997 he failed to investigate an allegation that a detective had supplied a controlled drug to a female prisoner.

On 23 May 1997, it emerged that two detectives—the one who was a known drug abuser and the one who was a risk taker; or the "tools for the job", according to West Yorkshire police—had taken a prisoner from police cells to identify houses he had burgled, but in truth the prisoner was supplied with heroin and taken to a pub by the officers. That information comes from the West Yorkshire report on which Mallon relies. The prisoner was a known heroin addict and was on charges of theft and burglary. The detectives had stopped by a garage on the way to the pub and returned with some "gear"—a euphemism for controlled drugs. At the pub, the prisoner was given two pints of beer and allowed to use a controlled drug. Due to the drinks and drugs, and not quite knowing what he was doing or where he was, the prisoner signed a statement admitting to a number of offences that would be taken into consideration at his forthcoming trial. That was how the clear-up rate of crime was improved in Mallon's Middlesbrough.

When the prisoner was returned to his prison cell, the custody officer noticed the remains of a wrap of heroin still in his possession. This was a roll of aluminium containing heroin which the prisoner had been given by one of the detectives and had already used. Traces remained on the aluminium.

Mallon said to me on BBC television, on "North of Westminster", that allegations saying that he had pleaded guilty to drug-related offences were "lies". He also claimed in *The Northern Echo* that five of the allegations related to an incident in which it was claimed that a prisoner was taken out of a police station and given drugs. He says that he was satisfied that no drugs were passed. In fact, the drugs would end up in Holm House prison with the prisoner's belongings—the aluminium foil and the heroin clinging to them—when the prisoner was remanded to the prison. All these facts were uncovered by Operation Lancet, whose team ensured that the incident was thoroughly investigated.

The fact that a prisoner had been given drugs by one of his detectives was known not only to Mallon. He sent one of the detectives back into the cell—prior to the prisoner's removal to Holm House—and ordered the custody sergeant to allow him access. The detective told the prisoner that he must keep his mouth shut—a prudent course which the prisoner had felt he should adopt anyway. Mallon then addressed junior officers in the force and told them they, too, must keep their mouths shut and forget about the incident. At this meeting, Mallon even praised the officer whom he knew to be on drugs. He did this in a hectoring and dismissive fashion, setting no example to the young officers at all.

On 4 February 2002, Mallon pleaded guilty to failing to investigate allegations that detectives had supplied a controlled drug to a prisoner and, following his guilty plea, he was required to resign from the force. He also pleaded guilty to the fact that he did not pass on information in his possession when this incident was investigated by another officer.

Zero tolerance seemed to be based on a drug-abusing detective and a risk-taking detective having obtained statements from a prisoner so sozzled on booze and heroin that he admitted to other offences. Not all members of the public were enamoured of the policy. Two of them made a number of serious allegations of criminal conduct against the two detectives—the drug abuser and the risk taker—or rather, the "tools for the job". The allegations

[Mr. Stuart Bell]

were reported to a police constable who brought them to the attention of his inspector. A report was prepared by that inspector, but when the report was presented to Mallon, he deleted the majority of the allegations and instructed the inspector to prepare a diluted version. These were serious allegations that required investigation. The inspector retained the original report, which clearly showed that certain allegations had been deleted and that comments had been written on it by Mallon in his own handwriting. This document is a smoking gun in relation to Mallon's lies, and provides clear evidence that he was protecting officers who should have been prosecuted rather than protected.

Mallon has already pleaded guilty to all the above charges, and accepted that they amount to neglect of duty, misconduct to a member of a police force, falsehood and prevarication, and discreditable conduct. For this, too, he was required to resign. The passing of drugs and the cover-up thereof are serious disciplinary offences to which to plead guilty, along with the other guilty pleas. I should add that had Mallon made his guilty pleas to the West Yorkshire police—who conducted a review of the evidence—they would, of necessity, have come to the conclusion that there was sufficient standard of proof to support a criminal prosecution.

The West Yorkshire police report says that, given Mallon's denials of wrongdoing, it would be difficult to prove criminality. But Mallon denies no more; he has pleaded guilty to wrongdoing and to criminality. He has also pleaded guilty to failing to investigate reports that drug dealers were being tipped off to the imminence of a drug raid.

Police officers executed a search warrant in respect of drugs that might be found on premises in Marton road, Middlesbrough. On their arrival it became evident that the occupier had been warned. No drugs were found. One of the officers dialled 1471, and obtained details of the last incoming call before the search. The number was that of Middlesbrough police station.

Mallon caused no inquiries to be made, because he knew who had made the call and why he had made it. The house that was raided had been the house of not only a drug dealer but an informant. He was on the books of Middlesbrough CID during Ray Mallon's watch. Certainly he would not be a witness who might have been relied on had Mallon ever been brought before a criminal court.

On that guilty plea, too, Mallon was required to resign. He also pleaded guilty to lying—on 27 November 1997, when being interviewed for police purposes. He was, in fact, required to resign on 11 of the 14 charges to which he pleaded guilty.

It must also to be said that when allegations against Mallon's officers became a flood rather than a trickle, Mallon stayed mum. He declined to impart any of his knowledge to Operation Lancet's inquiry team. He hindered the operation from the outset and ensured that it stretched far beyond its natural life, at a heavy cost to the taxpayer—a cost of £3.3 million, not the £7 million tagged to it by the operation's detractors.

Of that, £1.9 million has been returned by central Government to local ratepayers; but Mallon perpetrated a fraud on those ratepayers. He made allegations about key members of the Operation Lancet inquiry team, requiring each and every allegation to be investigated. That cost the ratepayer £369,223. Needless to say, none of Mallon's allegations were substantiated. Then there were the costs specific to him within Operation Lancet—some £320,589—as well as, of course, a proportion of the operation's online costs. Mallon gave the Teesside ratepayer a total bill of £689,812, all of which would have been saved had he fully co-operated with Operation Lancet and pleaded guilty to the disciplinary offences at the outset.

Why did Mallon do it? Why did he ruin a police career? He breached those disciplines and committed those offences, knowingly and deliberately, because he did not wish to damage his reputation as Robocop, because he did not want the public to know that his policy was based on passing drugs for information, obtaining admissions from prisoners of other offences they might or might not have committed, clearing up the crime rate in an entirely bogus fashion—on false pretences—and using drug-abusing and risk-taking detectives, his "tools for the job", to do it.

This was his policy. This was his watch. It is by his own mouth and his own guilty pleas that he stands convicted. His vanity was such that he preferred to turn a blind eye to drug dealing rather than acting as a senior police officer with duties in the force and to the local community.

We do not need a police force of zero tolerance that rides roughshod over human rights. The streets may be clear in totalitarian countries, but we do not want their tactics here. We have, and must abide by, the rule of law. Middlesbrough people deserved better. They did not deserve to be deceived by Mallon.

They deserve, and have now got, a dedicated police force acting within—rather than without—the law.

Mallon walked on the wild side. He pleaded guilty to 14 disciplinary offences, and was forced to resign from the force. The evidence against him was such that, had he not pleaded guilty, he would have been found guilty. He knew all along that he was guilty, and he will be guilty to the end of his days.

I am glad to say that Cleveland police are confronting daily drug problems in Middlesbrough and elsewhere on Teesside. Their policy is to arrest a drug dealer a day, and by Monday of this week 134 operations—involving searches of people, vehicles and premises—have been carried out in the Middlesbrough district alone. Some 127 warrants have been issued under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, and 122 people have been arrested, 75 per cent. of whom were male. Drugs to the value of £12,500 have been recovered, and £24,500 in cash has been seized. Positive results have been achieved in 70 of the 134 operations.

I am grateful to the Minister for listening courteously to me as I have given the background to Operation Lancet. In the short time available, I ask him to confirm that, on two separate occasions, Mallon entered unequivocal guilty pleas to all 14 disciplinary charges after having maintained his innocence for more than four years; that the offences were drug-related and linked to a culture of passing drugs in prison cells to gain information, tipping off drug houses of impending raids, and using drug addicts as informers; and that such disciplinary charges are extremely serious. Mallon was a senior officer with

23 years in the service at the time that the offences were committed, and because of their seriousness he was required to resign from the service forthwith.

I also ask the Minister to confirm that the offences were not, as one noble Lord described them, "minor matters"; that members of the Cleveland police authority unanimously proposed that all papers relating to Operation Lancet be eventually returned to the Crown Prosecution Service, having regard to Mallon's guilty pleas; that Mallon was not cleared of criminal conduct in June 2000 or at any other time; and that West Yorkshire police had to agree that, given the lifestyles, convictions and nature of the individuals with whom Mallon was dealing—drug-abusing detectives and informants who were drug dealers themselves—it would have been impossible to reach a conviction beyond reasonable doubt before the Mallon pleas.

I also ask the Minister to spare a thought for the chief constable of Cleveland police, Barry Shaw, who has been much maligned throughout Operation Lancet. He is the oldest chief constable in the country. He could have retired two years ago, but he wished to see Operation Lancet through to its conclusion. He wanted to leave behind a decent and efficient police force that is free from the taint of corruption. He wanted to confront the social problems of our time, which are not of his making, and to create a police force able and willing to work with the public, notwithstanding the difficulties. He should be praised, not berated, for those policies, and I trust that the Minister agrees.

The Taylor review will inform the deliberations of the Home Office in establishing a new independent police complaints commission. Cleveland police have contributed to the review, which will make its report to the Home Secretary. The Home Secretary must ensure that Mallon's delaying tactics and allegations against key members of the Operation Lancet team can never be repeated. In the form of Operation Lancet, they have cost the taxpayer dear. I thank the Minister in advance for his answers.

The debate might seem routine, but it goes to the heart of our society. Do we want a society that is decent and built on the rule of law or one in which anything goes, rules can be bent and the rule of law discarded? I know the sort of society that I want, that the Minister wants and that the people want.

10.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) on initiating a debate about the investigation of misconduct in Cleveland police, which continues to attract interest and concern locally and nationally. I shall not be able to answer all my hon. Friend's points in the time that he has left me, but he well understands that. He believed that it was more important to get his comments on the record.

Public confidence in the police service rests on a reputation for integrity. When allegations of corruption or misconduct are made and the service's reputation is brought into question, it is important that thorough scrutiny takes place to establish the facts and determine the appropriate action.

It would have been entirely wrong if the force had not investigated the serious allegations of corruption. Cleveland police acted robustly by initiating an investigation into allegations in the case that we are considering. Although the investigation concluded in November 2000, the disciplinary process has ensured its continued high profile. That has been especially true of the case involving Ray Mallon.

Mr. Mallon, a senior police officer has, according to his own unequivocal admissions, committed serious acts of misconduct. They include failing to investigate allegations involving the misuse of drugs and giving false statements. Integrity has to be fundamental to the police service, and those matters are therefore serious. Six other officers remain suspended.

I am sure that my hon. Friend appreciates that if any appeals result from a disciplinary hearing, the Home Secretary may be called to make the judgment as the appellate authority. It is therefore not for me to comment on the details of any ongoing case.

As my hon. Friend stated, neither Mr. Mallon nor anyone else has appeared in court because of Lancet. The Crown Prosecution Service decided that no criminal charges should be brought. Again, that is a matter for the police and the CPS, not Ministers.

My hon. Friend said that there had been calls for issues arising from Lancet to be resubmitted to the CPS. That is entirely a matter for Cleveland police. Neither the Home Secretary nor I can play any role in that.

Let me ensure in the time remaining that I answer all my hon. Friend's specific questions. I can confirm that Ray Mallon entered pleas of guilty on two separate occasions to all 14 disciplinary charges.

The specific charges were serious, and because of that, Mr. Mallon was required to resign from the police service forthwith. He pleaded guilty to giving false statements at interviews, and my hon. Friend is right that the police authority has asked the chief constable to consider resubmitting the issue to the CPS. My hon. Friend knows the answer to his question about whether the issues have been before a court. I can confirm that Mr. Mallon's case concerned failure to investigate allegations involving the misuse of drugs.

I appreciate that the considerable cost and time taken by the investigation has been a source of concern and frustration and that such major investigations can place a significant burden on the budget of a small force such as Cleveland.

Dr. Ashok Kumar (Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Ainsworth: No. These debates are for the Back Bencher in whose name the debate is tabled. It is for them to decide how the time is allocated. It is not for Front-Bench spokesmen to decide how the debates are used.

The total cost of Lancet was £3.25 million. A further £690,000 has been spent on associated investigations and the disciplinary hearing against Mr. Mallon. In these exceptional circumstances, the then Home Secretary authorised a contribution towards these costs of £1.9 million from Home Office funds.

[Mr. Ainsworth]

I appreciate the difficulties that Cleveland police and the chief constable have experienced and the burden placed upon them by Lancet. I gladly take this opportunity to recognise the work that they are doing now. With my responsibility for drugs, I can welcome particularly the structures that they have put in place and the efforts that they are making to combat drug trafficking, such as the dealer-a-day campaign.

My hon. Friend called upon the Government to provide a fast-track procedure for all disciplinary measures. A fast-track procedure was introduced when the new police misconduct procedures were established in April 1999. Those procedures provide for exceptional cases of gross misconduct to be dealt with swiftly. The fast-track procedures are used rarely. I think that that is generally right. Most cases should be dealt with through the normal route, but I will reflect on my hon. Friend's comments about speeding up the process.

The important thing is to ensure that lessons from Lancet are not forgotten now and then repeated in the future. The Government are committed to reform of the police complaints system. We are also determined to learn from Lancet. The Government instigated a review of Lancet as a case study.

Following the unfortunate death of Sir John Hoddinott who was originally asked to carry out the review, William Taylor, formerly Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary in Scotland undertook to complete it—it will be completed shortly. It will not reconsider the conclusions of Lancet; the terms of reference were drawn up specifically with this in mind. It will inform the Government's policy as to the new system that we have in mind.

The problems of the present system in dealing with complex, long-running investigations have been a significant cause for dissatisfaction within the police service and with the public. We need to be confident that the new system will be robust enough to deal with the most testing cases.

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at twenty-three minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 7 March 2002

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF LONDON (WARD ELECTIONS) BILL

Order for further consideration, as amended, read.

To be further considered on Thursday 14 March.

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Recycling

1. **Andrew Selous** (South-West Bedfordshire): If she will make a statement regarding the implementation of European recycling directives. [37991]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): The United Kingdom has participated fully in the negotiation and implementation of European Community measures to increase recycling.

Andrew Selous: Will the Secretary of State explain why other European countries, such as Germany, were able to prepare in advance for the ozone depleting regulations, with the result that they did not incur the expenses that the UK has incurred? My county council, Bedfordshire, has had to spend £810,000 this year to store fridges, as no UK treatment facilities are available. Will the right hon. Lady assure the House that the Government will not be caught unawares in relation to any future European recycling directives?

Margaret Beckett: First, the hon. Gentleman is right to say that three other member states had made preparations that allowed them to handle fridges in the way that he suggested, but of course they did not do so without incurring expense. Twelve member states, including the United Kingdom, were awaiting further guidance from the Commission.

I share the hon. Gentleman's view that it is important that we get clear acceptance and understanding not only of the wording of legislation and regulations, but of what they mean—what the implications are. I assure him that we are more than eager to engage in such discussions in order to clarify all these issues before regulations are made or legislation implemented. That has not always been the case under previous Governments, but this Government engage at a stage when planning and discussion are under way.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): As my right hon. Friend is aware, there are very few companies throughout the European Union that provide the machinery for removing refrigerants from refrigerators, and there was a backlog of orders for such machines from companies throughout the EU, including Britain, wanting to take advantage of the opportunities of recycling. Will the procedure require licensing in Britain, and how will that affect companies trying to set up facilities in the UK to recycle fridges?

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend is right; the recycling does require licensing, but there are procedures in place, handled by the Environment Agency, to deal with that. My hon. Friend and the House may like to know that, as of this week, we are expecting the arrival of the first mobile facility for carrying out this type of recycling, and we have every reason to hope that other plant will be in place by June.

Andrew George (St. Ives): Although we accept the Minister's sincerity, does she accept that her Department faces an even worse crisis? A new wave of European legislation to which Britain has signed up is fast coming along, and her Department is as unprepared for that as it was for the directive that resulted in 250,000 fridges being stockpiled. Her Department seems equally unprepared for the hazardous liquid waste directive, which must be implemented in four months, and it is doubtful that the Department will be prepared for forthcoming directives on abandoned cars, waste from ships, hazardous waste, electronic and electric goods and many others. Does she accept that her Department does not have the capacity to cope, and that Britain runs the risk of being seen as the laggard in Europe in respect of waste management and recycling?

Margaret Beckett: No, I do not accept that; it is completely unjustified. The hon. Gentleman rolled into his observations a number of different sets of regulations that are all at different stages of discussion and implementation. For example, the waste electrical and electronic equipment directive is still under discussion in the European Parliament, so we are some distance away from that. I entirely share his view that it is right that we take on board the implications of these issues and prepare for them as thoroughly as we can.

The end of life vehicles directive is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, but I can assure the hon. Gentleman that extensive discussions and consultations are under way to make sure that we implement properly and proportionately the legislation and the regulations to which we have agreed. I can also assure him that there is no truth whatever in the suggestion that the UK is a laggard in these matters. Every member state has the same concerns and frequently the same difficulties as people experience in this country.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): May I remind my right hon. Friend that the delay in implementing the European directives was the responsibility of the former Tory

Government, who delayed the introduction of any such regulations for three years? Will WRAP, the waste and resources action programme, have some influence in determining the markets for recycled materials, which is one of the main problems that the Government face?

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend is right that WRAP is a very important organisation that was set up by the Government exactly in order to work on and develop the market for recycled products. One of the things that people often leave out when they discuss this issue is that it is all very well to talk about recycling and finding new markets, but it must happen in reality. He is right that the programme is an important and useful initiative that has been taken by the Government. He is also right to say—I realise that this was not popular with everyone in the House—that, with regard to the implications of European legislation in many fields, we have had to grapple with the knock-on effects of delay and the previous Government's inability to engage in negotiation. That is not a course of action that we intend to follow.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): I am delighted that the Secretary of State has come here to answer questions on fridges; we are used to the dithering performance of the Minister for the Environment. Perhaps she can clear something up for us. The Minister has blamed the European Commission for failing to keep him informed of the consequences of the directive on the recycling of fridges. As she will know, the Commission has vehemently denied that and blames the Government for the fridge mountain. As they cannot both be telling the truth, which one of them is not doing so?

Margaret Beckett: I see that it is my right hon. Friend's turn to be abused by the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman. It is the first time that I have heard anybody call my right hon. Friend dithering, and I have certainly never seen any evidence to suggest that he has such a problem—forthright and determined, yes, but dithering, no. On the handling of the fridges legislation, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that there is a very clear difference of opinion between ourselves and the Commission. I remind him that, as I said, 12 member states had not taken action to implement the directive, while 12 clearly had concerns about precisely what it meant.

Mr. Ainsworth: I am sorry, but that answer is hopelessly inadequate. There is a very serious problem with fridges, which are potentially hazardous, not least because they contain CFCs, and the Government are doing absolutely nothing about it. These days, one is about as likely to see a field full of fridges as one full of sheep. Given that, as we have heard, there are new directives in the pipeline dealing with televisions, personal computers and cars, is not there a real danger that the fridge mountain could turn into a whole mountain range of discarded possessions?

Margaret Beckett: No, there is no evidence of a huge build-up of difficulties in respect of fridges. The hon. Gentleman says that the Government are doing nothing, but I am sure that he is aware that we have already made some £6 million available to local authorities—

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): Piffling.

Margaret Beckett: As the hon. Gentleman's party is committed to cutting public expenditure, I am not quite sure how much he would make available.

The money is intended to deal with the issue up to the end of March, and we will discuss the matter further with local authorities. There is no evidence of a vast and growing problem or of great difficulty. It is a pity that Opposition Members are trying to create such a problem when one does not exist.

Energy

2. **Joan Ruddock** (Lewisham, Deptford): If she will make a statement on the energy review published by the performance and innovation unit. [37994]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): I welcome the review as a valuable contribution to the debate on how best to help the UK move towards a low-carbon economy in response to our internationally agreed climate change goals. It is too early for the Government to have reached a view on all the review's many recommendations, but we will consider them very carefully. As has been announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, we will hold a full public consultation leading to the publication of a White Paper later this year.

Joan Ruddock: I thank my right hon. Friend for her reply. As Government investment in renewables is running at about £100 million a year and in energy conservation at about £200 million year, and as her estimates of the costs of cleaning up nuclear waste from the nuclear programme suggest that they will be £85 billion, will she tell her colleagues in the Department of Trade and Industry that greater political will and more investment in energy conservation and renewables could enable us to meet any perceived energy gap, and that the environmental imperative is to say no to any new nuclear capacity?

Margaret Beckett: As my hon. Friend rightly says, the Government are committed to making much more substantial investment in renewables than in the past and to investment in energy conservation. We fully recognise the enormous contribution that those steps can make towards helping us to meet our climate change obligations. My Department has instigated a thorough consultation on the handling and treatment of radioactive waste. The Government are alive to the importance of these difficult and different issues and keen to stimulate public consultation and debate.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): The Secretary of State will be aware of the potential benefits to UK agriculture of renewable energy crops, but the problem is that power stations capable of using those crops are few and far between. What negotiations is her Department conducting with generators to increase the number of those units, and what input is she having into the rewriting of electricity trading arrangements to favour electricity generation from such sources?

Margaret Beckett: Electricity trading arrangements are the subject of wider discussions with my colleagues in the Department of Trade and Industry. Fuel crops offer considerable potential and they will be considered as part of the Government's discussions on our forward strategy for agriculture as a whole.

Dr. Jack Cunningham (Copeland): Is not it odd that on the very day that the Government's chief scientific adviser has called for a nuclear power building programme, and given that the Government are not only failing to meet their CO_2 reduction objectives under Kyoto, but will have no chance of doing so if we remove the contribution to electricity generation that is made by nuclear power—

Joan Ruddock: I am not suggesting removing existing nuclear power.

Dr. Cunningham: Will my hon. Friend stop making sedentary interventions and keep quiet for a moment?

As the performance and innovation unit report makes it clear that we should keep the nuclear option open, does my right hon. Friend accept that it is about time we faced the reality that however big the renewables programme—I support a big programme—we will not be able to provide the electricity for an advanced industrial economy without a contribution from nuclear power?

Margaret Beckett: My right hon. Friend is correct to say that the review suggests that we should keep open the option on nuclear power, although it did not make concrete proposals about the steps that we should take. The Government are carefully considering the recommendations in the review and will make proposals for consultation in the near future.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): Will the Secretary of State answer the question put by the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham)? Does she agree with Professor David King that the UK needs to reinvest in nuclear power, with the backing of a substantial Government financial package?

Margaret Beckett: I have not had the opportunity to study what Professor King is reported to have said, and I would wish to do so before I commented on it. All I can say is that the review recommended that the Government keep an open mind on the future use of nuclear power. As chief scientific adviser, Professor King is of course free to make his views known.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): If we are fully to develop renewable sources of energy, will my right hon. Friend tell the environmental and other groups that come to see her not to oppose offshore wind farms? Although they want renewable energy, many of those groups have blocked wind farms in the countryside. As the windiest country in Europe, it would be a disaster if our huge potential for developing offshore wind power were to be thwarted by the activities of those groups.

Margaret Beckett: I know that my hon. Friend shares the view of many in the House that many of those groups make a useful contribution to the debate, but he is also right to say that there can be a worrying tendency to a degree of inconsistency among them when it comes to concrete proposals. Everyone who wishes to see the greater development of a programme for renewables—I think that includes most hon. Members—must recognise that none of these issues is problem free.

Shellfish

3. **Richard Younger-Ross** (Teignbridge): What representations she has received regarding shellfish extraction from rivers; and if she will make a statement. [37995]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): I have received no recent representations about extraction of riverine shellfish.

Richard Younger-Ross: The Ministry has received a number of representations over the years asking the UK to re-examine the way in which it interprets European Union legislation. In the past, the Government have neither listened nor taken the opportunity to talk to the industry. An EU mission will consider the issue in May. Will the Minister ensure that it is given the facilities and the ability to talk to the Environment Agency, the sea fisheries committee and, especially, representatives of the industry? Will he, in particular, ensure that the mission comes to Devon, where there is a crisis?

Mr. Morley: I am not aware of a crisis in Devon. There has certainly been an issue relating to the classification of the water quality of a number of estuaries, and we understand that that is a serious problem. Substantial investment is being made in relation to the waste water directive and other directives to improve the classification of estuaries, so that we have at least a category B standard around our coasts. We will certainly co-operate with the mission, and we have close links with the various organisations involved with shellfish, because this is a matter of mutual concern. Our concern is to ensure that the water quality of our estuaries is improved, for the benefit not only of shellfish but of the estuary environment.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that proposals for dredging at Shellhaven in the Thames estuary could wipe out the shellfish stocks in the area, and that the proposals for repeat dredging would prevent the recovery of stocks? That would put my local fishermen out of work and severely damage biodiversity in the region. Will the Minister consider those proposals carefully, so that he can protect the interests of the fishermen of the Thames estuary?

Mr. Morley: I assure the hon. Gentleman that we take into account the interests of the fishing industry when considering dredging proposals. There is a distinction between ongoing dredging management of existing river channels and new dredging proposals for new developments. In the case of new developments, we insist on an environmental impact assessment being carried out, in which we take into account the possible impact on sea fishing and the wider marine environment.

Waste Management

4. **Mr. David Chaytor** (Bury, North): What progress she has made in her plans for the management of radioactive waste. [37996]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): The Government and the devolved Administrations published the consultation paper "Managing radioactive waste safely" on 12 September. We propose a programme of national debate and research, leading to scientifically sound decisions on the long-term management of radioactive waste that will inspire public confidence across the UK. The consultation period ends on 12 March.

Mr. Chaytor: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply. Does he think that it would be appropriate for a new nuclear power station to be constructed before a solution had been identified to the problem of our existing stockpiles of radioactive waste? Will he confirm that Government policy would be to charge the full cost of waste disposal to any new operator? Does he think that the chief scientific adviser would have issued his statement this morning if a hijacked aircraft had flown into Sellafield rather than the World Trade Centre?

Mr. Meacher: On my hon. Friend's first point, it has already been stated that the PIU energy report does not foreclose on the nuclear option. It does not propose new nuclear build, but, equally, it does not foreclose on the nuclear option in the interests of the nation's security of supply. There is no presumption on the part of the Government either for or against nuclear power. Significantly, however, the White Paper states that even if no new nuclear plant were built, and even if reprocessing were to come to an end with the phasing out of the Magnox reactors, there would still be 500,000 tonnes of radioactive waste in this country that would have to be managed over the next 100 years.

My hon. Friend asked whether any consideration of nuclear build should involve the cost of disposal. The answer to that is, frankly, yes.

The exposure of nuclear plants is obviously a major security issue given the events of 11 September, and it is kept firmly under review by the Office for Civil Nuclear Security. Security measures have been tightened in the light of that event.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): The Minister is right to talk about a major issue at Sellafield, because the amount of highly radioactive caesium 137s stored there in steel tanks that are almost 50 years old is approximately 100 times the quantity released at Chernobyl. Will he confirm that a passenger jet would take about 30 seconds to traverse the air exclusion zone around Sellafield and hit the tanks? Does he agree that, dependent on weather conditions, that would render all land within 400 miles of Sellafield uninhabitable? Will he recognise the urgent need for the imposition of new security measures, perhaps involving precautions as basic as barrage balloons, to deal with that threat until safer storage of fissile material is achieved?

Mr. Meacher: Even if what the hon. Gentleman said were correct—I certainly do not confirm that it is correct—it is extraordinary and pretty irresponsible for an Opposition Front-Bench spokesman to advertise in Parliament and draw attention to the exposure of a major nuclear plant. These matters have of course been the subject of intense discussion, and there has been intense examination of all the options. It is not my place to say publicly in Parliament exactly what precautionary measures we have put in place. I would expect such measures to be handled through the usual consultative channels, not openly broadcast. The hon. Gentleman can certainly be assured that the Government are acutely aware of the problems, and are doing everything possible to deal with them. However, I do not confirm the accuracy of what he said.

Youth Hostels (Foot and Mouth)

5. **Mr. Stephen O'Brien** (Eddisbury): What progress her Department is making to help the Youth Hostels Association to recover from the effects of the foot and mouth epidemic. [37997]

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): We promoted the re-opening of rights of way as soon as it was safe to do so, and 99.5 per cent. of England's rights of way are now open. We are giving strong support to the "your countryside, you're welcome" campaign. I recently announced the countryside access recovery fund for not-for profit organisations, such as the YHA, that promote access and understanding of the countryside.

To help recovery, the YHA has received £500,000 from the Countryside Agency, £200,000 from the business recovery fund and £300,000 from the National Assembly for Wales, as well as interest-free deferment of tax and other payments.

Mr. O'Brien: As the Minister will be well aware, like many rural businesses in my constituency the YHA has suffered £6 million of financial loss on just £30 million of annual turnover as a result of the foot and mouth epidemic, which might not have happened had the Government got a grip at the outset and paid heed to the lessons of the Northumberland report on the 1967 outbreak that devastated my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson). Despite the warmly spun words of the Minister in a letter to me on 29 November last year, why have the Government decided to reject the request to match the money raised by members of the YHA in an emergency appeal, which is forcing the YHA to consider selling its hostels, many of which are historic buildings, given that to their eternal shame the Government were happy to spend £1 billion on the dome?

Alun Michael: That was a muddled contribution—not so much a question as a rant. I have had discussions with the YHA, especially when the Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting and I met its representatives at St. Braviels hostel. It is accelerating a process that was already under way. It has recognised the challenges that it faces in modernising its network of hostels, which it is doing in partnership with the Government. I recommend to the hon. Gentleman the YHA's own newspaper, the front page of which described the act of the Secretary of State in re-opening Hartington hall, and the strong co-operation between the YHA and the Department in recent months.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): Does my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State realise that, despite the problems with clearing the correspondence backlog, her Department has a one-man rapid response unit in her Department? Last Friday, I faxed my right hon. Friend the Minister for Rural Affairs about the problems of the youth hostel in Teesdale. My right hon. Friend spoke in person to me about the matter on Monday, I spoke to the chief executive of the YHA on Wednesday, and a solution was proposed on Thursday. May I thank my right hon. Friend for his activity?

Alun Michael: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his remarks. His approach contrasts with that of the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien), who asked the original question. My right hon. Friend looked for a solution to the challenge facing the hostel in his constituency. He engaged in discussion, and I am pleased that we were able to facilitate the constructive talks between my right hon. Friend and the YHA chief executive. That is the way forward—partnership, co-operation and action.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): If there is a rapid response unit at the Department, I hope that it will extend the same courtesy to Opposition Members. We have waited nine months for answers to letters.

When YHA members visit the glorious parish of Oakford in my constituency in Devon, they find that foot and mouth still leaves a huge scar on the landscape. The area looks like terminal 5, and the Minister will know that a holding pit was constructed there during the foot and mouth crisis. The Department did not obtain a proper, formal leasing agreement from the landowner, so there is no obvious sign of the restoration of the land to a greenfield site. I hope that the Minister will intervene personally to ensure that that restoration happens.

Alun Michael: I hear what the hon. Lady says. It has nothing to do with the question, but I shall pass on the points that she makes. The Department has certainly experienced a massive problem with correspondence, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has acknowledged. We discovered that thousands of letters were outstanding up to November, and we have been working hard to clear them.

The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) suggested that Government and Opposition Members are treated differently. The Department's ministerial team is trying to deal quickly with correspondence from hon. Members of all parties, but we face a challenge. For instance, I signed a letter to a right hon. Conservative Member this morning, the time scale of response for which is the same as that mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster). We are very fair: we are trying to accelerate response times and improve the quality available to hon. Members of all parties.

John Mann (Bassetlaw): I welcome the fact that my right hon. Friend the Minister has visited youth hostels, and stayed in them. With my children and nephews, I will visit four youth hostels over the Easter break. I encourage the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien)—and perhaps some of his family—to join me in contributing to that organisation. Will my right hon. Friend look at what further assistance might be given over the next year to the YHA? It is vital for rural areas, and for young people in inner cities, such as those in my constituency, who are at risk from drug abuse and other social evils. When youth workers take them to youth hostels, those young people can enhance the quality of their lives, and learn basic skills, such as cooking and independence.

Alun Michael: My hon. Friend is right. I pay tribute to the way in which he has made representations on behalf of the YHA over recent months. I shall visit a youth hostel next week with the specific aim of discussing, examining and promoting the work undertaken with inner-city youngsters, some of whom are the most disadvantaged in society. We recognise that that is a vital part of the YHA's work, and that is why we are working with the association to ensure that it has as much success in the future as it has had in the past.

Fishing

6. **Mr. Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland): If she will make a statement on recent changes to total allowable catches; and if she will make a statement. [37998]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): The Commission originally proposed large cuts for a wide range of total allowable catches, in many cases going further than science would justify. At the December Fisheries Council, after lengthy negotiations we achieved an outcome that closely followed the scientific advice but did not avoid the taking of tough measures where they were justified.

Mr. Carmichael: The Minister's answer illustrates rather well the inflexibility of the current system of total allowable catches and quotas, and the problems caused by that inflexibility. Does he agree that the dumping of perfectly marketable fish to which the system often leads brings the common fisheries policy, as currently constructed, into disrepute? Does that not make the case for the inclusion in the new CFP of multi-annual and multi-species quotas? What progress is the Minister making with our European partners in that regard?

Mr. Morley: I support the introduction of multi-annual quotas, and we are making good progress. There is support for such quotas in the Council of Ministers, and the Commission has flagged them up in a discussion paper on reform of the common fisheries policy.

The problem with multi-annual quotas, however, is that stocks need to be in reasonable shape before they can be applied. Many of our commercial stocks are below their safe biological limit. Strict limits must be placed on what can be taken out of the sea. There is a rough and ready mechanism—I accept that it is not perfect—involving discards once fishermen have exceeded their allowable catch. Without such a system, how could we deal with people who were deliberately targeting fish, as opposed to those who had caught them by accident as part of their normal fishing operations? It is an intractable problem to which no one in the industry has suggested a solution apart from the multi-annual approach, but we must secure stock recovery before applying it. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we will apply it where we can.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): I know that the Minister is as concerned as United Kingdom fishermen and others, including me, about the number of dolphins being caught and killed in nets—mainly, it seems, in the winter bass fisheries. It has been suggested that separated grids might solve the problem, but research in America shows that naval and commercial sonar can damage cetacean sensor systems. That may explain why dolphins are entering nets and becoming trapped. What co-operation is taking place between British and American authorities to find a way of ending this needless slaughter as soon as possible?

Mr. Morley: It is a serious problem, which we are trying to resolve. We have instituted a three-year research programme to monitor different fisheries and to try to establish where the problem has been occurring. Unfortunately, it is difficult to persuade people to admit where it has been happening. We know that it is happening in the winter bass fisheries, however, and we are getting the support of the pelagic fishermen, without which we could not do the work.

I know that research has been conducted into acoustic noise and potential disturbance to small cetaceans. The sea mammal research unit is studying such issues. This problem, however, is a seasonal one in a particular fishery involving, potentially, a particular kind of net. We expect to give a trial to a new net this month, financed through the Department. It has been used in New Zealand, where it has been 95 per cent. successful in reducing the by-catch of sea lions. We are optimistic, but if that does not work we will consider other solutions.

Food Standards Agency

7. **Dr. Julian Lewis** (New Forest, East): If she will make a statement on the relationship between her Department and the Food Standards Agency. [37999]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): My Department and the Food Standards Agency have a good working relationship at all levels.

Dr. Lewis: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer, but it does not go very far. Is it not the case that the agency has much better formalised arrangements, known as concordats, with other Departments? Does the right hon. Lady share the concern of the National Farmers Union, which has been running a campaign since the autumn on the dangers of illegal meat imports? Measures to counter that dangerous activity will not be optimised until the Department has a proper concordat with the agency.

Margaret Beckett: I am of course aware of concern about illegal imports. I was not particularly aware of the view that a concordat is the best way of solving the problem. My Department is already undertaking a number of actions, and is having discussions with the FSA and others. That will continue. I intend, in the next week or so, to convene a high-level group to assess what more can be done. There is no need for a more formalised structure; considerable and ongoing contacts exist at all levels—official and ministerial—to solve that problem and others.

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): Much has been said about illegal meat imports, and rightly so, but there are stories of meat carcases with specified risk material attached being illegally imported into this country. Does my right hon. Friend envisage a tougher role for the FSA? For example, will it visit premises suspected of receiving such carcases and take tough action—such as requiring immediate closure—if they are indeed found?

Margaret Beckett: As my hon. Friend says, such carcases have been identified. They are inspected and dealt with, and a range of organisations and agencies are involved in that work, of which the FSA is one. I can assure him that the goal of everyone involved in such scrutiny and the application of precautions is to ensure that we pursue the matter as vigorously as possible.

Livestock Markets

8. **Mr. Peter Atkinson** (Hexham): What plans her Department has to ensure the continuing viability of livestock markets. [38000]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): It has been necessary for livestock markets to remain closed for much of the past year, and a need remains for disease control measures. Nevertheless, new biosecurity rules have allowed many markets to reopen in recent weeks, and I expect more to open in the coming weeks.

Mr. Atkinson: Does the Minister accept that many of the regulations introduced after foot and mouth are threatening the viability of livestock markets? Does he further accept that livestock markets play an absolutely vital role in setting base prices for livestock transactions? Will he undertake as a matter of urgency to review those rules—particularly the 20-day movement restriction and some of the rules affecting transport—to establish whether they can safely be modified, so that we can maintain a vibrant and successful livestock market sector?

Mr. Morley: It is absolutely essential that markets operate with good biosecurity and that proper livestock movement controls are in place. In that respect, and as markets recognise, the situation will not be the same post-FMD as pre-FMD. Even with those restrictions, markets are opening and functioning, but a small risk remains of the disease breaking out and of sheep being stressed during the lambing period. For those reasons, we must have movement controls, but we have amended them to take into account the legitimate needs of the livestock sector and the way it functions. Most important, we must ensure that measures are in place to prevent the spread of disease.

Mr. Brian Jenkins (Tamworth): Has my hon. Friend considered funding a project to establish whether a virtual livestock market, through which stock could be bought and sold, might supplement the traditional livestock market in Britain? Such a market would entail less stock movement, less stock stress and less exploitation by purchasers of marketplace suppliers.

Mr. Morley: Yes, we have. Indeed, many markets found alternative ways of operating during the period of closure, and we provided support for that. In fact, the Department grant-aided the Hexham market for internet sales and diversification on the premises. That provides benefits in terms of the social function and connections within the industry to enable the setting of prices. As I understand it, the Hexham market has obtained a licence for marriage ceremonies to be performed there—that really is diversification.

Mr. Peter Duncan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): The Minister will be aware that one of the greatest threats to the continuing viability of livestock markets is the fact that foot and mouth disease valuation payments to certain businesses remain outstanding. When can those businesses expect to be paid?

Mr. Morley: My information is that just about all valuations of compensation for animals killed in the outbreak have been paid. Some cases have gone to arbitration, but they are a matter for the arbiters. A very small minority of cases remain outstanding.

Phil Sawford (Kettering): While we all welcome the reopening of the livestock markets and recognise the valuable contribution that they make in our communities, will my hon. Friend please ensure that every effort will be made to reduce the possibility of cross-contamination at markets? Will he also consider carefully the traceability of animals that pass through markets in out-of-ring deals?

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I am sure that the independent inquiry will consider issues relating to the spread of disease. The fact is, however, that moving animals around the country is a risk, and that is recognised by everyone, including the livestock industry. A range of measures must be taken to reduce that risk, and biosecurity at markets, movement controls on animals and traceability are all important elements.

Flood Defences

9. **Mr. Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury): If she will make a statement on her flood defence consultation paper. [38001]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): The consultation document seeks views on the recommendations and conclusions in the report of the steering group that carried out a review of flood and coastal defence funding mechanisms. Both documents were published on 13 February and provide an opportunity to consider provision of the flood and coastal defence service, including a range of options for additional funding.

Mr. Robertson: I thank the Minister for that reply, but does he agree that the recommendation that developers should be taxed for building on floodplains is rather ridiculous when the Government's policy is that there should be no building on floodplains? Does he agree also that it would be rather unfair to expect residents who live on floodplains to pay extra tax, when they already pay council tax, national taxes and higher insurance premiums, if they can find insurance? Does he not think that as flooding is caused largely by acts of God or national disasters, the national taxpayer should finance flood defences?

Mr. Morley: The review stated clearly that the majority of flood and coastal defence funding should come from the Exchequer, as it does now. Of course, responsibility for tackling flooding has always been shared between national and local government, and there has always been an element of local funding. The report considers that position and a range of options. It is a consultative report, and people are free to express their views on it. These are not Government proposals, as Liberal Democrat councillors on York City council thought—they seem incapable of understanding a consultative report.

No one has said that there should never, in any circumstances, be development on floodplains. The whole city of Hull is built on a floodplain. Through PPG25, we have asked planners to consider plans more carefully and, in some cases, to turn down applications. In cases where appropriate development is possible, it is not unreasonable to expect a contribution from the developer towards new and existing flood defences or the enumeration of any potential impact downstream of further development upstream.

Mr. John Grogan (Selby): Does my hon. Friend agree that there is considerable merit in the consultation paper's proposal that the Environment Agency should take responsibility for flood prevention not only on main rivers but on all watercourses that are subject to flood risk? If that were done, it would avoid the confusion that has occurred, most recently in the village of Bolton Percy in my constituency, about exactly who is in charge of flood prevention—the drainage authorities, the Environment Agency or the local council.

Mr. Morley: The issue of main and non-main river courses has been raised by many hon. Members on both sides of the House, and I know that there is potential confusion. The reports suggests that the anomaly is rectified by the Environment Agency taking over responsibility for critical non-main watercourses. Of course, that has financial implications for the agency, and those are the issues that we have to consider as part of the report and the consultation.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): The Minister is aware of my long-standing interest in floods, and I hope that he will take this opportunity to join me in congratulating the members of Rawcliffe parish council for agreeing to act as voluntary wardens in the event of future flooding. I hope that other parish councils, or at least those that remain after the Government's reforms, will follow suit.

One overriding concern pervades the flood consultation: under the present law a house owner is expected to be aware of any imminent flood. That is impossible. People may already own a house on a floodplain, and as my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) said, flooding is often caused by an act of God so it is impossible to know when it will occur. Will the Minister seek to amend that law?

Mr. Morley: We will consider all these aspects. I warmly congratulate Rawcliffe parish council on its self-help. We are keen to encourage that. The Environment Agency has produced flood risk maps, which give people an idea of whether they live in a flood-risk area. The agency has also leafleted all homes considered to be in flood-risk areas, so people are aware of that risk. Individual house owners can opt to go on to the automatic voice messaging system, which rings them, even on their mobile phone if they want, if there is a flood warning. I appreciate the fact that sometimes drains overflow or ditches get blocked, and it is difficult to predict where that will happen. That is why we can never guarantee that floods will never happen. We can, however, reduce risk and we are making good progress on that.

Rural Economy

10. **Helen Jackson** (Sheffield, Hillsborough): What steps she is taking to strengthen the economy in rural communities. [38002]

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): We are driving forward a wide range of measures to strengthen rural economies in partnership with a number of Government Departments and agencies, including regional development agencies.

Annexe 1 of the rural White Paper "Our Countryside: the future, a fair deal for rural England" gives an extensive list of sources of funding, together with advice for rural businesses and communities.

Helen Jackson: I thank the Minister for that answer. He will be aware that South Yorkshire and my constituency are part of an objective 1 area that suffers from poverty. Hill farmers in the area have experienced difficulties arising from the BSE and foot and mouth crises. The help that they require must be cross-departmental. We are grateful for the support in respect of the rural bus community grant that we have recently received. Will my right hon. Friend, as Minister for Rural Affairs, look into the objective 1 funding stream in South Yorkshire to ensure that the rural elements in the area are getting a fair deal?

Alun Michael: I am happy to do so. If my hon. Friend wishes to draw any specific, detailed information or concerns to my attention, I shall be happy to discuss them with colleagues across government. As she says, the objective 1 programme is important. It promotes the development and structural adjustments of regions whose development is lagging behind. That includes a number of rural areas in South Yorkshire and places such as Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. There are 23 million euros available to South Yorkshire through that scheme, matched by an equivalent amount of Government money. I am certainly happy to look at any issues relating to the practical application of that scheme to rural areas.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Does the Minister accept that livestock markets play a vital role in the economy of rural areas? Chelford market in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne), which serves my constituency, the whole of Cheshire and elsewhere, is a large employer, not only through its livestock activities but through its associated activities. Will the Minister therefore ensure that there is the minimum additional cost to livestock markets so that they are able to continue to play their part in the rural economy? Will he also seek to minimise the additional costs that will be imposed on agricultural shows, which play a valuable part in the rural economy? I refer to the Poynton show in my constituency, which is important to that village and the surrounding area.

Alun Michael: In answer to an earlier question, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary emphasised the importance that we place on markets and the assistance being given to them to get back to business, provided that safety and biosecurity are properly observed. The same arises with the shows: we recognise the importance of agricultural shows to the local community and often to a wider region. We are certainly consulting on how they can be helped to undertake their work. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree that, in encouraging that activity, we need to be careful that we do not take risks which could lead to another outbreak of foot and mouth disease and problems right across the farming industry.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): It would strengthen the rural economy if we could export our beef to France. What steps are the Government taking to impress on the European Commission and France that France should open its markets to British beef?

Alun Michael: We are pressing that point. Colleagues have taken the issue up directly and indirectly, and the matter shall be addressed. We want our beef to be exported and our beef industry to recover in markets that it needs to enjoy in the future as it did in the past.

Countryside Access (Foot and Mouth)

12. **Mr. Peter Pike** (Burnley): What controls remain on access to the countryside and footpaths following the foot and mouth epidemic. [38004]

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): The only remaining controls on access to public rights of way are where they pass through the farmyards of premises that are still subject to veterinary restrictions. Those are premises where foot and mouth disease was confirmed or strongly suspected and where final cleansing and disinfection procedures are being carried out before restocking can be permitted.

Mr. Pike: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Does he recognise that, although it is extremely good that footpaths and the countryside have been opened up for access again following the foot and mouth epidemic, specific areas remain closed? If information about that is not publicly available from his Department or the county council, major problems could result. Is he satisfied that his Department and the county councils are making sure that people know exactly where they cannot go at present?

Alun Michael: My hon. Friend makes a fair point. We are encouraging local authorities to publish accurate information for the public on where remaining closed rights of way are located to assist in planning visits to the countryside. As I have indicated, a small number of premises are involved, and many local authorities—I discussed this with Lancashire county council only yesterday morning—recognise the importance of rights of way in the recovery of the rural economy and tourism. We are encouraging them to make that a priority and are working with them wherever possible.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Does the Minister agree that parish councils have a pivotal role in disseminating important information about rights of way? Is he aware, however, that his Department is systematically undermining those parish councils by labelling many parishes as sleeping or barely active? In my constituency, vibrant parishes such as Great Massingham, Roydon and North Wootton have been labelled as barely active. Does he understand the anger of those parish councils at being slighted in this way? Is this not yet another attack by this Government on rural Britain?

Alun Michael: No, it is not. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to refute the scurrilous Conservative central office handout that some Opposition Members have taken up. The handout labelled as "secret" information that had been published in *Hansard* and placed in the House of Commons Library. That is the level to which Opposition Members have sunk in seeking to undermine the role of parish and town councils. This Government have recognised the importance of that level of local government more than any previous Government. We are working with parish councils, and they are working with us—a large number of people turned out in Lancashire the night before last to discuss the future of parish and town councils. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for leading with his chin.

Slaughter Premium

13. **Mr. Huw Edwards** (Monmouth): If she will make a statement on the payment of the slaughter premium where livestock was culled during the foot and mouth outbreak. [38005]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): The payment of the slaughter premium subsidy depends on criteria that were not met by animals culled due to foot and mouth disease. However, we understand that compensation was based on the market value of the animal, including any expectation of its subsidy potential.

Mr. Edwards: I remind my hon. Friend that several farmers in the Grosmont area of Monmouthshire had their livestock culled. The valuers indicated that the slaughter premium would be added, and answers to parliamentary questions confirm that it should have been added. Will my hon. Friend consider this matter? If those farmers are entitled to the slaughter premium, it should be paid to them.

Mr. Morley: Since my hon. Friend raised this issue, we have had significant discussions with the valuers association. The situation is a lot more complicated than it would at first appear. To provide my hon. Friend with a rough guide, from 22 March we introduced a standard valuation. Farmers had the choice of taking the standard valuation or opting for individual valuation. That standard valuation for cattle included the slaughter premium, and was used as a base line in relation to valuation, including the slaughter premium. Valuation should therefore also have included the slaughter premium. Having said that, there are some difficult cases, and we are taking advice. Generally, however, it should have been reflected in the compensation, although the rate of compensation for cattle could be regarded as generous.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): I declare my agricultural interest. The Minister will be aware that I have corresponded with him and tabled written parliamentary questions about the associated issue of movement restrictions that prevented farmers from being able to get the over-30-months scheme premium during the foot and mouth outbreak. It is wholly unreasonable that, after the Government imposed movement restrictions, farmers could not then benefit from the OTMS premium. Should not the Government consider that as an associated cost of foot and mouth and pay the premium?

Mr. Morley: We have considered all the issues and examined that point closely. I repeat the point that farmers who were affected by foot and mouth of course went through a dreadful time but, throughout the outbreak, the livestock sector regarded the compensation provided as fair and generous. The compensation reflects many of the issues involved rather than the current market rate for animals.

Business of the House

12.30 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Will the Leader of the House give us the business for next week?

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): The business for next week will be as follows:

Monday 11 March—Progress on remaining stages of the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill *[Lords]*.

Proceedings on the Consolidated Fund (No.2) Bill.

Tuesday 12 March—Opposition Day [11th Allotted Day]. There will be a debate on "The Quality of Life in London and the South East" arising on an Opposition motion.

I understand that it will be a full day's debate, but the right hon. Gentleman might confirm that shortly.

Wednesday 13 March—Conclusion of remaining stages of the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill *[Lords]*.

Thursday 14 March—Debate on women and equality on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Friday 15 March—Private Members Bills.

The provisional business for the following week will be:

Monday 18 March—Debate on hunting. [Hon. Members: "Hear, hear."] I am glad that it has received so much consensus in the House.

Tuesday 19 March—Opposition Day [12th Allotted Day]. There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject to be announced.

Wednesday 20 March—Progress on remaining stages of the Adoption and Children Bill.

Thursday 21 March—There will be a debate on education: 14 to 19-year-olds on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Friday 22 March—The House will not be sitting.

The House may wish to be reminded that subject to the progress of business the House will rise for the Easter recess at the end of business on Tuesday 26 March and return on Tuesday 9 April.

The House will wish to know that on Monday 18 March 2002 there will be a debate relating to enlargement in European Standing Committee B. Details of the relevant documents will be given in the *Official Report*.

[Monday 18 March 2002:

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Union documents: 14117/01 and Addenda 1-13, The European Commission strategy paper on enlargement and reports on progress by applicants; 5745/02, Common Financial Framework 2004-2006 for Accession Negotiations. Relevant European Scrutiny Committee Reports: HC 152-xv and HC 152-xx (2001-02).]

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to the Leader of the House for providing us with the forthcoming business.

The right hon. Gentleman will no doubt be aware that at 11 o'clock this morning the Transport Committee produced its latest report, HC 680, on the public-private partnership for the London Underground. Extraordinarily, one of its conclusions is:

> "The decision of the Secretary of State to proceed with the PPP on the back of such a vapid concluding statement from his independent advisers, Ernst & Young, must be questioned."

A Select Committee with a Labour majority—all Select Committees have such a majority—has questioned the decision of the Secretary of State for Transport. Local Government and the Regions. Members of the Committee are not the first persons to question his decisions, and they certainly will not be the last. The Committee then adds:

> "It is essential that the Government allows Members a debate and vote in the House of Commons on a substantive motion on the future of the London Underground and the PPP."

Given the enormous respect that the Leader of the House has for Select Committees and his stated desire greatly to enhance their role, I am sure that he will be only too eager to confirm that there will not only be an early debate on this very important report, but that it will be on a substantive motion. I hope that he will be able to do that.

One of today's newspapers contains the headline, "Railtrack fiasco has shattered Blair's credibility in the City". It refers to the pronouncement by top fund managers in the City that said that the recent decision on Railtrack

> "has shattered business trust in the Government."

The report adds that

> "future private investment in public projects would be more expensive because of the perception of increased risk.
>
> The surcharge has been dubbed 'the Byers premium'".

Another newspaper quotes the Secretary of State for Transport as undaunted by all that and reports:

> "Mr. Byers claimed that the fund managers had fundamentally misunderstood the situation. Railtrack was a wholly private company".

That was not the impression that Labour Back Benchers had last week when they were only too eager to support the beleaguered Secretary of State when he appeared in the House. So will the Leader of the House tell us now or make arrangements to confirm later whether, as the Secretary of State claimed to the City, Railtrack is private or whether the Secretary of State wishes his colleagues to think that it is not private? May we have confirmation one way or another?

Today's edition of the *Daily Mail* has the headline, "Mittal: it gets worse". May we have a debate entitled, "How many Government Departments can you buy for £125,000"? We know, do we not, that No. 10 Downing street can be bought. We know that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office can be bought. Now it would appear that the Home Office can also be bought for that same £125,000. Has the Leader of the House been briefed to reply to the question whether this story about the Home Office and Mittal is true? In a friendly gesture, I would just sound a slight health warning for the Leader of the House, reminding him to be careful what he might say about any briefing that he has had. The truth is, is it not—it is now perfectly obvious—that the Government have been bought again? I hope that the Leader of the House will be able to clarify this latest story about the rather ghastly Mr. Mittal.

Yesterday, Richard Balfe, the most senior Labour Member of the European Parliament, joined the Conservative party. It is interesting that—

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): You can have him.

Mr. Forth: I hear the hon. Gentleman—

Mr. Skinner: He is in favour of the euro.

Mr. Forth: When giving his reasons for joining the Conservative party, Mr. Balfe accused the Prime Minister of ruling Labour by fear, and then he said, as reported in *The Daily Telegraph*, that

> "the Tory party under Iain Duncan Smith is a tolerant party that accepts differing opinions and encourages debate."

It is just as well; otherwise some of us might not survive very long.

I introduce the subject of Mr. Balfe because he obviously feels that there is no scope within the Labour party for any sort of debate or difference of view, and I remind the Leader of the House that recently, at this Dispatch Box, I had to defend his hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) from a vicious attack by none other than the Foreign Secretary. Now I find that I must try to defend the hon. Member for Glasgow, Kelvin (Mr. Galloway), who has been viciously attacked by his supposed hon. Friend, the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw). At column 88WH—I cannot imagine what that stands for—of yesterday's *Hansard*, the junior Minister said about his alleged hon. Friend that he was

> "an apologist . . . a mouthpiece, for the Iraqi regime over many years."

That then gave rise to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Kelvin saying:

> "The Minister is a liar"

and

> "The Minister told a lie about me."—[*Official Report*, 6 March 2002; Vol. 381, c. 88WH.]

Will the Leader of the House take his right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary aside and give him some quiet advice on how Ministers should stop abusing Labour Back Benchers to such an extent, otherwise they will all leave his party and join mine?

Mr. Cook: The Conservative party must be more desperate for members than we imagined if the right hon. Gentleman really hopes that my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Kelvin (Mr. Galloway) will defect to it. My hon. Friend is making a personal statement later this afternoon. I shall listen to it with interest, but I do not anticipate that the climax of that will be his joining the tolerant party of the right hon. Gentleman.

As for Mr. Richard Balfe, I am trying to come to terms with his departure with all the equanimity that I can muster, and the right hon. Gentleman will need all the equanimity that he can muster to work with him as a colleague, particularly on the euro.

I will, of course, study with care the Transport Committee's report, but I remind the House and the right hon. Gentleman—this seems to have slipped his mind—that the conclusion of the Ernst and Young study was that the analysis on which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport spoke was robust. I will, of course, consider whether we should hold a further debate on that matter. The House has considered the issue on a number of occasions, and I am sure that it will do so again.

On the City and the funding of public-private partnerships, may I point out to the right hon. Gentleman that, despite the alarmism that he seeks to spread further, since last summer there have been 44 new PPPs signed with City firms without any problem about their coming forward and offering the funding. Indeed, the Chiltern line, which will be known to several of his hon. Friends given that, on the whole, it serves areas that managed to survive their debacles at the last two general elections, has just attracted £370 million of private finance without anyone complaining about additional risk premium or the risk of that funding.

Of course, a fundamental question remains, which the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues are for ever failing to answer. If they had found themselves in the position of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, are they really saying that they would have paid out the money to Railtrack and left it in the hands not just of a private legal company, but one with private shareholders whom it repeatedly put before the travelling public, who are glad to see the back of it?

The right hon. Gentleman will be very pleased to hear that I can help him on Mr. Mittal and the newspaper story. First, the correspondence began with a request from the Belgian authorities, not with any request from Mr. Mittal. Secondly, Mr. Mittal is not under any investigation by the Belgian authorities; on the contrary, they were seeking evidence from him as a witness against one of his competitors. [HON. MEMBERS: "Corus."] *[Laughter.]* I honestly do not understand what Opposition Members find in any way amusing about our seeking perfectly properly to assist another European country with a legal investigation that it is carrying out.

I heard the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) say this morning that such things never happened during his time at the Home Office. It may therefore help him if I say that the organisation that handles and processes such correspondence—the UK central authority for mutual legal assistance—was set up in 1990 by the Conservative party. Every year, it deals with some 4,000 items of correspondence from other judicial authorities. When the right hon. and learned Member was Home Secretary it undoubtedly processed many thousands of identical requests. I suppose that we should be grateful to him for having made it clear that he had no idea whatever what was being done by the Home Office while he was Home Secretary. If the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst would like to debate that further, I would welcome it.

As we are on the topic of Mr. Mittal, I would welcome a debate in which we could explore from where came the £43 million in donations that the Conservative party received in its last year in office. Conservative Members

[Mr. Cook]

have never come clean as to who they received that money from or what they did for them, but we know one or two of the donors.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): Asil Nadir.

Mr. Cook: They received £400,000 from Asil Nadir, as my hon. Friend cries out, on the basis of his fraudulent company in northern Cyprus. They promised that they would return that money, but they never did so. I understand that they have just received several million from Lord Ashcroft, who, when he was appointed as a peer, said that he would like to be known as Lord Ashcroft of Belize. If the right hon. Gentleman would like to explore those matters further in a debate, we would be delighted to do so, and we would like to hear some answers.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, in the "What the Papers Say" script that we have just heard from the shadow Leader of the House, he was certainly right about one thing: the greater tolerance of the current leader of the Conservative party, who showed himself tolerant enough to appoint the right hon. Gentleman as shadow Leader of the House?

May I thank my right hon. Friend for confirming the debate on hunting in the provisional business for 18 March? Will he confirm to me—as a Labour Member who, when in government, used the Parliament Act to obtain the enactment of the Aircraft and Shipbuilding Industries Act 1977—that there is no obstacle whatever to using the Parliament Act to enact a new Bill passed by this House in this Parliament? Will he therefore assure me that, if the will of the House makes it very clear that it wishes a complete ban on hunting with hounds, the Government will ensure that such a Bill is passed, using the Parliament Act if necessary?

Mr. Cook: My right hon. Friend will be aware that I said in response to questions last week that we will have a vote on hunting on 18 March and, indeed, so will the other place. Thereafter, the Minister for Rural Affairs will be seeking to find a way forward and will make proposals before the Easter recess. That will involve legislation at some stage, but it is a bit premature to speculate about a point which, on that timetable, is not likely to arise for at least another 18 months.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): May I assure the Leader of the House that we, too, would support a debate on the failed privatisation of Railtrack and its relevance to the part-privatisation of the tube, if only because we could then establish whether the Conservative party was still in favour of privatisation, having botched it the first time around?

May I ask that we have a debate as early as possible on the private purchase of politicians? The Leader of the House may recall that, a few weeks ago, he gave a dismissive reply to my request for such a debate on its relevance to the future funding of democracy in this country. Today it is reported that his right hon. Friend the chairman of the Labour party has been having secret talks with the chairman of the Conservative party on the subject of state funding for the political parties and the political process. I do not know whether this is a private fight, or whether anyone can join in.

May I suggest that that debate should take place in this House and not behind the scenes between the representatives of the two dinosaur parties? There is genuine public concern about the extent to which successive Governments—the Leader of the House referred to this just now—have been dependent on private donations. We need to establish once and for all what those poor, benighted creatures were doing in making those contributions and whether they got value for money.

May we have a statement before Easter on the subject of Lords reform? The Leader of the House said that he was seeking a centre of gravity. The excellent and unanimous report by the Select Committee on Public Administration offers him an opportunity to create precisely that consensus and centre of gravity. Can I suggest that now the consultation period is long over, and that his White Paper—*[Interruption.]* Not the Leader of the House's White Paper; the Lord Chancellor's White Paper—I am sorry to have maligned the right hon. Gentleman in that way. Now that the Lord Chancellor's White Paper has been thoroughly discussed, it is time for the House to move on.

Mr. Cook: I am obliged to the hon. Gentleman for his characterisation of the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) and me as members of the dinosaur parties. In fairness to my colleagues, I am entitled to point out that the party of Gladstone is somewhat older than the party that I represent. The hon. Gentleman might wish to reflect on where the tag of "the oldest party" should be attached.

May I deal with the point about political parties by stepping back and looking at it a little more widely than I am afraid the media do? Our parliamentary democracy cannot function without political parties; that is the nature of democracy. We require political parties to be in good health and to have some source of funding. If it is the case that the media and some hon. Members are moving to the view that private donations are unacceptable, there has to be an acceptance of alternative ways in which political parties are funded. That is why it is entirely legitimate for members of both parties to have discussions and to explore and debate whether there should be state funding. There is no commitment to that on the part of the Government and I think that the chairman of the Conservative party might have some difficulty in carrying all the members of the Conservative Front Bench on this question.

Mr. Forth *indicated assent.*

Mr. Cook: I am grateful for that confirmation.

On the issue of House of Lords reform and the hon. Gentleman's point about the Public Administration Committee, I welcome one general point about the report, which is that it proves that it is possible for those who want reform of the second Chamber to reach agreement on what should be the shape of that reform. What has repeatedly worried me—I have expressed this to the House—is that, for decades, we have failed to proceed with root and branch reform of the second Chamber because those who are in favour of reform have been unable to agree on the shape of it. The Select Committee has done us a service by proving unanimously and without division that those in favour of reform are able to reach agreement. I am encouraged by that to continue with the search for a centre of gravity. I am also encouraged to recognise that doing nothing need not be an option.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): In yesterday's *Hansard*, the Prime Minister replied to me:

> "When decisions do have to be taken on Iraq, of course we will come and consult the House properly as we should."—[*Official Report*, 6 March 2002; Vol. 381, c. 297.]

Could it be confirmed next week that such consultation will take place before there is a commitment to military action, and not after?

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his characteristically helpful question. May I gently point out to him that the Prime Minister said that no decision has been taken, and no one anticipates one being taken in the near or medium future? Indeed, there is no timetable or process by which such a decision could be taken. It would therefore be ludicrously premature for me as Leader of the House to commit myself to what the House may do in the event of a hypothetical outcome that is not expected for many months.

In any event, the Government have demonstrated, with the recent crisis in Afghanistan, a willingness, enthusiasm and keenness to hear from the House. We have had five separate full-day debates on that issue in which, if I remember rightly, my hon. Friend was careful to give his views at length, as I am sure he will do when we debate it again.

Mr. Charles Hendry (Wealden): May we have a statement on the Government's relations with industry and trade unions? Yesterday in the House the Prime Minister said that the concerns of City fund managers about the financing of public-private projects were motivated by self-interest. Today we read on the front page of *The Times* that he is crawling back to them by reneging on pledges on workers' rights that he has made to trade unions. Can the Prime Minister make a clear statement to the House on where he stands? Now that we all know the way in which the Government operate, can we be told how much more money the unions would have to pay the Government to get a change of policy?

Mr. Cook: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman gives me an opportunity to correct the statements in this morning's press. We issued a consultation document last September on the preservation of pension rights. It listed a number of options that have been out for consultation. They are being discussed in the Government and no decision has been made.

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the considerable disquiet in companies up and down the country because of the demise of final salary occupational pension schemes? Will he make time for a debate on the Floor of the House on that important issue to reassure the many people who are worried and to see what can be done to support them?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises a profound and serious issue for the nation. Many of us are going to live longer than before, so it is all the more important to ensure that there are adequate pension schemes to take people through what will also be a longer period of retirement. I very much regret the decline in the number of final year pension schemes. I note that some of the companies that have started the process of erosion of those schemes have not shown any erosion in the pensions they award to their senior executives. I will convey my hon. Friend's observations to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. I assure [illegible] that the Government will follow the issue closely.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): May I reinforce the point made by [illegible] hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on the general concern about Iraq? Will the right hon. Gentleman try to arrange an early debate on the Floor of the House, led by the Foreign Secretary or the Prime Minister, on Iraq? Will he consider publishing at an early date a document that sets out and identifies the chief areas of concern in the context of Iraq? In the event of the Government deciding to take or to support action, including military action, outside what goes on in the no-fly zones, will he seek the support of the House on a substantive motion, even if that authority has to be given retrospectively, which is where I slightly depart from the views of the hon. Member for Linlithgow?

Mr. Cook: The right hon. and learned Gentleman has floated an alternative option to that proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). The request is ludicrously premature in terms of what may, or may not, be happening. No decision has been taken, and none may ever be taken. The fact that the right hon. and learned Gentleman and my hon. Friend have produced two different approaches shows that we need to consider the matter carefully before we commit ourselves to one or other way of proceeding.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman's other point related to the grounds of concern about Iraq. At the present time I do not think that there would be any difficulty for the Government putting in the public domain a response to the areas of concern to which the right hon. and learned Gentleman has alluded, but those issues are well known and unarguable. The fact is that the Iraqi regime has several thousands of unaccounted litres of toxic chemicals that would be appropriate to use in a chemical weapon; it has made considerable investment in developing biological germ agents that could be used in biological weapons; and has proceeded intensively—and appears to be continuing to do so—with medium-range missiles that could deliver such warheads. In addition, of course, Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons in his attack on an innocent village of Kurds, wiping out 5,000 women, children and elderly men with mustard gas.

Given that history and the present record, it is entirely proper that the world should take action through every available channel, starting with the United Nations, to ensure that Saddam Hussein accepts what the rest of the world accepts: no regime should have access to weapons of mass destruction unless it fully participates in international regimes to control proliferation.

Mr. Colin Challen (Morley and Rothwell): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to a report of the

[Mr. Colin Challen]

European Parliament on relations between the European Parliament and national Parliaments on European integration? It refers to

"the growing disaffection, disappointment and distrust regarding the development of the Union",

and goes on to talk about

"a fear of helplessness in the face of imposed decisions which cannot be influenced or controlled".

In the light of the fact that constitutional convention is considering many of the issues developing in the Union, what arrangements will be made for debates in this House—as the convention proceeds, and not just at the end of it—and what arrangements might be made to help Members promote the debate outside the House, since our colleagues in the European Parliament receive large amounts of money to promote their arguments?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend will be aware that this House is represented directly by two Members—one from our party, who has been elected to the collective presidency of the convention and is therefore well placed to monitor its proceedings and agenda, and one who represents the Opposition, who no doubt also represents their strong views against Europe and will be making his own strong commitment to it and reporting to us at great length.

I anticipate that, as the convention proceeds, it will be a matter of repeated discussion in the House. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe will be frequently before the House giving an account of it. We have had discussions on the process by which Members of the House and of the convention can report to Committees of the House, but I very much share my hon. Friend's concern that the debate should not simply be one within the convention or, indeed, between the convention and national Parliaments. The debate must also embrace the wider population and the civic community of Europe. I very much hope that high on the convention's agenda is the means of ensuring that it carries out exercises in listening to that civic community.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): Will the Leader of the House think carefully about the comment of his hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) and bear in mind the tradition of consensus across the House when discussing pension legislation and the future of pensions? Although there is much discussion at the moment in the House on legislation affecting second pensions, pension plus and stakeholder pensions, there has not been an opportunity to discuss the serious, long-term and deep effects on security in retirement. Will he therefore look favourably on the possibility of an Adjournment debate in which we can consider such issues and subject them to the measured and informed discussion that they badly need?

Mr. Cook: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that when dealing with the question of our citizens' income over a prolonged period—that might be two or three decades in retirement—it is important that we provide them with the stability and confidence of a cross-party approach, which is why many of us on the Labour Benches regretted that one of the Conservative Government's first acts after election in 1979 was to scrap the new pension scheme that the Labour Government had introduced. Had that been honoured by the Conservative party, the hon. Gentleman's appeal for a cross-party approach might have more resonance. However, I agree that we should try again to build that consensus, and I am sure that there will be opportunities to debate it in the months ahead.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): I failed narrowly to get in my question to Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Ministers, so may I ask my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to urge his colleagues in that Department to make a statement in the House on organophosphates? He will know that organophosphate sheep dips were withdrawn from the market a few years, but reintroduced in October 2000. However, this month, a significant research report has been published in *The Lancet* by Professor Nicola Cherry, who tells us that the results of her research

"suggest that organophosphates contribute to the reported ill health of people who dip sheep."

The issue is a huge one in farming communities, and it is worthy of a Minister coming to the House urgently to tell us what the Government's position is.

Mr. Cook: I can only express my deep regret that my hon. Friend did not have a chance to put that question to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs rather than to me, but I shall make a point of writing to my right hon. Friend this afternoon so that honour is served.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): May I press the Leader of the House on the issue of Lords reform? Has he had time to read a perceptive piece by Hugo Young—no relation—in *The Guardian* today? He says of the Government's proposals:

"Tranquillity beckons. Relief from a project too few of them really want . . . Deliverance into comfortable inertia."

Will the right hon. Gentleman dispel those allegations by promising an early debate on the Government's forthcoming response to the Public Administration Committee report, in which the Government's proposals will be set out clearly?

Mr. Cook: I assure the right hon. Gentleman that I begin every Thursday by reading *The Guardian*; it ensures that I come to the House in a suitably combative mood.

As the House knows, we are currently considering the responses to our consultation exercise. We received about 1,000 responses, many of a thoughtful and serious character. We shall at some stage publish an analysis of the responses, and respond to the PAC within two months. Obviously, the matter will have to return to the House at some stage, but I think it appropriate that we take time to get it right before it does so.

David Hamilton (Midlothian): In December last year, the Minister for Industry and Energy made a welcome statement that, after 17 years, he was to right a wrong done to sacked miners throughout the country, several hundred of whom were sacked during the miners' strike. To date, nothing further has been said. Will my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House ensure that a statement is made in the near future?

Mr. Cook: I know that strong feelings attach to that issue and that it is important to a large number of people in my hon. Friend's constituency. I shall make sure that his comments are drawn to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry as soon as possible.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Leader of the House may have picked up vibrations in the press about the Government's undoubted generosity in granting accommodation to Members who are absent from the House and their staff when sitting Members who attend regularly still do not have adequate accommodation. Is he in a position to offer guidance on the steps that would be taken to discipline a party that is not yet prepared to support the Police Service of Northern Ireland, and whose defeated candidate in the Belfast, South constituency at the last election—a Member of the Northern Ireland Assembly—joined others to intimidate people by putting up posters urging them not to join the police service, while at the same time encouraging their own form of restorative justice, a do-it-yourself kangaroo court?

Mr. Cook: I am sure that the whole House joins the hon. Gentleman in deprecating such activity, but the House has no mechanism to discipline its Members for activities undertaken outside the Chamber or the House—nor should it. Many hon. Members motivated by perfectly bona fide commitments and beliefs of their own carry out activities that the House would neither endorse nor be drawn to condemn.

The hon. Gentleman will be aware that when we debated the matter before Christmas considerable concern was expressed that Members are required to register only on taking the Oath, rather than on being elected. I am pleased that the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges has made a recommendation to the effect that registration should be required of all Members on the point of election or within three months of election. I hope to introduce a motion giving effect to that recommendation before Easter.

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the all-party group on children in Wales agreed last week to support in principle the aims of 'Sdim Curo Plant!—the Welsh campaign to ban the physical punishment of children and to give children the same protection as adults under the law of assault? I am sure that he is aware that the Scottish Executive propose to ban the physical punishment of all children under three. Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on this important subject so that we can consider how it affects children in England and Wales and raise the important issues associated with it?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises a subject of considerable debate. She is aware that strong and different views are held on both sides of the fence, which is why the Government have sought to make sure that they find the right balance between the protection of the child and the rights and responsibilities of the parent. As a Scottish MP, I fully support and welcome what is being done in the Scottish Parliament, but the principle of devolution is the right of each side to take whatever action it regards as appropriate for its side of the border.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): When the right hon. Gentleman was replying to my right hon. Friend the shadow Leader on concerns about PPP, he pointed out that there have been a number of successful PPPs in the recent past. He will, however, have heard a succession of leaders of the financial community on the "Today" programme this morning and elsewhere saying that a risk premium would undoubtedly be imposed for future PPPs as a result of the actions of his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. That is a matter for real concern, as the Government's credibility is in considerable danger. Will the right hon. Gentleman set in place methods to monitor the future rates of return from PPP submissions, if indeed he can get anybody to do it at all, so that we can see whether those fears are justified? Can those figures be published, unlike the unpublished figures relating to London Transport, and if there is cause for concern, can we have a debate on the matter?

Mr. Cook: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that every PPP is subject to tests of value for money, which require an analysis of what the future costs will be and how that compares with public sector traditional funding. No PPP will proceed unless it passes that value for money test. As I told the House, more than 40 such schemes have passed that test since it became clear that Railtrack could no longer continue. What would the hon. Gentleman and all his hon. Friends who raise the issue have done in the circumstances in which my right hon. Friend found himself last autumn? Are they saying that they would have volunteered £5 billion, the sum that would have been required to keep Railtrack afloat, in the full knowledge that the company had given hundreds of millions to its shareholders while skimping on investment for the travelling public?

Helen Jones (Warrington, North): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on the closure of Smurfit Corrugated in my constituency, with the loss of 94 jobs? Does he agree that a company which fails properly to consult its workers, which fails to give adequate reasons for choosing the Warrington plant for closure and which, it is suspected, will take the savings from that closure to invest abroad, should be held to account on the Floor of the House? Should we not have the opportunity to debate not just that closure, but the chances of providing better protection for British workers caught up in such situations?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend rightly and properly raises a matter of anxiety for her constituents and an issue that must be of serious concern in her constituency. There are ways in which she can ventilate that through the House. It is important that we make sure that we get the right balance of rights in the workplace, and the Government have taken action to ensure that there are fair rights at the workplace. We must get the right balance between the provision of skilled flexible labour that will attract investment, and the decent protection of that labour from unemployment.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): As the Leader of the House was present in the Chamber yesterday to hear Northern Ireland's First Minister tell the Prime Minister clearly how much it would undermine him and others who supported the Belfast agreement if the Government went ahead with an amnesty for terrorists on the run, can he

[Mr. Andrew MacKay]

give us an assurance today that no such amnesty will be granted? I see the right hon. Gentleman shaking his head. As he clearly does not intend to give us such an assurance, will he at the very least say that the suggestions in the press that the amnesty will occur over Easter are quite wrong, and that the House should be allowed to debate the matter before a decision is taken?

Mr. Cook: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland would be rather startled if I were to rule out or rule in what he must do. I have always made it perfectly plain that we want to ensure that the peace process succeeds. If time is required in the House to ensure that that happens, I shall, as Leader of the House, ensure that it is made available.

Jim Knight (South Dorset): Can my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on the membership of Select Committees? In particular, does he share my concern about the continued inclusion on the Defence Committee of the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth), who remains a member of that Committee despite his recent appointment to the Opposition Front Bench as a defence spokesman? He is indeed a very honourable man; I get on with him well and I congratulate him on his appointment. However, I feel that his membership dilutes the independence of the Committee and threatens its ability to achieve cross-party consensus.

Mr. Cook: I understand that this matter was raised in the Liaison Committee this morning, and I shall be very happy to discuss it with the Chairman of that Committee so that I can understand and reflect the collective views of the Select Committee Chairmen. It would be generally held to be desirable for Select Committees, which carry out scrutiny and seek to find cross-party agreements on their reports wherever possible, not to include Front Benchers from either side of the Chamber. However, I say to my hon. Friend that we must also be understanding of the fact that the official Opposition are so small they might need Front Benchers to be included.

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): Will the Leader of the House find an opportunity to debate in Government time the latest privatisation in the Ministry of Defence? The privatisation of fleet support services affects 4,000 jobs in Rosyth, Portsmouth, Devonport and Faslane. Will he give the House a proper chance to scrutinise the way in which the process has operated? We need to give some confidence to the work force that the 1,000-odd projected redundancies will be considered properly, and the House needs to be satisfied that the MOD has properly gone through all the processes for considering the bids for the work. There is currently widespread dissatisfaction about the way in which the matter has been handled and a resistance on the part of the MOD to come to the House to justify the position that it has taken.

Mr. Cook: This sounds like exactly the sort of issue that the Defence Select Committee could pursue if it were minded to do so. None the less, I shall certainly convey the hon. Gentleman's observations to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence and invite my right hon. Friend to write to him.

Andy Burnham (Leigh): I support the call made by my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, North (Helen Jones) for a debate on the manufacturing industry and employee protection. Problems in the industry are hitting towns such as Leigh especially hard. Leigh has lost thousands of jobs in recent years in coal mining and textiles, and we now face the injustice of 220 people being made redundant from Volex on terms that are by far inferior to those applying to counterparts in the Republic of Ireland who work for the same company. Will my right hon. Friend find time soon for a debate on the process of redundancy, how it is hurting families and how we might do more to protect employees who are being made redundant?

Mr. Cook: In recent weeks, a number of colleagues have requested a debate on manufacturing industry. I am acutely aware of those demands and keep them very much in mind. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry will open a debate in the House next week in pursuit of one of her other responsibilities, but I am conscious of the wish on both sides of the House for a debate on this matter. I shall see whether we can accommodate some way of ventilating these issues if time is available.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): In calling for urgent clarification from the Leader of the House, I seek to draw to the House's attention a matter that will concern Opposition, Government and minor party Members. On 30 January, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition asked the Prime Minister about worsening waiting times in accident and emergency departments. The Prime Minister replied—I refer to column 281 of *Hansard*—that the method of measuring such things had changed. Indeed, he said that it had changed under this Government. Given that ministerial replies from both this Government and the previous one make it absolutely clear that these figures are collated and collected centrally only by the Audit Commission, I was surprised to receive a note from the Library saying:

> "The Audit Commission has used the same indicators since 1996".

The note also said:

> "If Mr. Blair's response suggests that measurement methods have changed and that therefore the figures quoted by Mr. Duncan Smith are incomparable, it appears to be misplaced."

That is a serious matter. Given the Prime Minister's scrupulous regard for straightforwardness and accuracy—if only *Hansard* could measure irony—he will want to make an urgent statement to the House about the source of his information and the basis on which he made the claim. If it is inaccurate, he will want to apologise to hon. Members, for it is inconceivable that he would deliberately mislead the House.

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman raises an important, highly detailed and technical point. He will forgive me if I say that I do not believe that it would assist me or hon. Members if I attempted to answer it without either notice or considering the facts. However, I shall ensure that the Secretary of State for Health responds to the hon. Gentleman to clarify the issue.

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East): The Leader of the House may be aware of early-day motion 943, which looks forward to the celebrations for Europe day on 9 May, the anniversary of the date on which Robert Schuman presented his proposals for creating a European Community.

[That this House looks forward to the opportunity for the United Kingdom to celebrate Europe Day on 9th May; recognises that 9th May marks the day in 1950 that Robert Schuman presented his proposal for the creation of the European Union; notes that the European Union has been central to the maintenance of peaceful relations and coexistence on this continent ever since; welcomes the opportunity for the UK to join in this annual celebration of the diversity of cultures that exist within Europe; and celebrates the UK's membership of the European Union.]

Will my right hon. Friend consider holding a debate on Thursday 9 May to mark Britain's continued, positive involvement in Europe?

Mr. Cook: I am tempted to agree to such a debate if only to enable Mr. Richard Balfe to tell us his views on Conservative European policy.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a debate or statement from the Secretary of State for Health on the disposal of surplus national health service accommodation? A group of people in Wirksworth in my constituency would like the NHS care centre that was closed recently to be converted into accommodation for elderly people. That service is desperately needed in the town. A similar arrangement to that in Buxton, whereby the property was sold at a lower cost to local residents, could solve the problem.

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman has been able to raise an issue of concern to his constituency. However, I am not sure that the best way to proceed is through centrally imposed guidelines or requirements. Obviously, when appropriate and effective alternative uses that meet other social care or health needs can be found for NHS premises, the local health authority should provide for that. However, there is an alternative. In the case of large, commercially profitable sites—there is an example in my constituency—ploughing the money back into other parts of the health service is frankly best for the community. However, decisions should be made case by case, not centrally.

Mr. James Wray (Glasgow, Baillieston): In view of the Chancellor's actions to eradicate child poverty and the new Child Poverty Action Group report, will the Leader of the House arrange a debate on the subject in the Chamber? Britain has a population of 55 million, but the report states that Glasgow, with a small population of 600,000, has four of the 10 most deprived areas. It has suffered high infant mortality, horrendous housing problems and unemployment. I would like the Government to eradicate the poverty that the previous Government left behind them, especially in Glasgow.

Mr. Cook: We will hold the Budget debate next month. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will refer to child poverty and the action that we are taking to tackle and, over a period of time, to eradicate it. Like my hon. Friend, I heard the Chancellor speak on the matter yesterday, and I was impressed by the progress that we are making. We inherited a legacy of rapidly rising child poverty from the Conservative Government and we are taking action to decrease it rapidly. That is the right priority for the nation and the Government.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): On Tuesday, we spent three hours debating whether final planning consent for new nuclear power stations lay with the House or the Scottish Parliament. Although we did not get an answer to a clear question, we got the strong impression that final consent lay with the House. Meanwhile, the Minister for Energy and Industry, who should have responded to the debate, made a speech in Scotland that strongly suggested that the decision lay with the Scottish Parliament. What can the Leader of the House do to protect hon. Members from Ministers' contradictory statements? When can we have an early statement to clarify the issue?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman has just had a three-hour debate on the topic of his choice. He cannot really expect that to be followed by a statement in the House. It is rich for the Scottish National party to complain when Ministers go to Scotland. I should have thought that they would welcome every possible visit to Scotland by the appropriate Ministers. As I said last week, this matter has to be dealt with in partnership, whatever the legal niceties, and that is the way in which we shall proceed with the Administration in Edinburgh. *[Interruption.]* I should like to know whether the Conservative party—if it ever got into power—could offer the same kind of partnership with the Scottish Executive that we can.

John Cryer (Hornchurch): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on mobile telecommunications masts, an issue that probably affects every constituency in the country? There has been a recent proposal in my constituency for a mast between, and very close to, two primary schools, which flies in the face of the recommendation in the Stewart report—a Government report—that masts should not be located near such schools. The problem is that although PPG8 has been strengthened—for which I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government—it did not go far enough in incorporating some of the Stewart report's recommendations, particularly the recommendation that such masts should be kept well away from primary schools. May we have a debate, or at least a statement, on that issue?

Mr. Cook: As my hon. Friend will be aware, the conclusion of the Stewart report, based on the available scientific evidence, was that there is no general health risk from mobile telecommunications masts. However, I fully understand why parents are particularly anxious when they see such masts being located near schools—and, sometimes, on schools—having had experience of this in my constituency. I shall certainly convey to the Department my hon. Friend's concern that that recommendation in the Stewart report should be acted on.

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): Bearing in mind the interest of the Leader of the House in strengthening the

[Angela Watkinson]

role of Select Committees as part of the modernisation of the House, does he agree that the announcement on the declassification of cannabis by the Home Secretary at a meeting of the Home Affairs Committee just two weeks before the Committee commenced an investigation into drugs policy, and the announcement in the media today by the drugs Minister—the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth)—on how to make it easier and safer for people to take dance drugs in night clubs, undermine the role of the Select Committee?

Mr. Cook: I am not sure that I follow the hon. Lady's concern that the Home Secretary's making a statement to the Select Committee somehow undermines it. Personally, I welcome that innovation, and I am sure that many of my right hon. Friends will consider making further such use of Select Committees. If we want Select Committees to carry out their functions properly, and to have a proper status in this place, it is entirely right that they should occasionally receive new announcements from the appropriate Secretary of State.

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): I know that my right hon. Friend is aware of the good work carried out by my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) on asbestosis in respect of the Chester Street insurance company. However, is my right hon. Friend aware that the companies that agreed to pay compensation to asbestosis sufferers—and any future sufferers—are now reneging on the deal? They will not pay out any money, even to those who have received letters stating that their compensation has been granted, which means that the compensation has been printed out on paper but is not worth the paper that it is printed on. Will he arrange a debate on this serious issue, so that we can name and shame those companies?

Mr. Cook: I fully share my hon. Friend's deep regret at behaviour that appears to be deplorable. I am sure that many hon. Members will share the sense of outrage that his constituents no doubt feel. On the facts as stated, I would be surprised if there were no legal remedy available to those who are most affected, but I am sure that my hon. Friend will continue to pursue the matter and make full use of the facilities of the House to do so.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): On the day on which the Office of Public Services Reform at the Cabinet Office is issuing no fewer than 10,000 pamphlets to the public services, and on which Mr. Ian Jones, the head of news at the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, remains suspended without charge, may I ask for a debate in Government time on the operation and management of the civil and public services, the criteria for the maintenance of standards, and the accountability and responsibility of Her Majesty's Ministers?

Mr. Cook: I have no intention of saying anything on the question of the civil servant who has been suspended pending an investigation. It is a matter for the permanent secretary to announce the conclusion of that investigation and it would not help either the individual concerned or the permanent secretary for the rest of us to get drawn into a political debate on it in the meantime.

On the publication today of the pamphlet that has been delivered to up to 10,000 senior officials in the public service, it is proper and right that the Government should try to ensure that those who work in the public service understand the extent to which their contribution is valued and the broad strategy to which they are working. It would be the act of a bad employer and an inefficient manager not to ensure that that message is understood throughout the service. I notice that the Conservative party is calling for the decentralisation of the health service, which it highly centralised, so the hon. Gentleman should be pleased to hear that one of the four main themes of the pamphlet is flexibility through the decentralisation of power and resources to those in the front line.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Can we destroy at birth the self-serving fantasy promulgated by the hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell) that there has been a political consensus on pension policy in recent years? There was no consensus in 1980 for the cut in the link with earnings, or for the salami cuts over the following 17 years. There was no consensus in 1985 on the partial destruction of the state earnings-related pension scheme, which has done great damage. There was certainly no consensus on the policy in the late 1980s, when many people were tempted by the then Government to leave their good-value occupational schemes and go into atrocious-value personal pensions. We should have a good debate on this issue, but we must ensure that the blame is laid firmly where it belongs, which is not with the Government, because we opposed every one of those dangerous changes that have seriously impoverished today's pensioners and will impoverish tomorrow's pensioners.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend and I were members of the same team in opposition on social security and pensions, and he was an excellent shadow spokesman on pensions.

Mr. Forth: Those were the days.

Mr. Cook: I prefer these days, and I suspect that the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) also preferred it when he was on the Government side. My hon. Friend has had slightly longer to work on it, but he has given a much better reply than I did, and I commend him on it.

Brian Cotter (Weston-super-Mare): Can the Leader of the House help with a serious question that I asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on behalf of the small business community? I asked her to give a response to the Competition Commission's report on banking that was presented in October last year, and she said that she would publish the report as soon as practicable. That is an extraordinary, off-hand and cavalier response to a question that relates back to the Cruickshank report on banking, which was published two years ago this month. Can the Leader of the House help us to obtain a response to the report?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman said that he asked my right hon. Friend to publish the report, but I think that he meant publish the Government's response to it.

Brian Cotter: Yes.

Mr. Cook: It is important for the Government to ensure that the response is well thought through and consulted on, because it is not a matter of one Department reaching a view. It is important that time is taken to get it right, rather than rushing it. The time frame that the hon. Gentleman referred to is not unusual, but I am sure that the Department will be well aware of his anxiety to see the response.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): Following a week in which a Manchester United footballer signed a contract to earn £90,000 a week with the prospect of others being paid even more, in which ITV Digital announced that it was forced to renegotiate its contract with the Football League because it could not afford to pay the original price for television rights, and in which Bury football club in my constituency became the latest club in the lower divisions to go into receivership, does my right hon. Friend agree that the globalisation of football is having serious consequences for small clubs in the lower divisions, which many thousands of people support? Does he agree that those clubs have a vital role to play in their communities, as well as contributing to our national sporting life? May we have an early debate on the future of small professional football clubs?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend is correct about the importance of football clubs to local communities and local identity, which is why I am delighted that Livingston football club is currently beaten in the Scottish league only by Rangers and Celtic. That has done wonders for identity and pride in the city for the people of Livingston and the residents of West Lothian. That shows the success that can be achieved by a small club that only six years ago was in the third division. I recognise that it is important that we have a proper range of football clubs in the various communities of Britain, and that we do not end up with only mega-clubs.

These are choppy waters. I think that I have managed to build consensus in the House by avoiding controversy, but this matter is of such deep controversy outside it that although I shall report my hon. Friend's observations to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport, I am not inclined to go further at the present time.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): Will the Leader of the House be good enough to inquire now about the availability of Ministers to respond to urgent matters raised during the Easter Adjournment debate? I have used—and will continue to use—every opportunity to raise the urgent matter of the proposed demolition of important world war two buildings at the Dunkeswell airfield in my constituency. If I raise the matter in the Adjournment debate, it will be because I understand that Defence Estates has set a deadline of 1 April for the demolition of buildings that Defence Ministers previously have helped to preserve and that English Heritage has commended. If I do not get a positive response, I may end up spending my Easter recess chained to the control tower. I therefore hope that the Leader of the House will come to my rescue, and to the rescue of a very important world war two memorial site.

Mr. Cook: I feel under a very strong compulsion to try to find a way to avert that fate for the hon. Lady, and to prevent her from spending her Easter recess in that way. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary will be grateful for the advance notice of what the hon. Lady will raise in the Easter Adjournment debate, and I think that he is open to hearing other advance bids. I hope that the hon. Lady secures an outcome that is satisfactory for her constituents, but I am sure that we all look forward to hearing what she has to say in the debate.

Kyoto

1.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the UK ratification of the Kyoto protocol.

Following agreement at the European Community Environment Council on Monday, I am very pleased to announce that the Government have today laid the Kyoto protocol before both Houses of Parliament. This significant step begins the formal process of UK ratification of what is a hugely important protocol.

This House is aware of the leading role that the Government have always played in the fight against climate change and, in particular, of the pivotal role played by my right hon. Friends the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for the Environment in the original negotiations on the protocol in Kyoto. We have maintained that lead in subsequent negotiations, and we are making strong progress with implementing a strategic and innovative programme of action to reduce the UK's greenhouse gas emissions. I firmly believe that the UK, as well as the rest of world, has much to gain from meeting the challenge of climate change head-on.

The deal that I helped to secure, first in Bonn and then in Marrakesh last year, was the latest in a series of major political achievements, and it paved the way for ratification. Since then, the EU has set an aim for the Kyoto protocol to enter into force in time for the world summit on sustainable development at the end of August. That summit marks the 10th anniversary of the Rio earth summit, which set up the UN framework convention on climate change in the first place. Although we do not expect or wish climate change, as such, to feature prominently on the summit's agenda, entry into force of the protocol before the summit takes place will demonstrate beyond doubt the world's commitment to taking its environmental responsibilities seriously.

The Environment Council's agreement on Monday to the Council decision on European Community ratification and to the EU "bubble" was a significant milestone. This needed to happen first, so that the reduction targets agreed politically by each member state in 1998 became legally fixed. I was delighted with the outcome of the Council meeting, which followed some detailed and, at times, sensitive negotiations. It means that all member states can now complete their own national ratification procedures, and that the EU and its member states will be the first of the key developed countries to ratify the protocol.

This Government are wasting no time in ensuring that the UK ratifies the protocol as soon as possible. Today's event marks the start of our process. The protocol will be before Parliament for the next 21 sitting days. At the end of that period, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will sign the UK's instrument of ratification. For legal and presentational reasons, the UK will deposit its instrument with the UN depository at the same time as the European Community and other member states. We aim to do that by June at the latest.

UK ratification of the Kyoto protocol sends an important message to the world that we are committed to tackling climate change. It reaffirms the Government's pledge to meet our environmental objectives, and it meets our manifesto commitment to provide leadership abroad and work for international agreement on climate change.

I hope very much that countries not yet committed to ratifying will follow the EU's lead. The House will know that the United States recently announced proposals for domestic action to tackle climate change. We welcome President Bush's acceptance that climate change is a serious problem and his increased support for climate science and climate-friendly innovation, but our analysis of his proposals suggests that US greenhouse gas emissions will be about 25 per cent. higher in 2010 than in 1990. That contrasts starkly with the 7 per cent. reduction to which the US had originally agreed under Kyoto.

We continue to believe that the Kyoto protocol represents the only workable option allowing the international community to proceed with serious action on climate change, and we hope that the US will re-engage with the process. It is of course extremely important that we maintain a constructive dialogue with the Americans on climate change, and we will seek to establish a process through which that can be achieved.

UK ratification will mean that we become legally bound by the target to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions to 12.5 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2008 to 2012. Our climate change programme sets out a range of policies that could reduce emissions by 23 per cent. by 2010, which is well in excess of our Kyoto target and stands us in good stead for future reductions. The programme therefore also addresses the Government's ambitious domestic goal of cutting carbon dioxide emissions to 20 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2010.

Our climate change programme is providing a strategic focus for action. It is stimulating positive action by UK businesses, local government and other organisations. It is encouraging longer-term changes and a move towards a low-carbon economy, and it is implementing a series of innovative and creative policies to ensure that the UK cuts its emissions in a flexible and cost-effective way.

Let me highlight the key policies. We have established the world's first economy-wide emissions trading scheme, backed by a Government incentive of £215 million over five years. The scheme is due to go live early next month, and is one of our major priorities. Emissions trading is a cost-effective way of making a low-carbon future a reality. In pioneering the scheme, we hope and intend that the City of London will become the world centre for emissions trading.

We have set a target to provide 10 per cent. of the UK's electricity from renewable sources of energy by 2010, backed by Government funding of at least £250 million over the next three years. We aim to double, at least, the UK capacity of combined heat and power by 2010. We will publish our draft CHP strategy shortly, along with a range of measures intended to achieve the target.

We have introduced a climate change levy package that will help to fund measures to promote better energy efficiency in business; and we have established the Carbon Trust, which will recycle around £100 million of climate change levy receipts to boost the take-up of cost-effective low-carbon technologies. There are also a range of programmes and schemes to promote better energy efficiency in the domestic sector.

At European Union level, we have secured voluntary agreements with car manufacturers to improve fuel efficiency by at least 25 per cent., backed up by changes in vehicle excise duty and company car tax to encourage more fuel-efficient low-emission cars. Our 10-year plan for transport will address projected emissions growth in that key sector.

The programme takes account of what we might need to do to adapt to the effects of climate change in the UK. The Government are taking early action to identify adaptation priorities, and supporting the introduction of adaptation strategies on the ground through the UK climate impacts programme.

Our programme also begins to establish policies to reduce emissions in the longer term, beyond 2012. We know that Kyoto, while important in itself, is only a first step, and that much deeper cuts in emissions will be needed if we are to avoid dangerous climate change. The Government are determined to continue towards a low-carbon economy in a way that benefits both the environment and UK industry. This is one reason why we commissioned the recent performance and innovation unit energy report, which we are now considering and to which we will respond later this year.

I would like to finish by restating the Government's belief that meeting climate change targets will not only be good for the environment, but present new opportunities for businesses to improve energy efficiency, cut costs and get ahead of their international competitors by developing cleaner technologies and moving into new markets. It will present new job opportunities for people living and working in the UK, and will offer more choice for the consumer. We want to ensure that the UK makes the most that it possibly can of those opportunities, as well as making a strong and determined contribution to the global fight against climate change. Ratifying the Kyoto protocol is one of the most important steps on that road.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): I thank the Secretary of State for her statement, and for her courtesy in providing—on this occasion—timely notice of its content.

The Opposition welcome the EU's progress towards ratification of the Kyoto protocol. Whatever the uncertainties about the science of climate change, most of us share an instinctive feeling that we will come to no good by pushing billions of tonnes of chemicals into the atmosphere. One does not have to be a scientist to work that out. Reconciling the material needs of today with the quality of life that we pass on to our children and grandchildren is one of the greatest tasks facing this generation of politicians across the world. We hold the earth in trust, and we must not fail generations to come.

The Secretary of State rightly said that, although welcome, the Kyoto protocol is only an initial step. Is not its significance more symbolic than practical? Is it not an acknowledgement of the challenge that climate change presents rather than a blueprint for meeting it? Given that ratification will involve the Government's taking binding decisions that affect future policy, will she ensure that Parliament can have a full debate on the implications of ratification before taking further irrevocable steps towards binding commitments?

Can the Secretary of State confirm that the treaty will not acquire full legal status until countries that account for 55 per cent. of global emissions have signed up? In the light of the United States' regrettable decision to opt out of the process for the time being, what threat does its absence pose to the project's eventual success? Does she agree that it is essential to make greater efforts to persuade Governments in the developing world that signing up to Kyoto is in the interests of their people and their future? A better global environment will mean a more secure world.

None of that will happen without a cost. What estimate has the Secretary of State made of the possible cost to the United Kingdom economy of complying with the provisions of the protocol? Will she guarantee that the Government will not use the emissions trading arrangements to do a deal with a country such as Russia or Ukraine to avoid taking effective domestic action to reduce harmful emissions?

The Kyoto protocol builds on the success of the Rio earth summit in 1992, and I hope that the Secretary of State will pay tribute to the leading role played by John Major in laying the foundations of an international agreement to tackle climate change. I note with some amusement that she paid tribute to the role of the Deputy Prime Minister, but did he not nearly derail the entire process in The Hague in November 2000, causing the French Environment Minister to say—if I recall rightly—that he lost his nerve, lost his cool and was a male chauvinist pig?

Will the Secretary of State also acknowledge that Conservative energy policies of the 1990s have made the most substantial contribution to date to reducing UK greenhouse emissions? Is it not because of those policies that we have met, and even exceeded, early targets for reducing harmful emissions? Looking ahead, however, the picture is less rosy. Has she seen the report issued in January by Cambridge Econometrics that predicts that carbon emissions will fall by only 6.4 per cent. between 1990 and 2010—well short of the 20 per cent. target? Is she aware that, last month, the World Economic Forum branded the UK one of the dirtiest countries in the world?

The Prime Minister is given to delivering pious sermons on the importance of environmental protection to the developing world. Will the right hon. Lady remind him that the 2002 environmental sustainability index ranks the UK 98th out of 142 countries? Among EU countries, only Belgium fares worse. When it comes to waste and recycling, the UK has just about the worst record on the planet. People who live in greenhouses should not throw stones. The issue of climate change is bigger and more important than domestic party politics, but is it not time that the Government recognised that there is a glaring disparity between their lofty election promises and statements made at international conferences and their performance at home?

Is it not the case that while Switzerland, Germany and Austria have recycling rates of about 50 per cent., we achieve a mere 11 per cent., and that there is no realistic chance of most local authorities meeting the Government's target of 25 per cent. by 2005? Does the right hon. Lady accept that ill-targeted and bureaucratic taxes such as the climate change levy have, predictably, done nothing to reduce carbon emissions while piling costs on manufacturing?

Who are this Government to lecture the world about being green, when as we speak, as a direct result of their incompetence, fridges containing highly damaging chlorofluorocarbons litter pavements, municipal sites, open spaces and fields throughout the country? Why,

[Mr. Peter Ainsworth]

when the Government talk so enthusiastically about energy conservation, did the Minister for the Environment table wrecking amendments to the Home Energy Conservation Bill and then suffer the humiliation of having them voted down in Committee?

The Secretary of State mentioned combined heat and power. Is she aware that the CHP industry is in crisis, that the Government's strategy is running four years late, that staff are being laid off because orders have dried up and that since the introduction of the new electricity trading arrangements last April, CHP output has dropped by 60 per cent.?

The Secretary of State referred to the PIU report on energy, which after much delay was produced earlier this year. Is she aware that the energy industry is fed up with dithering and uncertainty, and needs clarity and leadership from the Government? There is a real danger that a great opportunity to put Britain at the forefront of developing new clean renewable technologies will pass us by if the Government continue to sit on their hands, bringing them out only to wring them hopelessly over the future of nuclear power.

The right hon. Lady talked about the launch of the Government's emissions trading scheme due on 1 April. We support that in principle but are concerned by reports that only half the anticipated number of companies have signed up for it. How many companies have now committed themselves to participation? Can the Secretary of State confirm that the UK scheme is compatible with that being developed by the European Union?

As in so many areas, the Government promised so much on the environment but they have not delivered. Given their performance to date, it is hard to understand why the right hon. Lady's entire statement had a strong flavour of self-congratulation. There is a great deal left to achieve; indeed, the task of delivering a cleaner environment is only just beginning. The Government will be judged not by the protocols and treaties that they sign or by the rhetoric that they use but by what they achieve for us, our children and our grandchildren.

Margaret Beckett: The hon. Gentleman began with what sounded like a high-minded welcome for progress—although, as he rightly said, it is only a start—but he ended up, as he usually does, whingeing on irrelevantly and not altogether pleasantly. Much of what he said was not relevant to the Kyoto protocol. I accept that we ought to seek a debate on the subject. It is not for me to set the agenda for the House, but I shall certainly draw his remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House. I hope that if we do have a debate, it will be a debate about the Kyoto protocol and not a general rant about all the things that the hon. Gentleman thought of to throw in, most of which were highly inaccurate. I shall try to pick up on at least some of the issues that he raised.

I am aware of the recent studies by Cambridge Econometrics. There is concern that there has been a slight increase in emissions in the last year, but we remain of the view that in the longer term we are on course to reach the targets that are being set.

Towards the end of his remarks the hon. Gentleman asked about the emissions trading scheme. I am not aware of any suggestion that there is a smaller number of potential companies wishing to participate than we had anticipated. In fact, we are rather encouraged by the number, which was of the order of 40 to 45 when I last checked. Certainly there is no truth in the suggestion that it is half the number that we had anticipated.

As for compatibility with the European Union scheme, I hope that the hon. Gentleman is aware that the Commission has made some preliminary proposals for a trading scheme. It is different in scope from our own in that it is mandatory, not voluntary. The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that our scheme was designed in consultation with the private sector precisely to identify what would be most attractive. The Commission's mandatory scheme does not deal with all greenhouse gases, treats energy suppliers differently from our proposals and is not for an economy-wide set of proposals. The Commission's proposals are at the most preliminary stage. It does not even suggest that its scheme would come into force before 2005.

Many other member states have some reservations and prefer some of the features of our scheme, so we have every hope that through constructive discussion we can reach a degree of compatibility. Certainly, we are extremely keen both that the whole European Union has experience in this important field, which has potential advantages for the future, and to ensure that there is enough flexibility in what is ultimately proposed for everyone to be able to participate.

The hon. Gentleman asked about costs. I do not recall ever having seen a monetary figure. It has consistently been suggested that the cost of complying with the Kyoto protocol is somewhere between 0.1 and 1 per cent. of gross domestic product anticipated in developed countries over the commitment period, at a time when it is anticipated that growth will be of the order of 25 per cent. There is no suggestion, therefore, that the figure should be particularly difficult to meet.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether the agreement was more symbolic than practical. No, there is huge symbolism and huge importance in having got a legally binding agreement with 177 countries participating. We are all sorry that the United States is not one of them. Even without its participation the reductions in emissions will be between 2 and 9 per cent., depending on one's assessment. That is certainly a worthwhile first step, particularly considering that we are talking about a legally binding first step.

The hon. Gentleman was uncharitable—characteristically, I fear—about my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister who, indeed, made a considerable contribution to the agreement. I am happy to accept that the former Member for Huntingdon and the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), who is with us today, made a contribution. It is admirable that Members from all parties have been instrumental in moving the debate and agreement forward.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the developing world. The Kyoto protocol encourages states in the developing world to take their own actions and to report what action they are taking. I share the view that that is necessary and desirable. I am also strongly of the view that there is justice in the argument that many of these problems have originated in the developed world and that it is for us to show that we are taking steps and then to encourage others to join us in doing the same.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): May I strongly support my right hon. Friends in their hard and sustained work on addressing these difficult problems? Could something more be said about the Carbon Trust and the recycling of £100 million of climate change levy receipts? Does my right hon. Friend have any sympathy with the view that targets will not be met without Sizewell C, Hunterston C and possibly Hinkley C?

Margaret Beckett: First, the Carbon Trust is doing interesting work with the business community. My hon. Friend may be aware that it believes that increased energy efficiency can make a massive contribution to meeting our targets, even without totally new technological developments of a kind that we cannot yet foresee. Indeed, it believes that we can meet our targets without further substantial change, although we all hope that innovation and new technology will come. There may be a misunderstanding. Although the performance and innovation unit energy review indicated that we should not close our minds to the future use of nuclear power, we do not require the fresh use and development of nuclear power to meet by 2012 the targets to which we signed up in the Kyoto protocol.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): I thank the Secretary of State for her courtesy in giving me early sight of her statement. The Liberal Democrats welcome the decision to ratify the Kyoto protocol. It is, in association with our European Union partners, an important symbolic step across the world that shows our determination to tackle climate change.

I was also very pleased by the positive way in which the Secretary of State set out her statement, and by her acknowledgment of the work done on both sides of the House over a long period. She seems to accept that Kyoto can only be a first and comparatively small step in a long-term operation to slow down and stop global climate change. Liberal Democrats share that view. Will she agree that behind the words and the bold statement there are some gaps and fudges? I want to press her on some of those points.

The reality is that the United Kingdom's Kyoto targets will be met more or less by accident, or willy-nilly. It was interesting to hear the shadow Secretary of State claim the credit for putting in place the policies that would achieve Kyoto. In fact, those policies were not put in place to achieve Kyoto but for entirely different reasons, and without regard for carbon dioxide emissions at the time. Does the Secretary of State agree that setting longer-term targets beyond Kyoto will be the test of United Kingdom policy for the future? Little progress has been made by the Government in setting those longer-term targets.

Later today, the House will be asked to approve the renewables obligation that was debated in Committee yesterday. As the Secretary of State will agree, that obligation is for only 10 per cent. of the energy available to the electricity sector, even in 2027. Therefore, although it sets targets for 2010, it does not advance them beyond that. What targets and policies do the Government have to achieve energy saving and energy conservation? Her statement is short on that, as, I would submit, is Government policy.

I am sure that the Secretary of State is only too well aware that the development of a carbon-free economy provides many opportunities for exports and growth in jobs in the United Kingdom. Will she confirm that those exports and jobs must be based on a strong home market? How will the United Kingdom develop that strong market?

The Secretary of State's report referred to the energy review, and the Minister for the Environment said at Question Time that the Government were neither for nor against nuclear power. When will she give the House a clear commitment to move forward with renewable energy and abandon the nuclear option?

We welcome the Secretary of State's words about engaging the United States in the fight against climate change. Clearly, its participation is vital to the long-term project. Will she assure the House that the Government will remain robust in their dialogue with the United States to try to persuade the world's largest contributor to man-made global climate change to mend its ways?

Finally, I assure the Secretary of State that Liberal Democrats are strongly in favour of the Kyoto protocol being brought into effect across the world. We look forward eagerly to the steps beyond Kyoto, and we will encourage the Government to take those steps.

Margaret Beckett: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his welcome of the statement. I accept fully that signing the Kyoto protocol is very much the first step.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether there were gaps in the scheme and whether it had been met by accident. I note that the shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth), claimed credit for the reductions that resulted from the devastation of the coal mining industry. However, he did not mention the fact that that did not occur cost free. Indeed, Conservative Members have been critical of the Government's handling of the coal industry since 1997. However, it is our estimate that the "dash for gas" will be responsible for only about 30 per cent. of the reductions that we anticipate will take place by 2010. Although that is not an insignificant contribution, it certainly does not mean, in the phrase of the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell), that we have met our targets by accident. The course of action that the Government have pursued will lead us to meet the targets.

The hon. Gentleman pressed me on setting longer-term targets, but it is a little premature to do that. Certainly, work is beginning on the next Kyoto period and on what are practical and sensible targets for people to aim for in making a contribution to tackling global warming. The targets will have to be assessed against the new information that is becoming available over a steady period from the scientific work on the impact of climate change. It is a little bit of a moving feast in that respect. However, we shall come forward—perhaps in response to the PIU energy review and certainly over time—with further proposals and longer-term targets.

The hon. Gentleman also asked me specifically about the renewables obligation and about whether we should set a more demanding target for that. It is important that we have the right balance between setting demanding targets and setting targets that we have practical means of meeting. One of the things that I found most encouraging from my exchange with the Father of the House, my hon.

[Margaret Beckett]

Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), is the degree to which we can meet the targets that we are currently setting without there being a giant expectation of a leap in the dark or of undiscovered science that has not yet been foreseen. It is important that we encourage and support innovation and that we set challenging targets while ensuring that they are not just pie in the sky. We must have practical means of achieving them.

Mr. David Miliband (South Shields): I am delighted to welcome my right hon. Friend's strong efforts to take forward this important agenda. Kyoto is the key test for those of us who think that an interdependent world requires multilateral engagement.

Will my right hon. Friend update the House on the technical and political work that is being done inside her Department on the so-called contraction and conversion approach to global pollution reduction? Many people believe that it is an innovative and equitable approach to tackling global climate change, and I would very much welcome her thoughts on its potential contribution.

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. There is no question but that the contraction and convergence model is a serious proposal. My Department is considering it along with a range of other models. There is a strong case to be made for such a proposal, and it has a certain appealing, simple logic. However, it has serious implications for what is required of different nations so, in that sense, it must be weighed against the wish to get everyone moving in the same direction.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): I congratulate the Secretary of State on the achievement of a process that has gone on for a long time under both Governments. Both sides of the House should emphasise the commonality of interest in achieving these ends.

Does the Secretary of State not agree that one of the highlights of the process was the agreement, under the previous Government, and its support, under this Government, of the European bubble and the European bubble principle in which those nations most able to do more achieve more so that the least-able nations do not have to reach the targets that would otherwise be set for them? Does that not set an admirable example to the rest of the world and, particularly, in respect of the future incorporation of developing countries? Should we not say that the European Union has proved its worth enormously on this issue as on so many others?

Margaret Beckett: I am happy to pay tribute to the decision to establish the EU "bubble". The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely correct; it was key to agreement within the EU. He is also right to say that the role that the EU played as a united group in the negotiations was absolutely key. There is no question about that.

The hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) accused me earlier of self-praise, but this is not self-praise. Other Ministers who participated in the negotiations in Bonn and Marrakesh have said forcefully that the united role that the EU played enabled us to act as broker to agreement, first, politically in Bonn and then to the legal text in Marrakesh. That was crucial.

The right hon. Gentleman has heard me say this on a public platform recently, but I freely say again, as someone who campaigned against our remaining in the European Community as it was in 1975, that the behaviour of the EU as a group in the negotiations has been a model of everything everyone ever hoped for from that agreement.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): I add to the congratulations to my right hon. Friend and her colleagues on reaching the accord and on the work that supports it. Given the significant potential job opportunities in renewable technologies, in manufacturing and in rural economies that might result from support of the Kyoto accord, does she not think that, with the benefit of hindsight, the decision of the Conservative party to cut various renewable energy funding streams appears short-sighted? By contrast, will she tell the House what further support she is lobbying the Treasury to provide under the comprehensive spending review for renewable energy technologies?

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the implications of some of the mistakes that were made earlier in cutting funding for renewables. He is also right to draw attention to the considerable job and trading opportunities that the agreement creates. Indeed, one of the schemes that the Government are pursuing—the home energy efficiency scheme—was delayed because there were insufficient people with the right skills and training to carry it out. That is another aspect of achieving agreement to practical and deliverable steps.

My hon. Friend is right to say that there are huge opportunities for Britain and for the EU in the agreement. We hope to take advantage of them.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): On behalf of the Plaid Cymru-SNP group, I welcome the Government's action in ratifying the Kyoto protocol. Although there is cross-party agreement on the issue, may I invite the Secretary of State to condemn certain political parties who mouth pious words in the House about renewables but who oppose all exciting wind farm projects, such as that in my constituency?

On the opportunities provided for renewables in the domestic agenda, does the Secretary of State agree that, if we were to double the target from 10 to 20 per cent.—that is completely feasible—we would produce 80 TWh a year from renewables, which equates very closely to the 88 TWh produced from nuclear power at the moment? Not only do we not need nuclear to meet the present Kyoto protocol, but we do not need it to meet the forthcoming 2050 targets. We can meet them with a combination of renewables and low-carbon technology.

Finally, will the Secretary of State tell us what the Prime Minister did on his recent visit to Australia? Did he discuss these matters with the Australian Prime Minister, because it is important to get Australia, which is a key Asiatic economy, on board as well?

Margaret Beckett: Yes, indeed. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister did discuss these issues with the Australian Government, as he does assiduously at all his international talks. He is very interested and engaged in that area of policy.

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his remarks and for his support. I note what he said about what I take to be the Liberal Democrats, and I do of course share the concern of those who say that it is important not only to be in favour of the principle of some of these issues but to be prepared to take and to back some of the practical decisions, even though they are not always easy.

The hon. Gentleman will know, I hope, that the PIU report did recommend that we double our target for renewables to 20 per cent. The Government obviously take that recommendation very seriously. It is one of the issues that we must consider and discuss when we contemplate our response to that report. I would only say to the hon. Gentleman that although it is desirable to increase renewables, it is also important, as I told my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey), that we ensure that the targets that we set are practical and that we believe that we can achieve them, although the hon. Gentleman is certainly right to say that we can have a much more substantial contribution from renewables than we have had hitherto.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): The Secretary of State will recall that at the Rio summit 10 years ago there was a very clear requirement on all signatory nations to establish local sustainability groups. In this country, many hundreds of such groups have been established and have often worked with great effort and vigour towards sustainable transport plans, a sustainable built environment and sustainable employment practices locally.

What will be done to ensure that the work is better co-ordinated; that those groups are better empowered to have influence on local planning and other decisions, and above all that those people, who are putting enormous effort into this area, feel that their views are being listened to and feel that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is able to take on board many of their suggestions so that, when we reach Rio plus 10, there will be some recognition of the great work that has been done locally? At the end of the day, only local pressure will ensure that sustainable development plans actually bear fruit.

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend is correct. As he said, a great deal is happening in local communities, with local community plans and development. Certainly it is part of the focus of my Department, as we work towards the world summit in September, to encourage schoolchildren in particular to become involved in working through plans for their area and focusing on what can be done locally. I share my hon. Friend's view that this is a very important contribution. I am also mindful of the fact that, on some issues where there are difficult choices to be made, such as waste management, it is where local communities have become engaged and have had those discussions that there is the greatest agreement and support for practical proposals to solve those issues. I therefore share his view that such participation is important and we shall continue to try to work with such local groups.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): In the answer that the right hon. Lady gave to the important question asked by the Father of the House, she was very careful to limit her answer to periods up to 2012. What will happen to British CO_2 emissions after 2012, assuming that the decommissioned Magnox power stations are not replaced by new nuclear build?

Margaret Beckett: I limited my remarks to the period up to 2012 because that is the Kyoto commitment period, as the hon. Gentleman clearly understands. There is a danger that after 2012, unless we take further action, there will be an increase in emissions, and it is for all of us to consider how best we can tackle that. The PIU report suggested that we should keep open the option of nuclear energy for that reason, but there are others who argue, as the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) did a minute ago, that we can meet that challenge by using renewables or other means. It is an issue that we must all consider and address, but the hon. Gentleman probably knows that at present any new proposals for any development or continuation of nuclear power would have to come from the industry, and at the moment there are no such proposals.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling): I congratulate my right hon. Friend and everyone else responsible for today's immensely important statement. Will my right hon. Friend consider how we can involve individuals in this process? It is the actions of individuals as well as those of Government that will bring about real change with respect to Kyoto. Will she consider how her Department could inform the British public and others about what the Kyoto climate change movement means, and what action they can take as individuals to bring about that worthwhile change? It is my view that as a country, as a world, as a planet, we are sleepwalking to disaster if we cannot bring about very real change in our individual behaviour as well as the behaviour of Governments.

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend makes an important and powerful point and he will know that the Government already have various programmes in place. Through the Energy Saving Trust, for example, we offer people advice about what they can do personally to increase energy efficiency, which both lowers their costs and is beneficial from the point of view of climate change. My hon. Friend knows that at present a PIU review study is taking place on the handling of waste, and there is little doubt in my mind that when that report is published it will have something to say about how we minimise our creation of waste as well as how we deal with it. My hon. Friend is quite right that, in all these areas, there are actions that individuals as well as communities not only can take but will need to take if we are to tackle these problems. My Department will be taking forward that work and publishing further research in the developing science of the impact of climate change.

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): May I join others in welcoming the announcement and the Secretary of State's commitment to meeting the challenge of climate change head-on? However, I share the unease of my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) that the fine rhetoric does not match the Secretary of State's record. Is she aware of the submission that the Sustainable Development Commission—a commission set up by the Prime Minister in October 2000—made last week to the Select Committee on Environmental Audit, which stated:

> "Looking beyond 2010, the public policy levers which would be needed to ratchet down production of greenhouse gas emissions have not been put into place. The UK's current performance on

renewables is poor, and the current target that 10 per cent. of electricity should be supplied by renewables will not be met unless institutional barriers like the new electricity trading arrangements are addressed"?

Margaret Beckett: The hon. Gentleman should be aware that we are discussing how those barriers can be overcome, and that we have said several times that we have every intention of overcoming them. We anticipate publishing the new combined heat and power strategy in the near future. As for the commitment to renewables, a substantial programme of investment is planned, as there is in a range of energy efficiency and other programmes. While none of us would argue that enough is being done, a substantial amount is being done, and rather more than was being done when the party that the hon. Gentleman supports was last in power.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): In congratulating my right hon. Friend, may I urge her to pay more attention to a neglected form of power that is almost eternally renewable, is British and can offer a huge source of power—the tidal range in the Severn estuary, where there is the highest rise and fall of tide in the world, very near to centres of population? Should we not regard that as a clean, environmentally friendly source of power that can eliminate altogether more development in the unpopular and expensive nuclear industry?

Margaret Beckett: Indeed, I share, as I believe do many in the House, my hon. Friend's concern that we do more to exploit the natural advantages of the United Kingdom. My hon. Friend knows that there is a substantial programme of investment in research into such subjects and the Government will continue to support and advance it.

Mr. Colin Challen (Morley and Rothwell): In congratulating the Front-Bench team on getting us to this marvellous announcement today, and especially congratulating the Deputy Prime Minister on almost singlehandedly saving the Kyoto process a few years ago, may I ask my right hon. Friend to pay special regard to the potential cost to this nation of now ratifying the treaty? Sometimes treaties of this nature can have a competitive cost to a country, placing it at a disadvantage to those countries that are not prepared to sign up to these proposals. In that regard, will we robustly argue with the United States that it must sign up, and that if it does not, we will robustly defend our competitive position?

Margaret Beckett: First, I rather suspect that one of the things that will ultimately have an effect in the United States is that it will realise that it is missing out on employment and trading opportunities as a result of not being engaged in the process. My hon. Friend is right to say that there are obviously costs and implications, as well as those opportunities, but I am confident that the overall balance is to the United Kingdom's advantage and will continue to be so. I simply remind him of the simple, but evocative phrase that companies saving carbon are companies saving money.

Personal Statements

2.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a personal statement. During the heat of debate, strong feelings are expressed on both sides of the House. I hope that, in my time here, I have always shown proper respect for the occupant of the Chair and observed his or her rulings. As you will be aware, Mr. Speaker, I was not asked by the Deputy Speaker in Westminster Hall yesterday to withdraw my remarks when they were made. However, on reflection, I accept that it would have been better if I had not used the phrase that I applied to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Kelvin (Mr. Galloway), and I am sorry for the offence that was caused.

2.21 pm

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Kelvin): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a personal statement. In the debate in Westminster Hall yesterday, exchanges became frank to the point of being unacceptable, and I should like to apologise to the Deputy Speaker in Westminster Hall, my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam), to you, Mr. Speaker, and to the House for my part in that. The issues under discussion were of grave urgency and importance, and they mean a very great deal to me. Exchanges on both sides of the argument were decidedly robust. None the less, I should like to say that I am sorry for stepping out of parliamentary order and for my failure to withdraw my remarks when asked to do so by the Deputy Speaker and now to withdraw them.

ESTIMATES DAY

[2ND ALLOTTED DAY]

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES, 2001-02

Environmental Audit

Considered pursuant to Resolution [5 February] and Standing Order No.145 (Liaison Committee) [Relevant documents: Second Report from the Environmental Audit Committee, Session 2001-02, on Pre-Budget Report 2001: A New Agenda? HC 363-I; and The Chancellor of the Exchequer's Departments: Annual Report 2001, Cm 5116.]

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That further resources, not exceeding £3,020,000, be authorised for use during the year ending on 31st March 2002, and that a sum, not exceeding £3,020,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund for the year ending on 31st March 2002 for expenditure by HM Treasury.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

2.22 pm

Mr. John Horam (Orpington): I should like to thank all my colleagues on the Environmental Audit Committee and the staff and advisers to the Committee for the work that they have done. As evidence of the Committee's hard work, I refer to the fact that, this week alone, we have taken evidence from the Deputy Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for International Development and the chairman of the Sustainable Development Commission, Jonathon Porritt, as well as participating in this debate—several of my colleagues are here today. Last week, we spent three days in Germany investigating renewable energy. As one of my colleagues remarked, I am sure that we would qualify for a charter mark for activity if they were awarded to Select Committees.

The debate today is billed as being about environmental taxation policy. That is a rather narrow and, in many ways, unhelpful overall title. It is narrow because, as our report on the Chancellor's pre-Budget report makes clear, we considered the whole gamut of ways in which Treasury policy can affect the environment: taxation, subsidies, investment, incentives, negotiated self-regulation, trading systems and so on. So the issue is not just about taxation. It is unhelpful because talk of environmental taxation inevitably invites the suspicion that this is another Treasury stealth tax by a different name.

I believe that concern for the environment is part of the natural evolution of a civilised, modern society that has come to understand that the quality of life is not just a matter of the standard of living It is about time that the Treasury wholeheartedly and intelligently joined in that debate; it is essential that it does so if we are to make progress. That is why I rather like the concept of sustainable development, which is occasionally rather well defined as treating the world as though we intended to stay. That concept contains the idea of a balance between all three important elements: economic, social and environmental issues.

The fact is that we can benefit economically from good environmental ideas. There is the possibility of a win-win situation. Indeed, given how other countries—Germany and Denmark, for example—handle waste treatment, renewable energy, fuel cell technology and so on, I am becoming concerned that the United Kingdom may fall behind economically because it does not give enough priority to environmental technology. I am afraid that the opposite of win-win is lose-lose, and we must not get ourselves into that situation.

I received for Christmas from a well-meaning friend a now famous book, by Bjorn Lomberg, called "The Sceptical Environmentalist". It is a fairly heavy academic tome, and I would not recommend it as bedtime reading. It certainly provides a healthy corrective to the more apocalyptic notions that sometimes hold sway in environmental quarters, but nothing in it denies the need for a sensible and precautionary approach to sustainable development.

When I visit local schools—as I did last Friday, to talk about globalisation and development—I am struck by the fact that many young people understand the relevance of concern for the environment, based on their knowledge of science and geography as taught in school. In Westminster Hall, only yesterday, we debated the participation of young people in politics. If politicians seriously want to capture the enthusiasms of the young, we would do well to talk more about the environment and the problems and challenges of globalisation than we do at the moment. That is particularly true in a year when the world summit on sustainable development will take place in Johannesburg.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): Will the hon. Gentleman join me in congratulating the students of Rooks Heath high school in my constituency on today being awarded a certificate for their successful activities in increasing the school's use of renewable energy and energy-saving materials? Will he also join me in congratulating the continued, excellent judgment of my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury in taking the time, while preparing for today's debate, to visit that school this morning to present that certificate?

Mr. Horam: That is an example of thinking locally and acting globally.

The Johannesburg meeting on world sustainable development will take place, by design, 10 years after the Rio summit and, by accident, nearly a year after the terrible events that took place in New York last September. Although we have, rightly, had to tackle terrorism by military means, a proper commitment to sustainable development is part of the answer to tackling the causes of terrorism.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): Does my hon. Friend agree that both events should remind the United States of the fact that it is impossible for any nation to act in isolation, that all of us depend on global solutions to global problems and that none of us ought to opt out?

Mr. Horam: I profoundly agree with my right hon. Friend. Just because the United States is so powerful, it should not forget that we live in an interdependent world. I hope therefore that the Financial Secretary will convey to the Prime Minister my desire that he persuade George Bush to go to Johannesburg, just as Mrs. Thatcher persuaded his father to go to Rio. If that were to happen,

[Mr. Horam]

it would send a positive signal about US intentions, which would help to repair the damage caused by its initial reaction to the Kyoto protocol, which we discussed earlier today. I hope that the Government will take that on board.

Our verdict on the Chancellor's November statement was that it was a serious disappointment. In the last Parliament—indeed, in his first Budget—the Chancellor issued a statement of intent on environmental taxation. It was an admirable statement and many people hoped that, at the beginning of the second Parliament of the Labour Government, he would take the opportunity to reaffirm those objectives and re-commit himself to those goals.

Unfortunately, the Chancellor did nothing of the kind. The pre-Budget statement contained only one paragraph on environmental issues, the substance of which was that the Government were consulting from today—the day of the pre-Budget statement—on a total of 10 new environmental measures.

On page 11 of our report, hon. Members will see that we have analysed those 10 measures one by one, which is precisely the careful scrutiny that a Committee of our kind should undertake. We discovered that only one of the 10 measures could be characterised as new. In only three of the 10 was consultation beginning on that day. If one defines "today" so as to include "tomorrow", it becomes four but, none the less, it is clearly not 10. Wherever this comes in the hierarchy of spin, I suggest that it is a considerable exaggeration of what the Government are doing in this area.

I am not accusing the Government of doing nothing at all. Indeed the Committee rightly praised many of the measures in the last Parliament that were taken with the considerable support of the Treasury; I am glad to see the Financial Secretary to the Treasury in his place. We should say also that the Government have succeeded in setting up the right kind of machinery inside government for developing policies on sustainable development in a coherent way. However, at some stage, process must produce delivery and that is where the Government have been so disappointing.

I contrast the situation in the UK with what we found in Germany last week. In Germany, there is a strong energy policy, with substantial environmental investment by the Government who were already having the spin-off of creating a large number of new jobs, as well as important export opportunities for German business. Here we have simply the performance and innovation unit report; a worthy document, but one which comes to no clear conclusions. We are just talking; in Germany, they are acting.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we could compare and contrast the problems with the new electricity trading arrangements that we have in this country, and the combined heat and power access within that, with the decision of the German Government to change their electricity metering law to allow ordinary household users to use photovoltaic cells and import directly into the grid? That cannot be done here.

Mr. Horam: The hon. Gentleman was present in Germany and is right. Another advantage of Select Committee-type scrutiny is that we can analyse Government figures carefully. I noted that the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said in her statement on Kyoto that the Government were putting £250 million behind renewable energy. We have analysed the figures carefully in the document. If the Financial Secretary to the Treasury looks at it, he will find that, in cash terms, the figure is much smaller if one takes out the double counting. Indeed, it will fall to £135 million next year.

As the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) has just said, there are considerable problems as a consequence of the measure in the renewable energies industry. CHP companies are packing up the investment that they had taken previously. The Government's rhetoric, in terms of the Prime Minister's statement before the last election, was admirable. Their delivery has been extremely poor.

It does seem that we are over-cautious in our approach and, perhaps because of the power of the Treasury, too finance-oriented. The German approach seems to be a matter of trying to devise a strategy and then worrying about the necessary finance later. Our approach seems to be exactly the contrary; to worry about the money and then to come up with a rather limited approach, which simply does not do the business.

Mr. Colin Challen (Morley and Rothwell): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the attitude of the German economic ministry is to subsidise and support a nascent environmental industry, so that it can stand on its own two legs and compete in the wider world, having created a new technology? Does he agree that to support such an industry is the right approach?

Mr. Horam: I agree emphatically with the hon. Gentleman and that is why I said that this is a debate about investment—and precautionary investment of the kind that he is talking about—just as much as it is about moving taxation from "goods" to "bads". There will be all-party support for a coherent approach.

Finally, I shall mention three specific areas where I think that the Government should take action as a result of the report. The first is to reform VAT to remove the present tax disincentive that works in favour of greenfield development and against brownfield development. In the present circumstances, that is an anachronism.

Secondly, on waste disposal, there is now consensus across political parties and among the various interests that the landfill tax should be substantially increased. I have never heard of a situation before in which a Chancellor is being urged to increase tax by almost everybody and yet does not do it. Something must have happened to the normal Treasury reactions.

Finally, the Government must sort out their energy policy. We have commented on this previously and I feel that here is an opportunity that this country should not miss. The report is vigorous and critical, but, I believe, fair. I believe that the Government should act upon it.

2.36 pm

Jane Griffiths (Reading, East): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam), who has a long and distinguished record on all environmental matters. I am grateful for the opportunity to make a couple of points on environmental taxation.

The Government's policy of shifting taxation from environmental "goods" to environmental "bads" is working. The reduced burden of taxation on road fuel gases has been put in place in recognition of their excellent emissions profile. When liquefied petroleum gas burns, virtually all that is produced is carbon dioxide and water, and even the carbon dioxide that is emitted is significantly less than that emitted by conventionally fuelled cars.

The result of this "greening" taxation has been to stimulate and grow a market of 50,000 vehicles to date running on LPG. That is a growth from virtually nil only a few years ago. It is certainly going in the right direction. The London congestion charge will also, I suspect, be a stimulus because most LPG cars will be exempt.

The potential market for LPG vehicles is far from being reached. In Japan, which has specific congestion and pollution problems, virtually all the taxis run on LPG and the country is one of the highest users of LPG in the world. Italy has the highest number of vehicles running on the fuel, with around 1.2 million, followed by South Korea and Australia.

Her Majesty's Treasury, I have noted, takes a rather cautious approach to shifting the burden of taxation, probably rightly. It has a natural horror of deadweight expenditure. The result is that environmental benefits—many of them now quantifiable in cash terms and lives saved—are sometimes slower to be delivered than they might otherwise be.

A good example of that is the company car tax regime, which is being gradually reshaped to bear down on the gas-guzzlers and the heavy carbon emitters. It is an area that could do with some joined-up policy thinking. It reflects a current separation between the climate change anti-carbon policy and the air quality anti-pollution policy. Company car taxation addresses carbon but does not yet adequately address pollutants. The importance of this is that it is among company fleets that the most dramatic gain can be produced, by choosing LPG over traditional fuels. A greater recognition of the desirability of LPG over petrol and diesel should be built into the car tax regime.

For instance, the fuel scale charges and VAT charges are at present not only heavy on the use of LPG, but unfair, since consumption of LPG is taxed as if it cost the same as petrol or diesel, despite the fact that it is only half the price.

Environmental taxation has not been deployed to refrigerants. Most fridges and cooling systems in the United Kingdom run on hydroflurocarbons, which are recognised as highly damaging by contributing to global warming. The trouble is that HFCs leak at a rate of 30 per cent. a year on distributed systems. The UK has to an extent relied on voluntary actions to improve the leakage, and that approach is given solemn lip service. Far be it from me to suggest that manufacturers have a vested interest in selling as much top-up HFC as they can.

The UK policy is delineated in the climate change UK programme, which states:

> "HFCs should only be used where other safe, technically feasible, cost-effective and more environmentally acceptable alternatives do not exist . . . HFCs are not sustainable in the long term".

So we rely on exhortation to produce change in the private sector. When we examine the pattern of procurement in the public sector, we find that the record is—if I am to be generous—patchy. If ever there was a case for a new economic instrument, this is it. I plead with my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to consider that.

2.41 pm

Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): The Environmental Audit Committee is an innovation for which we argued, and it is most welcome. It is a pity, however, that it did not get the powers that the Labour party in opposition envisaged for it. The idea was that it would be similar to the Public Accounts Committee, with the back-up and resources to do detailed work. All Select Committees suffer from a lack of resources. Although that applies to the Environmental Audit Committee, it has done some extremely good work nevertheless. The Minister needs to reflect carefully on its report. It makes a well argued and strong indictment against the state of environmental tax reform some five years into the Government's term in office.

As with any policy development, we need proper research and analysis of the problems to design effective environmental taxes. If we are not clear about the damage that is being done or the policy tools that are being used to address it, we are not going to be effective. Research and analysis do not take place as they should in government in general. There are far too few trials and too little analysis of whether Government policies are effective after they have been implemented. I have criticised the Chancellor before for introducing endless bureaucratic targeted schemes, few of which, if any, are properly analysed for their effectiveness subsequently in either cost or policy terms. The Select Committee report makes it clear that that is undoubtedly true of the Government's policies on environmental taxation.

The Committee criticises Treasury research as "inadequate". It states that:

> "the Treasury is failing to provide adequate leadership and co-ordination".

It highlights the appalling, although typical, refusal by the Treasury to publish key information. It not only calls on the Government to make reports on sustainable development available to it, but points out that if the Treasury continues to keep secrets, the reports must, at the very least, be released to the National Audit Office because they are—or should be—a crucial part of the comprehensive spending review process.

The Committee also rightly criticises the lack of joined-up thinking across Government. The Government talk about that a great deal, but too often they fail to deliver on it. If the sustainable development unit is a cross-government resource, it needs to be involved in evaluating the sustainable development reports. If it is not, a suitable body needs to be created to do that.

The Treasury's worst record is on allowing public evaluation of its policies, which applies across the board, not just to environmental taxation. The House and the general public lack the opportunity to see the conclusions of audits of policies that are implemented by the Treasury and other Departments that it encourages to act in the same way. The reports have to be made public or their value becomes diminished. I support the Committee's call to have a unit within the Treasury which is responsible

[Matthew Taylor]

for environmental taxes, developing resource productivity indicators, monitoring the adequacy of environmental appraisal and co-ordinating a more strategic approach.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): The hon. Gentleman has probably seen the press release that the Environmental Audit Committee issued to accompany its report. Following his important point on access to departmental sustainable development reports, is he aware that the press release says:

> "It is particularly outrageous that the Treasury is proposing to keep secret sustainable development reports submitted as part of spending review 2002. This will make it impossible for Parliament to hold Departments properly to account"?

Matthew Taylor: Not only am I aware of that comment, but I strongly welcome it. We could understand the Treasury not making the reports public when it draws up the review, but it is a different matter when it keeps them secret thereafter, because that makes proper scrutiny of Government policy impossible. Sadly, it is not just environmental issues to which that applies. It is a long-running failure on the part of the Treasury, and it is getting worse year by year, as any hon. Member who has tabled parliamentary questions to the Treasury knows because they are stonewalled time and time again.

The Minister needs to recognise just how strong the report is. It has been produced by a cross-party Committee with a majority of Labour Members, and concludes:

> "We strongly regret the refusal of the Treasury to provide us with the Spending Review main Guidance".

It comments that that

> "vividly demonstrates that the Treasury will only share what it does not value or consider important."

That is a pretty good summary of the position that this Government at least have managed to get into with regard to making information available.

It is even more worrying that when we cross-question the Government, as the Committee and hon. Members have done, on their evaluation of implemented policy—policies on which money has already been spent—the answer is frequently that there is no systematic evaluation of their effectiveness. I strongly welcome the report's request that the Government should fulfil their commitment to incorporate systematic ex post appraisals in future pre-Budget reports. However, Committee members should be aware that the appraisals often do not appear because they do not exist, even in the Treasury. The Committee also says:

> "We find it difficult to understand how the Government can decide what is the most appropriate policy mechanism, if it is not able to assess the effect of different policy instruments. We urge the Government to clarify how it proposes to develop appraisal and monitoring systems on a more comprehensive basis."

An overriding conclusion of what this and other Governments have done on environmental tax is that too often they have grabbed the green mantle in a way that simply hides the fact that the Treasury takes decisions that largely suit it. For example, the decision to opt for the climate change levy rather than a carbon tax was politically driven; it had nothing to do with best environmental practice. As a result, not only did that decision put huge administrative burdens on business in particular and, incidentally, on the Government, but the Government have been forced almost ever since to go through an endless process of rejigging the climate change levy in a desperate effort to make it work either environmentally or administratively.

Mr. Gummer: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Government have admitted that the reduction of emissions annually as a result of the climate change levy is less than the increase in emissions caused by the moratorium on gas-fired power stations? The fact that the Government at the time said that such an increase was immaterial shows just how small an effect such an enormously complicated system has on the environment.

Matthew Taylor: One great problem with the climate change levy is that it is not terribly effective in changing the way in which businesses operate. The whole point of adopting a carbon tax would be to tackle carbon use, which the levy fails to do. Although various efforts have been made to get round that problem, the situation is still far from ideal. In addition, the levy was introduced in one big block. A carbon tax could be phased in gradually in order to affect the real decision-making process of long-term capital investment, rather than penalise companies for past investment, as the levy has done, long after they are able to change those decisions. So, although the levy may be a stick of sorts, it provided little carrot and flogged a dead horse, since most investment decisions that it penalises have long since been taken.

Ian Lucas (Wrexham): Will the hon. Gentleman clarify whether he would support the introduction of a carbon tax that applied to individual consumers as well as business?

Matthew Taylor: My view on that matter has been consistent, and was presented in our manifesto in 1997, when the Government were first considering the matter. A carbon tax is the only way to address the matter successfully. By its very nature, it must apply to all fuels and therefore to all users on the basis of carbon use, but revenues could be directly used to compensate users. If they used more carbon energy, they would pay more; if they used less, they would pay less. However, ordinary people could be compensated from the revenue raised. I shall touch on that issue a little more in a moment.

It was precisely because the Government were not prepared even to countenance the possibility that households would be hit that they ended up with such an ungainly and relatively ineffective tax. You pays your money and you takes your choice, but it is rather unfortunate to end up with a system that is administratively highly expensive yet does not deliver the goods terribly well.

I want briefly to raise ~~three~~ issues. The first is landfill tax and the waste stream. Government policy on waste is in a mess; many Members represent constituencies that are in the process of trying to sort out that mess. Landfill is becoming expensive and less viable, but the Government are giving no clear steer on the approach that local authorities should take, and some decisions are having perverse financial effects. I am one of those who believes that incineration should be included in a levy system, but we need a comprehensive strategy for waste. The lack of such a strategy is a failing of the Government's approach to environmental taxation. They have taken on odd, individual items rather than providing a joined-up, overall strategy.

I have worked hard in Cornwall to move the county away from a proposal for an incinerator. I think that we have succeeded. Cornwall Environmental Services—the company that deals with waste in the county—has withdrawn its proposals and is looking for other, better, more environmental solutions. Until the Government either take the decision on their public finance initiative bid for investment in recycling facilities close to homes, so that recycling makes environmental sense, or sort out their approach to incineration and its alternatives, it will be very difficult for any local authority to give a coherent lead. We need a lead from the Government.

Similarly, the development of the countryside is a huge issue—in my part of the country and in the constituencies of many Members. The Government say that they want more brownfield rather than greenfield development, but as the EAC report accurately states, at the moment there are perverse incentives to develop greenfield land. As a result, previously developed areas, particularly in inner-city areas, are being allowed to run down. The re-development of such brownfield sites is subject to a huge VAT burden that does not apply to greenfield development. That cannot make sense. In several Budgets, I have expected the Government to announce some action on the matter, but they have failed to do so.

In a country where there is a shortage of land, the value of development land is dictated by the amount that people are prepared to pay for the properties that are eventually built on it. So, not levying VAT on greenfield development affects not the eventual price of properties built but the price of land sold for development—a windfall gain for the owners of the land and an incentive for developers to find such land. The system needs urgent restructuring, and I welcome the fact that the report highlights that.

Nobody should feel—I hope—that I do not believe that environmental taxes could play a crucial part in how we address the environmental issues that we face. The biggest of those is catastrophic climate change, although we also see the destruction of our countryside. I shall give one other example of importance—the aggregates tax. I have always believed that the aggregates tax could play a major, beneficial role in encouraging re-use of waste material rather than raw extraction in many of the most beautiful parts of the UK countryside. I welcome the fact that the Government have gone down that route, but it might be helpful to touch on how positive an impact a well-designed environmental tax can have.

I have in my constituency the largest area of opencast china clay mining anywhere in Europe. The china clay industry tipped more waste material in my small part of Cornwall than the coal industry's entire output when it operated on a large scale in the early 1980s. Therefore, there is a huge waste issue in our part of the country. For 250 years, that waste material has successfully been used in road building in the county of Cornwall. Therefore, there is no doubt that such waste material can be used successfully as an aggregate. Indeed, I notice in reports on the state of Cornwall's roads that despite very low investment we have among the best roads in the country primarily because they were built using an awful lot of aggregate material and they tend not to break up as much as roads in other parts of the country.

In 1999, 500,000 tonnes of china clay waste material was used locally. Just 2,000 tonnes was taken out of the county by sea in an experiment to find out whether there was a market for such material in the Thames area. In 2000, 890,000 tonnes were used locally as Cornwall county council in particular followed a policy of using such waste material as much as possible. As part of the same experiment, 19,000 tonnes left the county in that year—mainly for the south coast but even to Germany.

By 2001, as the company began to gear up in the knowledge of the aggregates tax and to build up facilities for using the material, it managed to make use of 1.3 million tonnes of waste material—53,000 tonnes going out by sea. The dramatic change as a result of the aggregates tax is that, this year, the company expects to reach a figure of 1.6 million tonnes, with at least 200,000 tonnes leaving from Par docks. However, it is being told by the people whom they supply that, once the aggregates levy comes through, it can expect much higher levels of demand, which could add another 300,000 tonnes to the total. Therefore, as much as 500,000 tonnes will go out by sea this year in comparison with just 2,000 in 1999. Therefore, no one should be in any doubt that such measures can make a difference.

Incidentally, such good news can be set against the gradual reduction in the number of jobs in the china clay industry, as there has been an announcement today that another 300 local jobs are to be lost.

Yesterday, I understand that there was a meeting at the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on the bid that has been put together by the Strategic Rail Authority, those administering objective 1 money in the county, Imerys—the main china clay company—and the DLTR for a major rail upgrade of clay rail routes and two new berths at Par. I hope that Treasury Ministers will get behind the bid. The project is set to cost more than £20 million, but it is believed that it will raise the tonnage of waste material to between 5 million and 7 million tonnes. With other local re-use, that means that all the waste from the china clay industry that can be used will be used, making substantial savings for the environment, not just locally but in other parts of the country, as well as protecting jobs.

It is worth bearing in mind that environmental measures can be effective. In my part of the world, the aggregates levy is doing exactly what it was designed to do. There is one problem, which affects the small, family-owned, traditional quarries that used to supply those services within Cornwall. The Government failed to offer them any alternative route for their businesses, and many of them fear that without some sort of invested support for new avenues of business, they will face sudden collapse through no fault of their own. We should consider giving them more of the resources that will come in to help them cope with the change. When they approach me, I tell them that change is the point of the policy, but I agree that they need help with the process of change.

The flaws are larger than the successes. On the whole, the measures have been badly targeted. Taxation of carbon has been wholly inconsistent, ranging from high rates on vehicle fuels to nothing on aviation fuel. The climate change levy is a muddle. The systems that have been adopted were adopted largely because they were simple for the Treasury, at the expense of environmental effectiveness and administrative cost.

Worse still, there is no clear medium-term strategy. As the Environmental Audit Committee points out, a rush of enthusiasm in 1997 has become, as far as anyone can tell,

[Matthew Taylor]

almost no enthusiasm and only a bit of spin doctoring in 2001-02, yet a medium-term strategy and a clear vision of the Government's direction are crucial if the policies are to be truly effective. Environmental taxation policy is all about changing people's decisions—above all, decisions on capital investment. If the householder deciding whether to invest in a low-energy hot water and central heating system or the business making major capital investment decisions cannot see where the policy is going, and if the Treasury gives no clear plan showing where environmental taxes are going, not only can we in Parliament assume that reforms are unlikely to happen, but, more important, people outside will assume either that they will not happen, or that they are so unpredictable that there is no point in making investments in preparation. A greener Treasury would be more open, because being more open is all about being more effective.

One reason why the Government are so unwilling to develop their environmental tax proposals is that they, like their Conservative predecessors, have been stung by complaints from the public about some of their major environmental tax initiatives—the road fuel protests under the current Government, and the campaign against VAT on fuel under the last Government. The public had a point in both those instances, because the Government, under the guise of environmental taxation, were raising the tax burden. My party and I have consistently argued, and we have consistently set out policies showing how it can be done, that the argument for environmental taxation will be won only when people see it as a process of reform of the tax system so that "bads" rather than "goods" are taxed, not as a means by which more tax is taken from people behind their back while claiming that it is all in the cause of good environmentalism.

The overall tax burden is not the issue: it is how we tax, not how much we tax. When the Government confuse the two, it inevitably causes the cynicism highlighted in the University of Surrey's recent report on public attitudes to environmental taxation in the UK, which said that people believe that such taxation is not about the environment, but all about stealth taxes, so they naturally oppose it.

3.4 pm

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): I begin with three comments of praise. First, I praise and thank the Select Committee on Environmental Audit for its report and the context in which it set the report. It is important that the Committee acts as a conscience and a critic of where we as a Government have got to, and sets out ways in which we can get to where we want to be. The whole House should thank the Committee, especially for the way in which it has set out the carrots and sticks involved in the process of reaching our goals.

Secondly, I thank my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for the statement she made prior to this debate on the UK's commitment to signing the Kyoto treaty. She set out with firm commitment the Government's intention to deliver on the reduction of carbon emissions in our society and to change to an economy that gives people a serious prospect of surviving through the century. I do not use the latter phrase lightly.

Thirdly, perhaps unusually, I thank the Prime Minister. In an important speech made a year ago, he pledged to create a low-carbon, low-waste economy in Britain and to green the agriculture sector and the common agricultural policy. Such statements are welcome, but they will not be realised unless they fit into a comprehensive green fiscal strategy, which should be put in place quickly. The question of how to put such a strategy in place quickly focuses our attention on the coming Budget, and it is right that we examine that.

From the report and our many debates in the Chamber emerge four principles around which environmental taxation should be structured and four types of measurable outcome that the House and the Government must take seriously. Taking the principles first, it is right to say that if environmental taxation is to command public support, it has to be clear and honest. Secondly, it must be based on a process that rewards the virtuous while penalising the villainous. There must be a sense of environmental justice in our policies.

Thirdly, there must be a direct connection between environmental taxation and environmental gain. The public will not object to environmental taxation if they can see that the payback directly enhances the quality of life that they, their children and their communities enjoy. Only when the money dissipates in the mist and nothing about the quality of their local environment changes do they begin to be deeply and legitimately sceptical about the purposes of that taxation.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): Has my hon. Friend heard that this week the Republic of Ireland introduced a 15 per cent. levy on plastic bags, of which each person in that country gets 325 a year? The levy will bring in £120 million to use for promoting green issues and environmental projects. Should we introduce that sort of thing in this country?

Mr. Simpson: We certainly should. I had not heard of that initiative, which I welcome, although I was aware of a similar one introduced in Greece not only to change the culture in Greek society as a whole, but to target specifically and encourage the re-use of shopping bags by the large number of people who visit Greece as tourists, whose lasting legacy appears to be the polythene bags they leave behind. We should consider such measures as practical applications of the principles I am outlining.

The fourth principle is perhaps the most contentious. We need to be unafraid of saying that if we are to deliver a sustainable low-carbon economy, we have to change the nature of market rules so that markets favour the sustainable rather than the polluting. The practical application of that principle will probably be the most contentious area that any Government have to tackle.

Where does that lead us? On the principle of clarity, and in terms of the specifics that I hope the Chancellor will consider in his contemplation of the coming Budget, the House and the country understand that we should adopt a clear position on the case for a pesticides tax and a fertiliser tax.

I hope that the Chancellor will also consider aviation fuel and the enormous damage that it does through ozone pollution and depletion. It is a mechanism through which suppliers can externalise pollution. The stripping of productive processes out of the United Kingdom to locate them in another country with lower environmental standards is not a global environmental gain. The connectedness of pollution issues means that we cannot consider in isolation what happens in one country. Rules must be set that apply across an international agenda.

On domestic initiatives, I welcome the Government's introduction of the energy efficiency contribution that is required of the energy supply industry to meet energy efficiency initiatives in domestic energy consumption and changes in the technology for environmental sustainability in the industry.

I also praise in advance the support that I am confident will be forthcoming from the Cabinet for the private Member's Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner), the Home Energy Conservation Bill. I know that it has slight financial implications, but in budgetary terms they are little more than the cost of a can of paint, and it would be tragic if the Government missed the opportunity of making changes that would be of enormous benefit to the fuel-poor and to those who are forced to be the most polluting energy consumers.

In terms of rewards and gains, I shall suggest a number of measures that I hope the Chancellor will consider. To promote energy efficiency in the home, we could make considerable mileage from offering rebates on stamp duty for properties that met high energy efficiency standards. That will become more straightforward when we introduce seller's packs that make available surveys of all homes, but we could it introduce before then.

An energy survey of a home would cost about £150. Even on the cheapest property that would be affected by stamp duty—one that cost £60,000—that would offer a potential saving of about £450, which could be used towards improvements in energy efficiency. Once in place, the measure could be widened to encourage households to undertake other improvements such as the recycling of water and the use of low-impact materials. The rebate is the sort of carrot that we ought to have in mind when we discuss environmental gain.

We should introduce flexibility for local authorities to vary council tax on properties that are already energy efficient or which we want to induce to become energy efficient. That would have the advantage of extending the payback period for improvements, reducing the cost to those undertaking the improvements, and saving money on their fuel bills and council tax. Large numbers of households around the country would welcome such a measure.

We could extend the measure to the business community by allowing variation in business rate rebates which would allow cheaper rates for businesses that employ local people, cut their traffic impact and implement green transport schemes for workers and energy efficient premises. My authority in Nottingham is beginning to move in that direction by discussing the introduction of a company car parking levy. Exactly such rebates are being offered to companies that sign up to local green transport schemes.

All these proposals involve hypothecation and the identification of a payback where the return of taxation to virtuous ends binds people in as net gainers from the process. That could be extended to arrangements for recycling in every home. I know that the landfill tax is contentious, but if householders saw its proceeds manifesting themselves in the setting-up costs of recycling schemes, it would allow them to make choices about being environmentally virtuous. Virtue will strongly influence where public pressure takes us in the years ahead.

We must allow the public to make important ethical choices that are also environmental choices. We must allow companies tax breaks to deliver the next generation of renewable energy technologies. We should examine ways of offering similar tax breaks to farmers and households for applying renewable technologies and using them in the daily process of their work and lives.

We should consider how regulation can offer consumers the choice that they want. My hon. Friend the Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths) made a powerful case for liquefied petroleum gas—LPG. It is a wonderful example. About a year ago, I was fortunate to be allowed to test drive an LPG vehicle for a week. It was an enjoyable experience, with one exception: I went into a state of panic when the fuel started to run low and I had to work out where to fill the thing up. I remember real anxiety and pulling into petrol stations to ask where I could get LPG. The attendants would scratch their heads. I even stopped the police to ask them. They said that they knew of a place in Southampton—I was going south—and suggested that I go into the centre of Southampton and ask there.

We must contrast that with the experience in France where, by regulation, the terms of franchises for petrol stations were changed. It is an obligation that one out of every six pumps must offer an alternative fuel, such as LPG or biodiesel. There is an important and legitimate argument to be had about which alternative fuel, but the key fact is that when one pulls into a forecourt, one knows that one can make an ethical choice. One is not offered the Hobson's choice of the polluting technologies that we are seeking to move away from. The introduction of alternative fuels makes it possible for motorists to fill up virtuously. I am certain that huge numbers—even greater than those cited by my hon. Friend—would make that change if they could go about their daily lives without panic or confusion.

Mr. Simon Thomas: If the hon. Gentleman repeated the experience of trying to find LPG in rural mid-Wales, he would run out of fuel long before finding the right filling station. LPG is an important option, but does he agree that the potential offered by biodiesel—because the vegetable oil could be produced in this country and the vast majority of diesel cars on the road could easily be adapted to biodiesel without retro-fitting—puts an onus on the Government to enhance the tax incentive for it?

Mr. Simpson: I accept that. I was giving an example of the Government's responsibility to make choice available to consumers.

Without discussing in detail the Home Energy Conservation Bill, we could make a regulatory change that would allow the public to act virtuously if we signed up to the commitments that require the licensing of houses in multiple occupation and the raising or setting of minimum housing standards. Those are not tax issues, but requirement issues, in much the same way as the Clean Air Act 1956.

My final and probably most contentious point relates to markets. I shall make two points. First, there are huge environmental gains to be made by changing our

[Mr. Simpson]

perception of food markets. Some 60 per cent. of the food that this country imports could be grown here. A fantastic report by the campaign group Sustain on EU food markets showed that the largest part of those markets is food swaps. The report was called "Eating Oil", which well describes what is happening. Huge costs, congestion and pollution go into shipping the same goods back and forth from one part of Europe to another. We should consider ways in which the Government can tax that favour the localisation of food markets. Indeed, that would also strengthen the public's demand for shorter and tighter lines of food accountability.

My final point is the one with which I suspect very few hon. Members will agree. Like a number of my colleagues, I have been in the habit of roundly denouncing President Bush as a right-wing, reactionary, belligerent old warmonger, but in the past couple of days I have been forced to consider whether I need to rethink that view. There may be a case for suggesting that the decision of the President of the United States to impose a levy on steel imports is environmentally right. In most major sectors of the global economy, there are huge product surpluses. We must ask what the point is of destroying jobs and production processes so that we can offload products made in the most polluting way in parts of the world where people, as well as the environment, are exploited and where the need for infrastructure programmes must come second because the only purchasing capacity is in the north. I wonder whether President Bush has now appointed himself as honorary leader of the globalised resistance movement. If he has, many of us would welcome it and say that in areas of product surpluses, the issue is not about taxation, but about whether we should hypothecate the tariffs that are imposed and whether they should be automatically transferred to ensure that the developing world can use resources for itself in ways that reduce their part of the pollution equation. I realise that that may be some steps ahead of the Environmental Audit Committee report, but I am sure that we are moving in the same direction.

I do not believe for a moment that by asking for such changes, we will make them happen. However, if we lack the courage to make the case, they will never happen.

3.22 pm

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): I am not sure whether the Prime Minister or President Bush would be more embarrassed by the remarks of the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson).

I should declare an interest, as I help a number of companies in doing their environmental good on certain issues. On many of those issues, one can hardly mention the environment without referring to those companies. I am also chairman of the not-for-profit organisation, Valpak, which deals with the obligations of companies in the packaging world.

I am very pleased that we are having this debate and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) on the way in which he introduced it. I also congratulate the Environmental Audit Committee on the way in which it considered the issues. Positive signals are very important. I put it to the Minister as delicately as I can that it would be very good if, on occasion, the Chancellor himself felt able to come to the Chamber on days such as this to hear directly the strong feelings that are held. I make that remark not least because he has a reputation—I am sure that he would like to counter this impression—of not really being personally terribly keen on these matters with the sort of fire that is necessary. If he wished to counter such views, coming here and listening would be a first step. I think that that is the only controversial remark that I shall make, but I hope very much that it will make a point.

Ian Lucas: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: On that point, I think not, but perhaps I shall do so a little later.

Before we turn to taxation, there is a serious issue in respect of how we encourage people to act in an environmentally friendly way. The first part of that is to make it easier to be good than bad. Man cannot be made good by an Act of Parliament, but one can make it easier to be good. For example, all of us have stayed in hotels where it has taken us some time to find all the switches to turn on the lights. Some are high up and some are low down; they can be anywhere. By the time we have turned them all on and it is time to leave the room, we say to ourselves, "Well, I'm damned if I'm going to turn them off again—after all, I'm paying so much a night that the hotel should be able to pay for the extra electricity." Of course, that is an improper reaction. It would be better if there were a system in which one switch would turn all the lights off, or better still, in which the room card turned the lights on and one had to turn them off as one left the room. Such a system would make it possible to save and do the right thing without causing people any inconvenience.

I know that some hair-shirted people would prefer us to be inconvenienced. I am not a person of that kind; I am not a puritan either politically or religiously, and I much prefer it to be easier to do good. That means that the Government themselves have a role to play. I think that that role is fourfold and might be called "CERT". "C" stands for counsel. The Government must say what is best in their opinion. Very often, they are good at doing that. The hon. Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths) made that point in respect of HFCs, on which the Government have made a perfectly proper statement.

However, counsel must be followed by example. The hon. Lady rightly said that the Government did not follow their own example. There are far too many examples at this moment of Departments that are directly procuring the very HFC equipment that the Government say is not the answer. If one cannot set an example, one does not have much right to deal either with regulation or taxation. One must say what one believes and then carry it out. Much could be done by public authorities to set the sort of example that we would like to see.

Regulation is another very important part of what happens. Whether it is based on a voluntary agreement such as that of the car industry to make motor cars more efficient, or whether it requires people to meet standards, depends on the circumstances. However, I believe that the Government could do a great deal more. For example, if we were to hasten the phasing out of that little red eye in the corner that can mean that every sort of electronic equipment is using almost half the electricity that it would use if it were fully switched on and replace it with equipment and technology that are already available, we could save at least two major power stations in this country. A huge difference could be made throughout the world. The European Union provides us with the means of agreeing a much faster phase-out than we have at the moment. If every dishwasher washed with as little water as the best, we would make a huge difference in terms of the energy needed not only to heat the water, but to pump it in the home.

If we were prepared to look more closely at the planning regulations, we could achieve a great deal. In that regard, I must tell the Minister that one of the scandals of the recent past is the almost total lack of input from DEFRA into the Government's Green Paper on planning. That is the first casualty of a reorganisation of government that I believe to be wrong. There was no proper environmental concern and a number of the proposals in the Green Paper will make it more and not less difficult to ensure that we plan for a more sustainable future. Frankly, I have yet to discern a single occasion on which the Minister for Housing, Planning and Regeneration has spoken about his proposals in a way that suggests that they will advance sustainable development or improve our opportunity to live in an environmentally friendly way.

I turn now to taxation, on which I think that the Government have not been willing to do as much as the public would be prepared to follow. Unusually, I agree with the Liberal Democrat spokesman, although I find it difficult to take from him any uplifting views on environmental taxation. With the benefit of hindsight we are rewriting our attitude to VAT on fuel, but I remember what actually happened. There was a by-election in which the Liberals wanted to get a vote or two, and suddenly their policy turned around. We should not be surprised about that, for if there is hypocrisy around we know on which Benches it is bound to alight. There is nothing more ready to move than a Liberal faced with a floating vote. As Liberals speak of high-mindedness, the other parties remember where the kick is landed at election time. The dirtiest fighters with the cleanest language—that sums them up. Although I agree with them on this matter, let no one think that I have much time for their normal activities.

The Liberals are right to say that environmental taxation cannot work unless people can see that the money that it raises does not increase total taxation and is used directly for environmental purposes. Thus hypothecation—the horrid word that I hope that the Minister is brave enough to use in the Treasury—becomes central to the success of environmental taxation.

When my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) introduced the landfill tax—I was part and parcel of that battle—his biggest argument was with the Treasury, which saw it as that dangerous thing: using taxation specifically. We should increase the tax on landfill and recycle all that is raised through Entrust, not pinch the whole lot for the Treasury, as happened last time—a disgraceful example of non-environmental taxation that was never explained by Treasury Ministers.

We must change the wholly unacceptable way in which taxation works in relation to car commuters and public transport commuters. That cannot generally be left to local authorities, because where city centres are in competition—for example, in Nottingham, Derby and Leicester—nothing will be done, although some kind of local taxation may be organised in areas where there is no competition. It should be a taxable perk to have a car-parking space and a non-taxable perk to be helped to use public transport. I see no reason why that change cannot be made, and I am sorry that the Government have not yet done so.

The climate change levy was, from the beginning, seen for what it was. For many months, we were given only the figure for how much the Chancellor would raise from it, not the figure for how many tonnes of carbon it would cut. That is because it was a taxation move that emanated from the Treasury, not from the Department responsible for the environment.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Gummer: The Minister may shake his head, but it is a matter of fact. The measure was proposed by the Treasury and comments were canvassed from the Department responsible for the environment. It is not surprising that the Treasury announced how much it would raise before anyone knew how many tonnes of carbon it would cut. Nor is it surprising that the changes that took place were intended not to improve the environmental outcome, but to buy the odd vote or two from people who thought that they were being over-pressed by the climate change levy. We have ended up with a huge operation that will do little good and was aimed largely at trying to do something on the margin for coal producers.

The truth is that the climate change levy will not contribute anything like enough to reducing emissions, but it will make us less competitive in many markets. That cannot be a good thing. I suggest to the Minister that it is unfair to put people like me in the position of having to be antagonistic towards a levy that I would instinctively support. It is called the climate change levy, so the Government should ensure that it is an environmental tax, not twist the words and make it difficult for us to support it.

Similarly, the aggregates tax will not deliver even as much as the industry offered in advance of it. I shall not say too much about that, as I do quite a bit of work with the industry. The Government have not proved the case for the tax. They have not explained how they will ensure that it is not translated into longer journeys by lorries carrying reconstituted material. They have not explained why so little of it will be used directly in the sustainability fund, nor what the sustainability fund will do. They did not even explain, before the tax was introduced, what it would do and how it would do it. That is not good for the environment because it does not look competent. Environmentalists must look competent because we are always being accused of not being so. The Government should at least have ensured that the tax was introduced comprehensibly and comprehensively.

HFCs and combined heat and power are very different things but they both suffer from the same problem—namely, that the Government have not made it easier for people to move from dangerous ozone-depleting refrigerants to forms of refrigeration and air conditioning that do not lead to global warming. We should be able to move from CFCs to benign alternatives. I try to encourage

[Mr. Gummer]

people to do that, for the good reason that I believe that it is right, and so should the Government. On CHP, the Government were warned for months about what their legislation and regulations were doing to the industry, yet they did nothing.

How can we achieve our ends? We can do so by using the market to which the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) rather cack-handedly referred. That market is a powerful mechanism; all we need to do is to give it the fourth dimension of time. If we make it recognise what it does over time and put a price on that we will be able to make it a powerful driver of environmental change. We can do that because we are part of the European Union. If we were in a market on our own we would not be powerful enough to make those changes: the competitive position would make it impossible. But because we are part of the largest trading community in the world, we have the means not only to change market conditions for this nation and for our colleagues in the EU, but to affect the global scene by driving those changes in the United States and beyond. In environmental terms, the EU gives us a large enough base not only to change ourselves without competitive disadvantage, but to change the world through others having to come to terms with the EU's environmental demands.

Not for the first time, I remind the House of the centrality of the European Union in ensuring that we have sensible environmental policies. The Chancellor can act effectively on taxation and regulation only if we are properly linked to the common decisions of the EU, which alone makes it possible for us to reclaim sovereignty over our environment. That is why the European Union is so crucial and why, without it, we lose sovereignty.

3.39 pm

Mr. Colin Challen (Morley and Rothwell): I want to focus on an issue that is affecting my constituency particularly badly, and which I imagine many urban hinterland seats face: the development of greenfield sites for housing. The pre-Budget report states on page 118:

> "A derelict and under-developed physical environment has a detrimental impact on the social and economic fabric of communities. Population movement out of urban areas makes it difficult to sustain good services and leads to pressure for new development in the countryside. If 45 per cent of new homes continue to be built on greenfield land, within 20 years an area the size of Exmoor would be built over and the quality of life in both urban and rural areas would suffer".

That is absolutely right. I do not know the relative size of Exmoor compared with my constituency, but I know that there is a feeling in Morley and Rothwell that the quality of life is beginning to suffer rather badly, due to the amount of new house building going on.

The pre-Budget report contains some excellent moves against new housing on greenfield sites to re-balance the demand for regeneration, but there is, as the Environmental Audit Committee says at paragraph 31 of its report, a great concern

> "that the Government has still not addressed the fundamental perverse VAT incentives between greenfield and brownfield development which still exist. The Government has admittedly introduced some concessions in VAT rates for development on polluted brownfield sites, and for the conversion of buildings for residential occupancy. However, it is still the case that new build on greenfield sites is zero VAT rated."

The Committee, on which I sit, goes on to call for urgent research

> "on the impact of removing the perverse fiscal incentive to build on greenfield sites."

Urgent is indeed the word.

There is a massive demand for building land, as evidenced by a report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, cited in Monday's *Yorkshire Post*, which claimed that new build must rise by 60 per cent. and stay at that level for the next 14 years. All that house builders want to do is get their hands on as much greenfield land as they possibly can, and cover it with bricks and mortar. Also in Monday's *Yorkshire Post*, the chief executive of Persimmon Homes, Britain's biggest house building company, said that all the house builders want to do is buy land, build houses and sell them at a profit. I understand that; there is a demand and those companies make the product to fulfil that demand, but they do not get too worked up about greenfield sites. In fact, they even advertise for greenfield sites, with or without planning permission.

The Treasury's response to the Environmental Audit Committee's question about the perverse VAT incentive was rather bland, and certainly lacked any sense of urgency. That is a great shame because, as more houses go up, a curtain of finality drops on our countryside, which is now at its weakest point of resistance to these estates of identikit houses on the edges of our cities and towns. Everywhere we look, regiments of bland dwellings are crowding along the boundaries of the urban landscape, like some great invading encirclement in a mediaeval siege, seeking to ensure that whatever is left of the unique heritage of our towns and cities is made to conform to the uniform master plan of the chief executive of Persimmon Homes.

Incentives need to focus much more on how we can reclaim city centres, brownfield sites and old industrial buildings. We are told that, nationally, 760,000 houses are empty on a long-term basis. In Morley, there is a rich architectural heritage, dating from the town's great industrial days, which needs an injection of capital to restore it to modern use. Old buildings need nourishing, and as there is clearly a need for residential buildings, the measures covered in the pre-Budget report for revitalising such buildings need far greater emphasis. As long as it is so much cheaper to build on a nice greenfield site, however, the incentive is not there, and what is achieved in the older urban areas is still far too weak in many of them to achieve a pure market-driven momentum. That is the case in Morley, and I ask the Treasury to give special attention to the recommendation on removing the perverse incentive contained in the Environmental Audit Committee's report.

3.44 pm

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): I am pleased to be able to contribute to this debate as a member of the Environmental Audit Select Committee, whose report forms the basis for this afternoon's discourse. On a personal level, I am also pleased to be doing so with the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, the right hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng), in the Chamber. I fought my first parliamentary seat in Brent, East against Ken Livingstone in 1997, and I have fond memories of participating in a number of borough-wide debates during that general election, including some with the right hon. Gentleman, so it is a pleasure to be here, debating with him again, five years on.

I would like to concentrate on the role of the Treasury as highlighted in the Committee's report. The Treasury is the Department primarily responsible for taxation policy, including environmental taxation. As such, it bears an important responsibility for the practical effect of such taxation on promoting—or otherwise—the concept of sustainable development. As part of our inquiry, we took evidence from the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, as well as from a number of other interested organisations, including the Confederation of British Industry, the Green Alliance, the Institute for Public Policy Research and Friends of the Earth.

Despite the Government's statement of intent on environmental taxation that accompanied the 1997 Budget, our witnesses expressed some scepticism about the Government's continuing commitment to using environmental taxation as an instrument of environmental policy rather than as a cover for raising additional taxation revenue, for the primary benefit of the Exchequer rather than for specific objectives of promoting sustainable development.

The Committee reported in paragraph 12 of its conclusions and recommendations:

> "We regret that the Treasury has retreated from a strategic commitment to environmental tax reform, by diluting the language used in the original Statement of Intent. Together with other factors discussed below, it suggests that the Treasury's approach is indeed ad hoc."

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: I am surprised by that part of the Select Committee's report. Rather than agreeing that the Treasury has withdrawn from a commitment to environmental taxation, I think that it is merely pausing for breath, having been very radical. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that a green tax commission, which was supported by the Environmental Audit Committee when I was lucky enough to serve on it, might be the way to provide additional support to the Treasury while it considers what further green tax initiatives are needed?

Mr. Francois: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. As I understand it, the Committee is continuing to push the concept of a green tax commission, and it is for the Treasury to decide whether it wishes to take up the suggestion. The hon. Gentleman suggested that there had been a pause; I would say that it has actually been quite a long pause, and leave it at that.

Another theme that emerged from our inquiry was that if the Government are serious about seeking to derive environmental, as well as purely financial, benefits from so-called environmental taxation, they need to organise themselves accordingly. Specifically, the Treasury needs properly to resource a specialist unit within its ranks to deal with environmental taxation and related sustainable development issues. The Committee made the point that such a unit could also specialise in examining individual departmental sustainable development reports. That subject was touched on earlier and I would like to return to it.

There is also an important issue relating to access to these reports. Departments were expected to produce reports on their sustainable development strategies as part of their submissions for the Treasury's spending review 2002. Our Committee was particularly vexed by the refusal of the Treasury to make available copies of those departmental reports for subsequent examination by the EAC. We argued in paragraph 20 of our conclusions and recommendations:

> "We expect to receive copies of the sustainable development reports submitted by departments as part of Spending Review 2002, so as to be able to audit them in line with our remit from the House."

From a sustainable development viewpoint, the reports are obviously of considerable importance, as they lay out the commitment to sustainable development of each individual Department. Taken as a whole, they provide an important illustration of the commitment to sustainable development across government, and are thus key source documents.

As a compromise, the Committee has suggested that the Treasury could make these reports available at least to the National Audit Office, and allow it to audit those documents and report its results to the Committee, which could take a view on its analysis.

Access to these reports is an issue not just for us. Yesterday morning, as part of the Committee's inquiry into the forthcoming world summit on sustainable development in Johannesburg, it took evidence from Sir Jonathon Porritt, who is chairman of the Sustainable Development Commission. The SDC was appointed to advise the Prime Minister and the Government on sustainable development issues, including environmental taxation. In his evidence to the Committee yesterday, Sir Jonathon also raised the matter of access to these departmental reports, and he supported the Committee's desire to be allowed to examine them. As he has the Prime Minister's ear, Treasury Ministers may like to pay some heed to his opinion.

I confess that it was principally the Labour party that argued for the establishment of the Environmental Audit Committee, but that gives it an added responsibility to allow the Committee to do its job. I remind the Minister of the Committee's remit:

> "Consider to what extent the programmes and policies of Government Departments and non-departmental public bodies contribute to environmental protection and sustainable development; to audit their performance against such targets as may be set for them by Her Majesty's Ministers; and to report thereon to the House."

To perform that role effectively, it should have access to departmental plans for sustainable development so that it can examine them. I urge the Treasury to drop its opposition to making that information available to the Committee and to allow us to perform the task for which we were originally constituted by the House.

I shall conclude my remarks in the hope that other hon. Members on the Committee will be able to speak. I ask the Minister to give serious consideration to what I have said.

3.52 pm

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): I have long thought that our party's future lay partly in strengthening our environmental credo. We should aspire to be a modern, left-of-centre party delivering year-on-year improvements in public services, and if we are to stay committed to the interests of the many and not the few we need to embrace the environmental agenda more

[Mr. Gareth R. Thomas]

rigorously than we have so far. I believe that new, bold steps in environmental taxation would be a positive move in that process.

I was lucky enough to serve on the Select Committee on Environmental Audit in the last Parliament, and I congratulate its Chair and members on their continued detailed scrutiny of environmental taxation. I apologise to the House, but I have to chair a meeting with the Minister for Industry and Energy to consider how to implement the recommendations of the energy review, so I shall not be able to hear the Financial Secretary's summing up.

By contrast with the mealy-mouthed attitude of some Opposition Members, the Treasury has been responsible for some significantly radical steps on environmental taxation, either through the climate change levy or the incentives to encourage alternative, cleaner fuels. Those steps are making a significant difference to market expectations and to the interest of business in developing environmentally friendly technologies.

However, we need to go much further on energy, transport and waste policy. We should be bolder in our use of environmental taxes and the revenues that they generate, and in our advocacy of taxation across national boundaries to help to solve some of our environmental problems. The point that my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) made about the urgency of the challenge to deal with pollution, particularly carbon emissions from aviation, is an important example.

There is also an urgency about the need for new consideration of environmental taxes, partly because of the concern raised by the recent report of Cambridge Econometrics about the rise in carbon emissions last year and this year. It is concerned that, despite our ambition of a 20 per cent. reduction in carbon emissions by 2010 on 1990 levels, if its analysis is right, on current trends we will achieve only a 6.5 per cent. reduction. That is a reason to consider afresh the case for a green tax commission. Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Belgium, Canada and the Netherlands already have such a commission.

A green tax commission could consider carefully how we encourage and give incentives to households to reduce unnecessary energy usage. The Cambridge Econometrics report shows that, if no further action is taken, on current trends there will be a 19 per cent. increase in CO_2 from households by 2010 on 1990 levels. The cut in energy conservation materials that the Treasury initiated—down from 17.5 per cent. to 5 per cent.—is a useful step in the right direction. The suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South about stamp duty rebates for households with high levels of energy efficiency is an interesting suggestion that such a commission could explore. In the Netherlands, domestic energy is taxed, but there is a tax-free allowance of 800 kilowatt hours per month for all households, so as not to penalise essential energy use. Households in the Netherlands are also required to meet much higher insulation standards.

I hope that the Financial Secretary will tell the House what further tax incentives the Treasury is considering to encourage the development of renewable energy. There is a huge challenge for us to take forward the recommendations of the recent performance and innovation unit report on energy. It highlighted the fact that, if we are to achieve our 10 per cent. target and the equally realistic target of 20 per cent. energy from renewable sources by 2020, onshore and offshore windfarms will have to be installed and operate at the rate of 1 GW to 2 GW per year in the period 2010 to 2020. Given Britain's current record on renewable energy generation, that is a huge challenge, but it has already been achieved in Germany, Spain and Denmark. Perhaps there is a case for further tax breaks to help to generate new investment in onshore and offshore windfarms, and wave and solar power.

I want to flag up the specific recommendation of the PIU report, endorsed by the chief scientific adviser, that there is a huge need for further funding for low carbon and energy research. I hope that significant action will be taken in that respect under the comprehensive spending review. In the Netherlands, an interesting scheme, supported by tax breaks, has been established to generate private sector investment through green funds, which are regulated by the central bank. The projects that they fund must be approved by the Dutch Ministry of Environment. I encourage my right hon. Friend to explore those points and the possibility of a green tax commission.

There has been a huge rise in the level of litter in the past 10 years. Litter is not the sexiest subject that the House must consider, but there is huge potential for the taxation system to help to solve the litter problem. My hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) flagged up the plastic bags tax in Ireland, which shows the potential of the taxation system for exploring these issues. Another PIU report is being prepared in that area, and I hope that my right hon. Friend is closely engaged in the consideration of the taxation measures that could help to solve some of our litter problems.

I look forward to reading my right hon. Friend's comments in *Hansard* tomorrow.

4 pm

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): It has been my pleasure and delight to be a member of the Select Committee on Environmental Audit since I came to the House in February 2000. The Committee does a sterling job in holding the Government to account on a wide range of issues. The Environmental Audit Committee's title is a misnomer, as the Committee acts as the House's Select Committee on sustainable development. No other Committee examines the Government's activity in that respect, or holds them to account on those matters.

Increasingly, the Government are adopting the sustainable approach. It is not always perfect, of course, which is why the EAC's scrutiny and reports are needed. However, the EAC's resources are stretched in accomplishing its task. If the Committee, in its role as sustainable development Committee, is going to be fully able to hold the Government to account on these matters, we need the openness referred to by the hon. Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois). In addition, the Committee must have the auditing powers and access to research that it lacks at present.

The EAC has proposed a Bill on those matters, which has been taken up as a private Member's Bill by the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor). I hope that the Government will consider the Bill's merits, as it would be better if they took the initiative. In that way, occasional accusations that the Government are sliding away from some of their commitment to sustainability can be countermanded.

As the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) said at the start of the debate, there is more to sustainable development and its promotion by the Government than environmental taxation. Although I shall confine my remarks to the issue of environmental taxation so as to be as brief as possible, I believe that the phrase "environmental taxation" is itself misleading. A better phrase would be "taxation for sustainable development", and it should cover everything that the United Kingdom must try to do.

The first thing to say is that the Government have retreated from their pretty radical and welcome position on environmental taxation. The June 1997 statement of intent on environmental taxation encompassed many things. It stated:

> "Over time, the Government will aim to reform the tax system"—

that is, the whole system, not just environmental taxation—

> "to increase incentives to reduce environmental damage. That will shift the burden of tax from 'goods' to 'bads'; encourage innovation in meeting high environmental standards; and deliver a more dynamic economy and a cleaner environment, to the benefit of everyone."

That final phrase—

> "to the benefit of everyone"—

is what made me consider the statement to be more about sustainable development. It recognised that the environment, social justice and the economy go hand in hand.

Unfortunately, the current statement of intent does not recognise that. The 1999 pre-Budget report said merely that the Government would consider using the tax system on a case-by-case basis. That is a real weakening of the Government's intent with regard to promoting sustainable development through the taxation system.

It was suggested earlier that the Government are merely pausing or taking a breath before moving on to a more radical phase. I do not see where more radical proposals are going to come from, although, of course, I hope that they do appear. The Government are prepared to scatter a few carrots around to encourage and incentivise the "goods", but they seem very wary about using the big stick on the "bads".

The background to the matter is public reaction, such as the protests that greeted the abolition of the fuel duty escalator. If the Government are to lead on these matters, they must explain them to the public.

The Government are to be congratulated on what they have done with regard to Kyoto, for example. They have taken an international leadership role on that matter, and the statement earlier today was worthy. However, the Government have not led the domestic agenda in the same way. If they want to be remembered as the Government who instituted sustainable development and incorporated it fully into the fabric of the UK, they must do much more.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): The hon. Gentleman mentioned that another hon. Member had said that the Government were drawing breath, but does he agree that they have approached the matter of the aggregates levy like a bull at a gate? The levy is due to be introduced in three weeks, but no detailed regulation covering its implementation and enforcement has been published. Have not the Government been over hasty in some areas of environmental taxation?

Mr. Thomas: I agree, and I shall deal with the aggregates levy in a while.

The energy review that has just been published recommends that the Government should create economic instruments to bring home the cost of carbon emissions. There is therefore another incentive to take such matters further.

The Government must address four principles when they consider environmental taxation. Although not all the principles must always be observed in environmental taxation, accusations that such taxation is a stealth tax can be circumvented if one or more of them are used to underpin the tax. Moreover, the Government must make it clear that the principles are used to underpin the tax. They could do that by means of an independent green tax commission, which the EAC has proposed in the past. I hope that such a commission will be established, but for the moment I shall concentrate on the four principles.

The first is the polluter pays principle. It is well known and widely understood, but it implies ring fencing and hypothecation. The Treasury, under all Governments, has been reluctant to consider that in the past, but increasingly it is seen as a valuable way to put the principle into effect.

The second principle is that the tax burden should be switched away from income and employment, and on to the consumption of resources. That is very important. The hon. Member for Orpington said that sustainable development meant treating the world as though we intended to stay. That is by far the most concise definition that I have heard, but we must switch the tax burden in the way that I described if we are to make that a reality. The difficulty is that we must also bear in mind a commitment to social justice in the matter—after all, the poor should consume in the same way as the rich. The redistribution of resources requires social justice in the tax system.

The third principle is the internalising principle—that the cost of producing goods should reflect real costs rather than actual costs. In other words, the external costs of production should be present in the final price of goods. The obvious example of an UK industry in which that does not happen is nuclear energy, but adherence to the principle can be difficult. For example, in a globalised market, how do we work out external costs? What are the external costs of what Bush has done with steel in the US? Does fuel consumption in this country have external costs in respect of global warming, climate change or the floods in Mozambique? The principle has its difficulties, but I believe that it must be taken into account when any environmental taxation is considered.

The fourth principle is that environmental taxation can be used as a practical policy tool in achieving certain objectives. In other words, the theoretical cost is sometimes less important than whether we use taxation to incentivise a "good" or penalise a "bad". The obvious measure to which the fourth principle applies is the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions. That may entail imposing for a time a certain amount of penalising taxation, as we will be trying to change people's behaviour.

[Mr. Thomas]

Taxation in such circumstances does not always work, as the Government's change of mind on fuel duties shows. When the fuel duty escalator was introduced in the 1993 Budget, the then Chancellor, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), said that it was also about achieving a cut in carbon emissions. However, one of the problems for the public was that there was no evidence that the levy would work in that way. Subsequent Governments have produced very little evidence in support of the contention.

More to the point, when the fuel duty escalator was frozen in the 2000 Budget, no evidence was produced about how that would affect traffic congestion, carbon dioxide emissions, or anything else. The Government were very remiss—and very ungreen, if I can put it that way—in not producing that evidence, and they were criticised for that failure by a short, sharp report from the EAC.

Issues relating to, for instance, fuel taxation demonstrate the potential complexity and difficulty of environmental taxation. In fact, the one thing that did stop carbon dioxide emissions from transport and reduce traffic congestion by—I think—5 per cent. was the fuel duty protest. That week in September achieved something that taxation has not been able to achieve.

The problem with transport costs is that the point at which taxation really bites and starts to reduce road transport is the point at which, by definition, it becomes unacceptable to the public. There must be alternative incentives, perhaps involving road pricing or public transport.

We must also ensure equality of choice throughout the country. At present, environmental taxes such as fuel taxes penalise the poorest rather than the richest. The hon. Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths) gave a good example relating to liquefied petroleum gas. There is not a choice in rural areas such as mine. There are only 93 fuel stations in Wales providing LPG, which means that it would be difficult to travel around Wales using LPG alone. I think that there are only five such stations in my county.

The hon. Lady said that 50,000 vehicles were running on LPG. As she may well know, the official registered figure is 26,694. Until the infrastructure is in place, whether for LPG or for biodiesel, people will not make the choice. Sometimes an incentive is needed. The power shift programme, which helps people to convert their vehicles, applies only to new vehicles. The vast majority of my constituents live in rural areas and drive older vehicles.

Government policy in this respect has not been a complete failure, as is demonstrated in the Environmental Audit Committee report. I was disappointed, however, that the idea of a pesticide tax had been shelved. I feel that that should be looked at again, and that more research should be conducted into how voluntary regulation is working.

Landfill tax presents a clear example of our failure. It should be given a much higher priority. I think it was the Environmental Audit Committee that suggested a rate of £25 per tonne. I am particularly worried about the fact that the tax is still only £2 a tonne for inert wastes. There is a mismatch between the landfill tax and the aggregates tax, which, we have been told, is intended to reduce primary extraction and encourage the use of secondary materials. Given a tax of only £2 a tonne on inert wastes, I do not see how the landfill tax can work hand in hand with the aggregates levy.

As the hon. Member for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor) said earlier, some of us were in the House within a month of the implementation of the aggregates levy. Many of us who claim to be environmentalists have found ourselves wrestling with the question of how we can support the levy in its present form. My particular worry is that the way it is currently being implemented may lead to the closure of the smaller quarries. For instance, a quarry in Ystradmeurig in my constituency supplies the road stone for my constituency and neighbouring constituencies. If it closed, there would surely be more road transport because of the need to transport the material, and more carbon dioxide emissions.

Mr. Gummer: Is it not also true that the sheer business of getting out stone that is necessary leaves behind a good deal of waste that will be classified as virgin material and will therefore cause real defacement and trouble in such beautiful parts of the countryside as the hon. Gentleman's constituency?

Mr. Thomas: That may well be so. I am given to understand that the maximum amount of hard waste that could be recycled would be only 1 or 2 per cent. of virgin aggregates.

Imports also give rise to concern. Although imported aggregates will be taxed, by-products will not, although they are taxed in this country. I fear that the market will be flooded by imports, which will need to be transported for long distances.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the most disastrous impact of the aggregates levy will be experienced in Northern Ireland? It will necessitate the relocation of jobs in the Irish Republic, where there are nearly 300 miles of border and 400 crossing points. We know of the problems with tobacco and oil smuggling; now there must be a new incentive for dodging tax on aggregates. Surely the Government should conduct research into all the implications, including the human hardship that would be caused, and—even at this late stage—defer the imposition of the tax on 1 April until further consideration has been given. I hope that would also avoid the embarrassment that may result—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. The hon. Gentleman is wandering into a speech rather than making an intervention.

Mr. Beggs: I understand that there is to be a judicial review.

Mr. Thomas: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comprehensive intervention. I too understand that a judicial review is to be initiated soon. I also understand that the aggregates tax is to be phased in Northern Ireland. The issues have not been resolved, however, and they need to be resolved if there is only a month to go.

David Taylor: Is it not the case that the proposed level of the tax, £1.60 per tonne, is three to four times the profit margin of typical companies? That, moreover, is based on very poor-quality research by an obscure company that has now gone into liquidation. It consulted only a few people, and only one in 10 said they would be willing to pay anything towards the so-called closure of their local quarries. Should the Government not rethink the tax?

Mr. Thomas: I agree that a research programme that merely asks how much people would be prepared to pay for the closure of a local quarry is, in fact, no research programme. That underlines the need for a genuinely independent environmental tax—green tax—commission to perform such research and inform Members. That would enable us to hold the Government to account.

The report also suggests the introduction of an incinerator tax. That has prompted great interest in Wales, where a couple of incinerators are proposed—one in Crumlin Bowers and one in the Wrexham area. The proposal has given the Committee a higher profile in the Welsh media, but I think it should be considered carefully.

As was mentioned earlier, we recently returned from Germany, where I noted that incineration was counted as a renewable in the energy programme. I do not think we want to consider it as such in this country, and I hope the Government will resist the idea.

I think we may see some innovative schemes. I am certainly interested in what Ireland has just done about carrier bags. Finding them 15 miles away from the nearest supermarket, on top of a mountain, is not a very pleasurable experience when one is taking a walk. It is obvious that something must be done about packaging. I also think that the points made about an aviation tax are central. It was excluded from the Kyoto protocol, deliberately. The arrangement dates back to, I think, the Copenhagen principles. It is a very old agreement, and it needs to be reviewed. The Government have an opportunity to take the lead.

We also need to increase the opportunity for biodiesel to be used in this country. A 20p rebate has been announced, but according to information I have received from Cargill plc a further reduction of about 15p is needed,

> "giving an overall rate of 10p per litre",

which

> "would be sufficient to ensure . . . a commercially viable . . . industry".

That is the important thing. We should not use taxation just to subsidise things; we should use it to help the market and to produce a commercially viable situation.

The Government have taken some major steps, especially in their first year. We have yet to see them do so in their second term. The problem is that some of their steps forward have been followed up by a lack of co-ordination, or a lack of joined-up government, and certainly by a lack of momentum.

4.19 pm

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): I join in the chorus of congratulation to members of the Environmental Audit Committee on producing an excellent report. It is hard-hitting, but, with one slight qualification, it hits the right targets, and I sincerely hope that its recommendations will be reflected in practical policy outcomes sooner rather than later. I look forward to hearing what my right hon. Friend the Minister has to say about the recommendations.

In a necessarily brief contribution to the debate, I want to highlight three areas in which the need for a more comprehensive use of environmental taxation measures is particularly important, the first of which is waste. I draw the attention of the Minister and the House to early-day motion 851, on sustainable waste strategy, which contains ideas developed by the Socialist Environment and Resources Association and Friends of the Earth. It has the support of some 60 Members across the political parties, and I commend it to Treasury Ministers. I look forward to hearing the Minister's comments on it.

Several hon. Members have referred to the second issue that I want to comment on: the lack of a tax on aviation fuel, which must be addressed and cannot be ignored for ever. Air traffic is a major and fast-growing source of noise and pollution. It is true that improvements in technology have reduced noise, but that has been outstripped by the great increase in the number of flights. If the sector grows unchecked, there will be consequences not only for atmospheric pollution but for noise pollution, affecting those unfortunate enough to live close to increasingly busy airports.

Even 10 years ago, emissions from international aviation accounted for about 3.5 per cent. of man-made global warming. According to the current UK trend, aviation is the fastest-growing area of carbon dioxide emission in this country. As has been pointed out, aviation fuel is exempted from taxation by international agreement. I urge the Government to take international steps—I do not suggest that the problem can be dealt with solely at a UK level—to tackle pollution from aircraft fuel emissions, and the consequences of noise pollution.

I suggested that we should deal with air travel pollution by taxing aviation fuel, but perhaps that is not the right way to control the growth of air travel. The Institute for Public Policy Research, which is held in high regard by the Treasury, made several recommendations on emissions trading in respect of aviation fuel that are worthy of consideration. It also made some interesting recommendations on regional airports and the need to control air travel in parts of the country where growth is particularly heavy. Expanding airports in the south to provide extra capacity for short-haul air travel is surely the wrong strategy. If we invest in high-speed rail, we could easily achieve a real transfer from air travel to rail travel for journeys of 400 miles or less. That is another example of the way in which environmental policy and transport policy are closely interlinked.

David Taylor: Does my hon. Friend anticipate as keenly as I do a more coherent and well-directed environmental framework within which regional airports can operate, once the Government's 30-year aviation strategy is eventually announced? It is important that

[David Taylor]

regional airports do not expand to take the surplus decanted from London airports without an environmental framework in place to protect their local populations.

Mr. Lazarowicz: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point. It is ironic that much of the increase in air traffic in the UK—at regional and international airports—could be met by a transfer to rail, rather than by simply ratcheting up the increase in domestic air travel.

The third and final issue that I want to address is the political hot potato of fuel duty on vehicles, which has given rise to much political opportunism over the years. Although I am in no sense criticising the Environmental Audit Committee, I note with interest that, despite its otherwise bold recommendations, this is one area in which it was somewhat coy. It said that the Government must

"consider all options for containing the growth of road traffic",

without exploring in much detail the available options. I know that the Committee had already discussed the matter, but I hope that it will return to it in due course.

There are important issues associated with tax on vehicle fuel that cannot be ignored or dumped. Road transport produces one quarter of all carbon dioxide emissions in this country. Making motoring more expensive in real terms must be one of the methods used to bring down that pollution. Other methods—persuading motorists to use lower emission fuel, and investing in alternative forms of transport—are also important, but if we are really to tackle the problem we must use all those methods, including a rise in real terms of vehicle fuel taxation.

After all, the likelihood is that the cost of motoring will fall in real terms in the next 10 years, for a number of reasons. In the UK in particular, car prices are likely to fall in real terms. Perversely, if fuel duty stays the same as fuel efficiency increases, motorists will be encouraged to use their cars more, instead of switching to public transport, thus bringing no benefit to atmospheric pollution. Traffic congestion would also increase.

Likely falls in the cost of motoring contrast with the cost of bus and rail travel, which, according to current trends, is at best likely to remain static, and may increase in real terms. Set against the cost of public transport, a reduction in the cost of private motoring will do nothing to encourage people to use public transport, but cause big problems in the delivery of the Government's 10-year transport plan.

I realise that these issues are difficult to discuss in the climate since the fuel protest, but a steady, real-terms increase in fuel duty is necessary to keep the cost of motoring stable, encourage more people off the roads and on to bus and rail, and create a level playing field. Many environmental organisations, such as Friends of the Earth, have made detailed and comprehensive proposals about vehicle fuel taxation, and I urge the Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer to take account of them in the forthcoming Budget proposals.

The Government have made a very good start by using environmental taxation as an important weapon in their armoury to promote environmental sustainability in this country. As we have discovered in today's debate, it is easy in theory to call for environmental taxation measures, but specific measures often give rise to considerable opposition on both sides of the House, because of their possible impact on individual constituencies. I praise the Government for so far resisting calls to draw back from environmental taxation measures, and I urge them to be consistent by taking forward that policy and building on the Environmental Audit Committee's excellent proposals.

4.29 pm

Sue Doughty (Guildford): I will be brief as I know that time is running short. As a member of the Environmental Audit Committee, I pay tribute to our Chairman, who drove us hard but with a lot of kindness to get us where we are today, and to the people who support the Committee, who did a tremendous amount of work.

I was surprised by some of the comments about changing policies on tax because the Select Committee report says that we need to keep reviewing what works and what does not. That is a strong theme throughout the report. The Government started very well in 1997, and we were all pleased to see the work to set up an environmental taxation regime. We look forward to further developments. It would be easy to be rude about the Government, but their heart is in the right place; they have simply slowed down a little too much for comfort.

We need to use the opportunities presented to us in the Treasury approach to see what changes can be made. As other hon. Members have said, the Treasury needs an internal unit for sustainable development to look at not only fiscal development but the outcomes and effects of fiscal work. We need research and promotion of environmental tax policies. We need resource productivity indicators. I saw examples of those in Germany last week; we need them here so that we can find out whether we are on the right track.

We need to monitor the adequacy of environmental appraisal in new policy proposals and the impact of existing environmental tax policies. It is important that we co-ordinate the work of other Departments in which the Treasury is taking a lead, and we must ensure that Departments submit their sustainable development reports. We need to consider exciting changes. We have been talking about biofuels, which are wonderful. Our rural industries are ailing, and biofuels provide opportunities for rural regeneration.

We are concerned about home energy conservation. We do not seem to be doing enough for the fuel-poor, and we should do more to encourage the fuel-rich to use devices such as energy-saving light bulbs. Could we not give tax breaks on such items to encourage people who leave their lights on all day to do so much more cheaply? It is not the fuel-poor but the fuel-rich who burn excess fuel, and we are doing nothing to encourage them to use energy much more efficiently. Home energy conservation measures target the fuel-poor, but the fuel-rich are important if we are to achieve sustainability.

There is much more to be done, and I hope that the Budget includes major increases in landfill and incineration taxes. Many Members on both sides of the House, including the Deputy Prime Minister, who is not present, and me, have deep concerns about sustainable waste management. We look to the Treasury to support us in encouraging councils to take a new approach to achieving sustainable development.

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have been sitting here for 20 minutes enthralled by this truly important subject. As Chairman of the Defence Committee, I point out that we have an equally important subject, terrorism, to discuss. I know that this is not strictly within your terms of reference, but may I, through you, implore my colleagues to take note that, if equity is to be taken into account, this debate should terminate at 4.40 pm, after which my colleagues and I will become a little irritated. I plead with you to invite our colleagues to finish the debate no later than that.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am afraid that the right hon. Gentleman is correct: that is not a point for the Chair.

4.34 pm

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I am sure that everyone will be relieved to hear that I will be as brief as possible.

Whatever has been said about the urgency with which we need to proceed to the next debate, the whole point of the Environmental Audit Committee is to talk about putting environmental issues at the heart of Government. We want not only annual reports to Parliament but Ministers in all Departments considering the detail of the Committee's work. Those proposals have been on our agenda for a long time. We want to make sure that Ministers leave Parliament today ready to implement our recommendations.

We have had a thorough debate, and it falls to me, as vice-Chairman of the Committee, to impress on the Minister the urgency with which he should address the points that have been made. Our Committee is cross-cutting, and in many areas of policy the Government have, thankfully, recognised the importance of cross-cutting reviews and working parties. It is essential that environmental issues are at the heart of what the Treasury does. That means that we will get the right forms of environmental taxation. It falls to the Minister to tell us how the Treasury will implement our recommendations.

Many points have been made. My hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) has introduced a private Member's Bill that, if successful, would mean that the Committee had resources on the scale that is available to the Public Accounts Committee. The proposals of my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) are even ahead of those of the Environmental Audit Committee. The hon. Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) said that the sustainable development reports that are available to the Treasury need to be made fully transparent and they must be available to Parliament through the Select Committee. Will the Minister tell us what he is going to do about that?

We are still mystified about what happened to the pesticides tax. If ever there was a case of wanting to put the polluter pays principle at the heart of policy, the pesticides tax is it. I urge the Minister to look at that again. We have not had a satisfactory response, and we need to keep a close watch on the arrangements whereby the water companies have to pay for the clean-up mechanism.

These issues are at the same time both local and global. I urge the Minister to consider urban development and the nonsensical situation of having zero-rated VAT on greenfield site development. We have heard about the recycling of brownfield sites—what happened to that proposal? *[Interruption.]* Whatever conversation he may be having at the moment, will the Minister, when he winds up the debate, tell the House why the Government have not even carried out the research that would enable us to make proposals to encourage investment in the recycled brownfield sites that are so badly needed? I want to congratulate the Government on what they have done, but will the Minister tell us, even if he cannot provide the information to Parliament this afternoon, how we can deal with state aid rules and how we can find money to match the concessions that have been made on environmental issues?

We heard much about the climate change levy. I say to the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) that the ceramics industry has shown that the levy can work and make a real difference. Today the Government have ratified the Kyoto protocol, and we can now proceed with emissions trading.

Many issues have been raised, and there is no time to deal with them now. The recommendation for a green tax commission has been before the Government for five years. Does the Minister understand that if we are to avoid another conflict over fuel, we need a green tax commission to raise public awareness and to encourage as many people to engage in the environmental debate as took part in the "Pop Idol" debate on television a short time ago?

I hope that we can have more debates on environmental issues because many hon. Members, including those who are not on the Select Committee, have a great interest in the subject. It is now incumbent on Parliament to see how more time can be made available, so that the Government can respond without undue haste and the threat of the clock ticking away, as it is this afternoon.

4.39 pm

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): I congratulate all members of the Environmental Audit Select Committee and, in particular, my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) on their report, which is an important and wide-ranging piece of work. I note that today my hon. Friend is celebrating his birthday. He will regard the opportunity of this debate as the icing on his cake.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) and other hon. Members from all sides pointed out that the debate and the report cut across Whitehall departmental boundaries. My right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) in particular noted that it brings us into debate about European and international policy, not just policy that is the sole responsibility of those of us who legislate at Westminster. Emissions trading, for example, is covered by a British scheme, a European scheme and, at some stage in the not too distant future, a global scheme. We shall have to make all three work and mutually compatible.

I am aware of the point made by the right hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), so I will concentrate on a few key aspects of the report rather than do justice to

[Mr. David Lidington]

its entire contents. It is a trenchant report and I hope that the Minister will take seriously the criticisms made by a Committee that spans the party membership of the House. The Committee talks of a desperate need for greater clarity in the presentation of figures to do with environmental measures; and of the Treasury

> "failing to provide adequate leadership and coordination across central Government."

The report calls for much greater use of specialist expertise, both within the Treasury and Whitehall more generally to track the practical effectiveness of environmental measures, including environmental taxes once they have been legislated for.

I want to focus in particular on the aggregates levy and the climate change levy. As the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) pointed out, the aggregates levy already appears to be having a beneficial effect on the prospects for the use of china clay waste in Cornwall. I have read that the same is true of slate quarry waste from parts of Wales. But it is undoubtedly true also that there are serious worries in other parts of the quarrying and aggregates industry about the impact of the levy on its ability to compete, particularly with overseas rivals. The point was made strongly by the hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) when he drew our attention to the particular difficulties of the Province. I read, for example, that in Scotland a £20 million project to increase trade at Peterhead bay harbour is under threat because the impact of the aggregates levy will be to impose an additional £1.5 million on the cost of that project, putting 500 actual or prospective jobs in that hard-pressed area at risk.

Whatever the arguments about the principle of having an aggregates levy or the shape which the Government have chosen for that tax, there can be no excuse for the botched way in which the Government are seeking to introduce it. As the hon. Member for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor) pointed out in an intervention, we are now about three weeks away from the date when the levy comes into force and firms start having to pay it, yet businesses do not have available the detailed regulations which will govern the implementation of that new tax. Worse still, the Government announced on 28 November last year that they were going to amend the Finance Act 2001 on which the aggregates levy is based.

The Government are proposing no fewer than 10 changes, which presumably will have to be legislated for in this year's Finance Bill. We are unlikely to know its contents before May. I imagine that those changes will be imposed retrospectively. It is hugely unfair on businesses to leave them trying to cope in this state of limbo. The Government, as I hope the Financial Secretary will have the grace to concede, have breached seriously their guidelines for giving businesses a minimum of 12 weeks between the publication of new regulations with which they are expected to comply and the date at which those regulations come into force. I do not believe that there is an adequate excuse for treating businesses in that way.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal pointed out, when one looks at what the climate change levy is likely to deliver in terms of reduced carbon emissions, it is small beer in terms of what the country has signed up to under Kyoto and other international agreements. It will bear heavily on particular sectors of industry. In practice it will transfer money away from manufacturing at a time when manufacturing is in recession and away from small service businesses employing part-time or low-paid workers, to service businesses employing a lot of people. Banks, for example, will probably benefit from the way in which the Government have chosen to introduce the levy.

The Financial Secretary will be familiar with the criticisms made by the Engineering Employers Federation on behalf of its members over many months, but other industrial representatives are making similar criticisms. The British Rubber Manufacturers Association says that the levy will add 1 to 2 per cent. to its production costs. Representatives of firms making industrial gases through to the trade associations for convenience stores and for high street launderettes, each from their different perspective, are making comparable criticisms of the disproportionate impact that the levy is likely to have on them, with them paying far more out than they will receive in national insurance rebates, and of the complexity of the levy for small businesses in particular having to deal with the paperwork that it entails.

The National Farmers Union estimates that the agricultural sector will pay out some £25 million in climate change levy and receive only about £9 million back in national insurance rebates. It is a badly designed tax. As the Secretary General of the United Kingdom Aluminium Federation said last year:

> "If ever a group sat down to design a racehorse and finished designing a camel, it was those Government Departments responsible for the climate change levy."

Part of the problem arises from the fact that the Government have decided to link eligibility to enter a climate change agreement with the integrated pollution prevention and control regulations part A. The problem is that the IPPC is a system designed to capture the biggest polluters, not necessarily the biggest users of energy, so some big users of energy are excluded from the whole system of climate change agreements. The makers of industrial gases account for about 1 per cent. of the UK's entire consumption of electricity, yet they are ineligible to enter a climate change agreement. That sector faces an annual tax bill of perhaps £13 million in the first year and is likely to get rebates of perhaps £500,000 in national insurance contributions. The Cold Storage and Distribution Federation says that its members too are big energy users but are ineligible under the IPPC, yet for these companies up to 10 per cent. of total costs can be in electricity alone.

The climate change levy will distort markets and put some British industries at a competitive disadvantage with their rivals elsewhere. British glassmakers have a climate change agreement, but their German competitors—who account for a quarter of the entire EU glass output—are exempt from such a tax altogether.

The levy will even have some perverse environmental effects. In the steel industry, if a company uses acid to remove oxide scales—known as "pickling" in the industry—it can join a climate change agreement. However, if it uses a better, more environmentally friendly process—mechanical descaling—it falls outwith the IPPC regulations, and so is barred from entering the climate change agreement. Perversely, therefore, it will face a bigger bill from the levy as a result of having introduced a more environmentally friendly industrial practice.

As other hon. Members have said, a complex system of administration has presented small businesses in particular with difficulties. The British Printing Industries Federation pointed out that

> "a printing company will not only be expected to spend a considerable amount of time filling in the necessary forms but will then have to calculate how much of its energy is used in the printing process as opposed to warehousing, offices and dispatch, which are not eligible for the discount."

It concludes that

> "many companies just give up at this point."

There are many other subjects on which I would wish to press the Minister, such as the Curry report's reference to the need for more incentives for biofuels and the Government's timetable for consultation on the landfill tax credit scheme. Why have the Government chosen to reject, according to a written answer on 4 March, the idea of a tax on incinerators?

I want to conclude with another theme that has come through strongly from the Select Committee report: the need for much greater openness on the part of the Government in general and the Treasury in particular about how they research and track the effectiveness of their environmental policies. Paragraph 39 of the report states that

> "there is very little public knowledge of what research the Treasury is in fact carrying out."

It quote Friends of the Earth as saying:

> "We are not always clear about what research they are doing".

In paragraph 41, the Select Committee calls for a detailed environmental appraisal to be published as a supporting document for every future pre-Budget report. In paragraph 52, it again calls on the Government to make sustainable development reports from Departments subject to scrutiny and audit.

I understand the Government's argument that the sustainable development reports are part of the process in Government for considering plans for a Budget document or public spending decisions, and that they should be kept confidential until those decisions are made and announced. However, I cannot for the life of me understand the case for keeping those reports and analyses secret even after the decisions have been made and announced. It will make for better parliamentary scrutiny and, even more important, better policy-making in the interests of our country and its people if the Government are prepared to be more open about the criteria that they use to introduce and design environmental taxes than they have chosen to be hitherto.

4.54 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): This has been an excellent debate. The number and quality of the contributions are a credit to the Committee, its Chairman and the seriousness of the subject matter. I exempt from those opening remarks the contribution of the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) and the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) who—characteristically, I am afraid—is not in his place. Their contributions were hackneyed, ill-informed, partisan and grudging in the extreme about the Government's undoubted achievements in this field. However, this has been a welcome opportunity for the House to consider these matters. I share the view of some right hon. and hon. Members that the House does not spend as much time as it ought in considering environmental matters, so this debate is all the more welcome.

The Government's central economic objectives include the promotion of high and sustainable levels of growth and high levels of employment—growth must be stable and environmentally sustainable. Quality of growth matters, not just quantity. Delivering sustainable growth is a task that falls across Government. It is a core feature of economic policy under this Administration. The Treasury is committed to that goal. How and what we tax sends clear signals about the economic activities that we believe should be encouraged or discouraged, and the values that we wish to entrench in society. Just as work should be encouraged through the tax system, environmental pollution should be discouraged.

To that end, the Government have implemented a range of policies across the tax system to deliver environmental objectives. That is an ongoing and incremental programme. Over time, the Government will aim to reform the tax system and increase incentives to reduce environmental damage. That will shift the burden of tax from "goods" to "bads", encourage innovation in meeting high environmental standards and deliver a more dynamic economy and a cleaner environment to everyone's benefit.

I therefore take exception to the suggestion made by the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) that this Government, and the Chancellor in particular, do not have much interest in environmental matters. He bemoaned the fact that the Chancellor was not present this afternoon. At the same time, he suggested, Janus-like, that somehow the Treasury had no business introducing the climate change levy because it is not an environmental Department. He cannot have it both ways. [HON. MEMBERS: "Janus-like?"] That means looking both ways.

The Chancellor has put environmental considerations at the heart of the Treasury. To suggest otherwise is to try it on; the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal knows better than that. I know that in some quarters he is regarded as a saintly figure in relation to the environment. My view is that his role is more impish than saintly, although I am prepared to accept that he is at least a candidate for beatification. That is to be welcomed, but I am a little sceptical about the evidence. Be that as it may, he ought to give some recognition to what the Government have achieved. I hope that he will take advantage of future opportunities to do that.

Of course, environmental taxation must meet the general tests of good taxation. It must be well designed and meet objectives without undesirable side effects. It must keep deadweight compliance costs to a minimum. Yes, we must be concerned about such costs and ensure that the distributional impact is acceptable. Care must be taken of the implications for international competitiveness, and that is our role in relation to the climate change levy. Far from accepting the strictures of the hon. Member for Aylesbury, I would argue that we have done just that. Where environmental taxes meet the tests, the Government have used them and will continue to do so.

[Mr. Paul Boateng]

The launch of our statement of intent on environmental taxation in 1997 gave a clear indication of what the Government were determined to achieve. We have taken crucial steps forward, but we are the first to accept that there is more to do. However, credit should be given for the steps that we have taken. Indeed, credit has been given by independent, objective observers.

I note the contribution of the hon. Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois). I well remember him in his previous incarnation as the Conservative candidate in Brent, East. He showed all the necessary characteristics of a Conservative candidate in the borough of Brent. He was of brave heart and also demonstrated remarkable fleetness of foot. Both characteristics are necessary for someone who champions the Conservative cause in a borough such as mine. I am delighted that he has found a happy billet in Rayleigh and, no doubt, he has made and will make a distinguished contribution to the Committee on which he serves.

The hon. Gentleman is wrong to suggest that our commitment has lessened, that the pace of reform has slowed or that there is insufficient leadership from the Treasury. Over the next year, we will deliver on a number of important commitments, with the introduction of the new company car tax system and a new levy on aggregate extraction. I know that the Environmental Audit Committee has supported many aspects of these policies as we have demonstrated their efficacy.

Developing new tax systems has taken time. Much consultation with business, environmental groups and others has been required. I am sure that hon. Members will acknowledge and support the principle that consultation should be built into the policy process. Of course, we could move more quickly by implementing policies that had not been developed in that way, but that would be a false economy and, ultimately, would slow the pace of the reform that the overwhelming majority of those who have spoken in the debate want to happen. We have taken time to get our proposals right and to ensure that, as we protect the environment, we avoid adversely affecting either the businesses that drive economic growth or progress against our wider social objectives.

We have also been making new proposals. I should like to draw the House's attention to several recent announcements, mainly because they demonstrate the importance of sustainable development to Government strategy and because they effectively challenge some of the conclusions of the Environmental Audit Committee's report.

The Committee argues that we are not taking our strategy forward, yet we have made important progress on cleaner fuels and the pre-Budget report contains important new proposals on the green technology challenge. The Committee claims that we are not consulting stakeholders on new proposals, yet we are regularly meeting green non-governmental organisations and discussing new ideas with other Departments.

The Committee asserts that there is insufficient appraisal of the impact of Budget measures, yet the pre-Budget report appraisal contained for the first time a link with the sustainability indicators of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Surely, the Committee should welcome that. The Committee opines that the Treasury is showing insufficient leadership, yet we have published guidance on sustainable development, required Departments to produce reports alongside their spending proposals and have agreed testing public service agreements on environmental targets. That must be, and is, good news.

Let us turn to our new proposals. The Government have published the "Powering Future Vehicles" draft strategy, which is an important document considering the road vehicles of the future and the engines and the fuels needed to power them. The Treasury is a co-signatory to the document, which is an expression of our commitment to the environmental challenge. In the pre-Budget report, we confirmed that we will support this strategy with further tax incentives to be considered in the run-up to the Budget.

The pre-Budget Report also confirmed that the Government will seek to introduce further tax incentives to support environmentally friendly investment in three important areas. The green technology challenge envisages enhanced capital allowances for a further range of energy-saving technologies, for cleaner fuels and vehicles and for minimising water use and improving water quality. That is not the sign of a Government who have lost their way or who are pausing to gather breath; it is the sign of a Government who are committed to new initiatives, to the consultative process and to ensuring that stakeholders are with us on the changes that are necessary. We are moving forward.

I want to say a word about stakeholders, because we have made it absolutely clear that they had to be central to the development of new measures. That is why the climate change levy was preceded by Lord Marshall's taskforce on economic instruments and the business use of energy. That is why the aggregates levy was the subject of extensive discussion with the industry, including detailed consideration of the industry's proposals for a voluntary package, which we were not prepared to accept. Furthermore, our treatment of the issue of pesticides should not give anyone cause to believe for one moment that, if the voluntary approach does not work, we will hesitate to legislate. Make no bones about it: we will. We are determined to give the voluntary route a chance, but if it fails, no one should be in any doubt as to the determined action that will be taken.

The non-governmental organisations are with us on this. Chris Hewett, senior research fellow of the Institute for Public Policy Research, said in an article in *New Economy* that

> "there is no doubt that Labour has been the greenest government Britain has ever seen".

Norman Glass, of the National Centre for Social Research, said:

> "What has been particularly striking has been the role of the Treasury in achieving this."

Far be it from Treasury Ministers to blow the trumpet of the Treasury—that would never do—but to suggest that the Treasury has been holding back progress does not give credit where credit is due.

However, it is important that, as we propose new tax measures, we should have that vital dialogue with other relevant Government Departments—the Departments for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and of Trade and Industry. We are still very much in the market for new environmental tax measures, where a good case is made and the conditions set out in the statement of intent are satisfied.

On appraisal, it is absolutely vital that even policies designed and implemented with the support of stakeholders should pass their reality check. That is why we are committed to a full and frank system of appraisal. We are committed to an evaluation of the environmental impact of all Budget measures. That was not a characteristic of the Government of which the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal was a member. They never issued clear guidance to all Departments on how to undertake environmental appraisals. They never ensured that the links between Budget measures and sustainability were made clear. All these measures will have a significant impact on the environment, and will serve an environmental purpose, so I absolutely reject the charge that the pre-Budget report fails to capture comprehensively the environmental impact of Budget measures; it does.

On leadership, no one should doubt our determination. Departments with a public service agreement have been requested to produce a sustainable development report, to be submitted alongside the analysis of resources in spring 2002. We do not discourage the establishment of PSAs with sustainability impacts. Many PSAs have a direct impact on the achievement of our sustainable development targets. Merely adding the words "sustainable development" to PSA targets would not increase that impact. We are determined, however, to ensure that they do make a difference.

It is perfectly true that sustainable development reports will not be published. Why not? Because they are internal documents, intended to clarify Departments' thinking about the implications of their policies. That is what they are for. They are not meant to be glossy brochures where the by-product is yet another reduction in our stock of timber. They are working documents, designed to achieve a specific result, and we are determined that they should do so.

Let us have no illusions about what would happen if the Treasury announced an intention to allow other bodies—the Environmental Audit Committee or the National Audit Office—to audit the Departments' efforts. The hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) knows very well the way of Departments. He has served as a Minister. He knows the disciplines of preparation for a spending round and he knows that the awareness of a forthcoming audit would inhibit the analysis of Departments, because they would have an eye on what would subsequently be made public.

We are serious; we want the output of those Departments in the process to add value to the work. We do not want it to be a box-ticking exercise. Nevertheless, in the aftermath of this process I would be happy to consider with the hon. Gentleman and the Committee how best we can ensure that it is demonstrably a real process, which has made a real difference, and we are only too happy to receive any ideas that he and the Committee have about how best we can do that, subject to the caveats that I have given.

I challenge the notion that the Treasury is not offering sufficient leadership. PSAs, sustainable development guidance, sustainable development reports and the integration of sustainable development into the spending review all suggest otherwise.

I do not accept that the policy is too complex. It is a complex world; the environmental challenge is complicated and our policy response must capture that complexity, not superimpose an artificial simplicity that would be bad for business, society and, ultimately, the environment.

Time marches on, and I am aware that another important subject will be debated this afternoon. However, I want to ensure that right hon. and hon. Members understand the seriousness with which we take this subject. I will seek to address in correspondence a number of the other points that have been made by right hon. and hon. Members. In conclusion, I would argue that we have done a lot, but that there is still more to do. We are grateful to the Committee—and its distinguished Chairman, the hon. Member for Orpington—for the commitment and determination that it displays in its work in challenging the Government to do yet more. I do not believe that the House or future generations, to whom we are ultimately accountable, will find us wanting in that respect.

5.11 pm

Mr. Horam: I waive my right to reply in view of the immense frustration felt by my fellow Select Committee Chairman, the right hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George).

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman.

Question deferred, pursuant to paragraphs (4) and (5) of Standing Order No. 54 (Consideration of estimates &c.) and Order [20 November 2000].

Terrorism

[Relevant documents: Second Report from the Defence Committee, Session 2001-02, on the Threat from Terrorism, HC 348-I, and the Government's response thereto, HC 667; and The Ministry of Defence: Annual Report 2001, Cm 5109.]

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That further resources, not exceeding £2,058,352,000, be authorised for use during the year ending on 31st March 2002, and that a sum, not exceeding £1,636,556,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund for the year ending on 31st March 2002 for expenditure by the Ministry of Defence.—*[Mr. Stringer.]*

5.12 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): I very much welcome this short debate, which will be far shorter than I had expected. When the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) and I decided who would go first, in the time-honoured way of tossing a coin, I had no idea that the Environmental Audit Committee would get almost three hours and the Defence Committee would get an hour and a half.

I am sorry to begin my speech on a sour note, but I certainly want to avoid any other Committee that spends a great deal of time producing a good report being pushed into a time corner because of some ridiculous procedures in the House. This place continues to baffle, bemuse and anger me. We have just listened to an important debate, but the time constraints on us are truly unfair given what we are now discussing, although I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's fine gesture in forgoing his winding-up speech.

I should certainly like to thank the Liaison Committee for agreeing to this snippet of a debate on the threat from terrorism. We in the Defence Committee have produced an excellent report, which deserves to be considered in a much longer debate. The events of 11 September shocked the world, and the effects of those atrocities were felt around the globe and will continue to resonate for years to come.

Al-Qaeda seemed to turn a new page in the long and bloody history of terrorism, presenting us with a new threat that is global in reach and ruthless in scale and horror. Its ambition and technology are unsophisticated, yet sophisticated; it is able to adapt to new circumstances, and I am not certain whether we will be able to adapt to new circumstances as effectively. As we say in our report, there is now a danger that a new benchmark in horror has been set.

In the course of our inquiry, we took evidence from a number of experts in the field; from the MOD, the Secretary of State and officials. We are grateful to them and to our advisers for their contribution. In my remarks, I will address two principal issues. The first is the nature of the new threat. In fact, is it new? How is it qualitatively different from those that we have faced in the past? Secondly, I want to look briefly at what steps we—and particularly the MOD and the Government—might take in response.

I see myself being ever more like Victor Meldrew as I go on, but, before I talk about the issues, I would like to comment on the Government's reply, which was excellent. However, we published our report on 18 December last year and we might have expected a reply by 15 February. In fact, the Defence Committee received the reply on the late afternoon of the day before yesterday. We published it this morning, before our Committee has had a chance to read it properly and, I presume, before hon. Members on both sides of the House would have read it. I ask the Minister, with due deference, to try to persuade his Department to produce responses in the time allotted and certainly to give the Government's response prior to a debate on the report, to allow hon. Members a chance to read it.

The threat is the substance of today's debate. The first question to be posed is how we face this new and qualitatively different threat from a new breed of terrorist. This is the question we ought to answer. The attacks of 11 September were not al-Qaeda's first terrorist outrage. There were several previously; in Saudi Arabia, at US embassies in east Africa and the attack on the USS Cole. Many people forget that there was a dummy run at the World Trade Centre by al-Qaeda in 1993, when a van packed with explosives was detonated in an underground car park—six people were killed and hundreds injured—in an attempt to topple one tower on to the other with massive casualties.

The events of 11 September stand out as unique in their appalling nature. Having examined all the previous attacks, our conclusion was that

"a threshold has been crossed in terms of scale and level of casualties."

We were concerned that it is not only al-Qaeda that is a threat; other terrorist organisations would try to exceed the carnage of 11 September.

The Committee pointed out the dangers from weapons of mass destruction, and we looked into this in detail. The Government's response was that there was a risk of such attacks on the UK, but that it "remains low". That may be so. It may be a low risk, but if there were an attack using weapons of mass destruction, God forbid, the consequences could be catastrophic. One only has to imagine what would happen if an aeroplane were crashed into Sellafield, or if a biological agent were released on the tube, or if a chemical tanker were blown up in an urban centre. The Committee has received evidence and information on each of those scenarios and others, and they were, frankly, terrifying.

The Committee and the Government need to think seriously about how we plan against such threats, which are deemed to be "low risk" but which, if they did occur, would have overwhelming and potentially catastrophic consequences. Such threats are the hallmark of asymmetric warfare. We need to prepare much better. To put it simply, in the past we have graded threats by combining an assessment of their potential severity with an assessment of their likelihood. We would expect to take action where a threat scored highly under each assessment.

Now, with new asymmetric threats—especially where they involve unconventional weapons such as chemical, biological or radiological weapons—they may not score highly in terms of likelihood, but that must not be used as an excuse for inaction.

The second theme is countering the threat. How can we do it? The threat seems to be amorphous and ill-defined and, even after the recent events in Afghanistan, we must not underestimate the continuing capabilities of those who would choose to attack us. The threat comes not just from al-Qaeda, which has a presence in 60 countries, but from other militant Islamic groups and states that sponsor terrorism. In addition, there may be other threats of which we are unaware. I do not want to be over-alarmist, but we have to think long and hard—indeed, short and hard—about the problem. The Americans do not underestimate the threat. It established an Office of Homeland Security and, as we all know, increased its defence budget by $48 billion for 2003, which puts the figures in our spring supplementary estimates into perspective.

The Government are working on a new chapter to the strategic defence review and will publish their findings, I presume in July or thereabouts. We hope that resources will match any new threats that emerge. The Select Committee is closely monitoring that and will report on it.

The Committee is examining the defence and security of the United Kingdom, which goes beyond its traditional scope. It is important to bring together the work of the Ministry of Defence, the Treasury, the Cabinet Office, the intelligence services, the private sector and the governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. All those must be calibrated to produce an efficient response.

No doubt my colleagues will want to give their impressions of our major inquiry so far. I am not at liberty to disclose the details of the work that we have done on the substantive issues, but there is an urgency to it.

Resources are not an issue in the United States in its war against terrorism. We asked a senior official about that, who replied, with a shrug of his shoulders, "We're a rich country." We are not a poor country, and money must be spent. The protection of our citizens must be one of the first priorities—if not the first priority—of any Government. The spring supplementary estimates show that the Government have not shirked their responsibilities. Our report on the threat of terrorism demonstrates that the commitment must not be short term. That report, which we published in December, said:

> "Whatever the outcome of the present action in Afghanistan or the fate of Osama Bin Laden and al Qaeda, we cannot expect to neutralize the new threats easily or quickly. The campaign against terrorism has been described as three-pronged in that it includes military, diplomatic and humanitarian initiatives. This three-pronged campaign must be pursued both legitimately and relentlessly. We must not lose our sense of the urgency and importance of this task in the months ahead. We must not hesitate to take the necessary steps to protect the UK and our interests overseas."

5.22 pm

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in the debate. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) and his Committee colleagues on the excellent contribution that their report of last year makes to our deliberations. I shall endeavour to follow his lead by being brief so that others can speak.

It is clear from the context of the atrocious terrorist outrage on 11 September that we could vastly increase our defence expenditure on military forces and still not protect ourselves from similar terrorist attacks. It is notable that that attack took place in a country that spends a greater proportion of its gross national product on the military than any other. It is clear that in the United States and the United Kingdom alone there are thousands of high-profile targets, including public buildings, military establishments and individuals, all of which could be the target of a terrorist attack. It would be impossible to provide an increase in military presence that would afford them all protection, even if we could find the resources.

The Committee's report puts the problems in context. It asks how we can tackle the causes of terrorism, disrupt terrorist networks in the short term and ensure that they cannot carry on their work, and, in particular, avoid running the risk of a catastrophic terrorist event as highlighted in the report. I should like to draw out a couple of points from the Select Committee report and raise a number of issues with the Minister on those specific subjects.

Following 11 September, how is the Ministry of Defence working with other parts of government with security responsibilities, particularly MI5, MI6 and GCHQ, to identify terrorist threats worldwide and disrupt such activities? I know that that is not the Minister's direct responsibility but we understand from the newspapers that there has been an increase in their resourcing since 11 September, and it would be interesting to know how the MOD is working with those agencies to disrupt terrorist networks. If those agencies are to be increasingly important in dealing with the threat of terrorism, there should be more visibility and more accountability to this place for their expenditure.

The right hon. Member for Walsall, South mentioned the catastrophic threats identified in the Select Committee report. Although it would be impossible to defend ourselves against the wealth of risks to our country by increasing protection of all our key sites, it is clear that investment in protection of the UK and our allies from nuclear, biological and chemical attacks is immensely important. We would be grateful to hear from the Government today what action they are taking to remove from circulation the stockpiles of such weapons around the world and reduce the risk that terrorists might use such deadly weapons against civilian and military populations, with catastrophic effects.

On those specific threats, the Committee report considers how the MOD integrates with the civil contingency agencies that have a prime role in leading our response to certain events. It is understandable, as the Committee said, that civil agencies should lead the response to flooding, foot and mouth and riots, for example, but, importantly, it noted that it might be appropriate for the MOD to play a clearer role in responding to the more serious threats—nuclear, chemical and biological—that we might face from terrorist organisations.

It would be inappropriate to end without saying something about Iraq, which is very much on the agenda at the moment and which the US Administration have portrayed as part of their continuing battle against the threat of international terrorism. I shall not repeat, particularly in this short debate, the comments that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) made yesterday in the Westminster Hall debate that attracted considerable public and press attention. Suffice it to say that he laid down clearly and precisely our party's concern about the noises coming out of the US Administration.

The Government must be well aware of the risks of mounting a serious attack on Iraq, especially the risk to the coalition against terrorism. Although I understand why they are keen to continue the close alliance with the United

[Mr. David Laws]

States, which has existed not just since 11 September but, fortunately, over many decades, they have a responsibility to use their special position to convey to the US Administration some of the concerns expressed in this place, and no doubt among members of the Government as well as on the Government Benches. In that way, we may avoid the worst excesses that could be possible if some of those in the US Administration get their way.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I endorse what the hon. Gentleman said about the speech of the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell). It should be read. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there are great qualms in the United States itself about the proposed course of action?

Mr. Laws: The Father of the House is right to point out that there is concern in the United States as well as in Parliament. Let us hope that the time available before serious military activity is contemplated is sufficient to enable wise heads to prevail. The Government have an important part to play in that respect.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that Saddam Hussein has for some years defied the requirements of the international community that he open his territory for inspection, and that the reason for those requirements is the belief that he is trying to acquire weapons of mass destruction? Is he saying that it is Liberal Democrat policy that if adequate evidence emerges that Saddam Hussein is acquiring weapons of mass destruction, we should do nothing to stop it?

Mr. Laws: On terrorism, the hon. Gentleman is well aware that no information available so far links Iraq to the 11 September events. My party takes extremely seriously the prospects of all countries that do not currently have nuclear weapons acquiring them, and we hope that the current situation can be used to give us the leverage necessary to get inspectors back into Iraq, so that we can find out whether such weapons are being accumulated. That would be our preference over short-term measures that use military action without first going down those paths.

Because of the short time available, I shall not speak much longer, but let me say that although it would be naive in the extreme to pretend that the short-term threat from terrorism can be dealt with through longer-term measures to deal with poverty and injustice throughout the world, or that such measures would have any great effect in the short term, I hope that in the spirit of that appalling and overused phrase "joined-up government" the Foreign Office, the Ministry of Defence and the Department for International Development will work far more closely together to deal with the sources of discontent that lie in poverty and injustice. That, in the longer term, offers us the hope of dealing with international terrorism at source.

Although the Government are to be praised for the progress made since their election in 1997 to put overseas development assistance back on the political agenda, I ask the Minister, even though it is not his responsibility, to pay heed to the large number of Members of Parliament who now want the Government to set a time scale on the delivery of the United Nations target of 0.7 per cent. of gross national product going to overseas aid. I hope that that and some of the other measures in the Select Committee report will enable us to tackle the causes of international terrorism, and remove and destroy the seeds of future terrorism.

5.32 pm

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh): The hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) will understand why I do not take time to respond to his remarks.

I welcome this opportunity to discuss how we deploy our resources in the light of the threat of international terrorism. Our requirements of our armed forces since the end of the cold war have changed immeasurably. On taking office, the Government launched the strategic defence review, the conclusions of which were published in 1998. It made it clear that the Government wanted this country to be a force for good in the world.

The Government are to be congratulated on recognising the need for a strategic overhaul of our defence capabilities to ensure that we could meet the challenges of the new environment following the end of the cold war. However, no one could have predicted our armed forces becoming involved in the many and diverse actions in which they have become involved, including those in East Timor, Sierra Leone and Kosovo. It is a long time since our armed forces conducted so many concurrent activities abroad.

The events of 11 September mean that we need to refocus our military policies and capabilities. The Government are right to draw up what they call "The Strategic Defence Review: A New Chapter". I welcome the fact that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has launched a public discussion paper to influence the work and the final conclusions.

The world changed on 11 September 2001. The attacks raise important issues, such as weapons of mass destruction, a subject touched on by the Chairman of the Defence Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) I pay tribute to the work done by him and his Committee. There is no doubt in my mind that if the terrorists responsible for those atrocities had had the capability to use weapons of mass destruction, they would have done so. I have no doubt that they will do so if they ever acquire the materials and the skills necessary. We must urgently address the threat of weapons of mass destruction.

As I have said before, it is no secret that the international measures to contain the development of weapons of mass destruction leave a lot to be desired. Indeed, the Select Committee report identifies some of the weaknesses in that regard. We must step up our efforts to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction. We do not want to regret not having done so.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister and the Ministry of Defence on the discussion paper, which is open for public responses until the end of next week, and the proposed new chapter.

There are additional or enhanced roles for our reserve forces, both in home defence and security and in overseas operations, but because of the pressure of time, I shall not set out the arguments for them.

Equally briefly, I welcome the announcement—there is one press report to this effect, which I trust is accurate—that the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, DERA, will not be floated on the stock market. I hope that the Government will put the privatisation option behind them and that we can move forward. We can discuss that later, on the basis of defence research being carried out in the public sector.

Angus Robertson (Moray): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the Government should also reconsider the prospective privatisation of the defence fire service?

Dr. Strang: I certainly do.

In the light of 11 September, we must take another look at the resources that we devote to our defence. What military resources are we talking about? I shall consider intelligence. Signal and human intelligence will play a crucial role in our fight against terrorism. Unlike two armies lining up against each other, a terrorist threat is not in the public domain. The Government are providing additional money for intelligence.

Co-operation with other countries, especially the United States, will be extremely important, but because of our colonial past some European countries have a particular relationship with communities and countries that are relevant to the fight against terrorism. The United Kingdom and France in particular come to mind. As a result, there are circumstances in which we may be in a better position than the US to get intelligence.

Once we have acquired and analysed the intelligence, we must respond. If military action is required, we need the most modern equipment practical and the highest calibre personnel available, with all the back-up that they require.

I understand that the finances announced alongside the strategic defence review were tight, but adequate and that defence chiefs and Ministers thought that they could just get by, but no more, on the amounts allocated. That is appropriate: the Labour Government had other key priorities and there was no scope for giving defence more than was justified. I think that it was Aneurin Bevan, the architect of the national health service and the Minister for Health in the 1945 Labour Government who said that government was the language of priorities.

Since the publication of the strategic defence review, our armed forces have had to do far more than we could ever have expected, and to their credit, they have done it. We must adequately fund our military to enable them to do what is required of them. To put it starkly, if we do not, our service men and women will be killed and we will lose.

When the strategic defence review was published, the judgment was that Britain no longer faced a significant direct external threat to its security. That assessment may no longer hold. With the new challenges before us, we must give our military increased resources to enable them to do what we ask of them, or change what we ask. It is not fair on our service people to do otherwise.

We need more money to fund our service people and ongoing associated costs, but a range of vital procurement programmes must also be adequately resourced. We must ensure that they are not delayed for financial reasons. That would affect not only our capability in terms of military hardware, but the morale of our service people.

We all understand why the defence budget has gone down as much as it has—by 29 per cent. in real terms since 1989-90. There was a consensus among all parties that the end of the cold war justified a peace dividend. That is another way of saying that we have cut our armed forces significantly under both parties.

Historically, we are not an isolationist country. Most hon. Members supported the Government's aim of being a force for good and their commitment to deploying military resources to that end. We are rightly proud of the achievements of our armed forces, including, for example, the ongoing operation in Sierra Leone. We must now recognise that if we are serious about rising to the challenge of 11 September, we must provide significant additional resources. As the Select Committee said:

> "If we are to add a new chapter to the SDR, we must add the money to pay for it."

5.40 pm

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): I applaud the report of the Select Committee on Defence and join the right hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) in criticising the way in which this debate has been truncated. It is perhaps still open to the Leader of the House to come to the Chamber and table a business motion restoring to the debate the three hours that had been envisaged for it.

Like other hon. Members who have spoken, I want to refer in particular to the implications here in the home base of the United Kingdom of the threat from terrorists. Before dealing with the United Kingdom, however, I should like to highlight a particular overseas deployment from which there are some valuable lessons to be learned. I refer to that which has occurred since 11 September to Tampa, Florida, where United States Central Command—CENTCOM—and United States Special Operations Command—SOCOM—are located. I visited Tampa last month as a member of the Defence Committee of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. There is little doubt that the success that British and American forces have had in working together co-operatively—they have done so with a remarkable degree of success on the ground in Afghanistan—was materially aided by the rapid and effective tri-service deployment to CENTCOM after 11 September.

There is a very valuable lesson to be learned from what happened. The ambit around the world of US Central Command's territorial command by no means includes all countries that might be future sources of al-Qaeda terrorist activity. I hope that the Ministry of Defence is now preparing for the possibility of making similar deployments should they become necessary at any time to US Pacific Command, which has responsibility for most of the far east and part of the Indian subcontinent, and also to US European Command, which is responsible for a number of the African states. There are very valuable lessons to be learned from the success of the deployment to US Central Command.

The Ministry of Defence made an astute judgment in choosing to position as the senior British officer in CENTCOM a three-star general who has a strong background in special forces operations and ranks equally to the American deputy commander of CENTCOM—the deputy to General Tommy Franks. That, too, was a very good judgment by the Ministry of Defence.

[Sir John Stanley]

There is no doubt that the war against terrorism will be very protracted. I suspect that it will continue for years rather than months and involve a considerable number of countries. We know that the United States has already identified the countries that are dubbed "the axis of terror", but perhaps even more significant is the action that it has taken—rightly, in my view—to identify friendly Governments who face terrorist threats inside their own countries, as well as seeking to reinforce those Governments' ability to deal with such threats.

I was struck by a report in Tuesday's *Evening Standard*, which said:

> "Money, arms and US advisers are earmarked for Indonesia, Uzbekistan, Nepal, Jordan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgystan".

As chairman of the Nepal all-party group, I welcome the inclusion of Nepal in the list. That young, genuinely free multiparty democracy faces a serious threat from Maoist terrorists. As hon. Members know, in the past two or three weeks, the worst murderous Maoist attack has occurred in western Nepal. In it, 129 people were killed, including 76 police officers and 48 members of the Royal Nepalese armed forces.

It is perhaps a pity that the Nepalese look to the United States for support in their war against terrorism, given our long and close military connection with Nepal and the enormous sacrifices that Gurkha soldiers made in two world wars and most recently in the Balkans. It is therefore disappointing that the British armed forces are perhaps too stretched to give material help to Nepal in its hour of need. I hope that the Ministry of Defence will reflect on that.

Mr. Dalyell: As vice-chairman of the Nepal group, I endorse the right hon. Gentleman's comments.

Sir John Stanley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman and vice-chairman of the group.

Let us consider the United Kingdom. The Government made two significant statements in the immediate aftermath of 11 September. The right hon. Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh (Dr. Strang) echoed one of them. The first was the Prime Minister's statement on 14 September. When he spoke of the al-Qaeda terrorists, he said:

> "We know, that they would, if they could, go further and use chemical, biological, or even nuclear weapons of mass destruction."—[*Official Report*, 14 September 2001; Vol. 372, c. 606.]

The second statement was contained in the paper, "Responsibility for the Terrorist Atrocities in the United States, 11 September 2001", which the Government placed in the Library on 4 October. It states:

> "The clear conclusions reached by the government are: . . . the United Kingdom, and United Kingdom nationals are potential targets".

I do not believe that there is ground for revising either statement in the light of subsequent events in Afghanistan. Indeed, we would be seriously deluded if we believed that the overthrow of the Taliban regime has diminished the threat from al-Qaeda to the United Kingdom, the United States and possibly other countries. That organisation remains intact in many countries; as we have witnessed in recent days, it is far from finished even in Afghanistan. We do not know whether Osama bin Laden is still alive and operating, but if he is not, there is little doubt that he will have a successor.

The threat remains, and we must take it seriously. I am worried about whether we are doing that. The United States takes it extremely seriously; the Secretary of Health and Human Services has announced that his Department will procure sufficient smallpox vaccine to immunise the entire American population in the event of a smallpox attack. When I was in the United States at the end of last year, coast-to-coast television broadcast a full-scale exercise in one state, showing the civil and the military emergency services—the National Guard—responding to an anthrax attack.

In this country, so far as I am aware, we have had no statement whatever from the Secretary of State for Health on the availability of smallpox vaccine, or any others. To the best of my knowledge, no exercises involving military and civilian personnel have taken place in any part of the United Kingdom—on the ground, as opposed to paper exercises in offices—to ascertain how we would respond for real in dealing with an attack on this country using weapons of mass destruction.

I appreciate that the Ministry of Defence is not in the lead on civil contingency planning, but there is one question that has to be asked of the Ministry, and answered by it. It is simply this: in the event of an attack on the United Kingdom using weapons of mass destruction—particularly chemical or biological weapons—and a request being made by the civil power for military assistance from the Ministry of Defence, probably in hour one of day one of such an attack, will the Ministry be able to give an adequate response to that call for assistance? That is the key question, and one which, I trust, lies in the in-tray of the Secretary of State for Defence. I have a strong feeling that, if that question were asked today in such circumstances, the answer would be, "We are wholly inadequately resourced to supply the degree of military assistance that would be required."

The threat—and the effect of the threat—is widely known and has been well publicised by the Ministry. In 1999, the Ministry published a document entitled "Defending against the threat from biological and chemical weapons", which has lain largely uncommented on and unreported in the Library of the House of Commons. To my knowledge, no previous Government had ever published such a document, and I believe that the Conservatives would have done well to publish one when we were in government.

Much of this debate is conducted in general terms, and I can see why, because I understand the public's sensitivities. Occasionally, however, it is necessary to get into specifics, and I want to give just one illustration from the Ministry of Defence's document. It describes the various chemical and biological agents that might be used, and gives details of the effects. I shall refer to one, the biological agent of plague, which I imagine we all remember distantly from our history lessons at school. The document describes the effects of plague thus:

> "Following 2-3 days of incubation, fever, coma and respiratory failure occur, leading to death in 48 hours."

That, by and large, would be the impact of a biological weapon attack on any population centre.

In those circumstances, there will be two absolute imperatives. The first will be to bring such medical help as can be made available to those who have been caught in the infected area and who have the infection. The second imperative will be to try to contain movement so as to prevent the infection being spread more widely—conceivably, right across the country. That will be the critical role for the Ministry of Defence. I have to ask the Minister whether anyone believes that the resources of the police will be sufficient on their own to prevent the movement of large numbers of very frightened people. That is a real question that the Ministry of Defence has to face and to answer, because that will be the nature of the military assistance that will be required.

I want to put three proposals to the Minister. First, I hope that the Government will now update and revise this public document. It needs revision post 11 September, and it needs addition in the key area for the Ministry of Defence to which I have referred.

Remarkably, when the document reaches the section that is euphemistically headed "Managing the Consequences"—the consequences of a chemical or biological weapon attack on this country—the role of the MOD is described in just six words:

> "The Armed Forces assist as required."

That is a wholly unsatisfactory and insufficient response to the situation. It begs fundamental questions about that response. How many members of our armed forces will be required and on what time scale—I suggest that the answer to that is instantly—which units and which formation will those forces come from, how sufficiently will they be trained and how adequately will that training be exercised? Those are among the key questions, which I hope the Defence Committee will pursue on behalf of the House, getting access to whatever classified information is required.

Mr. Eric Joyce (Falkirk, West): With respect to the right hon. Gentleman, he is making a long speech, and quite a lot of Members want to speak.

Sir John Stanley: I shall conclude my remarks.

The second proposal that I want to put to the Minister is that the MOD's contingency planning in this area should be updated and implemented fully. Thirdly, contrary to what is said in the Government's response to the Defence Committee's report, I believe that it is imperative that they reverse the serious reduction in the Territorial Army that has taken place since they came to power.

5.57 pm

Mr. David Crausby (Bolton, North-East): The decent people of the world were horrified by the events of 11 September, not because they were in sympathy with the United States Government, but because they felt for the American people. The atrocity carried out on that shameful day involved the murder of members of the general public. We must remember that it was an act aimed not at the Government or the military, but at everyday people from countries throughout the world who were unlucky enough to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. They were firefighters, office staff, cleaners, maintenance people, tourists and even small children sat on their parent's knee.

I am not convinced that the world changed completely on 11 September, because the threat from terrorism had been growing for decades. The asymmetric threat had developed alongside the possibility of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons becoming increasingly available to unscrupulous and even unhinged political and religious extremists. What changed on that day was that al-Qaeda, clearly supported by the Taliban regime, showed its readiness to commit such an act without fear of the consequences. Until then it was assumed that no one would be mad enough to detonate a nuclear weapon in one of our cities because of the consequences for their own cities.

What was also very different was that there were no negotiable demands: it was an act based in hatred and evil. When faced with such anger, the Americans had little choice but to respond with all their considerable might. What also changed was that the Americans felt justified in their determination to take conclusive action, not just in revenge but to defend themselves and to ensure that there would be no repeat of the events in New York, Washington and Pittsburgh.

The long-term reality of the effectiveness of defence may, of course, be different. There can never be complete and absolute protection for our homeland from that type of attack. When suicide extremists are involved, and have the support of one or more state regimes, defence becomes an entirely different and much more dangerous business. The Americans are entitled to do their best to protect themselves at home. That is their duty, just as it is ours to increase security in an increasingly pluralist world.

However, it cannot be possible to cover every eventuality. The nature of our enemies' tactics will be to attack what we do not cover. What happened last September in America shows that they will have no scruples about who they kill, or where or how they do it.

The harsh and unpleasant truth is that if we do not deal with the source of the infection, we are doomed to failure. That is why an attack on Afghanistan after a period of negotiation with the Taliban was fully justified. The Americans considered their action, and took their time. They were right to do what they had to do, and the British Government were right to support them.

The Americans recently increased their defence budget by $48 billion. That is nearly one and a half times the total of our defence budget, and it puts in perspective the increases proposed in the estimates today. Clearly, we must provide our forces with the resources that they need.

It gives me no pleasure to speak in favour of war, but we cannot and must not allow individuals and organisations freely to prepare for the destruction of our entire way of life. It is critical that we do what is necessary as peacefully and responsibly as possible.

Patrick Mercer (Newark): Is the hon. Gentleman speaking in favour of war, or in favour of a wholly rational defence?

Mr. Crausby: I hesitate to speak in favour of war, but I accept that war is the last resort in defence. I therefore agree with the implication in the hon. Gentleman's question.

However, we must involve the rest of the democratic world in what needs to be achieved. We have seen what has happened in the middle east when a policy that is based exclusively on an attempt to crush the opposition is employed. Questions of poverty, freedom and equality will inevitably play a part in the resolution of the world's differences, as will the way in which we deal with the trade in drugs.

[Mr. Crausby]

Terrorism feeds on poverty, and is very often funded by the illegal drugs trade. Our efforts to eradicate world poverty and end the trade in heroin, for example, must be at the forefront of what we do. However, in the end, we must deter those who consider action against our people, and we must be prepared to take pre-emptive strikes against those who threaten us. To achieve that, the roles of the Royal Marines, the Parachute Regiment and special forces should be enhanced in any future strategic defence review.

The threat facing us is entirely different from the threat posed during the cold war. Attacks on our nation will no longer come across the English channel. We need to plan the location and nature of our defences with that in mind.

One of the most important challenges involves the development of ballistic missiles by hostile regimes.

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): The hon. Gentleman mentioned the possibility of exercising our right to mounting a pre-emptive strike. Before we put people in harm's way, is he satisfied that the intelligence agencies of this country and our allies are co-ordinating their approach? Are they prepared to share all available information at the appropriate time to safeguard the deployment of our troops?

Mr. Crausby: I think it is naive to expect that the intelligence services would share information with everyone concerned, but I am happy enough that the country has a sufficiently good relationship with America for that to be possible. Whether it would extend to other nations is for them to deal with.

The problem of missiles must be tackled before it is too late, and we witness, for example, the destruction of a European city. If that happened to London or Manchester, many of our constituents would demand the most vicious revenge. They would expect the most extreme action to be taken against the perpetrators. The Government have a serious responsibility to prevent such a scenario, by whatever means, and they are entirely justified in taking whatever action is needed in the cause of sustainable peace and security.

6.6 pm

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent): I am advised by the Registrar that I should start by drawing attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Interests. I am a member of the Regular Army Reserve of Officers, and of the regimental council of my old regiment.

I want to register, also, my dissatisfaction at the fact that such an important debate has been confined to such a short period at the end of the parliamentary day—I think that hon. Members on both sides of the House agree about that. I have sat here for nearly eight hours, and after sitting through two debates I have been asked to limit my speech to five minutes. I will certainly do that so that others can speak, but it is not very satisfactory when such an important matter is being discussed.

It is appropriate to pay tribute to the Chairman and members of the Select Committee for their excellent report, and—as in any debate of this nature—to our excellent armed forces, both those deployed in the fight against terrorism and those performing other tasks throughout the world. They are the best possible advertisement for the United Kingdom, and they deserve our thanks, support and admiration.

I think that it is fair to pay tribute to the Government, both for their decision to deploy resources in the war against terrorism and for the success of what has been done so far. Much has been achieved, although, as I am sure Ministers will be the first to admit, a great deal remains to be done.

I had intended to mention some of the things that I thought had worked well in the war against terrorism, and some that had worked less well, but because of the time constraints I will simply identify a few equipment issues that I think the Ministry should address. It is probably unsurprising that these gaps have appeared, given the new and immediate nature of the threat we now face.

The first equipment issue relates to ISTAR—intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance. It is crucial, for two reasons—the need to target terrorists accurately, and the need to avoid collateral damage and civilian casualties. Much has been achieved since the strategic defence review, but much more needs to be done if Europe and the United Kingdom are to match United States capabilities. Those who want a practical example need only consider the success of the United States Predator unmanned spy plane, and the technology gap between that and our equivalent, the Phoenix.

Strategic air transport also gives cause for concern. The United Kingdom's long-range heavy-transport aircraft are currently leased from the United States, while the Airbus 400M is bogged down in political difficulties. Those difficulties must be resolved.

Our lack of a deep-strike capability is also important. It is important not just to the expeditionary warfare in which we are currently engaged, but to the sustaining of humanitarian operations away from the UK base. It is, in fact, a large, secure floating base for our troops. I welcome the decision to order two new aircraft carriers—60,000 tonnes rather than 20,000—but we must recognise that there is a gap in our order of battle until they arrive.

Following 11 September, it is also important that we address the deeply worrying lack of an integrated, land-based air defence system in the UK homeland. Without such a system, our country has no means of enforcing air exclusion zones around key points such as nuclear power stations, the City of London and transport hubs. In the short term, we clearly need to redeploy fighter aircraft to protect those points, but the issue must still be addressed.

The other lesson that immediately emerges from 11 September is the need to broaden the scope of defence policy. If the war against terrorism is to be successfully prosecuted, military, humanitarian, political, diplomatic, financial and legal resources must be provided. Afghanistan is a particularly good example. If we had deployed timely economic aid after the Soviet invasion, there is a good chance that the current conflict would have been prevented.

What are the lessons for the future? We must increase defence expenditure. The question is one of credibility. The Government tell us that the threat is very real, and I wholly believe them. If the UK is to meet that threat in concert with the United States, more money must be spent. The United States has recognised that fact—its defence spending has risen by 14 per cent. There are also signs that it may turn inwards, which would increase the burden on Europe. The European rapid reaction force has identified 150 basic defence capabilities, 40 of which—a considerable number—will remain outstanding by the end of next year. It is now a matter of record that our Prime Minister has ambitions for Africa. They will inevitably cost money, and troops will be required to carry them out. We must be honest: meeting this threat—if we are serious about it—will simply cost us more money.

It is also important to tackle overstretch. We in this House argue about the exact figures, but we agree that overstretch exists. It is vital that sufficient numbers of troops be ready for immediate deployment, and that they have time to train and to recover. That can be achieved in two ways: through recruitment and retention—my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) has much to say on that, and I urge the Government to listen—and through reducing our commitments elsewhere. A role clearly exists for other European countries in that regard, particularly in the Balkans.

It is vital to reorganise the Territorial Army to meet the extra commitment of homeland defence. I shall not go into the details, but the TA is ideally suited to the task, and we should look to the example of the national guard in the United States.

It is also crucial to remember the importance of conventional warfare. The Gulf is a good example of how such warfare can arise rapidly, particularly in this era. Conventional warfare is also the best preparation for our troops taking part in expeditionary warfare. Expeditionary warfare situations are broadly similar to those associated with conventional warfare, and conventional equipment—particularly tanks and helicopters—can also be used in the war against terrorism.

As I have said in previous such debates, it is easy to start a war but difficult to bring it to a successful conclusion. The Government and our armed forces have made a good start in tackling the threat of terrorism, but many more challenges lie ahead. We in the United Kingdom are lucky to have the finest armed forces in the world. It is surely incumbent on us as politicians to ensure that they are deployed as effectively as possible to meet this new threat.

6.13 pm

Jim Knight (South Dorset): Given the time, I shall restrict my comments to the resourcing of the armed forces. There is no doubt that, in defence as much as anywhere else, one gets what one pays for. The events of 11 September had an enormous impact, and as others have said, the reverberations will be felt long into the future. On that day, the strategic defence review's omission to treat seriously the asymmetric threat was exposed as a fundamental flaw, and I support the Government in committing to a new chapter for the SDR. I would strongly argue, however, that a new chapter requires a new tranche of money.

In September, the Prime Minister spoke of a three-pronged approach—humanitarian, diplomatic and military, as the Chairman of the Select Committee reminded us—in response to the terrorist attacks on the United States. It is highly appropriate to continue that approach. Our diplomatic efforts are assisted by the stick of the military and the carrot of development assistance. Indeed, the ability of our armed forces in peacekeeping and peacemaking is unrivalled in the world. They are currently deployed in 80 different countries, including in some substantial peacekeeping roles. That is certainly placing a considerable strain on them and it is not sustainable indefinitely.

I am a strong advocate of the United Kingdom fulfilling its international responsibilities to the full. I support the Prime Minister's lead, but if it is to continue, it needs more resources. One use of such resources—apart from expanding capability, which I shall come to briefly at the end—would be an expansion of the reserve forces, as others have mentioned, not to recreate the home guard, but to give some slack to the armed forces and to enable them to perform some specific tasks which more knowledgeable people than I would want to specify. I am particularly attracted to giving the Territorial Army, with its military command and control skills, the expertise and equipment to support the civil power in dealing with nuclear, biological and chemical attack threats in the United Kingdom homeland.

We also need more resources to increase capability. We cannot hope to catch up with the United States' capability and in many ways it would not be appropriate, but there is a real question over the future development of NATO. It would appear that the experience of action in Kosovo has led the United States to become increasingly wary of joint action. The invoking of article 5 was significant, but it was not followed by significant NATO action in Afghanistan.

There is no time now to rehearse the arguments around the expansion of NATO or the European security and defence policy, but, clearly, efforts towards capability improvement by the NATO capability conference and the European Union's Helsinki goals have to succeed. We do not want or need a European army to rival the United States, but we need more burden sharing and more coalition action, particularly in Europe's backyard. It would also help to alleviate the strain on UK armed forces if our European allies were sharing our burden. In turn, if we improve our contribution in NATO, I would hope that we could gain more leverage in persuading the United States to increase its development aid and peacekeeping commitment and capability. Recently, when in the United States with the Committee, I consistently raised the point with politicians and others that they should increase their role in terms of international development. I am afraid that I did not come away desperately reassured.

In summary, there is no greater duty on Government than to ensure the defence of their citizens. In the post-11 September world, it is a much more uncertain environment in terms of homeland and international security. Therefore, we need more resources for our military: for an expansion of the reserves, for a better co-ordinated capability and for the use of the military in harmony with our diplomatic and humanitarian efforts.

6.18 pm

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): I am delighted that we are having the opportunity of this debate, but we are all disappointed that it has been cut short. With the modernisation of the House, we should have a Standing Order that allows the House to suspend its Standing Orders to extend a debate for an hour on a night like this, to allow hon. Members to speak.

[Mr. Mike Hancock]

The inability of the managers here to contemplate what would happen is mind-boggling incompetence of the worst order. I am delighted to speak and I will respect the time.

Many hon. Members have spoken about the events of 11 September and how things have changed and will possibly never be the same again. The real change was that for the first time America's homeland was hit and Americans in real horror faced what many countries have been facing for decades. It brought to the attention of the American people the fact that nowhere was safe from people who will make a determined effort and will respect no one and nothing, least of all their own lives, but will get the greatest satisfaction only from killing as many people as possible in the most horrific circumstances.

The American response was predictable and natural for most human beings. They had to respond as they did and they have committed us all to a war on terrorism. It has to be a worldwide war on terrorism, not just against those who threaten the American homeland. Terrorists are active right across the world. This war will never end until we respect the democratic and human rights of human beings everywhere. Nations and individuals have a right to play a part in that.

Many members of the Select Committee on Defence have listened with great interest over the past seven months to what will be done and what has already been done. In all honesty, some of us are disappointed that more has not been achieved in those seven months. The right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir John Stanley)—sadly, he has left the Chamber—spoke about several great threats that most reasonable people would say it is impossible to defend ourselves against. All we can do is hope that the country would have enough of the machinery of its infrastructure left to respond to them. Unfortunately, we would not be in a position to do that at the moment.

The Defence Committee report exposed clearly that not enough finances are earmarked for the defence of this country and to support the original concept of the strategic defence review, let alone to meet the financial implications of this new chapter. The Government must tell us where they intend to find the money that is needed, and over what period. Great issues are involved, and the consequences of inaction will be grave for the whole nation.

One other thing occurred on 11 September—a new benchmark in terror was set, as our report readily identifies. Sadly, when benchmarks are set, others will aspire to top them or compete with them. We must look beyond the threat of out-of-control—or much-controlled but out-of-contact—planes crashing into places such as central London or other European capitals. Many of those who gave evidence to the Defence Committee said that we must start to think like the terrorists. Not many rational people can think like terrorists. Nobody in the House would conceive of doing away with their own lives and taking several thousand others with them. It is very difficult to put oneself in the mind of a terrorist and thus to understand one's opponent. It is not comparable with fighting an opposing army who might be subject to the same disciplines as we are.

We do not even know about these terrorists—their organisations are still in the building stage. However, we know that they have an ability to deliver weapons of mass destruction. Whatever weapons those might be—they are on the shelf in some instances—those involved are just months, if not weeks, away from being able to put them together. Some of those who gave evidence to the Committee stressed how easy it would be to make a cheap, low-grade nuclear weapon. Chemical weapons could easily be deployed once people had the materials to put together the mechanics. We must be eternally vigilant.

When the Select Committee visited the United States, it was obvious that one of the big deficiencies that allowed its back door to open was that the intelligence agencies were not talking to each other effectively. They all claimed some sort of knowledge but it was not universally shared. There was no real co-ordination of the material being gathered. It is no good saying, after the event, "He over there knew a bit, she over there knew a bit, and somebody in another country was putting together parts of the jigsaw."

We must be relentless in focusing on those issues on which we can deliver. As many hon. Members have said, we must have armed forces of whom we can be proud, but they are over-stretched, and they need further financial and human resources. Intelligence services need to be beefed up and have more money spent on them, but we must make sure that they are not so jealous of the resources at their disposal that they are not prepared to share them early enough to allow a properly measured reaction. As at least one hon. Member has suggested, on some occasions the best form of defence is the pre-emptive strike. Sadly, I am sure that in the next decade or so we will, as a nation, have to come face to face with the fear and the consequences of having to take those decisions.

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): When a pre-emptive strike is made against another country, it implies an absolute disregard for international law. Is the hon. Gentleman in agreement with such a disregard?

Mr. Hancock: No; I am not, but there comes a time when it can be necessary to make a pre-emptive strike, as a measure of last resort. If it had been possible to prevent the attacks on New York because intelligence told us that a group of individuals were prepared to carry out those attacks and were being shielded by another nation, there is a legitimate argument that they could and should have been taken out before they could unleash their doom and gloom on the whole world.

We must appreciate that we in this place have a duty to protect our nation, and that that protection has a cost: a human cost and a resource cost. The Government owe it, not just to the Defence Committee and its report, but to the nation, to ensure that the defence of the nation is properly financed and resourced over a period sufficient to allow us all to have confidence that we shall not ask the men and women who defend our country to do it on the cheap.

6.26 pm

Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): I shall simply mention three subjects; the first is homeland defence.

The Defence Committee said in its report on the strategic defence review that it was worried that the review might be too foreign-policy-led, which could lead to a neglect of the level of insurance needed for home defence. The events of 11 September have made us all think again about that statement, without wishing to arouse undue public concern. However, it is clear, from the report that we are debating tonight and the evidence that we have heard, that more needs to be done, and that although it would be wrong to rush ahead and engage in all sorts of measures of homeland defence without debating and considering them properly, there is a concern that some aspects have not been given sufficient priority in the months since 11 September.

Remaining on the subject of homeland defence, much has been said about reserves and the national guard. I admit to the hon. Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent (Hugh Robertson) that I have still to be persuaded that we should take the national guard route. I prefer to be more traditional, and to consider and debate instead how we may increase the size and role of the reserves. I believe that many hon. Members, especially Labour Members, recognise that with hindsight the strategic defence review should not have made its recommendations to reduce the reserves, and I would or will welcome far more debate on the exact role that they can play.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): I thank the hon. Lady for her courtesy in giving way. I shall be brief. The SDR took away many Territorial Army infantry battalions. I speak as an ex-TA infantry officer. Does the hon. Lady think that what happened on 11 September gives the Government a legitimate reason to revise that mistake and to restore the number of those TA infantry battalions that could be optimised for home defence?

Rachel Squire: I certainly think that it gives, and should give, the Government the opportunity to revise the conclusions that they reached in the strategic defence review, but I will not commit myself by saying how many additional battalions there should be. I do not know enough to do so.

Secondly, like other hon. Members I welcome the additional money that has been set aside in the spring supplementary estimates for the Ministry of Defence, but I fervently hope that it will not be the last. During the Defence Committee's visit to the United States recently, we were continually reminded that the US defence budget increase was bigger than our entire Budget. I believe that we all recognise that it is crucial to the future of NATO that the European allies increase their financial commitments to that organisation, and that it is crucial to the standing and role of our armed forces that we give them the necessary resources.

The third issue, which I shall touch on briefly, is the current discussion about Iraq, which goes to the heart of the strategic issue of how the United Kingdom can and should support the United States and how we can contribute most effectively to the fight against terrorism. The Select Committee has been very clear in our view that terrorism cannot be defeated by force alone. Reference has already been made to Iraq, and I shall not go into the possibilities on this occasion, but I want to refer to my concern about our armed forces' existing operational commitments.

Frankly, we should not consider committing our armed forces to any additional operation unless we consider reducing their existing commitments. Many hon. Members share the concern that they are already stretched, and it does not seem as though they will be able to hand over the lead of the interim force in Afghanistan in three months' time. It has become clear this week, with the deaths of members of the American armed forces, that the situation in Afghanistan is far from stable.

We are also concerned about Macedonia and whether it, too, could turn into a tinder box. We should remember what the Chief of the Defence Staff said in a lecture at the Royal United Services Institute in December:

> "Quite simply, we cannot be 'all seeing' all the time—we simply do not have the resources."

I look forward to fuller and more regular debates on the many issues that we need to address.

6.31 pm

Patrick Mercer (Newark): May I start by declaring my interest as a member of the Regular Army Reserve of Officers and a trustee of my former regiment's association? I shall be as brief as I possibly can and will try not to iterate the strategic points that have been made by so many hon. Members before me. The whole thing comes down to a question of money. However, it is not a question of just increasing the amount of money dedicated; it is a question of spending that money cleverly and in a wise and measured fashion.

I draw the Minister's attention to an excellent organisation that used to exist—the Home Service Force. In many ways, it was laughed at and called, "Dad's Army", but it was extremely cheap, extremely effective and perfectly organised for key-point protection. The Territorial Army may not want to undertake that task. If we were to consider arming the Home Service Force with weapons such as Rapier or Blowpipe, perhaps it could become a real force multiplier. Before I am laughed out of court on that point in terms of technology, hon. Members should bear in mind the fact that Yeomanry soldiers are expected to man the Challenger 2 fleet, so there is no reason why the Home Service Force should not take up the role that I suggest.

I shall make the point again about the very welcome introduction, or conversion, of 2 and 52 Brigades and draw attention to the excellent points made by the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Crausby) about the training of our conventional regiments to the same standards as those that we have come to expect from the Royal Marines and the Parachute Regiment. Our conventional regiments are fine and excellent organisations and changing 2 and 52 Brigades to infantry brigades makes that point entirely. I urge the Minister to look hard at equipping those brigades with a proper headquarters, and with organic artillery and sappers, to make them deployable so that they, too, can take their place in the order of battle in the field.

I shall move on quickly to the use of intelligence. We have seen how the 3rd Military Intelligence Battalion has played its part in this battle, but I ask the Minister to consider the flexibility of our intelligence reservists.

Last and perhaps most contentiously, I should like to draw attention to the activities of our Special Air Service—a handful of men whose activities are rarely talked about. I do not intend to intrude into their modus operandi or exactly what they have been achieving in Afghanistan. I would say this, however; currently, some of the hardest fighting of the Afghanistan campaign is

[Patrick Mercer]

going on. As far as I am aware, there are no British forces involved at the cutting edge of this campaign at the moment. Without letting too many cats out of the bag, I strongly suspect that that is because the tiny numbers of our special forces involved over there are exhausted.

I draw the Minister's attention to the operations of R Squadron of 22 SAS and the flexibility that that organisation provides. I would like him to look also at the operations of 21 and 23 SAS, the two Territorial regiments that support 22 SAS. It is entirely feasible that we should expand both the Territorial and reserve base of the SAS. There are any number of ex-Territorial soldiers of regular battalions, the parachute regiments or even the Royal Marine Reserve who are ready and willing to serve in an expanded Territorial or reserve capacity inside the SAS.

I would also suggest—I may be preaching the unpreachable—that we expand the SAS. "It is not possible," I hear the Army cry. It has been done—most effectively, for the campaign in Northern Ireland, where an adjunct was added to the SAS precisely for that campaign. The laurels of that organisation are very infrequently polished but, by golly, they are there for all to see.

The SAS, rightly, has high standards, as anyone who saw the programme recently that asked "Are you tough enough for the SAS?" will know. I strongly suspect that I am not, but there we are. The fact remains that there are lots of people who are willing to give it a go. If the mentality of "many are called but few are chosen" can be expanded, and if flexibility can be given to the Army's style of recruiting its select and best soldiers, I believe that it would be more than possible to expand the SAS, perhaps by 100 per cent. I urge the Minister to look at that idea in some detail.

Our forces are, without doubt, the best in the world and I pay tribute to them, just as every other right hon. and hon. Member in the Chamber today has done. But the fact remains that, nearly six months after 11 September, we have seen the United States gird its loins for war, motivate and mobilise its reserve and dedicate $48 billion to expanded defence spending. Nearly six months on, this country has—a discussion document. Discussion documents do not stop bullets; discussion documents do not stop terrorists. We need deeds, not words.

6.37 pm

Mr. Eric Joyce (Falkirk, West): I want to say something about a man who was born and educated in Britain, who attended a British public school and the London School of Economics and who is, as I understand it, still a British citizen. He stands accused of complicity in cutting the throat of and beheading a journalist and videoing the whole process for posterity. The individual, Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh, has not been tried and found guilty, I should stress—I suppose. But he has shown a marked reluctance to dissociate himself from the slaughter.

We also know, or suspect, that there are other individuals who live in the UK, or who have at times done so, who have, or may have, similar tendencies. There are no Scottish National party Members present, but I should point out that an incident in the past few weeks has shown that there are people at the low end of that spectrum who have a pretty low tolerance, too.

Sometimes a debate in the Chamber—not today, I hasten to add—reflects a reluctance on the part of some people to recognise the nature of the threat and the need to take decisive action to counter that kind of threat, not only in the UK but across the world. Sometimes questions raised, and the manner in which they are raised in the Chamber, are characterised by an unhealthy anti-Americanism. They suggest at times that people do not engage fully with the reality of the brutal mindset that characterises those who are prepared to engage in most horrible murder for their own aggrandisement, either on this earth or elsewhere.

That tendency, when it expresses itself, has the potential to miseducate people into thinking that it is possible to intervene in human rights abuses or violent breaches of security but always to do so bloodlessly. Well, it is not. The overwhelming majority of people in this country and, indeed, in the House, including Labour Members, support the Government's determination not to act precipitately on international terrorism and on threats to our security. We want them instead to act decisively when and if the situation merits it.

Harry Cohen: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Joyce) referred to Mr. Sheikh in Pakistan. I want to put it on the record that he and his parents are my constituents. The key consideration is that he get a fair trial.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): The hon. Gentleman knows that that is a matter of debate, not a point of order.

6.40 pm

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): I begin by paying tribute to what the men and women of our armed services have done in the war against terrorism. They have carried out their roles well and we have perhaps not praised them enough. My hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) speaks from experience. He reminded us that everyone will be thinking of the troops in action at Gardez, and we offer our profound sympathies to the families of the Americans lost in the shootings at Kabul and of the Germans and Danes killed on bomb disposal duties yesterday.

The debate has been of a high quality despite, or perhaps because of, its truncated nature. As always, I greatly enjoyed the Victor Meldrew of the Defence Committee, the right hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George). I also enjoyed the contributions of the right hon. Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh (Dr. Strang) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir John Stanley). They all spoke with great knowledge of and passion for defence.

The debate comes at a crucial moment. Defence budgets are giving every sign of being stretched to, or possibly beyond, their limits. That has been the underlying theme of the debate. It was interesting to see how many Labour Members spoke about overstretched troops, underspending and people doing too much for too little. The hon. Members for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Crausby) and for South Dorset (Jim Knight) in particular mentioned those problems. The reality is that we appear to be doing too much with too little. That cannot go on for ever. I hope that the Minister listened carefully to the many Labour Back Benchers who made that point passionately.

Will the Minister clarify one or two technical details on the accounts? What was the out-turn of last year's spending? I understood that there was an underspend of £72 million, and was surprised to see a report in *The Independent* this week, with the headline "Brown calls in auditors to scrutinise spending", which said that the underspend was £500 million.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): Wrong.

Mr. Gray: If the Minister is right perhaps that is another example of the Chancellor briefing the newspapers in a certain way to win a particular battle. *The Independent* goes on to quote sources within the Ministry of Defence as saying that the Chancellor

> "is squaring up for a battle with . . . the Defence Secretary."

The article says that the Chancellor

> "is deeply sceptical about MoD demands for extra funds to meet the new threat of international terrorism".

The Minister says that the report is inaccurate, so he must tell us where it came from and assure us that the Chancellor is as enthusiastic as he is to spend the money necessary to win the war against terrorism.

There is another element to defence finances. In November, the Chancellor announced new money to pay for the campaign in Afghanistan. He said:

> "I can report that for new equipment and immediate operational requirements an additional £100 million has been made available to the Ministry of Defence."—[*Official Report*, 27 November 2001; Vol. 375, c. 834.]

In a letter to my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth), dated 26 February, he said that there was a further £55 million, making a total of £155 million. Is that new money or does it partly come from the previous year's underspend, in which case it is another blatant example of new Labour's double counting?

What does the Minister intend to do replace the £250 million capital receipt that he may not now get from the botched privatisation of QinetiQ announced in that most embarrassing U-turn yesterday? Has the Treasury agreed to take the hit, or will the money have to come out of defence budgets? Is he planning to write off the staggering £15 million that he wasted on consultants on the botched privatisation? Guess who advised him on it? It was none other than new Labour's close friends, Arthur Andersen, to which the Ministry of Defence has paid £7 million so far. Is the money coming from our front-line capabilities?

The confusion over where the money to pay for the Afghanistan campaign is to come from is compounded by a letter from the Minister to my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State for Defence dated 27 February in which he says:

> "we estimate the total extra cost in relation to Afghanistan in Financial Year 2001-2002 to be some £261 million."

If that is so, will the Minister tell us how he has paid for it? Has it come from the previous year's underspend or the Chancellor's £155 million—if that is indeed new money—or has it perhaps been found by moving money from capital to current accounts? The spring estimates seem to confirm the latter.

There is a muddle, and the Minister needs to tell us today in words of one syllable how much has so far been spent on the war in Afghanistan, precisely how that has been funded, how much he intends to spend in the year ahead and how he will pay for that. The Opposition suspect that all this accountancy fudging is designed to cover up the reality of some deep and damaging cuts in defence expenditure in general. One or two worrying examples of that have been announced in the past few weeks.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire) and my hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) talked about deep cuts in the Territorial Army as a result of the strategic defence review. I am proud to be wearing the tie of the Honourable Artillery Company today. On top of that cut, we have seen the moth-balling of 5 squadron of the Tornados and of the 32 Sea Harriers, and the decimation of the Fleet Air Arm.

A statutory instrument was sneaked through the House the other day under the guise of giving the Army base repair organisation greater freedom to operate commercially, whereas in fact it meant the cutting of 700 jobs in that organisation. We heard today—I hope that the Minister is listening and will answer this point—of the premature withdrawal of HMS Fearless, our last Royal Navy assault vessel. Let us hope that we do not need it in the troubles that lie ahead.

What is more, as my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent (Hugh Robertson) said, the long-feared "procurement bow-wave" in the MOD seems to be becoming ever more a reality, as evidenced by delays in the deployment of new equipment such as the A400M and the Nimrod MRA4. They are the latest examples, but there are of course many others. If, as it appears, Ministers cannot fund current operations without deep and damaging cuts in our defence capabilities, what hope have we of funding the challenges that might lie ahead?

In contrast to the hon. Members for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) and for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) and their party, the Conservative Opposition are proud of the fact that we have stood shoulder to shoulder with the Government in their fight against terrorism so far, and shoulder to shoulder with the United States Government in their war against terrorism—and we intend to continue to do so. If we are to do so—my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling warned us about this—and if challenges lie ahead, we need to know how the Government can say that they intend to do all kinds of things but appear, first, not to be funding them properly, and secondly and even worse, to be making some deep and damaging cuts in our defence capabilities. That simply will not do. They cannot have it both ways.

I was not the least encouraged by the Secretary of State's recent comment that

> "I shall certainly be putting my case to the Chancellor, but I recognise it will have to sit alongside equally vigorous cases presented by my colleagues in health, education, public transport and so on."

Unnamed defence sources have said:

> "We are in the middle of a battle royal with the Treasury."

Rumours abounded last year that the Chancellor was seeking up to £1.5 billion of cuts in the defence budget. The Minister owes it to the House to make it clear this evening that that is not what is about to happen.

[Mr. Gray]

This debate is the Minister's opportunity to reassure us that he and, perhaps more importantly, the Chancellor are resolutely determined to fund our excellent armed forces properly in the ever more challenging tasks that lie ahead. If we are to defeat international terrorism—we are as determined as the Minister to do so—the effort in that direction must be properly funded.

6.48 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): One of the misfortunes of defence debates is that, irrespective of their title, we always seem to cover all defence matters. I shall do my best to reply to all the points that have been raised.

This debate takes place against a background of continuing activity and danger for our armed forces in Afghanistan. The Taliban and the al-Qaeda terrorists whom they harbour have been reduced to scattered remnants, but that is not to say that they are no longer a threat, as we see from current operations against Gardez. Like the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray), I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the courage of all coalition soldiers fighting there, and to offer my condolences to the families of those—American and Afghan—who have died fighting to free Afghanistan and the world from the threat of terrorism.

On the subject of time, let me point out that we have at least four more days of defence debates in which hon. Members will be able to speak about anything they fancy. Defence gets a fairly generous allocation of time: we have had at least three full days, perhaps four, on the war against terrorism since it started. We have adequate time to debate defence issues. Although it is disappointing that we did not get our full time today, the environment is considered equally important by many hon. Members, and it does not get the same amount of time as defence.

As for the timing of our reply, I apologise to my right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) for the time it took. A balance has to be struck between speed and helpfulness, and we tried to make our reply as helpful as possible on this occasion.

As this is an estimates day, I had better say something about the estimates, if only to correct the misapprehensions of Opposition Front Benchers. In the current financial year, we shall incur £261 million in additional costs through our operations in Afghanistan. The bulk of that—some £115 million—is attributable to Operation Veritas, our contribution to the global coalition's operations against international terrorism. That figure covers operating costs—fuel, transport, stores and so on—that we would not otherwise have faced. We also expect to generate another £80 million in similar costs for Operation Fingal, the United Kingdom's element of the international security assistance force that we currently lead in Kabul. The bulk of the remainder—some £57 million—represents capital costs for urgent operational requirements. The final £9 million represents "non-cash costs". That is all new money.

In addition to that, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State announced on 26 February that the Treasury had agreed to add a further £55 million to the £100 million already made available for capital costs arising from urgent operational requirements. That gives a total of £155 million in new money of which, as I have said, we have so far spent £57 million on capital costs. The subject is complicated, but I assure the House that the money involved is new money.

Turning to the privatisation of QinetiQ, I was involved in that issue yesterday, and despite my best efforts some of the newspapers appear to have picked up my remarks wrongly. Only an idiot would have proposed that we continue on the preferred course of a stock market placing, even though, at the time that it was made, the proposal was perfectly reasonable. Although—with apologies to hon. Members from the minority parties—I can imagine a few idiots on the Opposition Benches continuing blindly on that course, we could not do so. We have decided to go for a trade placement instead, which is by far the safest course of action. We will get the money that we require from the sale, and QinetiQ will get the freedom that it needs to grow and to develop its business.

I cannot go into detail in response to some of the points made by the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws), save to say that extensive work is being done on co-operation among our security forces. I shall discuss the action we are taking on CBN—chemical, biological and nuclear—risks later. Active civil contingency links exist and are being strengthened. It has been possible to do quite a lot along those lines.

Conflict prevention is at the centre of our efforts, especially in Africa. We are already working cross-departmentally. The three Departments that the hon. Gentleman mentioned—the Ministry of Defence, the Foreign Office and the Department for International Development—are doing a great deal of work on conflict prevention and resolution in that continent. In addition, extensive work is being done in eastern Europe and central Asia. We are very active in that respect.

As for the calls to increase reserve forces, we have spent a great deal of time and effort trying to bring our reserve forces much closer to the front line. I do not want that effort to be diluted by attempts to add roles that are well beneath the capabilities in which we now train our reserves to participate. We are using our reserves and integrating them into our forces. To be frank, that is by far the most cost-effective way in which to provide surge capability in many of our units. The House will be aware that in a parliamentary answer today I pointed out that a further compulsory call-out of 49 Royal Auxiliary Air Force personal will be made to assist air transport movements in support of our ongoing work in Afghanistan.

I shall try in the limited time available to respond to the specific points made without repeating myself. My right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South was right in his introductory remarks. The same point was made by the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir John Stanley) and others. The risks from many chemical and biological threats are low, but the consequences are indeed terrible.

The right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling might be interested to know that, as a specialist in public health, I have independently come to the conclusion that plague is an exceptionally dangerous organism, as he might well have expected. However, there are two positive aspects. One is that we are developing what appears to be a very effective vaccine, which will be available in the next two years. That will be the first time that a reliable vaccine has been available. Secondly, plague is an exceptionally difficult organism to grow and certainly to deliver. Therefore I would assess that the threat still involves a combination of opportunity and means, and as the product of the two is so difficult to achieve, the threat of plague remains very low, compared with other biologically active agents.

We have decided that Fearless will be stood down at the end of its current engagement, instead of going on until January or February next year. Any Department must make decisions about the most cost-effective way to use its resources, and it would not have been cost-effective, in my opinion and that of my colleagues, and according to the advice of our senior staff, to have continued a 37-year-old vessel, excellent though its service has been, for the next six months, given the extra resources that would be required. Fearless is our last steam-powered ship, and I am sorry to see her go. Her service and that of her crew has been sterling, and the crew will give us further good service on Albion and Bulwark when they come into service in 2003.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh (Dr. Strang) spoke cogently about the language of priorities and of the need to fund the level of activity that we wish to carry out. I agree with him. I cannot predict the outcome of discussions on the Budget, much as the hon. Member for North Wiltshire might wish me to second-guess the process. It is still going on and we will defend our corner vigorously, but there must be an exact match between the commitments that we give and the resources that we offer up to meet them.

In passing, I should point out that we are partly the victims of our own success. Smart procurement has worked. Programmes are now on time and the slack in the system, which was available in the MOD budget year after year, sadly—or perhaps gladly—is no longer with us. That makes things much more difficult.

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): With reference to the new chapter of SDR, does my right hon. Friend agree that it is vital that finances are not an obstacle to our doing what is necessary to fight the war against terrorism?

Dr. Moonie: I entirely agree that resources must be made available to meet any new commitments, unless those commitments turn out to be substitutes for things that we do at present and we find that they are not necessary. I am not trying to suggest that we have yet been able to find anything like that, but any rational being must admit that there is at least a logical possibility that we would be able to do so. Should major new requirements come along, we will have to consider the matter closely.

I am interested in the possibility of the home defence service being re-activated, with considerably greater numbers of teeth than it ever had or were ever envisaged for it. If we think that static guarding is the answer for certain installations—I remain to be convinced of that—we will have to find some way of implementing it.

The right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling was the only person whom I have heard in any of the debates so far mention the effectiveness of our co-ordinating officers in Tampa, Florida. That has proved itself, just as the permanent joint headquarters in the UK has done. It has shown how effective it is to co-ordinate on the ground, right at the centre of operations. Its value has been proved time and again, and I pay tribute to the officers who serve there. We shall have to do that in future, although rather than regularise it we will probably have to do it on an ad hoc basis.

There were other thoughtful contributions from my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Crausby) and the hon. Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent (Hugh Robertson), who made a good point about ISTAR. We are identifying ways of identifying friend and foe, and we will continue to do so as quickly as possible.

It being Seven o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER, *proceeded to put forthwith the deferred Question relating to Estimates which he was directed to put at that hour, pursuant to paragraphs (4) and (5) of Standing Order No. 54 (Consideration of estimates).*

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That further resources, not exceeding £3,020,000, be authorised for use during the year ending on 31st March 2002, and that a sum, not exceeding £3,020,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund for the year ending on 31st March 2002 for expenditure by HM Treasury.

It being after Seven o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded to put forthwith the Questions relating to Estimates which he was directed to put at that hour, pursuant paragraphs (1) and (3) of Standing Order No. 55 (Questions on voting of estimates, &c.) and Order [20 November 2000].*

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

Resolved,

That further resources, not exceeding £2,058,352,000, be authorised for use during the year ending on 31st March 2002, and that a sum, not exceeding £1,636,556,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund for the year ending on 31st March 2002 for expenditure by the Ministry of Defence.

ESTIMATES, 2002-03 (NAVY) VOTE A

Resolved,

That during the year ending on 31st March 2003 a number not exceeding 46,025 all ranks be maintained for Naval Service, a number not exceeding 17,340 for service in the Reserve Naval and Marine Forces, and a number not exceeding 250 for service as Special Members of the Reserve Naval Forces under Part V of the Reserve Forces Act 1996.

ESTIMATES, 2002-03 (ARMY) VOTE A

Resolved,

That during the year ending on 31st March 2003 a number not exceeding 128,195 all ranks be maintained for Army Service, a number not exceeding 84,000 for service in the Reserve Land Forces, and a number not exceeding 6,000 for service as Special Members of the Reserve Land Forces under Part V of the Reserve Forces Act 1996.

ESTIMATES, 2002-03 (AIR) VOTE A

Resolved,

That during the year ending on 31st March 2003 a number not exceeding 57,415 all ranks be maintained for Air Force Service, a number not exceeding 23,050 for service in the Reserve Air Forces, and a number not exceeding 550 for service as Special Members of the Reserve Air Forces under Part V of the Reserve Forces Act 1996.

ESTIMATES, EXCESSES, 2000-01

Resolved,

That a sum, not exceeding £3,097,059.33, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to make good excesses of certain grants for defence and civil services for the year ended on 31st March 2001, as set out in HC 635.

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES, 2001-02

Resolved,

That further resources, not exceeding £4,531,170,000, be authorised for use for defence and civil services for the year ending on 31st March 2002, and that a further sum, not exceeding £3,727,881,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to meet the cost of defence and civil services for the year ending on 31st March 2002, as set out in HC 636.

Ordered,

That a Bill be brought in on the foregoing resolutions: And that the Chairman of Ways and Means, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Andrew Smith, Dawn Primarolo, Ruth Kelly and Mr. Paul Boateng do prepare and bring it in.

CONSOLIDATED FUND (No. 2) BILL

Mr. Paul Boateng accordingly presented a Bill to apply certain sums out of the Consolidated Fund to the service of the years ending on 31st March 2001 and 2002: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 8 March, and to be printed. Explanatory notes to be printed [Bill 65].

John Austin (Erith and Thamesmead): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I hope not to delay the House too long. My point of order is further to that which was raised last night by the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait), to whom I have given notice of my intention of raising this matter tonight. I do not question the ruling given by you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, which I believe was wholly appropriate to the narrow point that the hon. Lady raised, but the matter has wider implications concerning the jurisdiction of the courts and the rights and privileges of hon. Members.

The hon. Lady referred to an injunction that prevented local newspapers from identifying an individual and a hospital, but she went on to identify that hospital, which was formerly situated in my constituency and is now located in that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr. Raynsford), and is the main district general hospital serving his constituency and mine, and Eltham. As far as I can ascertain, the hon. Lady made no attempt to give prior notice to my right hon. Friend, my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) or I of her intention to raise the issue. I believe that that was a discourtesy.

A newspaper carried a story in all its 12 editions, rather than only the local and Greenwich and Woolwich editions, because as it said,

> "publishing the story in just one edition and identifying the area would have contravened the judge's court order".

I make no comment on the wisdom or otherwise of the injunction or of the trust in seeking it, but the identification of the hospital on the Floor of the House has clearly breached the injunction, as local and national newspapers may now publish what the hon. Lady said and the name of the hospital.

I recognise the importance of the right of MPs to freedom of speech and the importance of parliamentary privilege, and I recognise and support the intentions of article 9 of the Bill of Rights, but that should be seen in the light of rules surrounding sub judice matters and the courts. Although this issue is not technically sub judice because the courts have already made a decision, there is an important principle that courts should not seek to prevent Members from expressing their views, but that neither should Members subvert decisions of the courts.

I would not expect a substantive answer tonight, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I am aware that there is currently a case before the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, but I should be grateful if you could give the matter your careful consideration and advise hon. Members accordingly on the use or abuse of privilege in this context.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (John Austin) for giving me notice that he would be raising that point of order. I can in fact give him a fairly definitive answer in terms that may not be wholly unexpected. As the hon. Gentleman recognises, hon. Members enjoy freedom of speech in this House, and I can therefore advise him that nothing disorderly has occurred. However, it is always hoped that hon. Members will be mindful of the consequences of remarks that they make about such cases.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING

That the draft Town and Country Planning (Fees for Applications and Deemed Applications) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2002, which were laid before this House on 12th February, be approved.—*[Angela Smith.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

ELECTRICITY

That the draft Renewables Obligation Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.—*[Angela Smith.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITIONS

New Park Campsite

7.7 pm

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): The villagers of Brockenhurst in the New Forest, East constituency are overwhelmingly against the principle of the creation of a campsite at New Park, Brockenhurst. Under the auspices of the parish council, no fewer than 1,719 out of 2,652 people on the electoral roll have signed this petition. Ninety-five per cent. of those contacted signed it and

65 per cent. of the electorate as a whole have therefore expressed support for the petition of residents of Brockenhurst, which states:

That the Forestry Commission proposes to close the existing campsite at Hollands Wood and to open a new campsite at New Park, that the proposed new campsite will be detrimental to the surrounding environment, and that they oppose the principle of the Forestry Commission's proposals.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Forestry Commission not to proceed with its proposal to open a campsite at New Park.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Secondary School, Sittingbourne

7.8 pm

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): The petition of the residents of Sittingbourne declares:

That there is an urgent need to build a new secondary school on the north side of Sittingbourne to meet the needs of young people in north Sittingbourne, Milton Regis, Kemsley and the villages of Iwade and Lower Halstow. Such a development is necessary to guarantee parental choice, to develop community awareness and to avoid transport chaos in the centre of Sittingbourne.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons call on the Department for Education and Skills and Kent county council to consider as a matter of urgency the planning and siting of a new secondary school in north Sittingbourne.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Dronfield School

7.9 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): The petition that I am presenting seeks to put in place arrangements to turn the split-site school at Dronfield, where my own children went to school, into a single-site school, because the Gosforth site building is dropping to bits and was recently closed due to wind and rain. The petition of residents of Dronfield and district, which I support as the rational alternative, declares:

That the teachers, staff and governors of the Dronfield school help provide an excellent education for the young people of Dronfield; that the performance of the Dronfield school will improve now it has recently become a technology college; that standards at the Dronfield school will be further assisted if the existing two-site facility can be brought together on a single site; that spending £1.5 million on maintaining the Gosforth site over the next five years, as part of a split-site school, does not represent good value for money; and that a failure to move to a single site would be an enormous lost opportunity.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Secretary of State for Education and Skills to approve the proposals submitted by Derbyshire county council for a scheme to consolidate the Dronfield school on a single site.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Kent and Canterbury Hospital

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Angela Smith.]*

7.10 pm

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise once again the future of Kent and Canterbury hospital and of acute health services in east Kent. I am also grateful to my hon. Friends, including my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent (Hugh Robertson) and the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt), for coming to support me here.

Since my last Adjournment debate, four formal options have been put forward and the consultation period has just closed. The crisis in our hospitals has worsened. I believe that all four options put out to consultation are dangerous, and that the formulation of those options—the process before consultation—was hopelessly flawed.

Time restricts me to describing just four factors this evening. The first is the failure of East Kent health authority and the East Kent Hospitals Trust to relate the issue of capacity to that of affordability. The second is their failure to include cancer. The third is the lack of support for, and consultation with, the medical and nursing staff, and the fourth is the issue of access.

Let us start with capacity and cost. Last year, 81 consultants—almost half of those in all three sites in east Kent—supported a motion stating that the quality of patient care was being undermined by a shortage of capacity. More than four fifths of junior doctors across the three sites signed a letter making a similar point. Since then the position has worsened. Individual cases, such as those of 97-year-old Connie Jones and 82-year-old Arnhem veteran Bill Holman, both of whom were left for two nights on trolleys in our accident and emergency unit, are sad examples of the worsening crisis. The queues outside the casualty departments at all three east Kent hospitals continue to grow. On some nights recently, we have had as many as 50 trolleys in the Kent and Canterbury hospital casualty department. Colin Baker, the distinguished ITN war correspondent making a programme for Trevor MacDonald, said that the situation was as bad as a Balkan battle zone. He should know; he was wounded in one.

Elective surgery has been disrupted to the extent that operating theatres are under-utilised due to a lack of beds. I shall give one example from the many. Yesterday I received a pitiful letter from a constituent who has had her hysterectomy operation—needed because of desperate bleeding—cancelled for the fourth time. Surely the most important issue for the consultation should have been to show how the revenue costs of each capital option would allow room for the extra beds that we so desperately need. Instead, all the options have been presented without any capital costing. There are no financial figures. Instead, the management continue to promise that their plans will allow for 175 extra beds. Asked about funding, they simply say that that is a matter for their political masters.

It will come as no surprise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, or to the lady Minister, whom I welcome to her place, to hear that it is not my job to defend a Labour Government. It would, however, place an unreasonable demand on any Minister of any Government if the management were simply to say that they were going to engage in a

[Mr. Julian Brazier]

programme of colossal capital spending—with all the revenue implications that that entails—and that the funding consequences were a matter for Ministers.

Estimates for a less radical option A—the so-called Dobson option—have risen from £102 million to £150 million. The average overrun for larger private finance initiatives has been about 30 per cent., which would raise £150 million to £200 million. However, that would fall a long way short of the cost of the most radical option, option D. A typical annual PFI costs about 10 per cent. At a time when the south eastern NHS budget is desperately overstretched, can such a burden be afforded, even without adding any of the extra beds that we desperately need now?

My second point is that the cancer centre has not been included in the consultation process, although the document includes an appendix on cancer and Professor James, the director of cancer services in Kent, appeared at all the consultation meetings. He said again and again that he was determined to keep a full cancer centre in East Kent. He further told us that all three oncologists at Kent and Canterbury hospital—he referred to them by name—fully supported him and the plans in the document. Above all, he stressed that, with an oncologist post vacant, they could keep the oncology centre going with its new linear accelerator only if a positive atmosphere was generated to attract new blood to Canterbury, and we all agreed on that last point.

Unfortunately, the truth is that two of the three consultants to whom Professor James referred had already put their vehement opposition to the proposals in writing in public letters some weeks before, and the Minister has those letters. They pointed out the clinical dangers in the approach. I understand that the third oncologist has now denounced Professor James for misleading the public about her views.

The national cancer director, following a visit to the Canterbury oncology centre, has also refused to endorse the concept. He said in his letter only that "It might work". In fact, the text rules out keeping a cancer centre under two of the four options, and even says:

> "For the longer term it is not possible to guarantee the continuous medical support . . . that is required for safe inpatient radiotherapy and chemotherapy services in Canterbury."

Is that the positive language that will help to recruit a new oncologist to East Kent's cancer centre? Crucially, the Maidstone and Tonbridge Wells Healthcare Trust, which is responsible for cancer services in Kent, was not a signatory to the document.

The third issue is the exclusion of so many doctors and nursing staff in the formulation of the four options. No proposal is likely to work unless those that have to deliver it feel committed to the outcome. Obviously, that does not mean total consensus. However, everyone must feel that they had the opportunity to put their point of view, and a reasonably large majority of the doctors and nurses involved must agree with the broad outline of the outcome.

Mr. McNee is a urology consultant who is based not at the Kent and Canterbury but in Ashford. He said:

> "I am extremely angry about the consultation document. I first came across it at 11th January 02. My clinical director Robert Insali had not seen it until I showed him. . . . At no point has there been any discussion with the body of urology consultants."

Another Ashford doctor, John Sewell, who for 21 years has been a consultant physician in emergency care, has condemned the proposal on eight grounds ranging from cost to the risk of service collapse. He sent a confidential letter, then courageously scrubbed out the word "confidential" and made it public.

The pattern among consultants is repeated among the junior doctors. All three East Kent branches of the Royal College of Nursing, Canterbury, Thanet and south eastern, have come out against the proposals in a joint document, which states that

> "the RCN believes that the proposals could fundamentally undermine future quality of care for patients in East Kent, particularly older people".

They also condemn the failure of the document to cover community services. It seems absurd to do such a radical reappraisal of acute services without covering community services.

Is this the way to treat dedicated professionals? They are the very people who will have to deliver the quality health care that we need in East Kent in the future. Is that the way options should be formulated?

Finally, I turn to the question of access. Canterbury is the centre of east Kent, the hub of the bus and rail system. Canterbury and Faversham GPs belong to by far the largest primary care group in east Kent. They have voiced their opposition to the proposals in the strongest possible way. Both Dover and Shepway district councils faxed their replies to me this afternoon, rejecting all four options. One council calls for an independent review, and the other uses similar language. I understand that all the councils in Kent, apart from Ashford, have demanded that the cancer centre be kept in east Kent, and in practice that has to mean that it be kept at Canterbury.

The independent hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor) has asked me to pass on to the House his apologies, as his broken arm prevents him from attending this debate. He is organising a rally for 25 March to get new thinking into emergency provision, based on ideas from the Royal College of Physicians. I hope that Ministers will listen to him.

In summary, the formulation of the proposals is deeply flawed. Many of the crucial people—the doctors and nurses who have to deliver the services—appear not to have been consulted. The cancer centre was excluded from the process, and its needs were pushed in a cowardly and unsound manner into the back of the document. Issues of access were simply glossed over.

Above all, the desperate and growing capacity crisis has been simply ignored. A fig leaf of nominal extra beds has been produced, while the authors of the proposals have ducked away from considering whether the proposals will allow us to fund even the existing number of beds, let alone some extra beds.

When the proposals come before the Minister and the Secretary of State, I urge that they be sent back to East Kent health authority, which will dissolve at the end of the month. I hope that the Minister will ask its successor authority, the new Kent and Medway strategic health authority, to start again with properly formulated proposals based on consultation with the doctors and nurses who will have to implement them.

7.21 pm

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): I congratulate the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) on securing this Adjournment debate. I almost want to call him my hon. Friend, as he has been outstanding in keeping me informed about everything that has happened in this matter. Cross-party support in the matter has been evident for four years, and the hon. Gentleman and I have gone together to see Secretaries of State. We have displayed our anger together, and sometimes we have found it impossible to understand the answers that we have been given.

At this late stage, I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will consider seriously the points made about cancer by the hon. Member for Canterbury. That is the health service's top priority, and I honestly do not feel that we will have a centre for cancer in east Kent of which we can be proud.

I also want to draw my hon. Friend the Minister's attention to the fact that the Kent and Canterbury's accident and emergency department is a disgrace. She must recognise that immediately—that is, now. I do not believe that we can be proud of something that is so bad. Are not there hit squads that can be sent in to improve matters, or is no extra funding available? Are there no mobile rooms that we can use to help matters? There must be a way to take people off the trolleys. The A and E provision is demeaning, degrading, disgusting and awful. I ask my hon. Friend to reflect seriously on the urgent answer to the problem. We need that answer tomorrow, not in three or four weeks.

Finally, is it possible for my hon. Friend the Minister—or the Secretary of State, or another health Minister—to make an unannounced visit to Kent and Canterbury hospital? In that way, the state of the A and E department can be seen. It beggars belief.

7.23 pm

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent): I want to make three key points on behalf of my constituents in Faversham—a town of 18,000 people that was not even mentioned in the consultation document.

The first point has to do with transport. The transport links to Ashford and Margate are atrocious. There is little or no public transport, and Faversham has many elderly or disadvantaged people. Both groups tend to be heavy users of the health service, but in effect they are being disfranchised by the process.

The second point is that there is no funding to build up local cottage hospitals, such as the Faversham cottage hospital. That hospital could not take over from the Kent and Canterbury, but it could help.

The third point has to do with cancer care. The out-patient model proposed by East Kent health authority is unproven anywhere in the UK. It has been rejected by all consultants, and by the Royal College of Radiologists. The Maidstone hospital—to which all inpatients would transfer, under the proposals—is already overstretched. The proposed model simply could not cope.

I shall end by quoting a letter that appeared today in the *Faversham Times*. It was written by the chairman of the Faversham branch of the Labour party. He said simply this:

> "To people living in Faversham, it is hard to understand why our services appear to be getting worse".

I could not have put it better myself.

7.25 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Yvette Cooper): I congratulate the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) on securing a debate on an issue that he has raised many times. I know that he did so in a debate that was replied to by the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears).

As the hon. Gentleman said, East Kent health authority published a consultation document on 5 December on the modernisation of health services in east Kent. It set out four options for acute-service reconfiguration. As the hon. Gentleman also said, the three-month consultation period ended last week, and the responses are now being considered in the health authority.

All the options enable the hospital to treat the majority of patients whom it currently sees in its accident and emergency department, and to have a 24-hour nurse-led minor injuries unit as well as providing day surgery and out-patient services, orthopaedic services for older people, community assessment and intermediate care. The options also include provision of a day-care hospital, out-patient clinics, midwifery-led low-risk maternity services and cancer services.

East Kent will also benefit from an increase in bed numbers as a result of all four options. Each option would involve an increase of at least 175 beds throughout the trust.

There has been intense consultation, arousing passions and strong views in all parts of the health community and the local community in general. I am advised that staff at Kent and Canterbury hospital were consulted extensively on the shortlisted options between March and August last year, and that staff consultation included one-to-one with consultant staff to review the case for change and the shortlisted options.

I am also advised that four workshops were held and were well attended by consultant, nursing and therapy staff. Four seminars also took place across east Kent to involve staff in the evaluation of the shortlisted options. All consultant staff, senior nurses, therapists and managers were invited. Three workshops were apparently held in January to review the "network of care" arrangements in east Kent. Members of the clinical policy board and three other lead clinicians, two of them from Canterbury, have worked to specify the relationship between east Kent's hospitals. At the last of the workshops, specialist services were discussed in depth.

I am advised that the consultation gave all involved an opportunity to comment and express their views. I am also advised that the community health councils were content with the consultation process.

The exercise was carried out by a joint sub-committee of East Kent health authority and East Kent Hospitals NHS Trust boards, which draws its membership from across the health community. The sub-committee set up a reference group to examine the processes of the consultation to ensure that it had been robust and inclusive, and had allowed all interested groups to have their opinions heard.

Mr. Brazier: I hope the Minister realises that I am not criticising the consultation process. I am criticising the

[Mr. Brazier]

formulation of the four options that were presented. The Department has had all the letters I referred to for weeks. How does the Minister—who has sensibly used the phrase "I am advised that"—reconcile the letters with the picture she paints of the putting together of the proposals?

Yvette Cooper: I understand the points that the hon. Gentleman is making. Clearly many of them concern the options themselves, and must therefore be taken into account by the health authority when it considers its responses to the consultation. I am also advised, however, that there were extensive consultations on the shortlisted options before the period between March and August last year, and I understand that the community health councils are content that the consultation process has been robust and proper.

The process from here on in is that a joint sub-committee of the trust and health authority boards is responsible for considering all responses and making recommendations to both boards by around the end of March. The two boards will then decide how to proceed, and a recommendation will be passed to the new strategic health authority, the Kent and Medway, which will make recommendations to Ministers. It is the boards' responsibility to base their decision on the consultation responses. If community health councils object to the recommendations, they will be referred to Ministers.

The hon. Gentleman will therefore understand that if we are to ensure that those processes are properly carried out, it would be inappropriate for me to pre-empt not only the boards' decisions but those that Ministers may have to make if the recommendations are referred to them. However, I will attempt to respond to some of the points raised by the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members during the debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) asked if Ministers could visit Kent and Canterbury hospital. I can tell him that the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Salford, intends to visit the hospital in the coming weeks and will have the chance to listen to views at that time.

Hon. Members also raised issues of capacity in the area. I can tell them that there has been considerable extra investment in east Kent. I agree that capacity in the area needs to increase, and that East Kent health authority continues to need additional investment, as does the NHS throughout the country. Next year, East Kent health authority will receive an increase of 9.85 per cent. in cash terms, which is an increase of 7.17 per cent. in real terms. The Government are determined to continue those increases in funding because clearly we are dealing with issues of long-term underfunding and lack of capacity throughout the health service. We will continue to address those issues.

In addition, the Government are providing £845,000 from the modernisation fund to improve patient access schemes in east Kent; £935,000 to help the move to six-day working for day surgery; additional money for dermatology and orthopaedics; £2.1 million to help to ease Kent-wide problems associated with delayed transfers of care; and £250,000 to streamline accident and emergency services and provide support for rapid access to therapies, diagnostics, pharmacies and porters.

Hon. Members referred to accident and emergency services. The Government have acknowledged the severe pressures on A and E, particularly during the winter months. The trust has acknowledged that Kent and Canterbury hospital has faced considerable pressures, particularly in the A and E department. The Department of Health's winter and emergency services team visited the trust recently. It recognised the excellent work being done by staff at the trust, but identified some areas that must benefit from improvement, and made several recommendations.

An intensive support team of six people has been identified to work with the trust over the coming months. That team, comprising experienced doctors, nurses and health care professionals, will help to develop plans to modernise the A and E department with emphasis on the clinical governance agenda. It is important to be clear that the issues are not simply additional capacity and investment. We need reform and modernisation to make sure that care is provided in the best possible way and using the most up-to-date methods.

Hon. Members also referred to cancer services and I can assure them that their points have been heard by Ministers. If community health councils refer these issues to Ministers, they will certainly be considered.

Mr. Brazier: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way a second time, but I seek clarification on a further point. The outcome of this will have a profound effect on cancer services, but they are not part of the consultation process and Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells trust was not among the consultees and did not sign the document. Do the community health councils have the legal power to refer those matters to the Secretary of State?

Yvette Cooper: If the matters under consideration as part of that consultation are referred to Ministers by the community health council, Ministers will take account of the points that hon. Members have made in this House about cancer and related issues when they come to consider those subjects.

The Kent cancer network has looked at the national cancer plan in order to determine the future vision for the delivery of cancer services in Kent. It is clear that cancer services will continue to be provided at a number of hospitals, including the Kent and Canterbury. I am advised that the vast majority of patients requiring cancer services will continue to be treated in Canterbury under each of the four options. The few patients in Kent who need specialist cancer services will continue to be treated in centres that are able to provide the specialist care that they require. That is entirely appropriate and follows good practice and is the most effective means of offering access to high-quality care for all patients.

Cancer services at Kent and Canterbury hospital are part of the Kent cancer network and it is important that they remain so as part of the national cancer plan, the standards of which ensure high-quality care.

The cancer strategy for Kent is currently being developed. It will set out the current arrangements and the priorities for future investment. The East Kent Hospitals Trust is working effectively with the Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells trust and the cancer network towards this aim.

I am advised that in none of the options is it stated that Canterbury will lose its ability to care for cancer patients. The consultation document has given East Kent residents the undertaking that the majority of cancer patients who currently receive treatment there will continue to do so.

Hugh Robertson: Is not the crucial point that even by the trust's own estimates ambulatory or out-patient treatment will account for only 80 per cent. of those currently treated at the Kent and Canterbury? That leaves a significant 20 per cent. of in-patients who will have to go all the way to Maidstone or to other hospitals in London for specialist treatment. That is a significant proportion of patients who will be worse off under this plan at a time when Maidstone, at the other end of my constituency, is telling me that it cannot cope.

Yvette Cooper: Again, I have to say that the issues around the options need to be taken into account first and foremost by the local boards. They must make their decision. It would be wrong for me to pre-empt that process.

When it comes to cancer patients and cancer care people want to be sure that they are getting the highest quality care, especially for life-threatening conditions. We need to consider issues around access, but also issues around the quality of care. That in the end is what the national cancer plan and the discussion of cancer networks was all about. Those factors need to be taken into account.

Whatever option in the re-configuration is chosen, the adoption of the national cancer plan will continue to influence and improve the final pattern of services to be delivered. As part of the cancer plan we need more nurses, doctors, radiographers and equipment, and we need to ensure that new drugs are available to those who can benefit from them and that people suffering from cancer get the highest possible quality of care.

Although many views on reconfiguration issues are being discussed in east Kent, I understand that there is agreement that the issues must be fully discussed and in an informed way. All parties recognise the important need for modernisation and for investment in the area. It is important that the debate has been aired widely and fully, and I know that the hon. Member for Canterbury has striven to do that at every possible opportunity.

I assure the hon. Gentleman, my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey and other hon. Members that Ministers do not take the turbulence that the different views have created lightly. We consider it seriously and—

The motion having been made after Seven o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at twenty minutes to Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 8 March 2002

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Police

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

9.33 am

The Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs (Mr. John Denham): I am very pleased to introduce this Adjournment debate on policing, which replaces the traditional annual debate on policing in London, the last of which took place in June 2000. It is right that the debate should now take a different format, because the creation of the Metropolitan police authority has brought the management and accountability of the Metropolitan police service very much into line with the rest of the police service in England and Wales. Indeed, I hope that this will be—subject to the usual channels—the first of an annual series of debates on policing in England and Wales.

As the House will know, it is our intention to develop an annual national policing plan, proposals for which are in the Police Reform Bill currently under discussion in another place. We hope that the plan—developed in partnership with a wide range of policing interests, including the representatives of victims and other organisations, the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Association of Police Authorities—will provide the basis for future annual debates in Parliament, enabling the House not only to have a debate on a motion for the Adjournment but to discuss policing priorities, policing performance, and the strategic direction of policing in England and Wales against the background of a clear statement of Government policing priorities.

Much has happened since the last debate on policing. In an extraordinarily wide range of ways, the people of this country have had good reason to be grateful to the police service, its officers and its support staff. Just over a year ago, the Selby rail disaster reminded us of the vital role that the police and other services play in responding to civil emergencies. Over the summer, the disturbances in towns such as Bradford, Burnley and Oldham, saw the police forced to confront inexcusable violence and aggression. I know that, at the time, hon. Members on both sides of the House welcomed the firm and decisive support that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary gave to the police, who were in the front line.

The 11 September terrorist attacks on the United States brought new pressures and challenges to the police service, in reassuring the public as well as stepping up the fight against international terrorism in the UK. One of the most impressive, if little remarked on, events of the late summer was the way in which Londoners—perhaps those working in Canary Wharf, in particular—came to work on 12 September. That was a tribute to Londoners, but we should also acknowledge the importance of the rapid response of the Metropolitan police service and of the City of London police in putting large numbers of officers on the street in a very visible way to reassure the public and to get life back to normal.

The role of the police service did not end there. In the wake of the anthrax attacks in the USA, our police service had to respond to malicious hoaxes and legitimate fears. That work, which involved a rapid expansion of the police's ability to respond, meant that the disruption to business and personal post was very limited, despite the number of suspect packages identified over subsequent weeks. The police service has, therefore, faced many new challenges over the past year, and it has responded extremely well to them.

The British crime survey figures published in October 2001 confirmed the success of the police—with their partners in local and central Government, the voluntary sector and the business community—in bringing down crime rates over recent years. According to the survey, crime in the previous year fell by 12 per cent., and the chance of being a victim of crime in 2000 was the lowest since the survey began nearly 20 years ago. Across the survey, violent crime fell by 19 per cent., and, since 1997, crime fell overall by 21 per cent.

The House will want to acknowledge the vital contribution of the police service to those achievements and to recognise the importance of its work with other agencies in local crime and disorder reduction partnerships—set up by this Government—and initiatives such as the investment of several hundred million pounds in crime reduction, which has involved the largest ever closed circuit television programme and the introduction of neighbourhood and street wardens.

The background to this debate is, therefore, that a great deal that has been achieved. We were able to mark that in a small way by awarding the golden jubilee medal to experienced members of the police service. This is certainly no time for complacency or self-congratulation, however, because our society and our police service face major challenges. Although crime as a whole has fallen, some crimes—street robbery, in particular—have undoubtedly risen, sharply in some areas, over the past year. We must support the police in their efforts to tackle this problem.

As hon. Members will know, the Metropolitan police service has moved substantial resources into tackling street robbery through the safer streets initiative, which began on 4 February. I am told that in the period up to 28 February there were 485 arrests for robbery and more than 7,500 arrests for other offences in the nine target London boroughs. I understand that allegations in those nine boroughs have fallen by nearly a quarter, and that by the end of the third week of the operation, four of the boroughs had reduced street crime to below last year's level. We should acknowledge the Metropolitan police's substantial commitment and the real achievement of its officers over the last few weeks.

That underlines an important point. Effective policing can make a real difference. We want the Home Office and the police standards unit to work with other major metropolitan forces to identify and implement the most effective ways of tackling street robbery.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the great

[Ms Diane Abbott]

concern in London about the rising tide of gun crime related to crack cocaine? That is a particular concern to me and my hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr. Lammy). Is he aware that the Metropolitan police would ask the Government to consider two specific actions: first, the introduction of legislation to ban imitation firearms; and, secondly, raising substantially the minimum sentence for being found in possession of a firearm to five years?

Mr. Denham: I am aware of my hon. Friend's close interest in this matter. She secured an Adjournment debate on the issue at the end of last week, to which the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry North-East (Mr. Ainsworth) replied. We keep all these matters under consideration. We recently received the report of the firearms consultative committee, which looked at the issue of imitation weapons. We are considering our response. I shall make some brief remarks about the crack cocaine and gun crime problem, and my hon. Friend is right to raise those concerns.

Communities in several of our major cities have witnessed new levels of gun and drug-related crime. Some sections of the media tend to focus on the black participants in some of this crime, but we must never forget that black communities are the prime victims of the crime and that they deserve our response. Police forces have responded by setting up specific operations to target the criminals, such as Trident in London, and are having success. However, more is needed, which is why our law enforcement agencies, through the concerted inter-agency drugs action group, are working together in this country and with authorities overseas in countries such as Jamaica to stem the flow of cocaine into the UK and to identify the gunmen. That is a real challenge and priority for us. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) will speak later in the debate on this matter.

It is important that we work to ensure that the police are supported. We are working to tackle the problem of offending on bail. Hon. Members will be aware of our plans to extend the tagging of juvenile offenders. Through an initiative in London covering 10 boroughs, we are working on identifying those young people at risk of being drawn into street crime at an early age and taking measures to prevent them from becoming involved in serious crime.

Derek Conway (Old Bexley and Sidcup): The Minister mentions young people and the stage at which they become involved in more serious crime. Will he comment on the statement made this week by the Metropolitan police commissioner, who feels that his officers are doing their best to bring alleged perpetrators of crime to justice, but that the system is not following that through? The perpetrators are released, to their glee and amusement, back on to the streets of London to commit further crimes. Rather than understanding and helping, the justice system is, in the eyes of the police and my constituents, exacerbating the problem. The Minister's words of support are welcome, but does he feel that the rest of the system joins him in that?

Mr. Denham: All elements of the system recognise the need to take action to make sure that we do not generate a sense of invulnerability among young people—to paraphrase the hon. Gentleman—whereby they feel that they can offend, be arrested and avoid action being taken against them. That is one of the reasons why this Government have halved the length of time that it takes to bring young offenders before a court. Labour Members will remember that, under the hon. Gentleman's party, it typically took more than 140 days to bring a young offender before a court. We have had success, but we need to do more. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced at the beginning of last week that we are bringing together in one taskforce all the agencies in London, including all the elements of the criminal justice system, to look specifically at youth crime in London and to make sure that the police, the court service, the Crown Prosecution Service and the probation service are working effectively to tackle the problem.

We recognise the problem of young offenders offending while on bail, and we have introduced new initiatives. In a number of areas, including inner London, tagging for juvenile offenders will be available from the middle of April and will be rolled out nationally in June. Although there is not one single measure that needs to be taken, there is undoubtedly a series of measures, including those that I have mentioned, that need to be taken to make sure that young offenders are dealt with effectively.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): I appreciate why the Minister wishes to trade statistics going back to before 1997, but will he answer directly the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Derek Conway)? Does he agree with Sir John Stevens' statement in relation to the whole criminal justice system, or does he believe that Sir John Stevens got it wrong?

Mr. Denham: We recognise the commissioner's concerns, which have been expressed not only by him. I had discussions this week with the president of the Association of Chief Police Officers, who is worried about elements of the criminal justice system. However, let us remember that we are dealing with different issues, not just one set of problems. There is the issue of what happens to young offenders. Another debate is about serious criminals and the way in which criminal courts conduct their hearings, and there are issues about disclosure of evidence and disclosure of defence. The Government are dealing with those issues by saying that we need to reform the whole criminal justice system. Therefore, as I shall say later in my remarks, reforms are needed in the police service.

We recognise that reforms are needed in the sentencing system, which is why my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, while he was Home Secretary, commissioned the Halliday report on sentencing, on which we have consulted recently. That is also why the report by Sir Robin Auld on the structure of the court system was commissioned. We are considering how to bring about changes as a result of the issues raised in those reports. However, we need to consider the matter as an end-to-end reform of the criminal justice system. That means reforms to sentences and court procedures, speeding up parts of the system and reforms to the police service. We acknowledge the debate that has taken place over some months, but we have led that debate by saying that we must discuss how the criminal justice system operates and how it can be made more effective in every part of its work.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): I would tend naturally to agree with much of what the Minister has said. Having paid him that compliment, will he explain why, despite what he said about the need to reform, the Government have abandoned the criminal justice Bill that was due to be introduced in this Session of Parliament and that was heralded in the Queen's Speech? It was designed—I suspect that it would have had cross-party support—to address many of the shortcomings that Sir John Stevens and others have identified.

Mr. Denham: I know that the hon. Gentleman will recognise in private if not in public that my Department has undertaken a substantial programme of legislation this year, including a major Bill to take necessary and urgent measures to tackle terrorism, that was not and could not have been envisaged at the time of the Queen's Speech. However, we made it clear that we will publish a White Paper setting out the nature of our proposed reforms to the criminal justice system. That will be followed by legislation, although it has not been possible to present it to the House in this Session. There is no diminution of our commitment to introduce reforms of the criminal justice system. The hon. Gentleman will recognise why we are working to our current time scale.

We have touched on youth crime, but there is another challenge for the police service and others. Probably every hon. Member would tell me that antisocial, yobbish and loutish behaviour is a real difficulty for many of those whom we represent, whatever the nature of our constituency. In some areas at least, the police service has perhaps at times considered the issue to be beyond its remit. Responsibility for tackling antisocial behaviour cannot be laid entirely at the door of the police service, but good, high-profile, visible and accessible policing led by officers in the community who solve problems with the community undoubtedly has a major role to play.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): My right hon. Friend knows that 75 per cent. of people in prison were permanently excluded from school. He also knows that, from September, the Government are introducing the obligation on all excluded children permanently to attend a pupil referral unit. Does he agree that preventing such children from receiving only five hours of education, roaming the streets, getting into trouble with drugs, stealing mobile phones—

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): And pagers.

Geraint Davies: Exactly. Such children are unable to get back into mainstream education and end up in jail, so the changes will have a major and lasting impact on reducing youth crime.

Mr. Denham: My hon. Friend is right. Money has been made available for the change, because the Government have a good record on investing in public services. We want to ensure proper education provision for those who are excluded full-time from school and to avoid contributing to crime problems, so we must make available what is necessary for the good management of schools. Providing a good education is one way to deal with those problems.

Despite real achievements over the past two years, we acknowledge that we still face real challenges. Before Christmas, we published the White Paper, which sets out how policing must develop in the 21st century. Key elements of it are being implemented and others, subject to the decision of Parliament, will be enacted in the Police Reform Bill.

Our proposed reforms have received a broad welcome, inside and outside the police service. They are the outcome of more than a year's work and consultation with the police service, its staff organisations and the Association of Police Authorities. The need for reform is not in doubt, nor is the real direction of reform, although elements will always be controversial with some people.

Reform is needed because, although crime has fallen, it is still too high. Fear of crime remains stubbornly high, although the chance of being a victim has fallen. Too few criminals, including serious criminals and persistent offenders, are brought effectively to justice. Antisocial behaviour must be tackled. As in almost every organisation we can think of, public or private, performance and achievement vary; some parts work better than others.

The aim of police reform is to support the police service in its key jobs of tackling crime and criminality, reducing crime and the fear of crime and tackling antisocial behaviour, and to raise the performance of all parts of the service to the standards of the best.

There are two main strands to that work. The first is making the most effective use of the record number of police officers in England and Wales. This Government reversed the long-term decline in the number of police officers. The Labour Government's crime fighting fund has made sure that we are now on track for record numbers of police officers this spring, and for more than 130,000 by April next year. That is by far the largest number of police officers ever in England and Wales.

The work has been backed by resources—a 10 per cent. increase this year and another 6 per cent. increase in the coming year. That is a substantial and growing investment in the police service. Of course, as we move towards 130,000 police, we must make the best use of every single officer.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): It is a great achievement to be able to return to the police officer levels that the Government inherited, having had five years in which to do it. In Sussex, whose constabulary has been the hardest hit in England and Wales, there have been 273 officers fewer than in 1997 for some time. When will we get back to the 1997 level?

Mr. Denham: The hon. Gentleman does not understand his history. The cut in police numbers began in the early 1990s under the Conservative Government and was pursued, allowed and encouraged for a lengthy period. We have invested in the crime fighting fund, so police officer numbers are going up across the country.

[Mr. Denham]

That significant achievement has been recorded because we reversed the previous Government's policy of taking no interest in police numbers and earmarked money, through the crime fighting fund, to ensure that officers were recruited. He would have done better to give us the credit for the significant change in direction that we have achieved.

Next year, we will have 130,000 police officers and we must make the best use of every single one. Last year, "Diary of a Police Officer", a report commissioned by Ministers, showed that 43 per cent. of an officer's time was spent in the police station. Of that, 41 per cent. was spent preparing prosecution files and paperwork.

The taskforce that we set up to tackle waste and bureaucracy, headed by the former chief inspector, Sir David O'Dowd, will report to Ministers, initially in March and then in July. Over the coming year, we shall want to drive forward that work to free up the largest number of officers that we can from red tape, bureaucracy and inefficient ways of working so that they can be in the community—visible, accessible, tackling crime, where the public want to see them.

One way to make better use of officers is to make better use of support staff. The number of civilian support staff has already grown under this Government—to 56,644 in September 2001, which is over 3,500 more than in March 1997. We will now give them new powers: to take on roles that do not need the full range of powers and responsibilities of a fully trained, professional, sworn police officer; to take on more custody and detention duties; to take more responsibility at the scene of crime; and to escort prisoners.

We want to enable the police service to bring in specialists—in information technology and finance, for example—as investigators with the necessary police powers of investigation, working alongside police officers. In the investigation of crime, we will be developing a more specialised, more experienced and more professional cadre of police investigators and bringing in new expertise that is not readily available to the service at present.

It is not only in those specialist roles that support staff can be used effectively. The public want to see people with authority in their communities. Above all, of course, they want to see police officers. That is why we are committed to record numbers and to making those officers more visible and accessible, and why we want to increase the number of specials. They not only provide a valuable addition to the strength of the police service, but represent, in an important way, the wider reality that we will never fully tackle crime unless ordinary men and women in every community are prepared to stand up and be counted. Specials are a particularly important expression of that.

As, for example, the Metropolitan police have argued strongly, not every patrolling duty, minor public nuisance and traffic duty needs to be carried out by a fully-fledged police officer. The development of community support officers will give the police service a new flexibility to meet new needs and to ensure that police officers can be deployed in the most effective way.

There are other people already working in the community, as neighbourhood and street wardens or as security staff in shopping malls and on industrial estates—people with whom the police already work. We shall strengthen that relationship, enabling them with—and, of course, only with—the approval of the police to exercise new powers as part of an extended police family.

Making best use of the time and commitment of police officers means supporting them at work through better IT and better working conditions. It means supporting them if they fall ill through the development, for the first time, of a truly national approach to occupational health. It means a better and fairer pay system.

At this point, I would not be surprised if hon. Members pointed out that Police Federation members, in a fairly substantial turnout, recently voted against an agreement that their national leadership reached with the official side of the police negotiating body in December—I thought that I would mention it before hon. Members did.

That result was disappointing, if not a surprise, but it is important to remember the outcomes that we and the employers' side seek. The police need a better pay package to make the vast majority of officers better off. That is why we are prepared to invest substantially in an agreement that brings real reforms.

Reforms, too, are needed to reward the experience, expertise and competence of the most experienced officers, and to recognise that not all jobs are the same and that years of service, rank and hours of overtime are not always the most satisfactory way to reward officers for the difficult and demanding jobs that they do. The reforms also recognise that a reliance on overtime for the income of officers and as a substitute for the best management of staff time is neither good for the service nor for officers themselves.

The pay agreement is now in conciliation, led by the independent chair of the PNB. Agreement will no doubt require flexibility on all sides, but I believe, as I hope the House does, that the aims that we have set out are right, and that we should seek an agreement that, whatever the detail, will achieve them.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): The Minister said just now, and in the letter that he sent to hon. Members, that the vast majority of officers would be better off under the proposal. A Home Office document gives examples of officers who would be better off. Will he give some illustrative examples of police officers who would be worse off? Who are the minority of officers who would be worse off?

Mr. Denham: With a service of 120,000 people, we could never make an absolute statement that no single officer would be or could be worse off because of their overtime pattern or whatever. If some would be worse off, it would be a very small number. The package is aimed at making the vast majority of officers better off, and the document to which the hon. Gentleman refers shows that. That has been recognised in the national negotiations with the Police Federation. Focus has been put on the proposed overtime changes, which has tended to obscure the fact that over a period younger officers would get to the top of their pay scale much more quickly, there would be potential for new earnings at the top of the pay scale, many officers would be eligible for additional payments, and there would be an across-the-board increase under the pay deal.

I want to concentrate on the aims of the reforms of the pay system. They are not only about achieving a better pay system, but about modernising the system and ensuring that we make the best use of officers in the service.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): I commend the continuing effort to recruit and retain officers across the country, but does my right hon. Friend recognise that there continues to be a problem in London owing to the cost of the London economy and house prices? That is particularly important for civilian recruitment. Will he commend the example of the people of Pinner in my constituency, who have rallied to the concerns of the police about their capacity to keep open the front desk at Pinner police station? More than 80 volunteers have responded to that initiative.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. Interventions should be brief.

Mr. Denham: In the current financial year, it appears that the so-called wastage rate of officers in London, which is under 5 per cent., is pretty much in line with that in other areas of the country. That is good news, and it reflects the enhancements in the conditions and pay for officers in London over recent years.

Innovative experiments are being carried out in several parts of the country involving closer working between the police service and volunteers. I was interested to hear about the example in my hon. Friend's constituency.

Annabelle Ewing (Perth): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Denham: I shall give way to the hon. Lady, but then I must make some progress.

Annabelle Ewing: If the proposed police pay and conditions package is such a good deal, why did 94 per cent. of police officers in Scotland reject it?

Mr. Denham: It is clear from the ballot that a substantial number of police officers believed that they would be worse off, although they were wrong about that. It is a matter of regret that the federation did not campaign vigorously for the deal. *[Interruption.]* It is all very well the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) muttering from a sedentary position, but the reality is that the package proposes a substantial investment of new money. He would be advising police officers in his area wrongly if he were to suggest that he genuinely thought that they would be worse off. It has been our intention to make the vast majority of officers better off, and the deal that was reached at Christmas would do so. Clearly, people were concerned that it would not have that effect. There were uncertainties about priority payments, about which officers want further information.

We are now in a conciliation process, and we shall try to get agreement with the federation. We want to make that investment, and we want to make officers better off. That is our intention, but we must also have reforms, which I hope will be supported on both sides of the House, to ensure that we make the best use of officers in the police service, because that is also important and part of the basis on which investment must be made. My responsibilities are for England and Wales, but the federation and the employer's side in Scotland are involved in the police negotiating body.

Pay reform is only one area in which we need to support officers. Too much police training has for a long time been poorly organised and delivered. We cannot yet ensure that every officer has properly planned training, even if they are called on to fill specialist roles. We need to make considerable progress over the coming years on improving the training system, which will include developing the potential of the most able officers and enabling them to get to senior positions rapidly.

We need to develop leadership skills at all levels. Given that the basic command unit is the critical building block of effective policing, we must ensure that BCU commanders are properly supported and trained. We will work with the service to establish how the devolution of responsibility to BCU commanders and the integration of BCUs within the wider force can best be balanced. We will also support officers through better use of science and IT, including the development of the airwave communications system, and the automated fingerprint identification system, which was made available last year. The number of DNA records on the national DNA database is rising every month, and is now about 1.5 million.

As we support the police service and make the best use of the record number of police officers, we must also identify the very best of policing practice and find the best ways of ensuring that it is implemented in every part of the police service of England and Wales.

Over the coming year, we will establish a new National Centre for Policing Excellence. Building on the work of the existing crime faculties, the national centre will develop codes of best practice—for example, on how to conduct murder investigations, or how to run effective reassurance strategies that will draw on the best and most successful policing practice.

For issues of national importance, we must ensure that all forces adopt best practice, such as the implementation of the national intelligence model, which can be used to underpin the targeting of local nuisance and persistent offenders who blight a community, and effective action against organised crime.

The police standards unit is already working with police forces on the best ways to fight street robbery. As we develop agreed methods of assessing police performance, it will identify why some forces and BCUs perform better than others, and will support those that are not doing so well.

All those measures will improve police performance where it needs to be improved. We will work with the police service and the police authorities to achieve that. We cannot sit back and say to a town, a city or a community that is being let down that nothing can be done. If part of a police service were persistently to fail and a chief constable and a police authority failed to act and take the measures that other forces would take, Ministers and the Home Secretary must be able to respond—not to direct operations or to require the arrest of individuals, but to ensure that effective action is taken and proven best practice adopted.

No one would expect or would sensibly want such a power to be used widely, and it certainly should not be used arbitrarily, but those who would hold us accountable

[Mr. Denham]

must allow us the ability to respond. We need to work with the police and police authorities to ensure that we are effective in tackling crime and criminals, in reducing the fear of crime, and in tackling antisocial behaviour. That has to be the test for the police service and for the Government.

I have acknowledged outside and inside the House that no White Paper on policing ever caught a single criminal, deterred a single crime or made people feel safer. What we do as a result of those policies and the way in which we implement police reform over the years to come will achieve that. That must be the aim and the test of all that we do. We have the responsibility to work for that aim, and I hope that the Police Reform Bill will give us the powers to achieve it.

10.9 am

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): I welcome the opportunity to have a debate on the police. I welcome, too, the Minister's largely constructive tone, which is in stark contrast to the tone of his boss the Home Secretary on many policing issues; that is part of the problem that we face. On behalf of the Opposition, I entirely join in the tributes that the Minister, who rightly recounted the events of the past 12 months, paid to the police.

None of us in this House or in the other place can ignore the fact that we are here by courtesy of the excellence of the police in ensuring that we are secure, and can represent our constituents safely in the freedom in which we believe.

When the idea of a debate on the police was first mooted a couple of weeks ago—at least, that is when the Opposition first heard about it—it surprised me a little, not least because it is only a month since we had a debate on the police support grant, albeit that that was on one specific aspect of policing. Secondly, as the Minister rightly reminded us, the Police Reform Bill is in another place, and I expect that it will be here about the end of April—although the Minister may have a better idea about the timing than I do. Finally, the Police Federation has recently given the Home Secretary a bloody nose over the pay and conditions package.

Overall, therefore, despite what the Minister has said, the Government do not have a record of which to be proud. I do not want to be super-critical, but I shall now look back over the past few years before taking us forward to describe how the Opposition see policing developing.

There has been much debate about police numbers, and my hon. Friends have pointed out the reality of the situation, which differs from the twisted use of statistics in which the Minister would like us to believe. The fact is that police numbers fell by 3,000 in the Government's first three years in office, and that last year, when they had been in office for four years, police numbers were lower than at any stage in the past decade. That is not a record that any Minister should be prepared to defend.

Even the latest official figures, for last September, show the grand increase of 73 officers under this Government—hardly cause for acclaim. If the Minister can reach his target of 130,000 by next year we shall applaud him. It will be a welcome increase and I hope that it is achieved. *[Interruption.]* Before the hon. Member for Hornchurch (John Cryer) giggles too much—

John Cryer (Hornchurch): May I remind the hon. Gentleman that Fred Broughton, the chairman of the Police Federation, is on record as saying that the greatest single blow to police morale was the Sheehy report of 1993? Will he tell the House who commissioned and implemented that report?

Mr. Paice: Much of the Sheehy report was not implemented, because the Police Federation made it clear that much of it was unacceptable. The hon. Gentleman should get his facts right.

The statistics on police numbers are stark. They are Home Office official figures, so one assumes that they are indisputable—although the Government sometimes manage to argue against their own published figures.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): Does my hon. Friend agree that if police numbers do rise in the next few years, it will not be thanks to the Government? Local council tax payers face huge increases in the precept, because they will be paying for the increases in police numbers that local communities want. Any achievement will be down to local communities, not to the Government.

Mr. Paice: I have not shown my hon. Friend my speech, but he presages my next passage remarkably well.

The figure of 130,000 officers that I mentioned is based on the assumption that the whole crime fighting fund will be taken up, and to achieve that, every force will have to meet the gateway criteria in order to access it and pay for its extra officers. There is a question mark over that. I am led to believe that this year, at least three significant police authorities will almost certainly pass budgets that will not meet the gateway criteria, so they will not be able to take up the officers allocated to them under the crime fighting fund. There is therefore a huge question mark over whether the target will be met.

The Government's record on funding to date is even worse than their record on police numbers. Between 1997-98 and 2000-01—their first term—the cash increase in Government expenditure on the police was 9.9 per cent., or 1.5 per cent. in real terms. Those are outturn figures. Let us compare that with the last period of Conservative Government: the cash figure then was 13.9 per cent., or 2.8 per cent. in real terms. This year, as was revealed in our debate only a month ago, the real increase in total standard spending was only 0.3 per cent.—not exactly largesse from the Government.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) said, we must also consider council tax, and there we see a different story. Over the current three-year period—last year, this year, and next year's anticipated figures—the cumulative council tax increases for police authorities are 30 to 80 per cent. As he properly reminded us, any increase in police numbers will come not from the Government but from funding by council tax payers.

It now seems that the police authority with the second largest council tax increase this year will be my local police authority in Cambridgeshire. The consultation that the police authority had with the population of the county showed that the overwhelming majority, accounting for more than 50 per cent. of the responses, wanted to go for the highest increase, because people were fed up with having the fewest police officers per head of population in the country.

As for technology, the Minister referred to the Airwave project, which we all welcome—although I suspect that many hon. Members will have had complaints from constituents about the siting of the masts. None the less, it is right to go ahead with Airwave, and I hope that when the Minister responds to the debate he can answer a couple of questions. First, is the roll-out of Airwave for the remaining forces still on schedule? Can he assure the House that there will be no delays, and that BT can deliver? Secondly, will the administrative receivership of Simoco, which makes most of the handsets, have any implications for the roll-out?

The background to the crime figures is that under the Conservative Government there was a 17 per cent. fall in recorded crime, whereas under the present Government, although the basis for calculating the figures has been changed—

Martin Linton (Battersea): Crime doubled under the Conservatives.

Mr. Paice: Crime did not double under the last Conservative Government. Crime doubled over 18 years—*[Laughter.]* Crime doubled in the whole western world. However, in the last five years of Conservative Government we reversed that trend. Crime was falling, and had fallen by 17 per cent. over those past five years.

We cannot draw a direct comparison, because the method of calculating the statistics changed shortly after the Labour Government took office. I do not mean that as a criticism, but it is a fact. It is also a fact that under the new method, in the first year in which the new statistics operated, crime rose by 3.8 per cent. That was followed by a welcome fall of 2.5 per cent., although crime did not fall back to its previous level.

As the Minister has reminded us, the British crime survey now shows a fall. He said that it was 19 per cent. I thought that it was 12 per cent. over two years, but we will not argue about that; the figures definitely show a fall. The Government seek plaudits for that, and if it heralds a return to the downward trend in crime, of course we will all welcome it. However, I urge him to be cautious about how he interprets the British crime survey. I would not be surprised if his own officials, too, were urging caution.

First, the survey published last autumn was not the full result: it was a sample of only 9,000 respondents, compared with the 40,000 needed for the full result to be published later this year. Secondly, the BCS measures only crime against adults, yet we know that some of the largest increases in crime recently have been against children. Indeed, the survey itself shows that the risk of phone theft or robbery is five times greater for children than for adults: more than 500,000 mobile phone thefts and robberies were from 11 to 15-year-olds, compared with more than 100,000 fewer from those over 16. The trend has been strongly towards crime against under-16s, who do not feature in the statistics.

The Minister should not parade the British crime survey results too strongly. The fact remains that the risk of being the victim of violent crime is five times greater in London than in New York.

Several of my hon. Friends have already questioned the Minister about criminal justice and the remarks of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis the other day. Nowhere is it more obvious than in the criminal justice system that the police need help. As the Minister rightly said, the "Diary of a Police Officer" threw up some stark and staggering facts, including the three and a half hours on average of processing for every arrest made. In his speech, the commissioner spoke of one case in which it took an officer seven hours to process an arrest.

As the commissioner also said, it is no use catching criminals if they are then released on bail to commit more, and often more serious, crimes. I know that someone appeared in court only a fortnight ago charged with a murder committed while on bail for street robbery. That is demoralising for the police, the victims and all our communities.

Why, then, do we not have a Bill? The Minister said that it was because we had a terrorism Bill that took up so much time, and of course we understand that, but the Home Office has dropped two pieces of legislation scheduled for this Session, one of which was an anti-terrorism measure, on extradition.

The Home Secretary told us that there would be three major, urgent pieces of anti-terrorism legislation in the autumn, and he has dropped one of those, too. I do not go along with the argument that it is all to do with overwork. I strongly suspect that it is much more to do with the debate that we will have on Monday week, because the Government have had to throw a sop to their Back Benchers by debating hunting. We know that the parliamentary programme of the House of Lords is full and that, to get a hunting Bill in, other things have had to come out.

Norman Baker (Lewes): Another flaw in the argument is that the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill contained many measures that were nothing whatever to do with terrorism—it was a cupboard-clearing exercise by the Home Office.

Mr. Paice: I entirely agree: the Bill contained measures relating to the British Transport police and the Ministry of Defence police that went way beyond anti-terrorism and should rightfully have been in the Police Reform Bill.

When it was announced that the two pieces of legislation were to be dropped, my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), the shadow Home Secretary, wrote a private letter to the Home Secretary expressing concern, especially about the loss of the criminal justice Bill, which had considerable cross-party support. He offered the Opposition's support in achieving the reform of the criminal justice system that the Minister espouses. When can my hon. Friend expect a reply?

The Minister did not use the word, but he referred to the debacle that we have had over the pay and conditions package. Let me reaffirm clearly that the Opposition stand foursquare behind the need for a more modern and flexible pay and conditions structure—there is no doubt about that—but one does not go about achieving that by spending six months slagging off the police, which is

[Mr. Paice]

exactly what the Home Secretary has done, accusing them of being inadequate, inefficient and "rife with Spanish practices". He condemned what he called the "police early retirement scam" and attacked the Police Federation for trying to

> "make a monkey out of the service they are supposed to provide."

He said:

> "we want police on our streets, policing and securing them, not demonstrating on them".

Those are not terms that one should use about a body of people that one wants on one's side. If one wants to manage change, which is what the Police Reform Bill is about, one needs the people who are to implement that change to welcome it and to want to be part of it. Anyone who has managed a business knows that that is the case.

Mr. Denham: The hon. Gentleman said, among a whole list of things that he did not reference, that the Home Secretary said that the police service was "rife with Spanish practices". I invite him to give me a reference to establish that the Home Secretary or myself, or any spokesperson on behalf of the Home Office, has ever used that term about the police service.

Mr. Paice: I will happily provide it. I have it in front of me. One assumes that spin doctors still speak on behalf of the Government—if they are still in post. In this case, the quotation is:

> "spin doctors branded the police service inadequate, inefficient and rife with Spanish practices."

That was published in the *New Statesman*.

After the Home Secretary had upset the police, it is hardly surprising that they rejected his package, which even the Minister accepts was considerably vague, particularly over the special priority payments. If the Government had not been so headstrong in trying to push measures through so quickly and had got more detail on the table, perhaps police officers would have been better able to understand whether they would be better or worse off.

I have had countless e-mails from and conversations and correspondence with police officers, and I understand that the main reason why they were determined to vote against the package was that they were so angry about the way in which the Home Secretary had addressed them over the past few months that they felt hatred towards him.

Geraint Davies: Sir John Stevens recently suggested that more people should be denied bail. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Bail Act 1976 should be changed automatically to deny bail?

Mr. Paice: I do not see how that is relevant to what we are discussing.

Geraint Davies: A moment ago, the hon. Gentleman spoke about people reoffending on bail, and now he is talking about the police. A top policeman has made some remarks about bail, and the subject is important for this debate.

Mr. Paice: There is certainly never a case for automatically changing any Act, to pick up on the hon. Gentleman's phrase. There may be a case for amending the Bail Acts. Bail policy, and sentencing policy, should not be governed by the capacity of the prison sector, which is what is happening currently. The prison population is now past the 70,000 mark, and that should concern us all, but we should not allow that to determine bail and sentencing policy. Magistrates in London, in particular, are letting people out on bail because there is nowhere to send them. That is not good news.

That is the point that I was making and, indeed, the point that the commissioner was making.

I turn to the Police Reform Bill, on which the Minister touched. I want to address the point with which he concluded concerning the powers of the Home Secretary to be involved—I use as non-pejorative a phrase as possible—in how the police operate. I have immense sympathy with the Home Secretary. Any of us who has sat in an office in Whitehall know, the frustration felt when decisions made at ministerial level seem to become diffuse by the time they appear on the ground. I have been there at a lower level and I understand that. There is a temptation to want to grab hold of things and make them happen. However, that does not mean that one should give in to such temptation.

The proposed methods in the Bill, particularly in clauses 5 to 7 and in part 1 generally, are wrong. This is what the Home Secretary recently said about the Metropolitan police—I should hasten to add, before the Minister picks me up on it, that the following is a direct quotation:

> "We will give you the freedom to do the job but if you don't do it, I'll have to intervene."

He told the Commissioner that

> "he has six months to demonstrate a sharp fall in street robberies."

One must ask the Minister who in the Home Office will do a better job. Is this the same Home Office that runs the Passport Agency, the prison service and the immigration and asylum system? Is there really anybody in the Home Office who thinks that they can run the police service better than the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis?

Historically, there has been a tripartite system of the Government—the Home Secretary—the police authorities and chief police officers. There is no evidence that there is anything fundamentally wrong with that system that needs changing. As debates in another place on the Bill have shown, part 1 is extremely unpopular, especially, as I have said, clauses 5 to 7, which give the Home Secretary powers to intervene in operational matters. The Minister is right that the Home Secretary cannot tell the chief constable to arrest Joe Bloggs because he does not like Joe Bloggs, but in every other aspect of operational matters, the Bill gives the Home Secretary immense powers.

That is not just the view of the Opposition and, I dare say, the Liberal Democrats—although the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) will speak for himself. We have consulted on the matter, and the view is shared by every police organisation: the Association of Chief Police Officers, the Police Superintendents Association, the Police Federation and of course the Association of Police Authorities. It is also a cross-party view in the other place. The decision to take control is tempting, but the Home Secretary should resist it. If he persists in trying to take control, he will lose that part of the Bill. I therefore urge him to think again about the powers that he is seeking to take.

The second aspect of the Bill to which I wish to refer is what might be described as the provisions on non-police policemen—community support officers and those in accredited community safety organisations. Civilianisation is of course not new; it has existed for some decades. However, giving such people police powers is new.

We welcome support for the police from wherever it comes and strongly support the various street and neighbourhood warden schemes that are already up and running in many parts of the country. Indeed, we have no objection to giving police powers to civilians for special purposes, such as in custody suites or for fraud investigations.

If we consider what is proposed for community support officers, we find, first, that the only body of support for the proposal is in the Metropolitan police. That is based on the assumption that resources to fund such posts will be transferred to the Met from local authorities. Perhaps the Minister would like to comment on that. Everyone else in the police family is against granting such powers. Now is not the time to rehearse arguments against giving such officers those powers—and the absurdity of a 30-minute detention period with no idea of what happens after those 30 minutes—but I tell the Minister again that the provision is wrong.

Many accredited community safety organisations—employees of local authorities or, possibly, security firms—already exist. They do a very good job, but without the proposed title and the proposed powers. I have visited a number of such organisations, and they have all told me that they do not need and do not want police powers. A system of accreditation of those organisations will be fine. It will give them a badge of recognition and a certain public esteem, but they should not be given powers permed from a range of options that will vary from force to force and even within forces. That would be confusing to the public and lack accountability.

Mr. Mark Field: We all want a policing system—and in the broader sense, a security system—that works. There is concern that the Police Federation in particular has been obstructive over some of the initiatives that have been introduced. Only yesterday it was announced that in my constituency and that of the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) there would be a 40-strong force of uniformed city guardians who will have certain powers. Most residents will be very much in favour of that—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must bring his remarks to a conclusion.

Mr. Paice: I understand my hon. Friend's points. I am sure that most residents of London boroughs and throughout the country will welcome a significant increase in the number of people helping the police. However, there is a risk of immense confusion—I shall come in a minute to the wider reasons—if such people have police powers. Any study of the Bill reveals a range of powers from which the chief constable of any force, or the commissioner in the case of the Met, can choose, and their use will vary. Anybody who exercises police powers should be accountable to the chief officer and to the independent complaints commission. That is another omission of the Bill.

The major reason why we the Opposition oppose what I call pseudo-cops is the failure to recognise the importance of community policing in the true sense of the word. Indeed, it could be argued that the provision downgrades the importance of community policing. There has been a great deal of debate—it is ongoing—about the role of community policing, especially in the context of what happened in New York.

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): I agree with the point about accountability; the issue of power should be closely scrutinised. I say in support of the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) that community support or auxiliary officers have a role in relieving pressure on our police in areas such as the west end of London, where the community policing dimension is less relevant. It is precisely in freeing police officers to work in partnerships and to reduce crime that community support officers and auxiliaries will be most effective.

Mr. Paice: I understand that argument. The hon. Lady will not be surprised that I have had discussions on such matters with the commissioner and deputy commissioner of the Met. However, it is not right to give support officers such powers. Having people out there in some uniform assisting the forces is fine, but they should not be given police powers other than perhaps the barest minimum, such as the ability to issue fixed-penalty notices.

I want to develop that argument and lead on to how we in opposition see the development of policing. I want to go back to first principles—indeed, to Sir Robert Peel. He set out nine principles of policing when he founded what we know as the modern police force. The seventh principle states:

> "Police, at all times, should maintain a relationship with the public that gives reality to the historic tradition that the police are the public and the public are the police; the police being only members of the public who are paid to give full-time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the interests of community welfare and existence."

His ninth principle was:

> "The test of police efficiency is the absence of crime and disorder, not the visible evidence of police action in dealing with it."

Those principles stand as true today as they did when Sir Robert Peel enunciated them.

We need to consider community policing not simply as people walking about the streets in uniform but as having a much more rounded function as custodians of the neighbourhood. It should be seen as important and effective. It should be seen as important by the officers, who should have a sense of possession of the community in which they work. I was fortunate enough to have a discussion with a former community officer of the year, PC Sweeny, who is currently seconded to the Home Office. His sense of pride in the community in Leeds that he policed, and where he had been born and brought up—his sense of possession—came through. That is a crucial factor.

Community policing, in its truest sense, needs to be seen as important and effective by the force at all levels, by the people who live and work in the area and by the

[Mr. Paice]

public bodies that serve it. If it is to work, the community officer must also be able to take charge. He or she must be able to require things to happen, such as streets to be cleaned after drugs users, vandals or graffiti artists. He or she needs to be able to ensure that abandoned vehicles are removed, that broken windows and pavements are repaired. The force must be behind him or her to respond when there is a need for more officers.

Community policing must be seen as a critical part of policing by the officers themselves. As the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) suggested, it needs to be seen not as something that they do reluctantly and happily pass to civilians but as something that they want to do. It needs to be seen as part and parcel of an important police career structure.

There are those who say that crime is not all that bad, that people are unnecessarily afraid of it. I believe that to be a false excuse. As we know, only a quarter of crime is recorded anyway, but crime is not only about the headline stuff—murder, rape, burglary, street robbery. It includes the more minor offences of graffiti, some aspects of drugs, vandalism, intimidation and the threat of violence to anyone who is not prepared to roll over in front of the gangs and thugs that roam parts of our country. How many people can deny that they have crossed the street to avoid a particularly unsavoury character or group of characters or to avoid foul language and drunken behaviour?

The fact is that very few major criminals did not start life as minor criminals. The most staggering statistic concerns the number of children under 10 who have already entered the world of crime. They come almost entirely from broken homes, often with a succession of different father figures—I use the term loosely—in the home. They have often been abused by parents and by other children. They become bullies and start to nick each other's things. They join gangs which become more important to them than their family. They move on through assault to robbery, rape and worse. In the meantime, the people who live in those areas become more fearful and tormented. They have to adjust their lives and accept their lot, but they should not have to.

There are those who say, "Forget all this. Just get tough and lock them all up." Of course that has to play a part. Dealing with criminals—detecting, prosecuting, convicting and sentencing them—is critical. We have to remove criminals from society, but to do so exclusively achieves little. We know about the very high rates of recidivism. If we lock them up in prison, the majority turn back to crime. Amateurs become professionals. We must also reduce the flow of new criminals. It is like catching water in a bucket without adjusting the flow from the tap into the bucket. That is why I believe that there is a need for far more attention to be given to the holistic approach to community policing.

It has been said in other places that tolerance is a virtue, or so we would believe. When related to other people's views, race or religion, it is a virtue, and rightly so. However, we have allowed it to be extended to tolerating behaviour outside the norm and in doing so we have unwittingly contributed to the problem. By tolerating bad behaviour, we have given it licence to go further. The rundown housing estates did not start that way; disadvantaged communities were not always so. We have allowed the liberal view to prevail that children should be allowed to discover themselves and that families do not matter.

Geraint Davies: I have already said that 75 per cent. of people in prison were permanently excluded from school. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that putting those who are not achieving in school on the streets, where they are dislocated from education and society and end up in prison, is absurd? Surely the real issue is to provide intensive education for those people to get them back on track so that they do not overflow into our overpopulated jails and commit endless crimes on our streets.

Mr. Paice: Education is part of the solution but it is not the only solution. The problems facing these young kids are far wider than simply being excluded from school. Indeed, their behaviour in school and being excluded from it is probably a symptom rather than the fundamental cause. We must address education but we must also address the fundamental aspects of society that led to the problems that led to exclusion.

It is time we realised that we were wrong to have allowed these freedoms to prevail. All of us in our communities have a role to play—we must stop turning a blind eye. The role of the true community policeman is central to that. Working with local organisations—bringing together those dealing with education, social services and the other aspects of policing with local charities and the majority of good citizens—is the only way to reduce the flow, rather than simply addressing the stock of criminals.

Mr. Banks: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Paice: No, I am about to finish.

That is the long-term way to address policing in this country. There is a long way to go. Many people say that it is too difficult and that we should not start, but unless we start we will never achieve it, and that bucketful of water will keep on overflowing and the problems that we face will increase day in, day out. As Sir Robert Peel said:

> "the police are the public and the public are the police".

They have to work together.

10.48 am

Ms Bridget Prentice (Lewisham, East): Rather scarily, I agreed with virtually everything that the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) said in his peroration about the role of the police in the community and the role of the community in supporting the police to outlaw the yobbish behaviour that is at first relatively minor but that can escalate into full-blown criminality.

I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak in today's debate because this issue clearly concerns all our constituents. Crime and policing are consistently high priorities in all our constituencies. I want to talk about how crime is being tackled in my borough. I shall refer to some of the things that the commissioner has said recently and what he said to the Select Committee on Home Affairs in his response to the Police Reform Bill. Many people will have agreed, at least in spirit, with what Sir John had to say. His language may have been more colourful than some of us would have used, but he would receive much sympathy from people who feel that criminals go before the courts and often, for reasons usually incomprehensible to the rest of us, walk away again.

That said, Sir John did not perhaps hit all the right targets, and there may be something to say for examining what the Crown Prosecution Service is doing when it drops cases. Police officers find it frustrating to do all the paperwork in the station, send it to the CPS and, after months of delay, discover that the CPS has decided not to take the case forward. That is, of course, also most frustrating for the victims.

That is why the example of fast-tracking young offenders is so good. People see results more quickly, and the even greater benefit is that the young person is far less likely to commit crimes while waiting to come to trial or to commit second or third offences. I hope that the Minister can roll out that fast-tracking system for young offenders even more widely throughout the court system.

Lord Woolf's comments about discouraging magistrates and judges from sending people to prison because the prisons are overcrowded miss the point. The process needs to be speeded up, but we must ensure that those who commit crime are given the sentences that they deserve. Decisions on whether to send someone to prison should be based not on whether prisons are overcrowded but on whether the sentence is appropriate. I am much more inclined to agree on that with Sir John than I am with Lord Woolf.

I shall not go into arguments about figures on rising crime, except to say that as time passes the Opposition seem to forget how bad things were under their regime. When we point out that crime doubled under the Conservatives, they say that that does not apply if we look only at their last few years in office. Those of us who suffered 18 years of Conservative Government remember the pain from beginning to end.

Hon. Members who want crime to fall might want to examine some of the excellent initiatives that have been taken in Lewisham. People may be surprised to know that Lewisham is the safest borough in London. Crime has fallen by 6 per cent. over the past year, and one reason is the relationship between the local police, the borough council and the community at large. That partnership has worked extremely well in ensuring that the borough remains a safe place in which to live, work and learn.

The £1 million that the Government gave the borough for closed circuit television has helped. CCTV has been an outstanding success in the borough's shopping centres and elsewhere, and its use is being expanded. A local newspaper, *News Shopper*, has begun a campaign in which it publishes pictures from CCTV cameras to help the community to respond to incidents and give the police information to help them to catch the kind of yobbish criminals who begin with low-level crime and, if their activities are not nipped in the bud, go on to become serial criminals. That is a good example of how the local community can be encouraged to support the work of the police.

I praise the work of Lewisham police under the control of Borough Commander Mike Humphreys. The House may be interested in a couple of examples of that work, which may be of use in other parts of the country.

A joint police and probation visit system has been set up to help to curb active reoffenders when they come out of prison. As the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire said, that is one problem that our criminal justice system must tackle. In Lewisham, probably for the first time, police and probation officers visit a person within a week or so of release from prison. They go through what is available to the person, and ensure that he or she is properly assessed. Information is passing between the police and the probation service on whether there is a high risk of the person reoffending. If there is, the person will be subject to further and extensive supervision. That is an excellent example of practical partnership between two parts of the criminal justice system which, in the past, often did not speak to each other because they were mutually wary and suspicious. I hope that that scheme can be expanded elsewhere.

Many hon. Members will be able to praise the work of their police community consultative groups. Lewisham has taken that further, thanks in part to the enthusiasm and commitment of the chair of the police consultative group, Asquith Gibbes. We have set up an independent advisory group, so successfully that Mike Humphreys has told me that he wonders how the police managed without it. The group is involved with the police on important decisions. For example, its members can read crime report entries at the police station, comment on the police force's investigations and report back. The group has been consulted on sensitive incidents such as a recent serial rape investigation across south London. The group was a useful forum for obtaining information that might not otherwise have reached the police because of the nature of both the crime and the people involved. That is a good way in which to use the local community to ensure that the police receive information without people fearing reprisal.

Hon. Members regularly raise with Ministers the problem of assaults on health service staff. We all know the dangers, particularly late at night and at the weekend, for health workers in our hospital accident and emergency units. A police office has been set up in Lewisham hospital so that health workers—doctors, nurses and auxiliaries—may know that an officer is on hand if they need extra support. That initiative has been hugely successful in reducing the number of assaults in the accident and emergency department.

Earlier this year, Lewisham and Hackney were fortunate enough to begin schemes running restorative justice initiatives. I went to the launch and was told what work would be done. I know that Ministers are keen to see how it will work. It is to be analysed by eminent researchers. Trained facilitators will bring victims and offenders together and, using appropriate methods, help offenders to understand and address their reasons for committing crimes and the effect on their victims. Our early information is that the scheme is particularly useful for victims and in dealing with those who have committed assaults. We shall be interested to see the results of the research.

Crime on buses and trains is another serious problem. Lewisham police have set up a scheme with bus companies using high-crime routes. It has worked so well that the Met has adopted it throughout London. It has helped to reduce the number of assaults and other crimes on buses, and I hope that it can be extended to trains, which I use regularly.

Another scheme in Lewisham, which is being revamped, is the ringmaster scheme, which, again, has been so successful that the Met has taken it on. Local

GREAT BRITAIN HOUSE OF COMMONS PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES (HANSARD)
2001/2002

Published on microfiche by Chadwyck-Healey (a ProQuest Information and Learning company)
The Quorum, Barnwell Road
Cambridge CB5 8SW
England

Distributed in the USA by ProQuest Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Rd
PO Box 1346
Ann Arbor
MI 48106 1346, USA

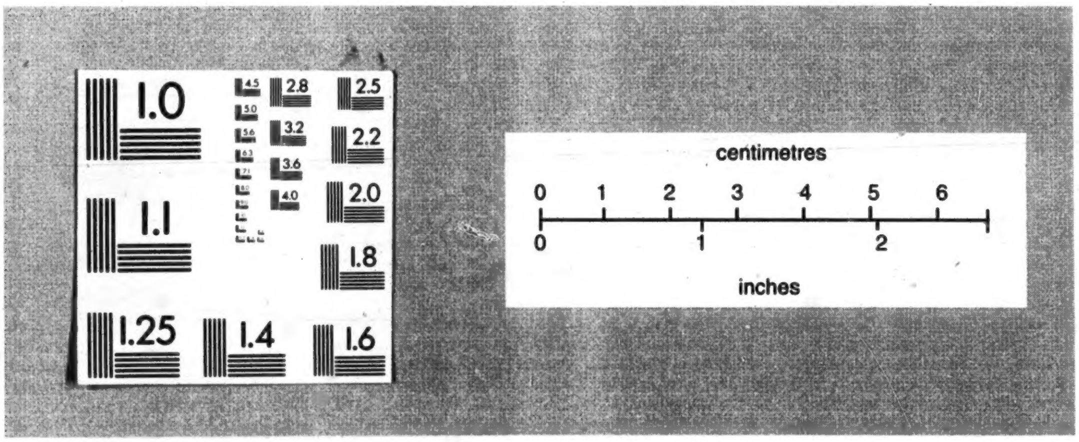
Date of publication: 2002/2003

Reproduction rights: © Parliamentary copyright 2001/2002. Reproduced by permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

Microfiche edition: © 2002/2003 ProQuest Information and Learning. All rights reserved.

Technical data: Film type: positive silver halide, archivally permanent microfiche conforming to AIIM and BSI standards.

Producing laboratory: Bell & Howell



[Ms Bridget Prentice]

police inform the community in areas where certain types of crime are being committed. The scheme is a great way of enabling the police to communicate with local people. It is particularly useful in dealing with deception crimes committed by bogus callers who go around telling people that they are from the gas board or the telephone company, and talk their way into houses—usually the houses of elderly people—to burgle them.

When the Lewisham police become aware of such activities, they can inform local people by telephone and warn them to be alert to bogus callers. Members of the community can then feed back information to the police so that they can catch the criminals.

Lewisham, along with Bromley, is one of the pathfinder boroughs. It will, we hope, be given more financial devolution to enable it to use its budget innovatively. I want the Minister to be enthusiastic about this. If the borough commander could give up 35 police officer posts and replace them with 35 civilian posts, the savings would allow him to put another 15 officers on the beat. I hope that the Minister will say that he considers that such an excellent idea that he would support devolved budgets throughout the Met area and, indeed, in police authorities throughout the country.

The Minister is aware of the need for civilians to be used to do administrative work in police stations and elsewhere so that police officers trained to do other jobs can do them. The quickest, most obvious way of reducing street crime is to put officers on the beat. That is how Lewisham did it in the past. Street crime increased when officers were moved to central London after 11 September; now that they are returning to the borough, it is falling again. There is a direct correlation between the number of officers on the beat and the level of street crime.

I want to mention some of the things that Sir John told the Select Committee about the Police Reform Bill. The hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire said that the Met was the only police authority that was interested in using auxiliaries, as it calls them—community support officers. There is a good reason for that. Sir John made it clear to the Select Committee that if he could have between 300 and 500 auxiliaries who would be the eyes and ears in central London, officers would become free to return to the boroughs and do the jobs for which they had been trained.

I was interested by the exchange between the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire and my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck). The commissioner said that the lack of a London-wide auxiliary force could lead to what he described as the balkanisation of police work in London. Boroughs such as Westminster may be able to afford a borough community force, but boroughs such as mine, Hackney or Tower Hamlets, cannot. We strongly support the part of the Police Reform Bill that refers to community support officers.

Sir John—and many other people—would like to know more about another aspect of the Bill. The Minister said that the standards unit was currently in force, but there is still confusion about its role and that of Her Majesty's inspectorate. Perhaps in time the two will become one, but it would be interesting to hear whether the Minister thinks that they should have separate roles, overlap, or even merge.

The commissioner said that police officers' working hours should be more flexible. He was particularly unhappy that only 16 per cent. of his officers were women. He thought that if the hours were more flexible, women who had left after having their second child—as most do—would be encouraged to return. That is an aspect of general policing that the Minister may wish to consider.

I am very proud of what the Lewisham police service in particular is doing and of what has been achieved, but there is still much to be done. Great challenges face our police service. Street robberies are too frequent, the fear of crime is too great, and police performance is too variable. No matter how many police officers are on the streets, we must never become complacent about crime in general. That is why I support police reform, as do both my borough commander and the Metropolitan commissioner. I am pleased that the commissioner also supports the reforms suggested in the Auld report.

There is much to be done. I hope that the Minister will continue to listen and take note of some of the ideas and examples of good practice that will be cited throughout today's debate and make them a reality throughout the country. I am very proud of our police service in Lewisham, under the leadership of Mike Humphreys. It is a safe borough in London. We would be happy to share our knowledge with others but in the meantime, general reform must take place, so that not only crime but the fear of crime is reduced and people can have faith in our police service and the criminal justice system.

11.10 am

Norman Baker (Lewes): I welcome the debate and thank the Government for their initiative in introducing it. I hope that it will become an annual event. It is certainly timely this year, given the progress of the Police Reform Bill and the recent vote of Police Federation members. I want to discuss the results of that vote first.

I was grateful that the Minister approached the matter with such an emollient tone, but he must recognise that, rightly or wrongly, there is a major problem, which the Government must deal with, in their relations with the Police Federation and police officers. The proposed package of pay, terms and conditions probably did not merit the 91 per cent. rejection, but 91 per cent. against and 9 per cent. in favour is a huge rejection. Every police force in the country and every policy authority area voted to reject the deal. In the Met, only 2 per cent. of officers voted in favour, and every rank voted to reject the deal. The best that the Government could manage was 29 per cent. among chief inspectors. A Police Federation briefing suggested that 37 per cent. said that the proposed reduction in overtime rates was the prime reason.

I do not want to say whether the deal was right or wrong; that is essentially a matter for police officers to decide in conjunction with the Government. I happen to think that it contains several good measures, although there are significant problems with the overtime package. Yesterday I spoke to a police officer in my part of the world, in Sussex—where I had a meeting with Police Federation representatives—who tells me that he has managed to have Christmas day off only twice in

20 years. Despite booking the day every year on 2 January or whenever, he is regularly called in to do mandatory overtime on Christmas day. Once or twice he was told almost on the chimes of 12 o'clock on Christmas eve that he was coming in to work the next day. If the Government are going to require that of police officers—as they do, and of course police officers must be called in when there are reasons for them to be—they must recognise that when there is mandatory overtime, cuts in overtime rates are likely to be a red rag to a bull.

Irrespective of whether the deal is fair, the Government have a small political problem with the Police Federation. I understand that the matter will now go to arbitration, but I should be interested to know how the Government intend to extricate themselves from the position that they have got themselves into.

The language used by police officers who write to me as a constituency MP is striking. It is far more confrontational than I have read in letters from police officers on any issue. I have received a letter from Graham Alexander of the Sussex Police Federation, a very long-serving police officer who is joint branch board chairman. He is quite a moderate person and I was surprised by the tone of his letter. He says that

> "the service as a whole is outraged at the way in which this present reform process has been conducted.
>
> It is a singular pity that the pay element has not been separated from other reforms (many of which are welcomed by the service) and it is also regrettable that the chronology of the so called negotiations was conducted with such haste . . . We are sick and tired of remaining silent whilst various arms of the Government actively encourage selective and outrageous misinformation which does nothing to increase our standing in the local community."

It has been suggested that that position is not entirely justifiable; Labour Members may well say so when they speak. It is certainly strong language. Regardless of whether it is justified, there is a problem, which the Government must tackle.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): I too have been surprised by the vituperation and seething anger in the correspondence that I have received from serving police officers, and I cannot believe that all of it is synthetic.

Norman Baker: It is not synthetic, and it behoves all of us to try to find a way forward and to help the Government if we can. I am willing to do that in some shape or form if I can, and I am sure that the same applies to the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice), as spokesman for the official Opposition.

I believe that some of the conditions that the Government proposed were not understood. There is scepticism about whether some of the promises made will replace some of the definites that would be removed. The Police Federation told me yesterday that the deal contained proposals, welcome in principle, to reward good performance from officers, but I was told that there is something called the outstanding performance appraisal payment, which was part of the Sheehy package, but not one police officer in the country has received any such payment. I do not know whether that is true, but perhaps the Minister will look into that.

Mr. Denham: The hon. Gentleman is essentially correct. The Sheehy package theoretically opened up an additional point at the top of the pay scale but no mechanism was put in place at the time to enable an officer to get it. For the avoidance of doubt, our commitment to enabling that to happen is absolute.

Norman Baker: That is a helpful response. I am grateful to the Minister. Perhaps more definitive statements might be helpful in the debate. At the moment, police officers feel that they are being asked to lose certain quantifiable privileges and benefits but are being offered what they regard as vague, unquantifiable benefits in return. That is part of the problem.

When the Minister replies, will he say how he intends to take the matter forward, through arbitration? Is it the Government's intention to impose the deal ultimately, even if there is continued massive opposition from police officers?

The issue of pay and conditions is also important because it affects morale in the police service. I am sure that all hon. Members wish to have a substantial number of police officers who are well motivated and who stay in post for a long time and therefore build up experience and the ability to police even more effectively than they do when they leave training college.

Numbers recruited are up. Belatedly, the Government have taken steps in recent months to deal with the shortage of police officers and more police officers are now being recruited throughout the country. That is very welcome, but retention is a problem; it is falling. The Minister may remember that when we had the debate on the police plan, I drew attention to the fact that resignations from the Metropolitan police area were up 29 per cent. on the previous year, that there was a similar problem in Greater Manchester and that the number of officers transferred from the Met to other forces was up 63 per cent. I am not sure whether to go along with the bucket metaphor used by the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire, but perhaps a colander metaphor might be more appropriate: water is poured in at one end and it comes out at the other.

Mr. Paice: That was on a different issue.

Norman Baker: It was a different issue, but it was related.

The 1997 Labour manifesto said that Labour wanted to get more officers back on the beat, which I take to mean two things: that people would not be stuck in offices doing paperwork and that the number of police officers would rise.

Mr. Denham *indicated assent.*

Norman Baker: The Minister confirms that. In September 2001, there were 127,231 police officers. The Minister says that he wants to get that figure up to 130,000. However, the September figure was only 73 higher than that for March 1997, and in the meantime the trend has dipped and then gone back up. It has taken four-and-a-half years not to make much progress nationally, and 18 of 43 constabularies have fewer officers than they had in 1997; I believe that Sussex is among the 18.

Those figures are a major concern because there has been an increase in some forms of crime—although not all—and we have a raft of new laws that require the police

[Norman Baker]

to deal with and act upon them. Thus, the pressures on the police are increasing. There is also more technology to deal with. The lot of the average police officer becomes more and more weighed down with legislation. Under those circumstances, it is necessary to have an increase in officers almost to stand still.

Mr. Denham: Perhaps I may ask the hon. Gentleman for his views on a specific issue, which Sussex illustrates—Sussex was mentioned earlier. It is true that between 1997 and September 2001 the number of police officers fell by about 240. Over that same period, the number of civilian staff increased by 357. It is clear that, to a degree, Sussex police service made that choice. However, does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Government were probably right to tell the police service as a whole that the fall in numbers went further than was necessary or desirable? Ring-fencing the crime fighting fund to ensure that numbers increase is the right response nationally, and for local forces.

Norman Baker: I agree with the Minister in two respects. Civilianisation has a role. In Sussex, it has been useful to consider what posts can be civilianised, and crime fighting has not suffered as a consequence. Occasionally, some of us in opposition try to have it both ways, but I agree that it is difficult to blame the Government for falls in police numbers, and then to credit increases to local authorities and council tax payers. Either the Government are responsible or they are not. Of course, the reality is that they are not entirely responsible, but there are levers that they can pull and perhaps they should have pulled them slightly earlier and further. However, I agree with the essence of the Minister's comment. The number of civilians involved in police work must be taken into account, but civilians will not provide the extra police on the beat that constituents want, for all manner of reasons.

Many of the proposals in the Police Reform Bill will be welcomed by all Members of the House, the police and the public. For example, I agree entirely with the creation of information technology and fraud specialists. Many criminals are highly specialised, and they need to be dealt with through specialisation in return. The Proceeds of Crime Bill was one way of dealing with that issue, and specialists in the police force is another. It is entirely sensible to go down that road.

In principle, there can be no objection to the reasonably uncontroversial idea of civilianised escort officers. Indeed, the Prison Service has such officers. However, there are one or two very controversial matters in the Police Reform Bill to which I want to draw attention, the first of which is the role of community support officers. I am concerned that the Government's approach—which has perhaps been adopted with the best of intentions, and in the light of the comments of the Met's Sir John Stevens—will lead to a lack of clarity and a plethora of different people performing different roles in different parts of the country, which in turn will lead to confusion among the public. A CSO could say, "You have crossed the border into borough A, where I have a particular power, but in borough B, in which you live, your CSO does not have that power." That is not a satisfactory way to proceed.

If we have a plethora of people with different responsibilities who are accountable to different people, our collective objective of ensuring the proper public accountability of those who undertake police functions will be weakened. That serious point must be borne in mind if we are to ensure that the police remain accountable—as the Government doubtless intend—and that such accountability be strengthened as far as possible.

I have a problem with the idea that someone who is not a police officer should have the right to lay a hand on another person and to detain them for up to 30 minutes. That is a very dangerous road to go down, for all manner of reasons. Such a person is liable to command less respect, and therefore to engender greater resistance from certain elements of the community. Nor is it entirely clear what will happen after 30 minutes if a police officer has not arrived. Presumably, the person in question will be set free. Respect in general for law enforcement agencies might also be weakened if those who detain people are regarded as elevated park keepers. That would weaken the authority of the police, and to judge by representations made to me by the Association of Chief Police Officers and others, the police themselves are concerned about that serious point.

I ask the Government to ensure consistency in the powers given to CSOs throughout the country, and that those powers are limited and do not include the right to interfere with the free passage of individuals. The Liberal Democrats are happy with, and will support, the concept of CSOs—indeed, we included such a provision in our last manifesto. We believe that the role of traffic wardens could be integrated with that of CSOs, so that they share the same functions. I am sure that abolishing traffic wardens—if that proved necessary—would be a popular policy in some parts of the country, but in principle there is no reason why traffic wardens should not become CSOs and be given increased powers. Similarly, CSOs could take on certain powers currently enjoyed by traffic wardens. That clear and popular option would relieve the police of a number of duties that, frankly, they do not want to perform.

There is a particular problem in my constituency—it is doubtless mirrored elsewhere in the country—with untaxed vehicles. I receive many letters from constituents, saying, "There is an untaxed vehicle at the bottom of my road, but no one is interested." The council cannot tow such vehicles away because they are not officially abandoned. The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, which is a long way away in Swansea, has one officer in Brighton to deal with Sussex responses. The reality is that untaxed vehicles sit on streets for weeks and months, and no one does anything about them. In turn, that infuriates law-abiding constituents who say, "Why should I bother taxing my car, given that this abandoned one is not taxed and no one is doing anything about it?"

There is a clear and obvious need to create an enhanced tier of civil enforcement, under local authority control, to deal with such issues. However, that is very different from establishing a second-rate police force, which would not command respect and would lead us into dangerous territory.

Geraint Davies: The hon. Gentleman will be interested to know that the first traffic wardens in Britain were established in Croydon, which has always been a popular place. Police in Croydon meet local councils weekly to co-ordinate the activities of traffic wardens and the use of closed circuit television—the eyes and ears of the police. Does he agree that that partnership approach is the way forward in tackling crime locally?

Norman Baker: Yes, and the Government are on the right track in talking about crime and disorder partnerships. Good work is being done in my constituency by Lewes district council, East Sussex council and the police. A great deal can come from such partnerships, not least the provision of information on the ground that can help the police to detect serious crime. As the police themselves say, those involved in petty crime are often involved in serious crime. Such a partnership tier should not be neglected.

Part of the solution is more police. The bottom line is that we need more professional, paid police officers doing a proper job. We need better retention of those officers to ensure that the good work done in recruitment is not lost at the other end. Perhaps we need a retained force—such as that in fire service—to offer part-time police work to those of, or approaching, retirement age. That would enable specialisation and help us to build on experience. We also need more specials. I do not understand why we cannot attract more specials, and we must consider what can be done to increase numbers. We also need community support officers, who should be local authority employees and should rack up the powers of traffic wardens.

A more serious issue—in this regard, I share in large measure the views of the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire—is the powers in the Police Reform Bill relating to democracy and accountability. In essence, the Home Secretary will have far greater powers of intervention than any previous Home Secretary has enjoyed. That is worrying and dangerous, and I hope that the Government will not go down that road. In many ways, the police are accountable to their local police authority. That tripartite structure—as the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire described it—is essential. It works well, and ensures that operational control remains with the chief constable, who in turn is accountable to the local police authority. That is a better way to deal with matters, rather than through the Home Office legislating via Parliament.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): When Mayor Giuliani took office, he was told by the local police establishment that he should concentrate on important matters, rather than concerning himself with petty crime, but he did concern himself with such crime. He put the criminals inside, and in doing so solved the major crime as well. However, he had direct control, and was directly and democratically accountable. Does the hon. Gentleman think that we should learn from the American lesson?

Norman Baker: I am happy to learn lessons from anywhere in the world. We in this country are always keen to learn from America, but perhaps we should learn rather more frequently from our European Union colleagues. I am always surprised when we look to America for solutions. America prides itself on having the death penalty, but that is neither fair nor particularly effective in reducing crime. We can learn lessons from elsewhere in the world, but we should not assume that what works in America will necessarily work here.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we have an opportunity in London? The Mayor of London should take a real interest in the policing of the capital and liaise closely with the Metropolitan police authority. We have a chance of effective political direction for policing in London, but whether we will get it is another matter.

Norman Baker: The Mayor clearly has a role to play in the co-ordination of policing across London. The hon. Member for Lewisham, East (Ms Prentice) mentioned the danger of balkanisation unless a London-wide perspective is adopted, and I agree with that point.

I tell the Minister plainly that my party cannot live with clauses 5 to 7 of the Police Reform Bill, which would give unprecedented powers to the Home Secretary. He would be able to direct chief officers to submit action plans. He would also be able to make regulations to require police forces

"to adopt particular operational procedures or practices".

That is unacceptable. We will not budge on that point and we will do all that we can, in conjunction with the Conservatives and others in this Chamber and in the Lords, to delete those provisions. That is a point of principle for us.

It would be very dangerous to give any Home Secretary such powers. The present Home Secretary is an affable fellow, most of the time, but when we frame legislation we should think about the worst possible holder of that office. We need to consider how those powers might be used by a future Home Secretary. I do not wish to upset the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire, but I wonder whether the Minister has thought about what the worst sort of Conservative Home Secretary could do with the proposed powers. That is the test that we need to apply in deciding whether the powers are reasonable and sensible.

I am also concerned by the Home Secretary's tendency to intervene—most notably in the sacking by press release of the chief constable of Sussex. I do not claim that the chief constable of Sussex was perfect, but if he was not, it was a matter for the Sussex police authority to deal with, not the Home Secretary. If the Government wish to argue that greater powers are necessary in law to deal with chief constables who are not up to the job, I am willing to consider the issue and to determine what provision could be made to that end. However, such powers should rest not with the Home Secretary but with the police authority or some other independent mechanism. When the Home Secretary was the Education Secretary, his style was to intervene before breakfast, before lunch and before tea—although someone else might have said that. That was unpleasant and unwelcome in education, but it is positively dangerous when it happens with the police.

Another aspect of the reform package is the independent police complaints commission, which is a concept that I wholly welcome. However, the March issue of "Police" says that it was the Police Federation's understanding

"that the IPCC would undertake 1,000 investigations a year."

[Norman Baker]

There are some 32,000 complaints against the police every year, which means that the new commission would investigate only some 3 per cent. of complaints, leaving 97 per cent. to be investigated by police officers. If that is the case, it is a weakness in the provisions. The IPCC should be responsible for all investigations of complaints. It should be able to call for evidence in the same way as the parliamentary or local government ombudsman does and obtain the views of the police, and it should be responsible. I hope that the Police Federation is wrong on that point and I should be grateful if the Minister clarified the role of the IPCC and how many cases a year it will address.

The clear-up rate was 32 per cent. in 1990, according to an answer supplied to my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes). That fell to 25 per cent. in 1999–2000, although the actual number of clear-ups rose, reflecting the increase in crime over that period. The public are concerned by those figures, but we must put them in perspective. The clear-up rate for serious crimes, such as murder, is much higher. That is right. If—horror of horrors—a child is murdered, the public want to know that the police will take it seriously and will not rest until the person responsible is apprehended, brought to justice and convicted, however long that takes. The performance indicators that the Government wish to introduce should not dilute that approach. The danger is that the performance indicators will dictate the police's approach. It would be easy to raise the clear-up rate by paying less attention to serious crimes and scooping up less serious crimes. That would be wrong.

People respond to performance indicators. The Minister had responsibility for the fire service at one point and he will know that it has often been argued that fire authorities get paid according to how many call-outs they receive. That means that they have no incentive to reduce the number of call-outs through education in schools. Sussex fire brigade tried that approach, the number of call-outs fell and it was penalised. Fire officers have suggested to me that they should ring up with false alarms to bring the number of calls up. We have to be careful that performance indicators, which are valuable in some ways, do not achieve a perverse result.

The point made by the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) is important and I hope that the Government will consider the issue of imitation and replica weapons, licences—eight-year-olds can qualify for shotgun licences—and the access that those under 18 have to weapons, including air guns, which are a major problem in terms of cruelty to animals.

The role of customs officers at ports is also important, because many guns and drugs enter the country. We now have a full ferry service again—thank goodness—at Newhaven, but the number of customs officers has fallen from 120 10 years ago to 15 today. We cannot hold back the guns and the drugs if there are no customs officers. A big green channel has opened up at Newhaven, but the red channel is very small. If we had more customs officers, they would pay for themselves, and I hope that the Government will make that calculation.

My final point concerns the fear of crime. Many areas, including my constituency, are not hotbeds of crime and are relatively safe, which is not the case everywhere. However, in my constituency, which I am proud to represent, there is a perverse fear of crime. One reason is that the police are not out on the beat as often as people would wish, so they do not feel reassured. I do not buy the argument that I hear sometimes from chief constables and others that having police on the beat is a waste of time. It reduces the fear of crime and people are certain that they can go about their business. For example, people in Seaford in my constituency can go out in the evening. Seaford does not have a particular problem with crime, but people's fear keeps them at home in the evening, with a consequent loss of their ability to enjoy life.

The hon. Member for Lewisham, East mentioned the Crown Prosecution Service and the prosecution of crimes, but people seem to get away with a whole range of petty crimes—such as vandalism, scratching cars and pulling up flower beds—because the police do not regard them as a priority, the CPS do not want to press charges and if those responsible are brought to justice they are given a fine or a warning. Such behaviour receives no proper sanction, but if people wake up to smashed milk bottles and windows, scratched cars and upturned flowers, they believe—often wrongly—that their area is unpoliced, not law-abiding and not safe. We must deal with those crimes if we are to make big inroads.

Overall, the Police Reform Bill has many good elements, although the Government have a problem with the Police Federation over the present pay and conditions package. The Minister will have to reconsider part 1 of the Bill because, as it is constructed, it will not wash.

11.40 am

Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas (Crosby): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to participate in this important debate on the police.

Most of my comments relate to the White Paper, and I will also take this opportunity to advise hon. Members of my work in my capacity as the chair of the all-party group for abuse investigations. Members of Parliament established that group in October 2001. Members from both sides of the House and the other place receive correspondence from a growing number of constituents who are concerned about the efficacy of the processes used by the police and the Crown Prosecution Service in connection with their investigations following abuse allegations.

Many organisations and constituents who act on behalf of the falsely accused assert that individuals have been convicted of crimes that they did not commit and that vexatious complaints have been made against those individuals with the express purpose of receiving financial or other gain. The group has not been established to consider individual cases, but it uses indicative cases to illustrate the processes and practices used by the police authorities, the CPS and the magistrates courts in the pursuit of their investigations.

The group has received a number of reports from experts in abuse investigations. On behalf of members of the group, I have met and been in written dialogue with a number of individuals, agencies and authorities to discuss the concerns of group members. I am particularly grateful to, among others, Mr. Barrie Irving, the director of the Police Foundation, and Denis Bourne of the Kansai Business System. Mr. Irving and Mr. Bourne have recently submitted written evidence, which I commend to the House, to the Select Committee on Home Affairs in respect of the White Paper, and in my speech I shall reflect some of their words, which I wholly endorse, as they reinforce the results of my extensive research into the activity of the police.

The White Paper condemns a number of features of police performance. Variations in crime and detection rates across the country are criticised, and it is argued, through the quotation from the Audit Commission, that that variability exceeds what can be explained by environmental factors. Although it is acknowledged that the police do not have sole responsibility for that variability, the Government's intention to reduce the variability and generally improve police performance is clearly stated.

To that end, a variety of stratagems are outlined, including improved training, to which I shall refer later, making human resource management regulations more flexible, and subjecting chief officers to a standard assessment procedure. The nub of the new sanctions to be made available to the Home Secretary to back up requests for better police performance is the creation of a standards unit in the Home Office and a new power to impose management intervention from outside a force—presumably, from outside the service—on forces deemed to be failing by the measurement methods and the criteria then available.

I wish to concentrate on the seminal issue of improving operational policing performance at basic command unit level, to improve overall police efficiency and, inevitably, effectiveness. The White Paper makes it clear that that will also be the priority behind the drafting of the Police Reform Bill. I also wish to comment on the wisdom and efficacy of the strategy outlined in the White Paper. I concur wholeheartedly with the belief that many police operational units are currently operating below par, but wish to argue against the methodology that is likely to be used to identify failing forces and basic command units and the remedial strategy that the Government intend to deploy against them.

Thanks to very considerable innovative policing research in the United States and other parts of Europe during the 1970s and 1980s, there is a ready supply of plausible methodologies available to improve detection rates, provide more effective policing services and control certain kinds of crime. Although those methodologies have been available for many years in the form of original US research reports, policing handbooks and Home Office replications of original US work, it would appear that the mix of operational activities on the ground in UK basic command units remains much as it was in the late 1980s; and there are some key reasons why that is so.

It has proved difficult to deliver to police authorities the information technology systems necessary to implement more sophisticated strategies in the UK. The UK police attitude to information and information processing reflects the reality that most officers have to supply data that do not directly help them to do their jobs. The pressure on local officers to maintain a purely reactive, incident-chasing style of policing has been unrelenting, as public demand for services and the dictates of the criminal justice system appear to use up all available time.

The availability of officers over time continues to be a matter of feast or famine. Externally dictated demands, conditions of service and other cultural considerations often lead to human resource wastage, and patterns of deployment remain stubbornly misaligned with demand in many areas. The service has evolved a culture of conformity with complex sets of regulations and directives. The eyes of supervisors and supervised are therefore directed to demonstrating that what has been ordered to be done has been done. In such a culture it is easy, perhaps inevitable, for results—performance—to take a back seat.

A national statistics-driven centralised performance management regime has been grafted on top of that system. Because of the structure of that regime, it has become absorbed into the culture of directives, orders and local attitudes to improving outputs. Statistics used to describe outcomes rather than inform the user about the inefficiencies and ineffectiveness of the processes employed are an absolute waste of time and should not, in themselves, direct funding or activity programmes.

In a culture of conformity, confronting individuals about performance in the absence of direct evidence of dereliction of duty tends to be avoided. Individual performance issues are rarely addressed. In extreme cases where discipline procedures are inappropriate, they are dealt with in an arcane way that breeds resentment and distrust. Formal performance assessment is largely a discredited process.

As long as that conformity model holds sway, there can be no real pressure on the service to provide the management skills training necessary for proactive performance management. There appears to be no need for it simply because, if people are meeting their targets, there is no criticism, and hence no need to evaluate the procedures that they employ to achieve their targets. Those points are well illustrated by my review of the inspections undertaken by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary.

My thorough analysis of the reports produced by HMIC and the CPS from 1995 to 2001 indicates that there has been no systematic evaluation of the processes used by the police when they collect evidence and that there has been no review undertaken by the CPS into the effectiveness of the processes utilised by its own staff who scrutinise and evaluate evidence for credibility.

What follows is an objective assessment of the investigations undertaken by HMIC and the CPS to illustrate the nature and scope of their work. Hon. Members will know that HMIC is charged with helping to establish and enforce standards of efficiency, rather than effectiveness, for each police authority. To that end, it undertakes a series of reviews designed to assess the operations of each constabulary and, where it finds flaws, to provide remedial recommendations. As hon. Members will know, those inspections can take one of three forms: performance review inspections, primary inspections or thematic inspections. Performance reports are also produced for the police training facilities throughout the country.

Although those inspections are an effective tool for defining the management framework and the efficiency of general operational procedures—they check on targets met and objectives fulfilled—the reviews, in any of their incarnations, do little to assess the substantive, rather than procedural, value of the work being carried out by each constabulary. As a result, the reports provide information on how well procedures are being performed and targets

[Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas]

met, but do nothing to examine the efficacy of the procedures themselves—how procedures and administration affect the quality and the credibility of the evidence collected. In that way, HMIC provides conformity audits, rather than effective performance analysis.

Although there has been no prescriptive model for performance review inspections, the topics covered in the reports are more or less universal. The issues assessed include long-term planning, budgetary and personnel policies, and questions raised by specific types of crime. In general, the reports will present a synopsis of the strategic ambitions of the force, which, far from providing a coherent vision of the purpose and substantive procedures involved in policing, read as little more than chronologies of meetings and publications and explanations of management styles.

In respect of the broader policy questions, the discussion is generally confined to how performance targets are set and the methods used to assess whether they are met. There appears to be a lack of concern for the choice of objectives and the selection of the methods employed to achieve them, despite the fact that, as resources become scarcer relative to demands, those decisions become more crucial.

The more specific sections of the reports that are designed to investigate performance and individual types of policing duties are similarly flawed. Methods of monitoring performance are again reduced to explanations of quality audit and "information package" distributions. Similarly, examinations of crime management constitute a list of target statistics and an evaluation of classification and recording procedures. Consequently, the recommendations that these investigations generate involve suggestions for more frequent publication of data, a shift in governing structure, the commissioning of independent studies into absenteeism and the like, and further reviews of whether practices are in accordance with strategy and produce the required statistics.

Although the statistics provided in the performance review inspections are certainly indicative of whether constabularies are effectively run and consistently meet performance targets, they, too, fail to assess whether the adoption of these structures and targets by the forces produces a high calibre of police work and helps to advance the larger goals of not only efficient, but constructive and just outcomes.

The primary inspections are similar in content and structure to the performance reviews, but are somewhat more detailed and provide further assessments of previous reviews and their effects. Although they delve more into specific facets of each area of analysis, the analysis itself is no more comprehensive than that observed in the performance reviews. Discussions of strategy and planning still amount to explanations of hierarchies and guidelines for establishing targets, while reviews of training are more focused on the logistics of the process than the efficacy of the methods and the skill sets that they are designed to impart. Similarly, the analysis of criminal justice performance concentrates on the efficiency of the methodologies rather than the quality of the product that these approaches are likely to produce.

I must touch on the performance and primary inspections of training facilities. The reviews of training facilities take the same form and occur on the same timetable as the inspections of individual constabularies. Like their counterparts, the training reports cover a wide range of topics, but are uniquely and disproportionately concerned with the status of the facilities and the equipment in the training establishment rather than the quality of the training provided. Generally, the reports concentrate on administrative matters and the suitability of training facilities, such as swimming pools, rather than the substantive purpose of the facilities.

National Police Training and its predecessors have, for good historical reasons, been structured as the institutions of further education within policing. Police officers have been treated by these institutions as students who, having received instruction, either pass or fail courses. Although such an approach can produce an educated elite, it does not, on the whole, generate pervasive behavioural competence and essential management skills. Raising the level of behavioural skills requires a coaching, mentoring approach, usually at the workplace. The accent is on demonstration and practice, not on the acquisition of information.

Trainers must be able to guarantee that they will, within broad limits, produce desired levels of competent behaviour. The trainee in such a regime is merely able to turn up and bring levels of intelligence, attention and motivation to the party. My analysis, which has been supported, suggests that such training produces the following skills deficits. Basic command units have not been trained on collaborative communication, and there is generally an inability and lack of opportunity to give or receive feedback on performance or the execution of cases. There is also—I have not been able to identify any suitable training—an inability to analyse effectively problems and, subsequently, design remedial action, in addition to defining simple work processes as a basis for assessing and improving performance. Although the inspections contain statements of what the training programme is designed to foster in students, the inspections do little to examine whether the goals are being achieved and whether the methods employed are appropriate to the goals set forth.

I also wish to reflect on thematic inspections. Because of their narrow scope, the thematic reviews are more likely to produce not only information on procedure, but an analysis of the value of the procedures themselves. However, in the context of sex abuse investigations that are currently being carried out in the United Kingdom, I wish to point out that there has been no thematic review from 1995 to date that relates specifically to the methods of investigation into cases of sexual abuse of children, even though new guidelines are simultaneously being prepared to assist in the investigation of such cases. In addition, it has proved impossible to obtain evidence from any individual police authority to show that it has undertaken research into the efficacy of the processes that it deploys in such cases.

What have I learned about the nature of the audit and assessment work that is carried out by HMIC? Its reports appear to be about the process that monitors the efficiency with which goals are achieved but not about the efficacy or the value of the methodologies employed by the police or the CPS during the course of their investigations or the value of the goals themselves.

I have a number of questions for my right hon. Friend the Minister. If there is manifest public anxiety about the quality of some aspects of policing—for instance, the choice of police goals and/or the methods of achieving them—how can the current tripartite system of police accountability engage constructively with this anxiety? Which part of the tripartite structure should take the lead, and how can the public interest best be represented? If the strict constitutional position is that HMIC provides an assessment of police authority efficiency, but not effectiveness, to the Home Secretary, what organisation should realistically undertake that task? Should the activity be better internalised? Should we not empower and require police authorities to review the efficacy of their procedures?

I am dismayed that the only way we appear to achieve significant change in the criminal justice system is as a consequence of royal commissions and departmental Committee inquiries. To use an engineering analogy, we must enable the providers of this crucial service to effect changes within their own company before they are declared bankrupt and sent into ritualistic receivership, only to be rebranded and relaunched essentially unchanged because the change has not arisen from the grass roots but been imposed.

I have to ask myself whether the police force in this country is currently the British Leyland of the public authorities, producing vast quantities of statistics that no longer appeal and are not indicative of the quality of the product coming off the line and into the street. To continue the engineering analogy to illustrate my point, every engineering company in the country had quality control departments 50 years ago to check that the production of the product was perfect. Where are the quality control departments in each police authority? Furthermore, British engineering companies found that, even if they had perfect products, that did not necessarily save them from liquidation. Companies that want to survive and develop must engage strategic and marketing departments that are specifically focused on the requirements of the public and shareholders, and must redefine their products to meet changing demands.

I cannot find these strategic product review activities in police authorities and I would argue that they need to be there. Management by consultant or, in this case, HMIC or the Home Office sometimes offers sinking ships a reprieve, but it cannot keep them afloat unless there is a serious redesign of the processes utilised and the products produced.

The involvement of junior officers in the reconfiguration of the service is essential. Bottom-up redesign processes can enable and have enabled organisations to transform themselves. However, I am aware that this proposal is currently counter-cultural, threatens established relationships with senior management and is usually sanctioned and supported only by the senior police managers who are confident in their ability to devolve power. Indeed, several successful schemes have been referred to in the debate and I am sure that this facet of bottom-up control has been a real element. Without coherent senior management support for the bottom-up philosophy, the results of such experiments quickly wither even though they are temporarily successful.

When junior officers are not involved in the process of change in the way that bottom-up techniques allow, there is a persistent tendency to keep street-level operations entirely isolated from senior managers and their schemes for change and improvement. It is into this cultural environment that the White Paper ventures. Its tone accurately mimics the hectoring tone of those campaigns for change about which junior officers are most cynical. The erection of a new superordinate source for this kind of rhetoric on the back of devices such as a "standards unit" and the formal assessment of ACPO-rank merely increases the vast chain-of-command distance between street level officers and the perceived source of ultimate power in the system. If the command structure already worked well, that might be an acceptable stratagem. In the face of the current evidence about the level of connection between senior and junior ranks, and in view of the length of the chain of command, the White Paper's approach threatens to reinforce the negative attitudes of junior officers and the dysfunctional management style of their superiors.

At a more prosaic level, the performance superstructure that is being planned by the Home Secretary is likely to create an even greater need for the collation of statistics and other information at basic command unit level. The average officer will not have a personal interest in the accuracy of that information. The top-down performance regime that is envisaged will merely reinforce the directives, regulations, report-up culture that officers on the ground can so easily identify as the source of their poor efficiency.

If the Police Reform Bill pours additional human resources into the system while doing nothing to change the management culture, there is a real danger that those resources will be mopped up by additional administrative burdens that are created at the same time. On the other hand, responsibility for additional officers, sworn and unsworn, will increase the need radically to overhaul junior and middle management training and performance procedures. If senior managers see themselves as being placed under threat by the invention of yet more superstructure at the Home Office, they will be liable to exaggerate their authoritarian style. That will actively hinder the process of management culture reform.

It is nevertheless right that the White Paper should target restrictive conditions of service, high levels of bureaucracy and inefficient information technology deployment as sources of poor police performance, but those key factors have been targeted to little effect for many years. As the complexity of social life and the rate of technological development increase, the leisurely pace of police adaptation becomes critical. The general approach of the White Paper was tried by Patrick Sheehy. Not only was there little visible implementation following his report, but the reduction of the rank structure that was achieved reverted more or less to normal after a polite interval. I understand the frustration of successive Ministers and their supporting teams of civil servants when faced with the police service's ability to fend off change. However, it is a well-established principle of clinical practice that losing patience with the patient does not increase the effectiveness of the treatment offered.

Local junior officers have a considerable degree of control over the figures that emerge so impressively from the mouth of the statistical machine that successive Governments have built at the Home Office. In important

[Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas]

respects, those figures are a product of the culture. They are fairly accurate where officers feel the responsibility to make them so, but can be alarmingly inaccurate where those responsible for collecting them have no stake in their accuracy.

For geographical, demographic, historical and social reasons that are not under police control, basic command units face idiosyncratic performance advantages and disadvantages. If officers perceived that they were generating information to feed a remedial process in which they were critically involved, and which was presided over by a supportive management, they would quickly ensure that data quality and processing improved. Something akin to the opposite is happening. Distant statistical experts are meant to identify failing BCUs. The tables in the White Paper give a stark picture of the rough and ready statistical reasoning that will be employed. Those responsible for drafting the White Paper must imagine that the political force of the argument for change will be enhanced if police management is seen by the public to be responsible for a degree of failure that is clear, stark and considerable.

In that context, I support the Police Foundation's argument that successive generations of police managers have allowed a management culture and style to evolve that does not produce adaptive and performance-related responses to changes and increases in public demand. The first step towards improving that situation should be to encourage senior managers to take responsibility for it. The proper—indeed, constitutionally exact—role of the Home Secretary is to support and to give advice to chief officers so that police performance at a local level can be enhanced. Taking the responsibility for problem definition and the design of remedies out of the hands of chief officers disempowers them when they most need to act with assurance and flair.

Facile statistical definition of failure is a powerful symbol of what the Home Secretary intends as regards the relationship with, and future action on, ACPO and the Police Superintendents Association. The definitions are facile because they fail to take into account the true complexity of the available performance measures and their patterns of interconnectedness and correlation with geographic and demographic characteristics of basic command units, and hence forces. No doubt Ministers wish to impress the police service with the firmness of their reform intentions. The Cabinet is signed up to evidence-based policy. It therefore appears to be counterproductive in that case to resort to a meretricious use of statistics.

To set the record straight, the variation tables quoted in the White Paper should be more properly used to set out a number of null hypotheses for which there are wel-established test procedures. That has already been tried out by several experts, and I believe that Home Office statisticians have also undertaken the task. The results of that exercise tend to give the lie to the idea that performance statistics show the kind of unexplained and unacceptable variation that the White Paper claims. Certainly, there is great variation, but much of it can be explained. Indeed, that is the point of the well-known and respected statistical technique known as analysis of variance.

It is far from clear that the figures accurately identify poor police management as a substantial cause. As I have been at pains to point out, there is poor police management, and it is the cause of poor performance, but the hot spots cannot be found by using the simplistic method that is adopted in the White Paper.

Mr. Wilkinson: May I interrupt the hon. Lady's filibuster for a moment to ask her to identify some of those hot spots?

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: Taking as an example cases in which I am closely involved, the statistics for the number of sex abuse offences that are being perpetrated on Merseyside would lead one to believe that the people of Merseyside are genetically predisposed to sex abuse. Statistics for other parts of the country show that very few sex abuse cases are being pursued, which implies that Merseyside is a hot spot for sex abuse activities and inquiries. However, there is nothing at all to support that view, unless one accepts that argument for genetic predisposition. I should be pleased if the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) were able to give me any research corroborating that theory.

An effective compromise is to present the simple league tables as no more than the beginning of an exploratory process. If it is to be successful, the process requires the good faith of the Government and the constructive participation of ACPO, the Police Superintendents Association and the Police Federation.

Ultimately, I would argue that diagnosis of management failure that is accurate enough to use as the basis for remedial action, and which will be accepted by all interested parties as the basis for change, requires a bottom-up, organisation-led approach. Where legislation supports such cultural reform processes, they can be said to have serious positive potential; otherwise, they are likely to suffer the fate of their predecessors.

I share the Police Foundation's view that the White Paper has set out on a well-worn path with insufficient insight into the nature of the problem that it seeks to tackle. To my knowledge, there has never been an example of a Government producing a revolution in management culture and style by legislative diktat. Nearly all the most effective catalysts for change were applied at middle and junior management levels, with directors supporting but not directing the process. Technological change is one universal means by which to power rapid and radical adaptation. No such radical technological change is on the horizon for policing, and innovations that might have had an effect—command and control, computer-assisted detection and crime pattern analysis—have mostly been folded into the existing culture without causing much disturbance. The Home Secretary and the Government may well argue that even during the Thatcher Administration and at the time of Sir Patrick Sheehy's report, concern over police performance and political will and power never coalesced as they do now; and that historical precedents should therefore be ignored in favour of a full-frontal assault.

ACPO and the Police Superintendents Association have already given their first reactions to the White Paper and I am pleased to say that it seems to have provoked a lively new interest in performance management. There is no intrinsic reason why, after a period of turbulence, the institutions outlined in the White Paper cannot be adapted to a reasonable and reputable process of management reform. However, the immediate intention to reform police conditions of service poses a taxing dilemma. The proposals have been roundly condemned and rejected by the Police Federation, as all involved could have predicted.

I acknowledge that conditions of service as regards shift working, overtime, salary scales, special payments, sickness, absenteeism, and so on must change. That much has been apparent since the Sheehy report in 1993. However, the way in which the list is approached will affect the progress of the rest of the reform agenda. So far, the auguries in that respect are not good, and my conclusion is that if negotiation with the federation remains on its current combative course, ACPO and the Police Superintendents Association will be seriously disadvantaged in trying to work behind the rhetoric of the White Paper, and with the impositions and injunctions of the Police Reform Bill, to achieve genuine reform in the management culture.

It should be clearly recognised that much could be offered to the federation arising from the reform agenda. The federation's considerable interest in the professional development of its members, and the introduction of warden and non-sworn officer schemes, will create opportunities for junior officers to take on management roles. New pay scales and reward systems are mooted; they would be welcomed at local level if there was trust that the spirit of these innovations would be honoured in their implementation. The recent federation vote against the reforms was a measure of its confidence in the service's management, just as the tone and content of the White Paper symbolise politicians' trust in the service. This is an elegant stand-off.

In conclusion, I believe that the political scene is too well set to be substantially redrawn at this juncture. If the Government have to keep on the present course, the most useful contribution that they can make to the reform of police performance management will be to invest heavily in three crucial areas. First, every effort must be made to empower, not weaken, the leadership potential of ACPO and the Police Superintendents Association. Secondly, a viable working relationship has to be created through the federation with sergeants and inspectors to deliver reform. Thirdly—most importantly, in my view—there must be a radical reappraisal of management training for junior officers. Only when these recommendations have been implemented will I have confidence in the product coming off the justice production line in the UK today.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. A number of hon. Members are hoping to catch my eye, so I urge Members to make brief contributions. More may then be successful.

12.11 pm

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): This has been a most reassuring debate. First, the Minister told us that there were no Spanish practices in the police, and now we know from the hon. Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) that there are no time-watchers in the House of Commons.

The contribution of the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) was to demonstrate by its loquacity that the Liberal party is at least the measure of the Conservatives. The difference, of course, is that my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) has his natural fenlander reassurance. I do not think that he ever gets rushes of blood to the head. He is someone on whom we can instinctively rely, and the police service want that kind of interest from those who are likely to be Ministers of the Crown in the near future. We were most impressed by what he had to say.

Without going down memory lane, I have detected that people's attitude to crime has greatly changed during the time that I have been in this place, from the early 1970s when I was a Member in Bradford, and from the late 1970s when I started representing Ruislip-Northwood. When I first became involved in inner-city politics in Bradford, and in outer-city politics in London, crime was not the overwhelming preoccupation for our constituents that it is now. Perhaps that is because, in those early days, there was not the drug culture that we have today. Muggings and street crime were not prevalent, youth was not so alienated, antisocial and violent, and there was not such a high incidence of racially motivated offences. The availability and use of firearms was much less, and—as a background—the family unit was not in the process of disintegration that it is in to a large extent today.

Any Government, therefore, will have a very difficult background against which to evolve imaginative policing policies. Her Majesty's Opposition are correct to emphasise—as I am sure they will on Tuesday, when we debate the quality of life in London and the south-east—that the breakdown of law and order in the capital and the prevalent culture of violence that exists in many of our big cities in the south-east and elsewhere have to be addressed as an urgent priority by Her Majesty's Government. They have not done so effectively to date.

There are useful initiatives. It is true that the crime fighting fund will provide extra moneys to recruit new officers—although retention has been more of a problem than recruitment—and the resource allocation formula will make it likely that outer London boroughs such as mine will have a higher proportion of officers than in recent years.

The effort that the Government are making to address the pay and remuneration of officers is crucial, and they must get it right. They will have to sit down with the representatives of the police service and work out a pay and conditions structure that will motivate and retain officers for at least the next decade. That may need some fairly radical measures, but it must be done.

I found something that the Minister said particularly important. He stressed the need to improve the training system, and said that the police needed enhanced leadership skills and a faster promotion structure. I endorse all those sentiments. I am not against the idea of a national centre for police excellence, or against the concept that the Home Secretary should more actively monitor the performance of chief officers.

In putting the tackling of crime at the centre of the Government's priorities, we could perhaps look at the model in many other countries, where the police service has an equal status to the three armed forces of the realm. I hope that the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis could be given right of access, if necessary, to the Prime Minister. That would be a measure of great imagination, and would have a lot to commend it.

[Mr. John Wilkinson]

The strategic aims that the Commissioner has set are wise. They include the increased security of the capital, in which regard the intelligence service within the police force must work more effectively with MI5 to tackle terrorism; the creation of safer communities for Londoners—all our constituents want more beat officers; and an improved police response to vulnerable victims. Here, too, our constituents often complain that the 999 system does not work well and that the police respond ineffectively and slowly.

A further aim is to tackle youth offending. I suggest that the Government reintroduce the borstal system. I believe that placing young offenders who have become alienated from society and repeatedly commit crime in an institution where they could learn new skills in a controlled environment in which discipline and better values were inculcated would be a great step forward.

Other measures are also possible. I would re-institute officer cadet entry into the Metropolitan force, and have a Trenchard-style police academy in which the best standards of leadership could be inculcated, and where the high fliers could receive the in-depth training and career-enhancing measures that are needed in their formative years.

Instead of having the problem of community support officers, I would transform the specials and have an auxiliary police service, rather like the Royal Auxiliary Air Force. It would operate to exactly the same standards as the regular force and be paid exactly the same rates of pay when on duty. It would be engaged in regular duty for two weeks every year and have a proper bounty. It should be a force to which retiring officers could aspire. They would receive an enhanced terminal grant if, on leaving the regular force, they joined the auxiliaries.

Lastly, there should be a much more flexible retirement age in the police force as a whole. Many of our police officers retire after 30 years' service when they still have a great deal to offer to the community. A flexible retirement age should be introduced, offering a full career even up to the age of 65. Clearly, officers who opted for such service would engage in more sedentary but nevertheless worthwhile duties, which are currently performed by civilians.

The Metropolitan police authority and the Government have exciting opportunities at present. The Government will have to show leadership and an interest in careers in the police service, which they have not done hitherto. If they can do that, they can start to address the problems that vex our constituents and that urgently need to be addressed.

12.20 pm

Martin Linton (Battersea): At the beginning of the debate, the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) said that we had had almost too much debate about the police recently. I welcome this debate, as do my constituents. We have had a horrendous couple of months in Battersea, which started with the murder of the estate agent Timothy Robinson, who was knifed as he got out of his car in the street. A few days later, a second knifepoint robbery took place just a few streets away. A few days after that, a yardie gun fight ended with a murdered man lying on the steps of Battersea police station.

I have received many letters about these events, as colleagues can imagine, and many local residents have been in a state of shock. Women have written me to say that when they parked their car at night they ran from the car to the front door. A man wrote to me to say that his wife would not even go out at night in a car because she was so frightened by what was going on. All those who wrote to me said that they could not remember when they last saw a bobby in the street. They read nothing but crime stories in the local papers, and the yellow witness appeal boards that are intended to reassure them merely unnerved them. One constituent wrote:

> "What was once a quiet and peaceful corner of London, is now a threatening environment."

In the days after those events, there were calls for extreme remedies. Some people called for vigilante squads, and criminals were talked of as "sub-humans". That must give us all pause to worry. Much anger was directed at police and politicians, exemplified in an *Evening Standard* headline, "In Battersea the police and the politicians have betrayed us".

As politicians, we are used to dealing with accusations of betrayal, and I am sure that we can cope with that. However, it is completely over the top to start accusing the police of betrayal. Nobody who knows the work of the police in Wandsworth could possibly doubt their dedication to the battle against crime, particularly under their present commander Martin Jauch. The debate should be about the most effective ways of policing. To accuse the police of betrayal is a symptom of paranoia and confirms my view that the author of that particular article, Dominic Prince, is something of a twat.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will think carefully in future about the words that he uses.

Martin Linton: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I shall adopt the suggestion of one of my hon. Friends and change the word to twit, which I am sure will be more acceptable.

The author of the article also claimed that there are police no-go areas in Battersea, and suggested that the estate just across the road from where he lives was one. I shall not mention the name of the estate because I do not want to contribute to an unmerited reputation. However, the assertion is a complete fantasy and overlooks the fact that the borough police headquarters is situated in that estate. He also said that the streets of Battersea were run by mobs, which again displays a talent for hyperbole that I am sure will ensure a continuing and successful career on the *Evening Standard*.

It is also an exaggeration—although, sadly, not much of an exaggeration—to say, as this journalist did, that Battersea is awash with street crime. There has been a very worrying increase. It has increased in the last few months from 5 per cent. to 7 per cent. of crime in the area. That may not sound much when expressed in that way, but it is a sharp increase. Sadly, many boroughs in London have an even worse problem, but that is little consolation for us.

Dominic Prince said something that I have seen repeated in many letters in which people complain that they never see policemen on the beat. That is an odd thing for him to say, as he lives about 100 yards from the borough police headquarters. It is interesting to look behind the comment, because it is made so frequently. It partly reflects modern lifestyles. People often drive to work: they drive back late, they are not at home during the day, and are often away at weekends. When they are at home, they expect to see a police officer strolling past, which is sometimes an unfair expectation.

At a public meeting held soon after the murders and attended by some 300 people, practically everyone was worried that they did not see policemen on the streets. The irony is that two of the best community policemen in the service operate in our area. In the ward where the murders took place, PC Charlie Baldwin is the organiser of the Battersea summer scheme, which is one of the most effective crime prevention summer schemes in the country. It was opened two or three years ago by the then Home Secretary and the then metropolitan commissioner, and their attendance was a tribute to the success of the scheme.

PC Baldwin was commended for saving the life of a man who recently threatened to throw himself off Battersea bridge by hauling him over the ledge by his trouser belt. He is an exceptionally good community policeman. In the neighbouring ward, where those other crimes took place, the community policeman is PC John Johnson, who has just won the Met's community constable of the year award for the second time, which I think is unprecedented.

Those community policemen would be the first to point out that there is a problem, which is partly to do with modern lifestyles and the fact that people are out all day and away at the weekend. There is no one to notice when a stranger is about. People often do not know whether someone is a stranger, because they spend so little time at home. People have far greater wealth, and they leave it unguarded for far longer periods. I think that the Minister can see where this argument is leading. Given the way that people live nowadays, a larger police force is required to look after them.

I welcome the extra 1,000 police officers that we have had in the Met area in the past year, and the commitment to provide another 1,500 by 2004, which will bring the Met up to the record figure of 28,000. That is in stark contrast to the last five years of the Conservative Government, whose crime figures the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire likes to quote. During that period the Met lost 2,000 officers: we lost 100 in Wandsworth alone. The figures for Wandsworth fell from 693 in 1993 to 596 in 1997. I grant that much of that reduction was due to amalgamations, and continued with the borough amalgamation in 1999.

I believe that that process went too far, as the Minister's opening comments suggested. We have now succeeded in reversing the trend. Police numbers in Wandsworth have risen in the past few months from 540 to 565, and we have succeeded in talking the Metropolitan police authority out of a proposal that would have cut the figure back to 550. As things stand, police numbers in Wandsworth are frozen for the foreseeable future at 565. I believe that, given recent events, far more police officers will be needed, and that is a common view in the area. More are needed in other boroughs, and more in London as a whole.

I do not seek to draw a false comparison with New York's 44,000 police officers, as they cover a much larger population, but we definitely need 30,000 officers in London, including 600 in Wandsworth, or we need new and higher targets for police officers and community support officers combined. This is an immediate problem in an area such as Battersea. We need police officers and community support officers. The idea of community police officers was pioneered by a former borough commander in Battersea, and it is a great concept, but it repeatedly breaks down because beat bobbies have to be called away to help on some other crime.

Given the choice between catching a real robber in Balham and patrolling a street in Battersea where there just might be a robbery, the superintendent is always going to go for catching the robber, so community beat officers are often called away rather than being left to patrol their own patch. The only answer is to have people whose job it is to patrol, who cannot be called away. That is why I welcome the idea of police auxiliaries. The hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) suggests that we should call them royal auxiliaries, but if we use the phrase in the Police Reform Bill we will call them community support officers.

I welcome the neighbourhood patrol that will start in Clapham Junction on 1 April. It is galling that in an area such as Clapham Junction that is known to have a high crime rate, one can see the street robbers and shoplifters in action at the CCTV control room in the town hall, but there cannot always be somebody on patrol ready to nab them. That is why it is important that community support officers should have the powers suggested, and be able to detain people for up to 30 minutes or accompany them to a police station.

The Police Federation is worried that community support officers will take its members' jobs, but £25,000 a year—I believe that under the new proposals that will rise to more than £26,000—is a very good starting salary for an 18-year-old, even in London, and people must recognise that police officers require certain skills, which is what they are being paid for. However, some aspects of traditional police work, such as providing a visible presence in the community, combating lower-level disorder, and escort duties, do not require those skills. Those are the activities that, under the Bill, community support officers would carry out.

The same was said in the 1960s when traffic wardens were introduced—in Croydon first, as we now know. I dare say that there were police officers who opposed the idea then, but which of them would now say that police officers should claim back the work that traffic wardens do?

Crime becomes more and more sophisticated, and police officers have to become more skilled, specialist and highly trained. The 18-week training that Metropolitan police officers have is too short. I am not sure about the police academy that the hon. Member for Ruislip–Northwood suggested, but I think that they should have a full year's training—and rather than their spending all that time in a police college, they should go to universities and colleges and study with probation officers, social workers and community workers. Trainee police would then be in contact with all the other professions that they will work with.

Making a reality of the problem-solving intelligence-led approach to police work requires greater analytical and planning skills, and the emphasis on the "order" part of law and order makes policing not easier

[Martin Linton]

but harder. As the American criminologist George Kelling pointed out, dealing with order raises issues of police discretion, so we need police with more training and maturity to deal with order issues as well as straightforward matters of law.

I am not saying that a university education makes people better police officers, but the figures in Warwickshire constabulary, for example, are worrying: only 8 per cent. of its probationers are graduates. The police career structure is fundamental to the problem. It was created when only 7 per cent. of each age group went to university, but that proportion is now well over 30 per cent. The career structure was created to provide an excellent career for school leavers, but nowadays anyone who stays on at school until the age of 18 will almost certainly go on to university, so there is no longer a group of people leaving school at 18 with A-levels who would naturally go into the police force. The natural recruiting ground for the police service should now be among graduates.

The danger is that the police service will be stranded in a time warp, designed for a world that no longer exists. It really needs to change and to become much more like a profession, with higher salaries and more skilled work. If it does that, and lets go of some of the jobs that do not require so much skill, we can fashion the kind of police force that we need.

Higher police numbers are not the full story and will not cut crime by themselves. We need greater effectiveness in the police service, and some of the operations currently under way in the Met police are wonderful examples of that. Operation Trident, led by former Battersea police commander Mike Fuller, is tackling the enormous problem of gang warfare and gun crime on our streets.

Operation Safer Streets is using covert cars, cameras and decoy officers to trap and arrest street robbers. As the Minister said, it is having enormous success and in four boroughs it has already reduced street crime. It is now being extended to other boroughs, and I am glad to say that Wandsworth is one of them. I very much hope that it will also be extended beyond 31 March.

The effectiveness of the police service, however, is not enough in itself: we have to consider the criminal justice system in its entirety. I agree with Sir John Stevens about the attitude to victims—it may be a bit strong to say that they are treated with "utter contempt", but they certainly often meet with indifference, and the courts do not take their responsibilities seriously enough. However, in my view, neither do the police.

The problem in the criminal justice system, as Sir Robin Auld pointed out, is that it is not a system: the police do their bit and then blame the Crown Prosecution Service; the CPS does its bit and then blames the courts; the courts sentence criminals and then hand all the problems to the prison service; and the prison system is concerned with ensuring that people do not escape, but does not do anything like enough to ensure that they do not reoffend: the reoffending rate among adult young males stands at 78 per cent.

A culture of buck-passing pervades the whole system. In the end, we have to get beyond that. The buck, clearly, stops at the Home Office, in the sense that that is the only organisation in a position to make all those different agencies work together. It can influence the police, the CPS, the courts, the magistrates, the judges and the prisons, ensuring that they all work as a single system.

It is unfair to put all the blame on agencies of Government, because responsibility for cutting crime rests not only with Government but with the community. There were hopeful signs in my area in the immediate aftermath of the spate of crime, when people discovered for the first time that there was a very active neighbourhood watch scheme in the area, and a Battersea crime prevention panel, which is one of the most successful at fundraising in London, and that Battersea summer scheme is right on their doorstep. We had meetings that produced a lot of new volunteers for neighbourhood watch and all the other schemes. I hope that the Minister will find time to meet some of them.

Clearly, nothing will comfort the girlfriend or the relatives of Timothy Robinson, but if one good thing can come from these horrific events, it will be a more active and crime-conscious community. That does not guarantee that we will be able to protect ourselves from such crimes, which can come out of the blue and affect anyone at any time, but it will help the police to reduce crime.

12.39 pm

Derek Conway (Old Bexley and Sidcup): I am grateful for your giving me an opportunity to speak, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I apologise to the House for my dulcet tones. I have a dreadful head cold, for which, like youth crime, there is apparently yet no cure.

It is interesting to follow the speech of the hon. Member for Battersea (Martin Linton), who made a number of thoughtful points on which it will pay to reflect on reading *Hansard*. I am not sure that I agree with all his assertions, but much of his speech would find resonance outside the Chamber as well as within it.

The Bexley division of the Metropolitan police service, which serves my constituency and three others, is commanded by a very effective officer, Chief Superintendent Chris Cerroni. In the time that I have represented the constituency, I have been surprised by how much time senior police officers have been prepared to give Members of Parliament, local councillors and consultative bodies. There has been a significant change in the police service's attitude to the community, but there remains a degree of frustration and confusion among people in the area about what they get for their bucks.

There has been talk in this morning's debate of balkanisation of the police service. In the light of the scale and size of the Met's operation, it is fair to say that there is a feeling—certainly in some of the outer-London boroughs, if not the inner-London boroughs—that far too much emphasis is being placed on shifting manpower to the centre. The problem is not the fear of balkanisation espoused on behalf of the Metropolitan Police Commissioner by Members this morning but the disproportionate resources that are being deployed elsewhere.

Indeed, I have a letter from a correspondent called Mr. Blair, who is not the Prime Minister of our country but the Deputy Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, and no relation. Mr. Ian Blair, who as far as I can tell is a very effective officer, wrote in a letter about my constituency dated 23 January:

> "However, my research has shown that Bexley has been adversely affected by supplying officers on a temporary basis to other operations. In view of this, I have directed our Central Operations Department to use them as little as possible in the future to offset this imbalance."

That is welcome news in our area because it has been obvious to those who live there that more and more Metropolitan police officers have been taken from outer London boroughs and put on central London duties, which are undoubtedly necessary but perhaps should not be performed at the expense of suburban areas.

My constituents have just received an additional £2 million bill—about £91 for each council tax payer—to provide for an extra 10 police constables under Mayor Livingstone's latest supplement. It was supposed to provide 20 officers; I do not know what happened to the missing 10. Given the problems of timings of shifts, sickness, training, appearances in court and so on, we will be lucky if we see for our £2 million an extra two police officers patrolling the streets of the borough of Bexley.

That is simply not acceptable and people are absolutely fed up with it. They are angry at politicians because they feel that we do not understand and that, on the whole, we are not burgled or mugged too often and do not live in at-risk areas. They see us as increasingly out of touch with what they say. *[Interruption.]* I realise that the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) is smiling at me because I am dressed in the Tory MP's traditional pinstripe suit. Before too many Labour Members refer to sociology traits, I should tell them that I was brought up on a Tyneside council estate, so I will not take too many lectures about what it is like to live in an inner-city area. Even in the north-east of England, people have bought the occasional pinstripe suit.

There is a belief that those who operate the criminal justice system—judges, senior police officers, Members of Parliament, Home Office Ministers or whoever—are a little removed from the fear and concern that people encounter at street level when going about their business. I dealt with a case a month ago of a mother whose 11-year-old daughter and 13-year-old son went to the local Blockbuster on Sidcup high street and a gang of youths pulled a knife on them. That is not the sort of thing that one expects to happen to children in Sidcup at teatime on a Saturday.

The leader of Bexley council, Councillor Mike Slaughter, has been prominent in pressing Mayor Livingstone, and especially the commissioner, to try to redress the balance. The borough council has rightly been very active, as have the Members of Parliament, in trying to explain the frustration in the area over the level of police power.

One irritating thing for the police officers concerned is that there is often so little that they can do. There has been a tremendous furore locally about the conversion of an old ABC cinema into a night club. The planning authority could do nothing because the class of use was the same. People could shout at their local councillor, but the local councillor could do nothing about it. Inevitably, they turned to the licensing magistrates who have a say in whether the conversion takes place—fortunately, it is not now going ahead. However, licensing magistrates can judge only whether the applicant is a fit person as an individual. They cannot turn down the licence on the basis that people may not want to deal with the consequences of having clubbers pouring out into a residential neighbourhood throughout the night.

Mr. Mark Field: Is not one of the concerns about licensing that the Government are proposing to take many powers out of the hands of locally elected representatives and put them in the hands of magistrates courts or other unelected bodies?

Derek Conway: My hon. Friend makes a good point, and I hope that the Minister and my own Front Benchers will take note of it. There is growing frustration that institutions are no longer accountable to public pressure. Constituents often ask why magistrates let so-and-so go, as they are not lawyers or judges but are supposed to be ordinary men and women who have been chosen to exercise justice in the name of the community. Yet the community often believes that local benches do not necessarily reflect the depth of their concern about the sentences that are imposed. I realise that this is broad-brush stuff, but it reflects the strength of feeling outside the Chamber.

Sadly, I think that the job of a police officer, which has become increasingly difficult and complex, must at times be very challenging from the point of view of morale. In my borough there is great concern that, when the police eventually gather enough evidence to bring a perpetrator to justice, the Crown Prosecution Service, in its often interesting and arcane way of making decisions on prosecution, gets to the point of doing something, the perpetrator is taken to court and the trial is about to commence, the defence lawyers have interesting ways of helping their clients. We all understand that that is what they are there for, but the consequence is that witnesses in particular get fed up. They hang around in court all day, trials are delayed and a witness might be called one night, only to have to come back days later. Eventually, although the police know that there is a good case to answer, it becomes increasingly difficult to get a witness to come to court and see it through. I am dealing with a case at the moment in which a young male witness was prepared to go the distance, at some considerable personal risk, only to find himself sat in the court anteroom opposite the accused. When crimes involve neighbours, that exacerbates the problem.

I am glad that this morning's debate has not involved bandying about figures of who locked up how many when they were in government, how many are being locked up under Labour and the trade-off of statistics, as that makes our constituents roll over with boredom. The House had better realise that the public, whether they are Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat or completely indifferent to the political process, are fed up with the level of crime.

Some Members mentioned the need for prisons to educate more. The hon. Member for Battersea spoke about increasing the involvement of social workers and the probation service. Although we must look at that aspect of dealing with young criminals in particular, the House would be unwise to lose sight of the need for deterrence, because that is what our constituents want. They do not want to see effective police work in catching criminals—they would rather have the criminal deterred from committing a crime in the first place. Where that has

[Derek Conway]

not happened and the system has so broken down that deterrence does not work, I do not believe that they are wrong to want an element of retribution.

We have said that people cannot defend themselves and their family by force of arms, and that in a civilised society they should do so by observing the laws of Parliament and through the officers of the Crown acting in their name. It is incumbent on this House, therefore, to make sure that they have the protection that deterrence and an element of retribution bring. It must be frustrating when people who have been diligent and law abiding all their lives, especially the elderly, are assaulted and robbed, only for the perpetrators to see it as a big joke because they think that they are invulnerable—perhaps we all did at that age; perhaps it is a male thing. They must not be allowed to get away with it, but our constituents believe that they are. It is time that the House took notice, stopped being partisan and realised that it is in the interests of all voters, no matter whom they support, to have a police service whose morale is high enough to lead to convictions and proper punishments.

12.50 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): I am reassured to see the hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Derek Conway) attired in traditional Conservative suiting—that helps people like me who become confused by all the new Members. It used to be that if someone walked by me wearing a red tie, I could safely say, if I did not know him, "Good morning, comrade". Equally, if someone came by in a suit like the hon. Gentleman's, I could hiss "Capitalist lackey" and know that the insult had been well directed. I am grateful to him for preserving that tradition.

I welcome the debate. Last Friday, at Newham town hall, I attended the chief superintendent's awards for officers of the borough who had conducted themselves exceptionally in the line of duty. I have attended the ceremony before and it is an eye-opener. It reminds us of the bravery continually exhibited by many police officers. I was alarmed by how many awards related to crimes committed in West Ham, but the ceremony drove home the point that the police have one of the most crucial roles in society—the preservation of order.

If the police are to fulfil that role, they need to retain the respect of the overwhelming majority of our citizens. Anything that imperils the respect in which they are held imperils us all. The hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) talked about changes of attitude in society, and he was absolutely right. Far more unites than divides the House on the policing of our society. As the hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup said, the exchange of "yah-boo, we-did-more-than-you" remarks neither advances us nor gives confidence to those whom we represent. I hope that we can continue in our present mode of putting forward ideas and exploring means of dealing with what we all agree are high and unacceptable levels of crime.

The hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood talked about attitudes. I was brought up in Brixton in the 1950s. We played on the streets, and there was no street crime that I can remember. There was certainly no fear of such crime. Attitudes were entirely different. One was never cheeky to a police officer. There was mutual respect in the local community and there was respect for the law and the police. In exchange, policing was non-intrusive and non-aggressive. In many ways, police officers were more like "Dixon of Dock Green" than those in "The Bill".

I do not want to sound like some rheumy-eyed old fart—

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): Impossible.

Mr. Banks: My hon. Friend can say that, but he should wait until I have finished before he rushes to judgment.

There was more respect in those days, not just for the law and the police, but among people for each other and for the communities in which they lived. I can illustrate that in several small ways, and I do not mean to be flippant. I used to ride my bike all over the place and would not have dreamed of doing so without lights. I certainly would not have jumped traffic lights or ridden a full-sized bike on the pavement. Those things happen all around us today. They are not very important in themselves, but they are symptomatic of changing attitudes.

Graffiti were hardly known in those days. The only sort of graffiti that I recall were slogans such as "No to German rearmament" or "Marples must go". We did not see the kind of mindless stuff that appears on our trains and walls now. I beg someone to say that I am wrong, but I seem to remember that the streets were not strewn with litter as they are now. All that sort of thing begins to add up.

There used not to be any football violence. Last week I spoke to the Metropolitan police about football hooliganism, and the way in which it is being forced away from the grounds and into surrounding communities. The police support the Football (Disorder) Act 2000 and say that it is working, but they are concerned about the fact that magistrates are still not ready to impose the banning orders that the Act allows them to impose. That must be considered now, in the run-up to the World cup. I hope that those in the Home Office and the Lord Chancellor's Department will remind the magistracy of its power to impose such orders, because they are important to the maintenance of decent behaviour both here and abroad.

The examples that I have given may not be significant individually, but when we put them together we can see how things have changed. The root causes of the changes in the nature and size of crime statistics are too profound for me to attempt a detailed analysis in this speech, but inter alia there has been a decline in respect and concern for others, and a more permissive attitude to violence. Our shock threshold has been lowered, in terms of violent crimes and violence generally, which is all around us on television and in the rest of the media.

We have also seen the emergence of a dependency culture—the feeling that a living is owed to people, rather than having to be earned. Undoubtedly the most significant contribution to the rise in crime is the phenomenal increase in drug abuse, although there are other factors. I think that Sir John Stevens missed the target the other day when he seemed to single out the criminal justice system. Judges are no more responsible for the activities of thugs and criminals than local authorities are responsible for litter on the streets. Lawmakers—us, and judges—do not criminalise people; people criminalise themselves when they take it on themselves to break the law. Having said that, I tend to agree with the hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup, who has shot off—to change his suit, I hope—that judges and magistrates are too soft and too disconnected from street-level reality. Nevertheless, they are not responsible for criminal activity any more than the police are responsible by not arresting enough people.

Along with a number of others, including my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Martin Linton), the hon. Gentleman spoke of the blame culture that tends to predominate nowadays. Every morning on the "Today" programme someone is whingeing on: "Why doesn't so-and-so do something? Why has this or that not been done?" Perhaps I say this because I am now a member of the party that is in government, but it always ends up being the fault of the Government and their Ministers. Why do people not say, "What are you doing about it?" [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Please; not too much.

I feel like that. I hope it is not because I am going soft or getting old—perhaps it is—but I feel that people are always coming along saying "What are you going to do for me?" One wants to say "What the hell are you doing for yourself? You start doing something for yourself, and then maybe we can do something for you."

There is far more talk about rights in society today, and not enough about responsibilities. I believe passionately in the rights of citizens, but the supreme right of all of us is the right to lead our lives free of fear and violence. That is the supreme and fundamental right of the law-abiding citizen in this country, to which all other rights are subservient.

As a number of Members have said, we have seen the steady rise of the law-and-order issue on the political agenda, not just since the life I remember in 1950s Brixton but in the time—nearly 20 years—during which I have represented a constituency in the east end. There is now more fear on our streets than I can remember. The Government—any Government, but I hope that it will be a Labour Government—who reclaim the streets for the law-abiding majority will not only gain enormous political support but, far more important, create a more civilised community for all of us.

The hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) rightly pointed to the need for community involvement, but communities need encouragement to get involved. Very often, people do not get involved because they feel isolated, intimidated and frightened of the possibility of reprisals if they identify themselves with the forces of law and order as opposed to the criminals in their local community.

The hon. Gentleman and others identified the areas of concern, but to deal with them we must contemplate measures that many might consider draconian. The Prime Minister was once wont to use the expression, "Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime". In order for that approach to work, it first requires us to be tough on the symptoms so that we may build the confidence to eliminate the causes. I shall now shut up and rattle through my own personal programme for being tough on crime.

The Minister said that we shall have 130,000 police in England and Wales; I welcome that. At times I think that we need 130,000 for my street, but let us be in no doubt: 130,000 in England and Wales is good, but not good enough. We need at least another 10,000 in London alone. As a regular user of public transport, I believe that we need far more police on the transport system, especially at night.

I was fortunate enough to be in Athens fairly recently, looking at the new metro system that is up and running for the 2004 Olympic games, and I saw armed paramilitaries on the system. I was slightly surprised. I asked various Athenians, and my friends out there, of which I am glad to say I have a large number—I may not have many here, but I have many in Athens—what they thought, and they were very supportive of that measure. Why cannot we think about using the military in support of the civilian authorities in this country?

Before hon. Members say that that is a bit extreme, I remind them that paramilitaries have been stationed at Heathrow and Gatwick in the past. We consider public safety to be important enough at airports to merit such measures, and there is not that much petty crime and violence in airports. Why do we not station paramilitaries at our railway stations, such as Liverpool street, or at Euston, where there is a hell of a lot of trouble at night, and particularly at weekends when football supporters are criss-crossing the country and passing through? That is the sort of thing that we should be thinking about.

Mr. George Osborne: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Banks: I was trying to get out of this as quickly as possible, but go on.

Mr. Osborne: I am very much enjoying the hon. Gentleman's speech; it sounds like the type of thing that Conservative Members hear from members of their Conservative association when they visit supper clubs on a Friday night. However, does he agree that there are real lessons to be learned from New York? We have bandied around the term "zero tolerance" to such an extent that it is now completely devalued, but there are lessons for London and the rest of the country in what was done in New York—increasing police numbers, tackling low-level crime and so on.

Mr. Banks: I agree entirely. I do not want to sound like one of the more robust members of the hon. Gentleman's Conservative association, but I think that zero tolerance—an idea that is much abused—is something that we understand. I have no difficulties with that. The hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup, who considers that people do not feel at risk, has gone, but I live in an area where the fear of street crime is palpable. It is out there, on the street. People will feel much more encouraged and feel safer if we crack down on street crime.

I remind Ministers that that policy is also politically popular. I am not suggesting that we should crack down on street crime for short-term political gain, because the long-term benefits to the community are obvious, but there is also political gain to be had. If any Government managed to secure safe streets, they would be extremely popular in an election, as Mayor Giuliani clearly demonstrated in New York.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) mentioned the growing problem of gun crime in London, and I take her point. I was woken up at two o'clock in the morning a few months

[Mr. Banks]

ago by police officers who said, "Sorry to disturb you, but did you hear any gunshots?" I asked why, and they told me that someone sitting in a car two doors down had been assassinated. It was not a random crime but a yardie crime, and the Trident officers were involved. The guy who was shot had been involved in previous drug-related offences and murders himself. Such shootings are happening more and more and people feel that they can get away with them. Many do, and indeed the persons who perpetrated the crime in my example have not been caught.

We should now contemplate the routine arming of all police officers. Officers are not necessarily in favour of that approach, but it works on the continent. It would not be an original or unusual idea. People argue that we have always had an unarmed police force, but that was because they were dealing with a different sort of criminal and a different society. Criminals and society have changed, and when that happens, we should contemplate changing too.

The hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire mentioned community policing. I am a great supporter of that approach. As the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood implied, we should set up a system of mobile community watches, under the direction of the local police. That would involve citizens directly in policing their own areas and give them a greater sense of self-confidence in their communities.

Mr. Mark Field: Does the hon. Gentleman realise that one of the main obstacles to the system of mobile watches that he suggests is the Police Federation? Experiments have taken place in Kensington, but the Police Federation has been up in arms about the role of the police as professionals being undermined and policing on the cheap. The fundamental reforms that the Minister mentioned would need to be put in place before we could even think in the terms that the hon. Gentleman suggests.

Mr. Banks: I am trying to explore further down the road than most hon. Members would wish to go. Mobile community watches are not about policing on the cheap but about more actively involving our communities in policing their own areas. In the end, that is the best form of policing, because it leads to the exertion of peer pressure within a community. It is not a question of vigilantes and would not involve people with baseball bats taking out people that they did not like. It would be organised properly, under the direction of a civilian authority. In case hon. Members are wondering, I should say that organised activity would not include knocking people over the head with baseball bats—even I have not got that far.

The decline in mutual respect and a lack of shared values in our society, especially among the young, is extremely worrying. I have a controversial proposal to address that. We should set up a compulsory national system of community service—not national service—for all 16 to 17-year-olds. I have not got time to expand on that now, but I hope to have the opportunity to propose it in a ten-minute Bill and hon. Members may reserve judgment until then. If we are to reduce crime, we must address the causes where that matters most—among the young. We learned respect and we must ensure that our young people are encouraged to acquire it.

The fifth element of my six-point manifesto concerns drugs, which are the cause of so much street crime—no one can deny that. At least half the prison population are inside for drug-related crimes. The so-called war against drugs is being lost and, as some hon. Members will know, I have long believed that it is an intrusion on personal liberties. I have advocated for many years in the House the legalisation of drugs because I believe that such a measure would reduce crime and enable more effective education and reduction programmes to be put in place.

I have changed my mind on one issue: identity cards. We should have compulsory identity cards. I used to oppose them, but I now believe that they would be a valuable law enforcement tool, provided that the necessary safeguards were put in place.

I also think that we should have a compulsory DNA register in this country. It would not be intrusive; it would be part of the registration process at birth. It would enable the police more effectively to deal with a number of very unpleasant and violent crimes, and it would be an invaluable tool in the event of a cataclysmic accident, where orthodox identification was very difficult, if not impossible—the twin towers is an obvious case.

In conclusion, I suppose that some of my colleagues and, indeed, others outside might think that I have turned into a neo-fascist—*[Interruption]*—or indeed into a fascist, but I would entirely refute that. I still consider myself, with some justification, to be that unfashionable creature, a socialist, because socialism is about social justice, mutual respect, personal responsibility, discipline and order. That is how I understand socialism. Regrettably, many of those virtues have been badly weakened or are totally absent from society, and it is up to the House and the Government to try to establish them during our period in office.

1.11 pm

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks), and I am pleased to be able to pander to the sartorial apartheid that he advocated earlier. His was an alarming and refreshing speech. According to my list, he wants to arm the police, restore national service and introduce compulsory DNA testing and compulsory ID cards. I am exceedingly grateful to him—I have been taking many notes for my Conservative women's club, which I shall speak to later this evening, because that is all interesting stuff. Perhaps he would like the name of my tailor, whom I share with his comrade the Chancellor of the Exchequer, so he can get kitted out as he expects Conservative Members to be kitted out, because I fear that next time he refers to some of his comrades who still wear their red ties he may get a poke in the eye in return, given what he has just said.

May I apologise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I have done to your predecessor in the Chair, for the fact that I may have to leave before this afternoon's winding-up speeches for a constituency engagement?

The Minister has been very brave to hold a debate on the police at this stage—just a month after 84,205 police officers have given a vote of no confidence in the Home Secretary and his proposals and just a matter of a couple of weeks after the Home Secretary was caricatured in the

Police magazine as some sort of Del Boy character; its editorial says that the police:

> "have lost confidence in political masters who have spent more time criticising the police than encouraging it."

He is also brave to hold this debate less than a week before a mass lobby of Parliament by police officers who are far from happy.

I should like to talk briefly about some Sussex policing matters, as one of the few Members to have spoken today who does not represent a London constituency. Sussex is not some idyllic, crime-free rural county in England; it has many problems. Indeed, the part of Worthing that I represent is not just a sleepy, crime-free area. Sussex is a large county with many communications and strategic problems. Last year, there was a long series of murders in Worthing, which took up a great deal of police officers' time. Of course, the Sarah Payne murder inquiry took a lot of resources. In just nine weeks, there were 20 armed raids on post offices and other small businesses in Worthing. A sub-postmaster in my constituency was held up three times in two weeks—twice at knifepoint and once at gunpoint.

Near my constituency, Brighton and Hove has an awful lot of drugs problems and a big increase in crack cocaine, and outlying towns are now used as havens for dealers, where they hide with their ill-gotten business. However, the drug problem in the area has not been recognised and Sussex police receive no extra funding to deal with the influx of crack cocaine, in particular.

Gatwick airport, with all the extra police resources that it requires, is in the Sussex police area. We face the enormous problems of unaccompanied—and under-age—girls coming from Nigeria, claiming asylum and then being abducted in very nasty circumstances to end up in the sex trade in northern Italy. A great deal of police time has been taken up in dealing with that problem, and I congratulate them on the successes that they have had. Policing the party conferences also takes up an awful lot of police resources.

Despite all that, Sussex police has one of the lowest—if not the lowest, in certain areas—ratios of police to residents of any constabulary in the whole of England. I pointed out earlier that the number of police officers is down on the 1997 level and, at its worst, the number of vacancies was 273. Sussex is one of the several police authority areas that are still well down on 1997 numbers, and council tax payers are having to stump up large sums of money, because of the 19 per cent. increase in the Sussex police precept, to recruit the officers that we desperately need.

Despite that, natural wastage in the police force is high. We always hear from the Government about trying to recruit new officers, but we still face a big problem because of the number of senior and experienced police officers who leave the force early. Over the past eight months in Sussex, the total natural wastage of police officers has amounted to 182. Some 87 left to retire, and many of them retired early; 44 resigned; and 16 took medical retirement. The figures are even worse for support staff: 248 left in that eight-month period; and 219 have resigned, with only 13 taking retirement.

I repeat a question that I asked the Minister's predecessor almost a year ago to the day. When I asked when Sussex could return to its 1997 numbers, his predecessor, now the Minister without Portfolio, said:

> "More than one third of forces in the country now have more police officers than they had in 1997, and that will happen in Sussex as well."—[*Official Report*, 12 March 2001; Vol. 364, c. 612.]

I would like to know when it will happen in Sussex, because there is precious little sign of its doing so.

Another problem results from the fact that we receive very little help from the key worker scheme. The assistant chief constable has written to local councils asking them to apply for funds for officers. As with other constabularies, much of the police organisation in Sussex is not entitled to money from the starter home initiative, and we are losing officers who are commuting from Sussex to London because of the better rates that are now being offered there.

Sussex has also had to deal with the highly damaging and long-running saga surrounding the shooting of James Ashley in Hastings a few years ago. As a result of that, the deputy chief constable remained suspended for a long time, before taking early retirement. As the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) pointed out, last year, the Home Secretary gave us an early example of his macho tendency to flex his muscles in his new job and tried to override the democratically appointed Sussex police authority. He got rid of the chief constable, Paul Whitehouse. Whatever one thought of the chief constable's record, that was not the way to approach the matter. It was however a sign of times to come and of political interference in local policing and the way in which we run it. If the Government are happy to take the credit for any successes that there have been and if they are going to interfere in operational matters as much as they seem to want to, they must also take the blame for the shortcomings and failings that we see every day.

I have a specific question for the Minister. Sussex constabulary has been the subject of an inspection by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary, so when will we see the report that was promised for the spring?

Sussex police have had a hard time, but I want to take this opportunity to praise the force. It works in difficult circumstances and I want to put on record—I am sure that the hon. Member for Lewes and other colleagues from Sussex will agree—my congratulations to the deputy chief constable, Maria Wallace, who held the fort during the difficult time when Paul Whitehouse went. She was rightly awarded the Queen's police medal in the new year's honours.

At last, we welcome Ken Jones from Avon and Somerset, the new chief constable. I am glad to say that, even at this early stage, he has been making all the right noises about high-profile, uniformed community policemen being at the front of his whole approach to policing.

I also want to congratulate—as many other hon. Members have done—some local policemen, such as Superintendent Graham Walter, who runs the Worthing division, and Inspector Chris Drew at Shoreham, on bringing a degree of stability back to our part of Sussex and on realising that nothing beats high-visibility, uniformed bobbies on the beat.

Chris Drew, in particular, has worked closely with local communities through the police consultative community group—which I praise. I have another point to raise with the Minister. I gather that the policy of the Sussex police authority—which may be a directive from the Home Office—is that PCCGs are to be chaired by nominees

[Tim Loughton]

from the police authority rather than from the community members who form the groups. That sends out all the wrong signals.

Local police in Shoreham, Adur and my local area have worked with local councillors—Councillor Blunden, Councillor Julie Searle and Councillor Paul Graysmark on Adur council—to produce a video about graffiti. The video was made by pupils in local schools and includes comments from local police officers, councillors and community leaders and shows how wasteful and destructive graffiti and vandalism are, the cost of cleaning it up and making repairs, and how that money could more constructively be spent on sports, leisure and youth facilities for the young people who cause such damage. That is an excellent initiative. With the co-operation and help of the local council—Adur council—and Shoreham police, peer group pressure is being applied to the negative forces that create graffiti.

Most of all, I congratulate the local police. They go on and on pointing out that nothing is better than uniformed officers on the beat. There is no substitute for that. It is not merely a question of numbers: uniformed bobbies bring reassurance to the people who see them. When people do not see the police, they feel that they are being ignored and that no one is watching out for them. That may or may not be true, but a real presence is a great reassurance, especially for elderly people—largely the sort of people whom I represent.

The presence of police officers also brings people out more. If they see something suspicious—such as a white van or someone acting suspiciously—they are more likely to report it if they know that their local police officer takes an interest. If they know the name of the local community police officer, they will take the trouble to ring the station and ask for that officer or will try to nab them when they are on their rounds in the area. Such advance intelligence is exceedingly valuable. It does not happen when there is no interaction between uniformed police officers and the local community.

I take issue with some of the comments made by Labour Members about the new community safety officers and street wardens. *The Times* published an interesting letter from the chief constable of the West Midlands police. He wrote:

> "The service I lead has grown faster than any other in the country over the past five years, and we deploy a greater proportion of police officers on uniform patrol duties . . . than anywhere else. The effect has been twofold: a substantial increase in the number of people arrested for crime (including robbery) and an increase in reports of minor offences. It seems to me that if you deploy street wardens, you will certainly achieve the latter without achieving the former."

There is a good deal of truth in that.

The police themselves have said:

> "The Bill creates the potential for the introduction of differing tiers of policing with different powers across different parts of the country. We believe that this is a recipe for public confusion and could undermine the accountability and authority that front-line police officers must have if they are to be effective . . . This raises important constitutional questions about individual liberties. Members of the public arrested by police officers are fully aware that the police are acting within their powers. But there would be no such certainty in the minds of the public about the powers of CSOs. This would lead to confusion and an increase in the number of arrests affected forcibly.

That is absolutely right.

I agree with the good idea of my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), who proposed an auxiliary police force. There is a great deal of merit in returning to that type of professionalised body, and the Minister should consider that proposal in detail.

An important factor in my constituency is that local residents see policing as a one-way street. They have seen their police stations closed, or at least closed during anything other than normal nine-to-five working hours; five police stations a month have closed under this Government. My constituents have also seen patrol cars taken away from local police stations to bigger centres and, as I mentioned, less bobbies on the beat.

Norman Baker: Fewer.

Tim Loughton: Fewer bobbies on the beat; the hon. Gentleman is right.

The vice-chairman of the Police Federation in London has said:

> "No one buys the idea that it is good to close police stations, whatever the Government or senior police officers say about new technology or rapid response. People like a local station that is open all hours."

I think that we have all heard of cases of people being mugged, attacked or robbed outside police stations that were closed during the hours of darkness. Those people cannot get through to a police officer, even using the automatic phone outside the station.

I praise Sussex police for the important work that they have done in dealing with the asylum abductions that I have mentioned. I also want to praise the Sussex police child protection team, which deals with more than 3,700 cases of physical, sexual and emotional child abuse or neglect; that equates to more than 78 investigations per officer per year.

I praise the team particularly for the work that it has carried out on the problems of joint enterprise, and on the case of John Smith, a four-year-old toddler who died after evidence of 57 different blows was detected on his body, inflicted at the hands of his prospective adoptive parents. Four hundred and ninety-two children in England and Wales have been either unlawfully killed or seriously injured by their carers or parents over the last four years; 239 of those were under the age of six months. Of the 366 cases in which investigations have been completed, 225 were not proceeded with by the police or the Crown Prosecution Service; 20 cases were dismissed; and only 99 resulted in successful prosecutions. That is a conviction rate of 27 per cent., compared with a national conviction rate for murder of around 90 per cent. These are crimes committed by parents or carers, and that is not acceptable.

Sussex police have done a lot of work on this issue. They are presenting a paper to the Home Office on it. The problem is one of joint enterprise. In the case of John Smith, it could not be proved which of the two prospective adoptive parents had dealt the lethal blow to the child. They were therefore given eight-year sentences for cruelty. We need a change in the law that will enable a sentence to be passed for causing death or serious injury by cruelty, which would allow a much higher sentence without the onus of proof as to which parent had dealt the fatal blow. That is the kind of recommendation that Sussex police want to make. They have done a lot of unappreciated, hidden work that has not often been acknowledged, and I would like to acknowledge it now.

There are many other issues that we could raise, and one that the Minister has not mentioned is that of the pensions time bomb. The news that the total liabilities for police pensions have leaped to between £34 billion and £36 billion is an enormous issue. That estimate represents an increase of some £10 billion in the last year. For once we cannot blame the incompetence of the Government's pension policy, because these are largely pay-as-you-go schemes funded by central budgets or local councils. Total expenditure on all schemes now amounts to 13.3 per cent. of total police budgets; some forces actually spend more on their pensions than on their forensic departments. Eighty per cent. of that cost is met by the Treasury, but the rest comes out of council tax, and that is having a big impact on operational resources.

There are a number of other issues that I shall not go into in detail, including the failure of antisocial behaviour orders and the problems of crowded jails. There is a record number of people in jail now, almost 70,000. Many are having to be released early to make way for others coming in. Of course, it will be the police who pick up the problems resulting from that. There are many problems for the police, and they are coping admirably in difficult circumstances.

The biggest problem of all has been that of declining morale, and the undermining of the role of the police by this Government and, particularly, by this Home Secretary. It really is not good enough to brag about just getting back to 1997 policing levels. Fred Broughton, the chairman of the Police Federation, expressed his frustration at the "politically drip-fed smear stories" and a rally next week will allow officers to register their anger. Graham Alexander, the chairman of the Sussex Police Federation, has said:

> "We are sick and tired of remaining silent whilst various arms of the Government actively encourage selective and outrageous misinformation which does nothing to increase our standing in the local community."

It is therefore hardly surprising that we saw headlines relating to Sir John Stevens earlier in the week.

I shall end with the editorial comments in *Police* magazine in response to the enormous vote of no confidence by ordinary policemen:

> "What should Mr. Blunkett do next? For a start, he could show some humility and lower a profile that has become a cross between *Batman* and *Super Mouse*. He should acknowledge, that if he genuinely seeks the confidence of the police service he needs to stop giving interviews and signing articles that decry our efforts and denigrate individuals who dare to take a different view. What the service and the public need now is enlightened leadership, unswerving support, and perhaps what a great Labour leader, Clem Attlee, once asked of a pestilential critic—a period of silence."

I wholly agree with that, as, I am sure, do all my constituents. It is a disgrace that this Government have driven our hard-working and over-stretched policemen to such desperate and vociferous measures just so that they can be allowed to get on with the job that they and we all want them to do.

1.31 pm

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): The hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Derek Conway)—who is no longer present—said earlier that politicians were rarely the victims of crime. That made me feel slightly edgy, as in the past three months my phone has been stolen, my house has been broken into, and the windscreen of my car has been deliberately smashed while my nine-year-old daughter sat screaming in the back.

That is not the only reason why I am pleased to contribute to this debate. I am a former member of the police parliamentary scheme, and over the past five years I have worked closely with my local force in north Kent, as has my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Dr. Stoate). Although he has been present throughout almost all this debate, I suspect that he will not be able to contribute. I am sure that, like me, he would wish to pay tribute to the work of Kent police, particularly those in north Kent, and welcome our new area commander, Superintendent David Pryer.

Crime and social disorder are a blight on the quality of life of my constituents. However, there have been significant improvements in the past five years. The overall level of crime has decreased, especially vehicle crime and burglaries, although there have been worrying increases in certain other forms of crime, particularly robberies and muggings, which are almost exclusively associated with the theft of mobile phones by and from young people. A worryingly sharp increase in domestic violence has taken place, and, in a population that has a significant and well-respected Sikh community, the number of racist incidents has increased, which is a cause for concern.

We have also seen the emergence of new forms of crime, which other hon. Members have mentioned, such as bogus calling. To give the most shocking example of that, in my area, and, I suspect, in those of other hon. Members, individuals are going around trying to identify and make lists of vulnerable households to sell them to other unscrupulous individuals who then operate as bogus callers. Police in my area are having to deal with ever-changing and increasingly ingenious attempts by certain individuals to extract resources from others.

The debate has included some discussion, although not a great deal, about the causes of crime. Crime has declined generally and in my constituency in the past five years. I suspect that that is directly related not to policing but to what has been happening to the economy as a whole. Prosperity has been rising in my area and unemployment has fallen by half. However, I am not among those who subscribe to the notion that unemployment and poverty are causes of crime. In the 1930s, there were far higher levels of poverty and unemployment than in the 1980s, but levels of crime were much lower. Evidence from the United States and the United Kingdom clearly shows that there is a strong link not between poverty and crime but between inequality and crime. It is no coincidence that during the 1980s, when inequality increased very sharply, there was also a fast increase in levels of crime. However, I accept the point made by the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) that that occurred in the 1980s and tailed off in the last period under the previous Government.

[Mr. Chris Pond]

Investment, not only in CCTV, which has been very effective in my constituency, but in more police officers is one factor involved in reducing crime. In north Kent, there has been a 25 per cent. increase in officers in the past two years alone. What matters is not only the size of the police establishment, but, if you will forgive me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what you do with it. Consultations by Kent police authority show that people want to see more officers on the streets and greater visibility, which is why the Government's emphasis on the visibility of the service and of the extended police family, which I welcome, is so important.

I prefer the description "community support officers" to those used by others, such as "pseudo-cops" from the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire and "elevated park keepers" from the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker). Those people have an important role in the service, not in replicating or replacing what professional police officers do, but in allowing those officers to do their job more effectively and in achieving greater visibility. As a member of the police parliamentary scheme, I saw how street wardens work effectively in the Netherlands, providing a sense of genuine security to local communities.

We have the investment, but that in itself is insufficient without reform, just as reform is insufficient without the investment, as we saw from the attempt to introduce Sheehy. The modernisation agenda is essential in ensuring better and more effective policing.

In my area, the police have adopted innovative measures to deal with the underlying problems of crime, intervening directly on people in the cells, particularly young offenders, with drug and debt counselling, which has been successful in helping to break the cycle of crime among a few persistent offenders. The multi-agency approach is used to steer young people away from crime and to ensure that we do not get the continued flow into the bucket to which the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire referred.

We have achieved much in north Kent. There, as elsewhere in the country, and despite my own experience, the chance of becoming a victim is the lowest for at least 20 years. As other hon. Members have said, however, the fear of crime persists, and I shall suggest reasons for that. The first is the growth in youth crime and disorder, to which the Minister referred. That disorder may be at a low level, but it nevertheless creates a climate of fear and insecurity.

Last November in the House, I raised the case of a young constituent who was arrested 76 times in a few months. No real sanctions were applied. In the process, we let down that youngster just as we let down the rest of the community. In north Kent, the police believe that just 10 young offenders between the ages of 13 and 17 are responsible for up to 40 per cent. of crime in some areas.

Antisocial behaviour orders are important in trying to deal with that and I am pleased that Gravesham has started to use them more effectively, but we need to address the underlying causes of the problem of youth crime. Sometimes, simple intimidation may be involved. Recently, friends of mine witnessed an elderly Sikh gentleman being jostled by a group of children. For them, the incident was a laugh. For that elderly gentleman, it was a cause of fear and humiliation.

The police face difficulties and I share their frustration. Although we have been more than successful in reaching the Government target of halving the time before young offenders are sentenced, the question is: what happens to those young people once they reach court? Magistrates in my area say that they have problems in knowing how to deal with such youngsters, some of whom begin their criminal career at the age of 10. By the age of 17, they are old lags and rather experienced at crime. Perhaps we should consider whether the youth court should deal with offenders of that age.

The police in Gravesham are concerned about the treatment of adult offenders. Last year, a case went to court that involved four offenders who were found with stolen goods worth no less than £250,000. After taking up considerable police time, the case was not treated seriously by the courts and the offenders received merely a suspended sentence.

I should like to refer to the comments of Sir John Stevens, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, on the treatment of victims. I have had regular contact with an organisation called Victims Voice, which was initially set up by the Marchioness Action Group and represents 15 member organisations. In a recent survey, it pointed out the consequences of being a victim of crime, which include loss of a job, financial hardship, physical and mental ill health, attempted suicide, alcoholism, divorce and loss of a home. It is not merely the fear of crime, but the consequences of crime that people face.

I welcome the fact that the Government, as part of their reform agenda, are ensuring that the criminal justice system takes more account of the needs of victims and witnesses. I also welcome the fact that ensuring visibility of the police is a priority. I am pleased that we are beginning to reduce crime levels. The bigger challenge now is to reduce the fear of crime.

1.41 pm

Annabelle Ewing (Perth): Like many hon. Members, I welcome the opportunity to speak. Those Members who hope to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will be pleased to hear that I shall keep my remarks fairly brief. Some hon. Members may be wondering why I, as a Scottish Nationalist Member, want to speak in a debate about police and policing primarily in England and Wales, but as the Minister will be aware, given our earlier exchange, the important issue of police pay and conditions has an impact on police in Scotland. Negotiations continue to be conducted on police pay and conditions at a United Kingdom level. Happily, other policing matters are now devolved to the Scottish Parliament.

I am surprised and disappointed that no Member from any other party in Scotland representing a Scottish constituency has sought to play an active role in the debate. On pay and conditions, the police force in Scotland is seeking someone to enable their voice to be heard in Westminster.

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Annabelle Ewing: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman, because he has hardly been present in the Chamber for the debate. That is a fair reason not to give way.

As I mentioned to the Minister in my intervention during his opening remarks, 94 per cent. of police officers in Scotland voted against the pay and conditions package on a turnout of 82 per cent. Tayside police force serves Perth constituency, and the vote there against the package was 94 per cent. It is regrettable that such an overwhelming rejection of the package was ascribed to policemen and policewomen in Scotland, and elsewhere in the United Kingdom, not understanding what they were doing or being misled by their federation. That is patronising and has been refuted by the Scottish Police Federation, whose general secretary, Douglas Keil, said:

> "If the Home Secretary and his advisors really think that the Federations could persuade police officers to vote against a 'good deal' then they really know very little about the police!"

That comment says a lot about how the negotiations were conducted.

It should also be recalled that the Home Office sent out 95,000 leaflets to police officers and took out adverts in the national press. The United Kingdom Government cannot set much store by their information campaign. It is not clear—perhaps the Minister could clarify it during his closing remarks—what the cost of that information campaign has been to date, but the Government do not seem to feel that it has been tremendous value for money.

The hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) suggested that the overwhelming no vote might have been something to do with the enmity of the police throughout the United Kingdom towards the Home Secretary. Certainly police officers in Scotland are disgusted by the way in which the negotiation process has been conducted and are—rightly, in my view—extremely angry with the Home Secretary.

However, I believe that the overwhelming rejection in Scotland happened simply because police officers there did not accept that the package was a good deal but regarded it as insulting and unworkable.

Mr. Lazarowicz: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Annabelle Ewing: I will not give way, for the reasons that I have already stated.

The concerns have been well documented in today's debate, and I do not need to delay the House unduly.

Mr. Denham: If the package is so insulting and unworkable, why did the leadership of the Scottish Police Federation support the agreement reached in December? Surely if that was their view, it would have been better for them not to support it.

Annabelle Ewing: It was the police officers who regarded the deal as insulting and unworkable, and it was they who were consulted in a ballot and voted—about 94 per cent. of them, in Scotland—against the Home Office package.

The concerns have been dealt with already in the debate: the changes to ill-health provision, the alteration and abolition of police allowances, the overtime regulations and so on.

We have talked about police morale. The suggestion that the police are not flexible has been deeply damaging to morale, and therefore to recruitment and retention. In Scotland, the police are extremely flexible. The police in Tayside and elsewhere in Scotland do a tremendous amount of work on the basis of good will, and if that were withdrawn it would provoke a crisis in policing. It is in no one's interest to provoke that.

Will the Minister answer two questions in his reply? First, as the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) said, what will happen if the conciliation breaks down without agreement? Will the Home Secretary impose the package on the police in Scotland and elsewhere? Secondly, what new money will be available for the package in Scotland, if it is agreed in some form in due course? New money is expressly referred to on page 1 of the heads of agreement.

The police work tirelessly for us and put their lives on the line. They deserve better than the approach that the Home Office has adopted so far.

1.48 pm

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): For the second year running, when asked what was the worst thing about living in London, Londoners rated crime and safety as their second greatest concern, after the cost of living. For reasons that have been explained by many other hon. Members, that is partly because of the recent upsurge in street crime and partly because of a number of high-profile tragic incidents.

In my area, a 20-year-old youth was stabbed to death on the Maida Vale estate, and six days later his grief-stricken father died of heart failure. A bus driver was stabbed in a road rage incident in Paddington. Such events get publicity and increase the fear of crime.

There has also been an explosion of antisocial behaviour on many of our estates, which causes great grief. That does not always involve serious crime, but consists of the kind of activities that make the quality of life so poor on those estates.

It was right for us to spend some time focusing on police numbers. London is getting some additional police, and that is very welcome. I believe that next year we will be up to about 28,000. As I said in the Adjournment debate of the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) a few weeks ago, we do not feel that police levels in Kensington or Westminster, which were frozen under the resource allocation formula, are adequate. Many colleagues have spoken about the need for high-visibility policing, and we need to make further progress on that.

I strongly welcome the auxiliaries or community support officers, who will make a real contribution. It is right that they should be scrutinised in practice, but there are variations in need in different communities, and areas such as the west end, with high concentrations of licensed establishments, require more policing support and enforcement than can necessarily be supplied by professional police officers.

Street crime has also been a focus for this debate. The hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) talked about child-on-child crime, which has constituted a large proportion of the increase in street crime. That must be taken seriously, because the damage done to young people's confidence when they are the victims of such crime will be paid back, and not in a happy way, over the years. I hope that the Minister will at least mention the priority that should be given to the police working in schools, and to preventive measures,

[Ms Karen Buck]

especially in relation to mobile phone crime. What has been the outcome of discussions between the Government and the mobile phone companies about preventive action?

I pay tribute to the work of the youth offending teams, and the youth inclusion project in north Kensington. Mentoring and the community referral orders have been very successful in preventing recidivism. How does the Minister see the future of the youth inclusion programmes, and will they be expanded? The intensive work with young people at risk—particularly those on bail and others who will be tagged under the new experimental scheme—is clearly an effective alternative to custody. We should all support that.

It is also right to talk about the broader issue of youth crime prevention. I understand why we talk about a yob culture and why people perceive young people as so threatening, especially on some of the estates that I have described, but we must never forget how appallingly damaged some of those young people are: they are the alcoholic children of alcoholic parents, the children of drug addicts and the products of abusive families. They deserve high levels of support, as do many of their vulnerable parents. Good work has been done through sure start, the Children Fund and Connexions, but there is a case for doubling or trebling the intensity of support that we offer, especially in inner-city communities with high social mobility and ethnic diversity.

Relationships between the police and the community remain crucial. I pay tribute to the project run in my constituency by the Black Police Association, working to develop and improve relations between black young people and the police. The Youth Parliament is also doing good work to improve the dialogue between the police and young people. There is considerable alienation among both black and white young people that must be overcome. Such dialogue and community relations are not only good in themselves but essential for intelligence-led policing, which we need to reverse the decline in detection rates.

Kensington and Chelsea police have successfully turned the tide of crime in the borough. I commend to the Minister the work being done by that force. There are many individuals who deserve credit: people working in the teams, as mentors and on the lay panels for community referral schemes, and police who are working on the front line doing a difficult and dangerous job. Unfortunately, there are too many to list now. They are working under the leadership of Moir Stewart and Andy Trotter in my two divisions. Such work, along with the many good reforms in policing legislation, will pay off and allow us, in the long term, to reverse the tide of crime.

1.54 pm

Mr. John Baron (Billericay): I am conscious that time is short, so I shall keep my comments brief. Thank you for allowing me to contribute to this important debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The debate is important because there can be little doubt that the public are rightly concerned about rising crime, especially violent crime. That is happening at a time when morale in the police force is at an all-time low. People look to politicians for leadership on the issue.

In recent months, and since being elected in June last year, I have taken extensive soundings in my constituency on law and order and the public's view on whether we are tackling crime adequately. The soundings have included a constituency-wide survey, delivered to every household, asking my constituents to respond to a detailed series of questions. Although I do not claim that any such survey is scientific, I believe that the number of responses and the size of the results send out some clear messages, to which I shall refer briefly.

In addition to the survey, during a two-week period just before Christmas, 5,500 of my constituents signed a petition that requested that the Home Secretary make available more resources to Essex police to get more bobbies on the beat. That also illustrates the strength of feeling about the issue. I presented the petition to the House just before Christmas.

It will come as no surprise to the House to learn that people are very concerned about rising crime, especially that involving young offenders, and want action from politicians that must include more police on our streets. The latest crime figures reveal what the public already know: crime is increasing. Figures for the past couple of years show that crime, particularly violent crime, has risen. For example, the number of cases of violence against the person was up by around 20,000 last year alone. Crime figures in Essex show an even worse picture, with recorded crime rising by 11.5 per cent. and violence against the person rising by a staggering 33 per cent. since 1998.

It came as no surprise, therefore, to learn from our survey that 90 per cent. of respondents believe that crime is on the increase in our local area and are very concerned about it. Recent incidents have included a man's throat being slashed during the Christmas period outside Billericay railway station, and a vicious attack by a gang on a man from whom a laptop computer and his wedding ring were stolen.

What are the solutions? Items at the top of the list must include a substantial increase in police numbers. We need a step change in policing levels, with as many as 25,000 to 30,000 extra police on the country's streets as soon as they can be recruited. According to the House of Commons Library, if all training and running costs and pensions were included, an extra 30,000 police officers would cost £1.5 billion. That is a large sum of money but not impossible to find if there is the political will to get much tougher with the criminal.

There can be no doubt that more police officers on the beat would make a difference. That was confirmed by information on trends in police officer strength and recorded crime in New York during Mr. Giuliani's time as mayor between 1994 and 2001. Research by the Police Federation of England and Wales suggests that, in 1992, New York and London both had approximately 28,500 officers. By 2000, the number of officers in New York had risen to 40,500 compared with a fall in London to 25,400. Between 1993 and 2001, recorded crime in New York fell by approximately 270,000 offences—a fall of 62 per cent. across all offence groups. By contrast, crime in London continued to rise.

Despite evidence of rising crime in this country, police numbers in recent years have hardly changed. Indeed, in Essex, total police strength is down since 1997, and, more worryingly, the number of constables—those who patrol our streets—has steeply declined. There has been a drop of something like 35 constables since March 1997.

Meanwhile, there has been a 30 per cent. drop in the number of special constables in Essex. That is not good enough and the public know it.

In the survey that I undertook, 99.5 per cent. of my constituents who responded said that they believed that there were not enough police officers on the streets. Of particular concern to many are the gangs of youths who terrorise local communities and against whom the police often cannot take appropriate action. Many lives, especially elderly people's, are blighted by such incidents, and they cannot understand why society appears to let them happen.

It is important to stress that I am not critical of the local police, as I have made clear many times. They do a very good job, considering the resources available to them, but they deserve more resources to do the job for which they have been trained: to reduce crime and protect the public.

The police are fully aware of their predicament. Last year, the Police Federation made the point in its paper entitled "Rising Street Crime Linked to Cops Shortage" that

> "The visible presence, and consequential deterrent of police patrolling our neighbourhoods is falling at the same time street crime is rising . . . we are as concerned as the public about rising violent crime and will continue to work hard to combat this but we cannot expect results over night when police numbers are so low."

In my view, integral to a greater police presence on the ground is a commitment to keeping police stations open. Since 1997, in Essex alone, 62 police stations have been closed, with only five opening. I am fortunate that we have four police stations serving my constituency, and their presence is greatly appreciated. However, a growing concern among my constituents is that our police stations are often closed when they are most needed. The main comment in the analysis following the survey was that local police stations should be manned 24 hours a day. We must do what we can to stop further closure of police stations. That is particularly the case in rural areas, for a local police station is often at the heart of the relationship between the police and the local community. When the station is closed, the relationship can suffer.

Despite the need for more police officers and more resources generally, crime is too important an issue to be left to the police alone. We must provide them with greater support, and that support must come from the courts and politicians generally. It has been said in the House that it appears that the courts are not supporting the police as they should, and sentences are proving too lenient. Earlier this week, we even had the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Woolf, urging magistrates to jail as few law-breakers as possible because our jails were already full. What nonsense is this? No wonder that two days ago, Sir John Stevens, Britain's top police officer, accused the courts of contributing to the surge in robberies, rapes and violent attacks by allowing the guilty to walk free. He made the point that it was not uncommon for muggers to be freed on bail eight or nine times for separate offences before facing trial for their first.

It is no surprise that the majority of my constituents believe that criminals are not given tough enough sentences, as revealed in the survey. We must have tougher sentencing so that criminals, especially violent criminals, are taken off the streets to protect the public.

It is not only the courts that should better support the police but the politicians. We can better support the police in a number of ways, but perhaps most important is the issue of too much red tape and performance measurement in the system, which keeps police officers pinned to their desks when they should be out on the streets. More than 50 performance criteria, the best-value regime and a raft of arrest paperwork give credence to the view that, in the words of one police constable, there existed more performance targets than personnel.

Mention has been made of the "Diary of a Police Officer", and lessons must be learned from it. We must allow the police to do the job they want to do—to fight crime, not push paper. We can also better support the police by working with them to introduce reform and fight crime and not against them, as appears to be the case. Unfortunately, the public relationship between the Home Office and the police has deteriorated noticeably over bitter disagreements about police reform and the Government's pay package. The Home Secretary has failed to carry the police with him on his proposals to reform working practices, pay and conditions. In a situation like this, that serves only as an unhelpful distraction and plays into the hands of the criminals. The price will be paid by the law-abiding majority. Anger is running at such a level that there is even talk of legal action against the restriction preventing police officers from striking. That cannot be right.

The pendulum has swung too far in favour of the criminal at the expense of the victim and the time has come to redress the balance. We have a situation where violent crime is rising particularly fast while police numbers remain, at best, static; where the police have one hand tied behind their back because of too much interference from the Government through red tape and performance criteria; where the courts are proving too lenient in their sentencing and are not supporting the police; and where the Government have instigated a public fight with the police at a time when police morale is at an all-time low. In such a situation, only the criminal will gain. The public are fast becoming disillusioned. As with so many of their promises, the Government have failed to deliver and are trying to deceive. Before the 1997 election, Labour employed strong rhetoric, promising to be tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime. Instead, the Government have proved to be tough on crime fighters and soft on criminals.

2.5 pm

John Cryer (Hornchurch): The hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) said that the resource allocation formula introduced by the Metropolitan police authority had benefited London boroughs that had previously suffered a loss of officers. It has indeed benefited certain outer-London boroughs, but Havering does not happen to be one of them. We have had a small increase in the number of officers—from 326 to 334—but it is nowhere near what we need.

Havering has unique characteristics. It is the second biggest borough in London and has more green belt than the other 31. Its rural nature creates specific policing problems, but it simultaneously has urban characteristics such as the nightclub capacity—between 10,000 and 12,000—of Romford, which is the biggest in the south-east of England outside the west end of London. Romford is not in my constituency, but it is in my borough, and the problems that it presents can be easily imagined.

[John Cryer]

On a recent Friday evening, I went out until between 3 am and 4 am with police officers who tour the borough, taking in Hornchurch, Rainham and Romford itself. It was a quiet night according to the officers, who did a good job. It was a cold and damp night, and as many officers say, the weather can be a good copper. Even so, there were a lot of arrests, and at one point there were almost not enough officers available to respond if an incident had occurred outside a nearby nightclub.

Like many hon. Members, I have worked closely with community officers over the past four or five years. Those officers, particularly the sector sergeant, say that they simply do not have the numbers to deal with a rising tide of yobbishness and antisocial behaviour. I have been Member of Parliament for Hornchurch for only five years, but even in that time the tide has risen, and the average age of the perpetrators of antisocial behaviour is getting younger.

It did my heart good to hear the peroration of "Bomber" Banks earlier. Such an inspiring speech should be set to the music of Elgar, and I have a lot of sympathy with much of what my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) said. My constituency has to deal week in and week out with the consequences of the yobbishness that he talked about. People in my surgery, or in letters or phone calls—many of them elderly, women and living alone—are often reduced to tears by their experiences.

A couple of weeks ago an elderly woman came to my surgery in tears, desperate about the vandalism and yobbishness that she experiences every night. If that is happening now when it is cold and damp, it will just get worse in the summer. Many hon. Members have detailed the experiences that they hear about every week. Things are at least as bad in Havering, and the bottom line is that we need more coppers on the beat. There is no doubt that the number is increasing—for the first time since 1993. The Sheehy report did a lot of damage to the police, but the numbers of officers are rising again. Unfortunately, we are not seeing them in Havering.

2.9 pm

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): I have been struck by the quality of most of the speeches in this excellent debate, and I hope that the Minister will bear them in mind. Like others, I particularly enjoyed the speech of the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks). I was waiting for him to tell us about the clack of the clogs in the Lancashire mill town and the old maids cycling home from the church and so on, but in fact he voiced a feeling that is widespread about the growing disorder in society.

Many Members have drawn on their personal experiences. Two recent constituency experiences of mine illustrate the current problem. The first involves a home watch, or neighbourhood watch, group whom I met on Saturday. Although the area concerned is a quiet residential part of Wilmslow, everyone is terrified of crime, everyone has recently had personal experience of it, and everyone says that police are not seen on the streets any more.

My other experience was similar to that of the hon. Member for Hornchurch (John Cryer). Like every other Member who has gone on patrol with the local police force, when I did so I was struck by the courage of those who jump out of police cars without knowing what they will face, but I was also struck by how overstretched the force was. My constituency is quite rural, and contains sparsely populated towns that are quite far from each other. The police had to drive from one town to another to respond to calls. It occurred to me that, in the event of a couple of incidents in different towns taking place at the same time, the police simply would not be able to cope.

There is a gulf between a public who want more visible policing and a police force that cannot provide it because it does not have the necessary resources. Moreover, many of the Home Office incentives, targets and so on that the police are asked to observe do not encourage them to put officers on the streets.

I am very disappointed with the police package produced by the Home Secretary. I refer to both the heads of agreement and the Bill. I think that when the Home Secretary first arrived and started talking about police reform many Members in all parts of the House felt encouraged, thinking that we would actually have a Home Secretary who would have the courage to tackle some of the issues that his predecessors had had trouble tackling. Unfortunately, however, we have ended up with a pay dispute with the police service and a Bill that, in my view, has dangerous tendencies.

Last week, I received a letter from my local chief constable and the head of Cheshire police authority. I am sure that other Members have received similar letters. It says:

> "We believe . . . that the cumulative impact of the Government's proposals, and the provisions of the Police Bill, would radically shift the current balance of responsibility for policing away from local people and local accountability, towards greater central direction and control by the Home Secretary.
>
> Such a step would in our view damage local policing and make policing more remote from the local communities it serves."

Any Member who receives a letter from both the chief constable and the head of the local police authority that says such things should be very concerned about the Bill with which we shall be dealing.

One of the main flaws in the package is the absence of a vision of what policing in the 21st century should be about. In an earlier intervention, I mentioned policing in New York. For the last four or five years, politicians have bandied talk of zero tolerance, but I do not think we have really examined what happens in New York. What did Mayor Giuliani and his police chief do when New York had a similar problem of rising disorder and low morale among police who had retreated from the streets into their patrol cars? First, they implemented the "broken windows" theory, which states that tackling low-level social disorder helps to create a climate in which more serious crime does not take place. Secondly, they took the police out of the patrol cars and the precincts and put them on the streets, defying conventional police thinking that that was not the best way in which to fight crime. A visible police presence proved to be an important preventive measure, as well as improving the rate of detection.

Thirdly—this was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mr. Baron)—the New York police dramatically increased police numbers. I am not making a party political point; I think that both major parties should consider whether we need a step change in the number of police whom we provide and for whom we pay. Neither party has done that in government, which is a source of much disappointment. As long as we go on failing to give the police the resources they need, the public will continue to lack confidence in our police service.

2.14 pm

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): I thank the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) for shortening his speech to allow me to contribute to this important debate on policing. I will devote my remarks to the good news, the bad news, the root causes and the solutions, and I have about 40 seconds for each.

The good news is that Tower Hamlets has less crime than other inner-city boroughs with less deprivation. The best news is that Tower Hamlets has been allocated an extra 147 police officers. That is an increase of 25 per cent., which reflects the fact that ours was the most under-resourced borough in London. Other elements of good news include estate wardens and the reduction in reported crimes related to drugs, criminal damage and residential burglary.

The bad news is that street crime has surged throughout London and street crime in Tower Hamlets is 50 per cent. higher than the London average. In the most recent year for which we have data, the police and the council between them received approximately 30,000 calls about street disorder, noise nuisance and abandoned cars, much of it gang-related.

I wish to apologise to the residents of Pevensey house, Harvey house, Pelican wharf, Alliston house, Gascoigne place, Gun place and Roman road, among others, who have written to me in great detail about the gang behaviour that is causing them continual suffering and unacceptable harassment, which I will not go into now.

One of the biggest casualties has been police response time, owing to the fact that the police have been so overstretched. A local councillor set out a familiar story:

> "At 9.00 pm . . . I reported that a group of people were drug dealing openly around Vallance Road . . . I was told an officer would come around to investigate and take details. At 12.45 am I telephoned again . . . again at 1.15 am and yet again at 1.45 am, by which time I had waited nearly five hours for an officer to get to the scene",

and he eventually went to bed. He added:

> "These same people are always dealing here and this was not an isolated incident."

Mr. Brian Boag writes that when he reported gangs vandalising cars, he was informed that there was a five to six-hour wait for police that evening. They were dealing with serious calls. He says:

> "I am a senior nurse in the health service and have seen the changes and improvements in health care provision. I recognise that these have resulted as a consequence of new Labour's action. I know there is more to come in relation to public services, but situations similar to the one I have outlined above cannot be allowed to continue."

The last resident whom I shall quote, Mr. Uddin from London E14, said:

> "I could not get police to help. I telephoned five times and waited 1½ hours. Then they told me they could not come. Please tell us how are we going to live in this borough without police help?"

Thankfully, we are getting that police help; a 25 per cent. increase will have a huge impact. However, we must look at the root causes of crime.

As we have heard, permanent exclusions of primary and secondary school pupils have increased. In Tower Hamlets they have increased by almost a quarter—24 per cent.—since 1998-99. That is why education services in Tower Hamlets will now be working with the community partnership to track what problem young people are doing inside and outside school. Our approach must be targeted. It is an astonishing fact that a quarter of the offences committed by young people are the work of just 3 per cent. of that group. We must nail that 3 per cent. of offenders, but we must help the other 97 per cent. of offenders, most of whom come from the poorest households.

Finally, and briefly, I come to the solutions. One solution is more police. We have them, but demographic trends in Tower Hamlets, with growing numbers in the age cohort that commits most crime, means that we will need more. We need more consistent sentencing. Inconsistent sentencing causes much distress not only to the victims but to the police. We need an effective multi-agency approach to crime reduction, more tightly linking the police, local authorities, the Crown Prosecution Service and the probation service, the emergency services, drug action teams, health authorities and the local community and voluntary sector. We also need to improve our action and record in the battle against drugs.

Finally, I wish to welcome the new borough commander in Tower Hamlets, Mark Simmons. It is a challenge; I know that he is equal to it. Let us work together to ensure that the 25 per cent. increase in police numbers helps to ease the distress of so many residents in Tower Hamlets.

2.19 pm

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) and to my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) for keeping their remarks brief so that I could contribute.

Senior policemen have pointed out that, however good policing is, their efforts are wasted if the necessary structures do not exist. As Sir John Stevens said, the criminal justice system is in crisis. It is not just senior police officers who tell us such things; the same is said by the bobby on the beat. One policeman recently expressed concern to me about the impending closure of our local magistrates court, in Trowbridge. That pattern is being repeated throughout the country. In fact, 114 magistrates courts have closed since September 1995. Such closures strike at the heart of our criminal justice system.

All hon. Members will support the principle that everybody, regardless of socio-economic position, should have equal access to justice. It is easy to get to an urban courthouse, particularly if one is relatively well off and owns a car, but if one lives in the country or does not have a lot of money, it is difficult to access justice in that way. We must recognise that the bulk of people who use our courthouses are perhaps not particularly prosperous. For them, the closure of magistrates courts is a real problem.

The rural White Paper made a big play of inclusiveness, service delivery, tackling deprivation and so on, but we need action to follow those fine words. I want Ministers to offer a commitment to preserving rural and smaller

[Dr. Andrew Murrison]

courthouses. The Lord Chancellor recently spent £600,000 on updating his Westminster accommodation. About £100,000 needs to be spent on the magistrates court in Trowbridge to preserve accessible local justice in that part of Wiltshire. I urge Ministers and the Government to support provision of that funding, so that we can continue the important principle of local justice in west Wiltshire.

2.21 pm

Mr. Denham: I am grateful to those hon. Members who had to foreshorten their remarks, and I apologise to those who were unable to speak. I shall take just a few minutes to wind up.

This has been a good debate, in which a wide range of interesting views was expressed. On hearing the proposal of my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) for paramilitary troops on the underground, my first thought was that that could be done only if one introduced conscription. He did not let me down, however, as he went on to advocate that himself.

My hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Martin Linton) rightly appreciated and stressed the complementary role of community support officers in conjunction with the police, and he recognised their potential value in London and elsewhere. The hon. Members for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Derek Conway) and for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) referred to various local and national issues affecting their communities. The hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) had an interesting idea about auxiliary reserves. Volunteer specials should be strengthened in various ways, but rather than reserve officers, we need a number of community support officers working year round alongside the police. That is certainly what the Met wants, and that is how we wish to support it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) made a thoughtful, if somewhat misplaced, speech. We do not intend that performance assessment will be a crude basket of statistical indicators. As she said, such assessment is merely a pointer to enable the examination of performance. Much more is happening in terms of revising training and leadership development than her speech perhaps allowed for.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East (Ms Prentice) stressed the very important role played by the partnership between police, local authorities and local communities in bringing down crime. Perhaps this debate did not deal with that point sufficiently. As I have said, the role of the police is essential, but they cannot be expected to carry the entire burden of crime reduction.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Pond) rightly linked persistently high fear of crime to the wider spread of antisocial behaviour, particularly by young people. The hon. Member for Perth (Annabelle Ewing) distinguished herself by being the only Member to argue that no reform of the police service is necessary. I do not speak on matters north of the border, but I should point out that every other contributor to the debate recognised in one way or another that change is needed.

My hon. Friends the Members for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) and for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) mentioned another important theme that was not developed in the debate: dealing with young people themselves. We must tackle the problem of young offenders, particularly persistent offenders, from whom the community must be protected. However, it is important to deal with a wider group of young people, through the youth inclusion programme and other means, to minimise the numbers who become offenders.

The hon. Members for Billericay (Mr. Baron) and for Tatton (Mr. Osborne), my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (John Cryer) and many others called for more police officers. Apparently, my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow is actually getting more. Hon. Members will pleased to learn that there will be a significant increase in her local force. At the end of the debate, the hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) also touched on reform issues in the criminal justice system.

We have had a wide-ranging debate, and I shall attempt to draw together the key themes and settle one or two issues. The myth that the Home Secretary and other Ministers have, in some way, attacked the integrity of individual police officers or the role that they play has been propagated once again in the debate. However, when we talk about public services, we must be able to talk about the overall performance of a service and where it can be improved, without that being interpreted as an attack on the individuals in the service. If we cannot draw that distinction, reform of any public service will be difficult. We support the front-line officers in the police service and the support staff. That is why we want to ensure that they get a better pay deal, but—like hon. Members on both sides of the House—we recognise the need for reform.

Many hon. Members mentioned police numbers. The decline in police numbers in London was set in train under the previous Administration in 1991-92 and across the service in England and Wales in 1993. We could not reverse that immediately on coming to power because we had to sort out the economy and the public finances first. We have now reversed that decline and, from everything that has been said in the debate, hon. Members on both sides recognise that we were right to establish the crime fighting fund and to earmark resources for increases in the number of police officers. It is clear that hon. Members wish us to continue that work, through the right mechanisms, in the future.

It is understandable that people want us to continue to build on the increases in the number of officers that we have already announced, but we should also remember that next year we will have 130,000 officers. If, over the next few years, 43 per cent. of their time is still spent in the police station—much of it on unnecessary paperwork and bureaucracy—we will be wasting the opportunity to have more officers out on the streets delivering the service that the public want to see. They want officers patrolling the community and to see intelligently led, intelligently tasked and problem-solving community policing. That is why reform must go ahead. It will be a big investment to have 130,000 police officers, as we will have next year in England and Wales, and we must make the best use of the time of every single one so that they can be where the public want to see them.

I was struck by how much consensus was expressed in the debate about the nature and direction of reform. However, hon. Members raised several issues of concern. It is worth saying that the Police Federation supports the new intervention powers in clause 5 of the Police Reform

Bill—in contradiction of the comments by the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice)—so even within the police service there are different views. To hear some hon. Members today one might think that I was personally responsible for shutting their local police stations. Such decisions are operational decisions for chief constables and the new powers will not mean that Ministers will take individual responsibility for police stations. The fact is that when all other methods of ensuring that a good police service is delivered have failed, we need to have the power to act. That power will be exercised at the end of all the other chains of responsibility, including the chief constable and the police authority. However, in such circumstances we would be expected to act and we need to have the power to do so.

The hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) mentioned clause 7. We need to have in place, in every police service, key parts of policing such as the national intelligence model. We can consider how the legislation is framed, but it does not make sense to have the collective policing effort undermined by a handful of forces that decide to take a different direction.

We have had a good debate, with great consensus about the need for reform and its direction, the need for more officers and the need to see more police officers and community support officers in local communities. That is what the Government are delivering.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Road Safety

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

2.30 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It has been widely trailed that the hon. Member for Oldham, East and Saddleworth (Mr. Woolas), an assistant Whip, will have the honour of replying to this Adjournment debate on behalf of the Government. Indeed, he is in his place, so I assume that that information is true. Will you confirm that it has surely always been the point of debates in the House that they are an opportunity for Members to get across their points to Ministers and for Ministers to reply to Members about their concerns relating to the Ministers' departmental responsibilities?

I always thought that that was the whole point of debates in the House of Commons. Although, in certain exceptional circumstances, a Government Whip may stand in for a Minister, I hope that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker—or perhaps someone from the Government, or even the hon. Gentleman—will be able to confirm that this is an exceptional circumstance, and that debates or, indeed, the House itself will not be further downgraded by Ministers not being in their places or prepared to reply to debates on their departmental responsibilities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): The House will have noted what the right hon. Gentleman has said, but he will know that the occupant of the Chair is not responsible for determining who answers; the Government are responsible for determining who should answer any debate in the House.

Ms Bridget Prentice (Lewisham, East): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will you confirm that Government Whips—assistant or otherwise—are Ministers in the Treasury, so they are entitled to speak on behalf of the Government?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The House will equally note what the hon. Lady has said.

2.32 pm

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): I thank the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) for arranging that exciting start to this Adjournment debate.

In many ways it is appropriate that today's interesting debate on the police should be followed by this Adjournment debate on road traffic, speeding and accidents. After all, the police have a very important role to play in enforcing speed limits on the roads and, if their resources are stretched, it will clearly affect their ability to carry out that enforcement role.

As today's debate on the police reminds us, there are individual human tragedies and suffering beneath the bald statistics of crime and violence, so the effects on individual people ought to be the starting point of a debate on road traffic, speeding and accidents. The fact is that deaths and injuries on the road still exceed those caused by any other crime of violence. Despite that fact, the most horrific accident on the road, perhaps with several people

[Mr. Mark Lazarowicz]

killed, may rate only one day's press headlines at the most. In most cases, a single death in a road accident may be mentioned only in a small paragraph in the papers and will probably not be mentioned on the television at all.

Of course, accidents on other forms of transport, such as air or rail, will normally attract much more attention and may lead to dramatic action being taken in an attempt to improve safety and prevent a recurrence. After the tragic Hatfield rail crash, rigorous speed limits were introduced on much of the network, hundreds of millions were spent in urgent repairs and billions are likely to be spent on some form of train protection system in future.

I do not for a minute suggest that it is not right for such action to be taken; I merely observe that perhaps the same action and logic needs to be applied to road safety. Bearing in mind the strong views expressed in the debate on the police, I would not for a minute want to argue against strong measures to tackle violent crime, and I fully appreciate that we need to tackle not only crime but the fear of crime, which is all too prevalent in many of our communities.

All that I ask is that the Government and policy makers give the same attention, focus and priority to the tragedies caused to many families by deaths and serious injuries on the roads. To put it bluntly, street crime should not be tackled at the expense of road safety and tackling speeding.

The number of deaths and injuries on the roads is staggering. In 2000, in the United Kingdom as a whole, 3,409 people were killed, 38,000 people seriously injured and 278,000 people were slightly injured. That represents a cost of £17 billion in police work, insurance and damage to property and, in many cases, serious and tragic personal consequences to victims and their families.

Yet the attitude remains in some quarters—among all too many of the public—that death and injury on the roads is a natural phenomenon about which little can be done and that it is just one of those things that impinge on the public consciousness for a while but are put to the back of our minds.

We hope that it will never happen to us. That attitude must be challenged, because the fact is that even the very term "road accident" is a misnomer. The huge number of deaths and injuries on the road arises from events that could easily be prevented in the vast majority of cases and from circumstances that—again, in the vast majority of cases—are easily foreseeable.

If deaths and injuries can be prevented, and if the tragedies that befall so many individuals and families can be avoided, why do we—and I mean the entire community, not just the Government and the House—allow them to happen?

That question is especially relevant to deaths and injuries caused by speeding, which is the subject of this debate. Speeding is one of the principal causes of death on the roads. By definition, every death and injury caused by speeding is preventable—easily preventable. Preventing deaths and injuries does not require billions of pounds to be spent on road engineering or road construction.

If there is an aspect of driver misbehaviour that is socially acceptable, it is speeding. Research by the Automobile Association shows that, all too often, the general public's attitude is that speeding is a bit of a game in which the motorist tries to outwit the police or the speed camera. Speed limits are all too often seen as minimums, not maximums—as those of us who drive within the speed limit quickly realise from the actions of many other drivers. The attitude that speeding is okay—a victimless crime almost—needs to be challenged and changed. We need to make speeding at least as socially unacceptable as drink-driving now is for most drivers.

That change in public attitude must be achieved in a number of ways. Advertising campaigns and education are undoubtedly important and have a role to play, but central to any change in attitude must be tougher enforcement of existing speed limits. The knowledge that one will be caught is the most effective persuader.

Stronger enforcement could be achieved in many ways. In the time available to me, I want to argue for five specific measures. First, we need more speed cameras—both fixed and mobile—which are a very effective way of reducing speed. The camera partnership areas that have been introduced around the UK in the last two years allow for hypothecated spending of funds collected from the penalties raised by new cameras. The schemes have been a great success. In Northamptonshire, one of the first areas to take up the scheme, there has been a reduction of almost 30 per cent. in the numbers killed and severely injured on the roads. At sites with fixed cameras, the reduction was even higher—67 per cent.

By April 2002, schemes will operate in 28 constabularies in England, Wales, and Scotland. That is a good start and the schemes will cover much of the country, but I call on the Government to make it a national scheme. I ask my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, East and Saddleworth (Mr. Woolas), who will answer for the Government, to make a commitment today to consider such a national roll-out of the scheme. Such measures are particularly important if more police resources are to be focused on other forms of violent crime.

I also want to take this opportunity to express a word of mild criticism of the Government, whom I otherwise respect for the way in which they have stood up to the hysteria of those who protest against the use of speed cameras. The announcement that traffic cameras would be painted yellow and placed only in highly visible locations pandered to some extent to the anti-speed camera lobby, which, I am afraid, will never be satisfied. I know that the matter was raised with the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth), during a recent sitting of the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

The danger of sending out a message that traffic cameras will operate only at well-known locations is that it will invite motorists to believe that speeding elsewhere can go unchecked. It will also tend to encourage rapid braking followed by acceleration in the vicinity of speed cameras, which is hardly conducive to road safety and runs the risk of creating new accident blackspots in areas where drivers know that there is little likelihood of detection.

Secondly, we need higher fines, heavier licence endorsements and bans for persistent speeders. How often do we read about the rich and famous escaping with a fine of a few hundred pounds for a speeding offence? Speeding fines should once again relate to the wealth and income of the person who has committed the offence. The Government undertook a review of penalties, which, as it ended last March, is taking some time to emerge from the system. We have been promised that the results of the review, and any measures that are to follow from it, will be announced shortly. The fact that it has taken a year suggests that the problem is not being taken as seriously as it could be. Will the Government reach an early conclusion to their deliberations on the outcome of that review?

Thirdly, we need a reduction of the current leeway that is allowed in many parts of the country, whereby speeding motorists frequently face no penalty for driving up to 10 mph or more above the speed limit. In many areas, no action is likely to be taken against driving at 38 mph or 40 mph in a 30 mph area. The attitude that is taken to enforcement depends very much on the attitude that is taken by individual police forces and prosecution authorities.

That is wholly unacceptable. Speed limits must be limits, not minimum limits. That is especially important bearing in mind the dramatic difference between the death or injury that is caused to a pedestrian who is hit by a car travelling at 40 mph compared with that caused at 30 mph. Every 1 mph increase in speed increases by 10 per cent. the risk of death or serious injury in an accident. I am not saying that every motorist who inadvertently strays 1 mph or 2 mph above the speed limit should face draconian penalties, but we must take a more consistent approach to prosecutions for speeding offences and ensure that the leeway practised in many areas is substantially reduced.

Fourthly, I urge the Government to roll out nationally the development of 20 mph zones and home zones, which are successfully reducing accidents and are popular with the public, as I know from my experience as a member of Edinburgh city council before being elected to Parliament. Those zones are currently experimental and the exception; they should become the norm, as they are in many areas on the European continent.

Finally, I urge the Government to make a commitment to more funding, research and pilot schemes to develop intelligent speed adaption, which allows the speed of a vehicle to be regulated using a global positioning satellite system that can prevent drivers from exceeding speed limits and even allow them to respond to local factors such as bad weather conditions or proximity to high accident-risk areas such as schools. We should remember that 41 per cent. of all pedestrian casualties in urban areas are children. Although in many respects our record on death and injury on the road is better than that of many of our European neighbours, we have a bad record on child pedestrian fatalities compared with many European countries.

The first field trials in the UK involving vehicles fitted with GPS technology will take place this autumn. Whether the system is taken further will largely depend on the willingness of the Government, the car industry and other European Union member states to support it. The Government are already funding the project; I urge them to set a good example by supporting an extension of the trials. In Sweden, for example, almost 6,000 vehicles are fitted with the system. I urge the Government to consider promoting such measures on a Europe-wide basis, given the competence of the European Union in this field.

It has already been drawn to the House's attention that a small page of history is being written today, in that the Government will be represented on the Treasury Bench by one of the Whips. When I was first elected, I was amazed to discover [illegible] bizarre custom that dictates that Whips do not speak in the House of Commons. I appreciate that, as well [illegible] being frustrating, it is often hard for Whips to justify their apparent silence in the House to their constituents. If that archaic custom is now withering under the glare of modernisation, I am happy to participate a little in its demise today.

I want to ask my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, East and Saddleworth, who will speak for the Government, and for whom I have great respect, to assure me that he will ensure that a Minister with specific responsibility for this matter will be made aware of my concerns, and will respond to the calls that I have made. I also ask my hon. Friend to tell the Minister to stand firm in his determination to tackle speeding, and not to be distracted by the vociferous lobby that cries foul whenever the law is enforced. My experience is that the vast majority of people—and many of the motoring organisations—want speeding tackled. The Minister should listen to organisations such as the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety, which does an excellent job advising Members of the House, and bodies such as RoadPeace, which supports the campaign for justice for road traffic victims. These organisations are made up of individuals who speak from experience of what death and injury on the roads can mean.

2.46 pm

Mr. Phil Woolas (Oldham, East and Saddleworth): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) on securing this important debate on road safety. He has a long track record of campaigning for better road safety, as the transport convenor in Edinburgh and, for many years, as leader of Edinburgh city council, on which he served with distinction.

I am sorry that the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), cannot be here to respond to the debate. Unfortunately, he is on important constituency business. He asked me to emphasise that his absence should not be taken as indicating any lack of priority being given to road safety. Indeed, I know from personal experience just how seriously the Government and the Department take this issue, and, in my experience, that was the case under the previous Conservative Government as well. It is a privilege for me to speak in this debate, and I shall, of course, pass on my hon. Friend's points to the Under-Secretary and Ministers from other Departments. That is a job that I take very seriously.

There is a close relationship between speed, accident frequency and casualty severity. The relationship is not straightforward, however, and it has never been possible to produce a precise figure for the contribution that speed makes to the cause of accidents. For some time, Governments have taken the view that speed is a causation factor in about a third of accidents, but so much depends on witness statements and on the road and traffic conditions that no one can be certain about it.

That uncertainty has allowed some commentators to promote the view that the speed at which we drive is not an issue in seeking to reduce road accidents. Indeed,

[Mr. Phil Woolas]

sceptics and, unfortunately, some elements of the press persist in misinterpreting a Transport Research Laboratory report on recording contributory factors to road accidents by asserting that speed is a factor in only about 7 per cent. of cases. The figure is certainly more than twice that, and if we add all the contributory factors relating to speed, we reach the figure of one third.

In the real world, however, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and it is telling that when we actively improve speed management or speed enforcement on roads with a high level of casualties—perhaps through traffic calming or the use of enforcement cameras—the number of casualties is reduced, often by 50 per cent. The evidence that speed contributes significantly to the cause and severity of road accidents is overwhelming.

Annabelle Ewing (Perth): I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman may not be able to answer this now, but do the Government have plans to amend the current speed limits?

Mr. Woolas: If I may, I shall mention that later.

Unfortunately, a jump is then made to the assertion that accident frequency is almost entirely dependent on the speed limit that is applied for any given stretch of road. Although it is important to try to apply speed limits sensibly, coherently and at levels that meet the demands of road safety, the environment and traffic flow, it is the actual speed of traffic, among other things, that determines the level of accident risk rather than the speed limit per se. That is clearly illustrated by the fact that collisions still occur at speeds within the speed limit, suggesting that speeds are too high for the prevailing conditions, or that driving speed is inappropriate. It is as important to combat driving at inappropriate speed as it is to treat the problem of drivers exceeding speed limits. That does not detract from the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith.

The UK's road safety record is, along with that of Sweden, the best in Europe. Even so, the Government are not complacent and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, when launching the road safety strategy in March 2000, announced challenging new targets for reducing road accident casualties by 2010. The targets are a 40 per cent. reduction in the number of people killed and seriously injured, but a tougher 50 per cent. target for children. That is because we are particularly determined to combat the needless and tragic loss of young life on our roads.

Combating the worst effects of excessive and inappropriate speed is complex. That is why the Department undertook and published a fundamental review of speed policy two years ago. Its recommendations were accepted by the Government and incorporated into the road safety strategy. The speed review concluded that speed limits should be set at levels that are safe, suitable for the road function, and at levels most likely to be respected by drivers. Motorists would be less willing to comply with limits set at inappropriate levels. Officials are working on improving information and guidance to local authorities on setting local speed limits.

Guidance to local highway authorities currently exists in the form of the circular Roads 1/93. It remains good and helpful advice, but we need to build into it the additional experience and better practice that has emerged over the past 10 years or so. The speed review also highlighted the difference between what has been achieved in reducing casualties on urban roads and on rural roads. The improvement in reducing casualties on urban roads is twice as good as that on rural roads. One factor is that rural roads are different in design and nature from urban roads, which makes it difficult to be consistent in setting speed limits. We have recognised that for some time, and work already put in hand is beginning to pay off as we seek to restore the balance.

The make-up of rural roads is such that accidents tend not to be concentrated at specific locations, but scattered along sections of road. Given that randomness, it has been more difficult to target problem locations on rural road networks. However, research by the Transport Research Laboratory suggests a form of analysis that could tell us where and when to intervene. Applied to a rural network or route, an analytical tool using accident rates quantified per junction, per bend or per vehicle-kilometre might indicate priority areas for remedial treatment. Accident rates based on national figures for different types of rural road would be established, which would provide a benchmark for local authorities to use as suggested intervention levels for their own roads. To support that, a technical manual is being produced that provides practical advice.

The road safety strategy suggested that a hierarchy of roads defined by function might help in setting speed limits and might improve consistency nationally from area to area, as my hon. Friend suggested. The Department commissioned a study to consider the development of a rural road hierarchy for speed management, and the report was presented to Parliament in a written answer from the Under-Secretary on 28 November 2001.

As well as conventional engineering measures, such as road narrowing and village entry features, we expect to make increasing use of more innovative approaches, such as vehicle activated signs, to ensure significant reductions in casualties on rural roads. I assure the House that in addressing the problems on rural roads we are not diverting attention from the urban environment.

We continue to invest considerable resources through local transport plans and additional grants to fund local authorities. Arrangements on resourcing in Scotland are devolved, but there is a consistent strategy. Extra measures include funds specifically to introduce more 20 mph zones and similar schemes to improve safety, particularly for children, pedestrians and cyclists in built-up areas.

Similarly, we are funding five demonstration projects that aim to improve safety on mixed priority urban roads, such as busy high streets. These are very high-risk areas because of the mix of uses, which leads to frequent conflicts between motor traffic, pedestrians and cyclists all going about their various activities. For the House's information, the five projects are in Norwich, Manchester, Crewe, Leamington Spa and Lambeth. Powers have been devolved, and Scotland may wish to run its own project.

The road traffic penalties consultation document was published in December 2000 by the then Home Secretary. More than 1,000 responses have been received, which was much higher than expected and has led to a delay in producing considerations and recommendations. I expect that the review will be completed shortly, and will be reported to the House.

As my hon. Friend said, drivers' attitudes as well as physical measures are important in reducing speed levels. Drivers need to be made more aware of the dangers of driving too fast. That is why effort and resources are being put into national and local publicity. Hon. Members may well have seen the recent highly effective television advertisements that highlighted the problems. It is fair to say that most people now regard drinking and driving as highly antisocial and unacceptable behaviour. By the same token, the general view on speeding is that it is a minor offence, and that if people are caught they have been unlucky, rather than acting dangerously. We must try to change that attitude and belief, and we can do that only by informing people of the true dangers of speeding.

There is some evidence that the general public are becoming aware of speed as an issue. That is good: it is a start, but we must be realistic. The Government are well aware of the vulnerability of motor cyclists, who face particular dangers. That is why the Under-Secretary has established an advisory group on motor cycling, which has been meeting for some months.

One of the most effective ways of enforcing a speed limit is to use enforcement cameras. Hon. Members may know that the Government are now allowing some fixed penalty speeding fine revenue to be reinvested in safety cameras to encourage more effective use of this technology in enforcing speed limits. The scheme that began as a two-year trial in April 2000 operates under strict rules, and is already promising to be the most important and successful road safety policy development for some time. Without those cameras, several hundred people who are alive and well would now be dead or seriously injured. One reason for their success is the public's consent for their placement, which is in part due to the requirement on local authorities to publicise their purpose. An indiscriminate use of cameras would, in our view, be counterproductive. Cameras can deal with excessive speeding only at particular sites or on particular routes, rather than reducing traffic speeds everywhere.

I have mentioned other measures, such as vehicle-activated signs, which are being developed. We hope that they will win the consent of the driving public, and act as information rather than threat in helping to reduce speeds.

I hope that I have been able to reassure my hon. Friend that the points that he has raised will be taken seriously by me in my meetings with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, and by Ministers in other Departments. We have a successful policy, but every death is one too many.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Three o'clock.

CORRECTION

Official Report, 7 March 2002; In col. 514, third paragraph, leave out "Jeremy Corbyn *(Islington, North)*" and insert "Harry Cohen"

House of Commons

Monday 11 March 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Victims of Crime

1. **Mr. Gordon Marsden** (Blackpool, South): What plans he has to give victims of crime more information about progress in *(a)* detection and *(b)* prosecution of the cases with which they have been involved. [38873]

The Minister for Criminal Justice, Sentencing and Law Reform (Mr. Keith Bradley): I am currently reviewing the standards of service outlined in the victims charter. At present, the police have a charter commitment to keep victims informed about key developments in cases. That includes information about whether a suspect is charged and the outcome of the court case. By autumn this year, the Crown Prosecution Service will have fully implemented a system to convey its own key decisions to victims. That will include information about whether charges are dropped or altered.

Mr. Marsden: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply and express my thanks for all the work that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his team are doing to support victims, including the doubling of funding for Victim Support and the promised victims charter of rights, to which we look forward eagerly. Nevertheless, from my experience, having taken up cases for victims of crime in Blackpool and held consultations on the subject, there are still problems with co-ordination of information between the CPS and the police. In particular, can I press him to consider the lack of continuity that is sometimes evident between investigating officers, those who make arrests and those who attend the court? It seems to me and to many people to whom I have spoken in Blackpool that that often causes problems in terms of relaying information.

Mr. Bradley: I am grateful that my hon. Friend recognises the additional support that we are currently giving to victims, including the doubling to £25 million of the grant to Victim Support and the changes that we have made in the courts to ensure that intimidated and vulnerable witnesses can give their evidence in safety, including through video links where that is appropriate. It is absolutely essential that we support victims end to end in the criminal justice system. Victims are also witnesses; they should be given information and support during the process of detection, when they need to appear in court, throughout the court process, when they are told about the offender's sentence—if he or she is found guilty—and when they are part of the sentencing process, if that is appropriate, where issues such as reparation and restorative justice may arise. Unless we support victims and witnesses throughout the process, we will not bring enough offenders to justice in a timely way.

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): If, as the Minister says, he cares about the rights and concerns of victims, will he explain why the Government have chosen to scrap a criminal justice Bill that would have furthered those rights and to replace it with a ban on foxhunting? Which is more important to him?

Mr. Bradley: We have done absolutely nothing of the sort. We have been consulting on key elements of reform in the Halliday report on sentencing reform and the Auld report on court reform. I invited the Opposition spokesperson into the Department to be briefed on sentencing reform. The hon. Gentleman is well aware that we decided at that stage to publish a White Paper in the spring with a view to introducing legislation on the criminal justice system in the autumn. Nothing has changed.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I very much welcome what my right hon. Friend has said, but can I draw a problem to his attention and ask him to intervene? Chief constables such as mine in Essex—I understand the problem to be endemic—are operating victim support in reverse in terms of people whose cars have been stolen. Is he aware that when my chief constable says that he wants the car for forensic purposes, people get not progress on prosecution, but a bill from the car recovery outfit? That is intolerable. It is now time for him to tell chief constables that this has got to stop—from this evening.

Mr. Bradley: I understand my hon. Friend's point. The situation has been going on for a long time, and I assure him that we are looking at it very urgently.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): May I congratulate the Home Secretary through the Minister on the support that he expressed for Sir John Stevens in his article in the *News of the World* on the need for reform of criminal justice? That position is rather different from his previous imprecations about his sending in Whitehall hit squads. May I pick the Minister up on the criminal justice reform Bill? He says that there has been consultation, but I have to tell him that, apart from indicating the contents of Auld, providing us with that report and giving us a briefing, the Government have engaged in no formal consultation whatever with the Opposition parties. As the importance of the criminal justice Bill is acknowledged in all parts of the House, when will the Government respond to the formal proposals that were put to them by my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), indicating that we would co-operate on moving such a Bill through the

House as quickly as possible? No valid explanation whatever has been provided of why the Bill is not being introduced in this Session.

Mr. Bradley: It is quite extraordinary that when we invited the official Opposition spokesperson to attend the briefing on the Halliday consultation, to which we received hundreds of responses, they had not at that point bothered to respond to the consultation document. If they want genuinely to participate and to ensure that we have cross-party support for introducing criminal justice reform, they should take the opportunity to respond to the consultation.

Mrs. Betty Williams (Conwy): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the success of victim support schemes around the country. That is especially true of two schemes—Môn-Gwynedd and Conwy—in my constituency. In the context of providing more information to victims of crime, will he ensure that police authorities automatically refer cases involving victims of crime to local victim support schemes?

Mr. Bradley: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's comments about the victim support service in her area. Through the extra money that we have made available, Victim Support has developed highly effective witness services in our courts, and every court will be covered by April this year. We must ensure that there is proper communication with all the agencies involved in a case, whether it be the police, the Crown Prosecution Service or others that become involved with the victim at that point or later in the process. Within that communication process, technology must be enhanced to ensure that information is quickly relayed to the different agencies so that they can then communicate with the victim and/or witness. That is essential for the effective completion of more cases through the court process.

Police Officers

2. **Mr. George Osborne** (Tatton): What representations he has received from police officers about his proposed reforms to pay, pensions and conditions. [38874]

4. **Mr. Andrew Lansley** (South Cambridgeshire): What discussions he has had with the Police Federation since the results of its ballot on the proposed new terms and conditions for federated ranks. [38876]

5. **Mr. James Clappison** (Hertsmere): What recent representations he has received about police conditions of service. [38877]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): Other Ministers and I have made numerous visits to, and undertaken consultation meetings with, representatives of the police service and members of the public around the country. Discussions that have taken place since the Police Federation ballot, both through the negotiating board and directly with myself and other Ministers, have been extremely cordial and fruitful.

In addition, I have received many letters from police officers and from the public. The public naturally place emphasis on reducing variations in service, ensuring a reliable and reassuring policing presence, and achieving a massive reduction in street robbery, crime and antisocial behaviour. Our reforms are designed to achieve those goals.

Mr. Osborne: The fact is that rank and file police officers rejected the Home Secretary's reform proposals by a majority of 10 to one. In my local police force in Cheshire, 86 per cent. of officers voted against them. That is hardly surprising, given that Ministers go around treating the police as heroes one moment and wreckers the next. Instead of blaming the Police Federation for the outcome of the ballot, should not he work with police officers, listen to their genuine concerns, and produce some better proposals?

Mr. Blunkett: There is a history of Opposition parties taking advantage of the efforts of Governments of both persuasions to bring about radical reform. Previous Home Secretaries bear the scars—internally, if not externally—to verify that fact. Those who do not like what we are doing—whether the Police Federation, the leadership of the police service or Opposition parties—have an obligation to say what they would do.

We shall seek a way forward precisely for the reasons that I spelled out a moment ago. This is not about an old-fashioned confrontation between trade unions and the Government, but about reform to bring a decent police service to the public whom we serve. The judge and jury of our success will be the men and women who face robbery on our streets and fear leaving their houses, not Opposition Members making knockabout points in the House about why we are not backing the Police Federation.

Mr. Lansley: Does the Home Secretary understand that police officers hearing what he has said today will be sorry that he has not expressed some sense of regret for the intemperate and derogatory nature of his remarks about the police, which contributed to the ballot result? Will he now express that regret, and say that he is willing to enter the current conciliation without preconditions on key issues such as overtime and priority payments?

Mr. Blunkett: How the Opposition have turned. What a reversal of roles. What an interesting backing of the trade unions against the people we are seeing this afternoon. Let me make my position absolutely clear. I have met representatives of the Police Federation since the ballot, and indicated to them and to the staff side that, of course, we are prepared to go into the conciliation with the intention of finding a solution, otherwise I would not have suggested going to conciliation in the first place. I also want to refute the hon. Gentleman's allegation that I have somehow used detrimental language against the police force. If he can find a single quote in my name, or an interview on radio or television, of course I will agree with him that I should withdraw. *[Interruption.]* Someone has just shouted out "Spanish practices". My cousin has lived in Spain for the last 35 years. I would never be able to visit her again if I had used the term "Spanish practices".

Mr. Clappison: May I give the Home Secretary an opportunity to use some positive language? Will he give sympathetic consideration to the letter that he has received from the chief constable of Hertfordshire about the severe difficulties that that force is experiencing in recruiting and retaining officers? Will the Home Secretary take into account the fact that the Hertfordshire force is now under strength by 290 officers, and that, in many cases, it is competing for recruits with the Metropolitan force, which offers an extra £4,000 in allowances and free travel? Will he give the otherwise excellent Hertfordshire force the help that it needs to put the officers on the streets to fight crime, which is what my constituents want?

Mr. Blunkett: We might have some degree of agreement here, because there is a genuine problem in Hertfordshire and the other counties that find themselves just outside the ring, in terms of the substantial enhancement that all sides sought, to ensure that recruitment could be increased in the Metropolitan police force by 1,100-plus over the last 12 months. However, it is precisely to be able to target resources, and to be able to reward those at the sharp end on top of the normal pay round—which is not until September—that we have embarked on the reform agenda. I hope that all hon. Members will, therefore, back that agenda in putting money and incentive into the pay packet and the jobs of those police officers outside the Met area who do not receive the same level of additional payments.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is my right hon. Friend aware that this action is 18 years too late? It should have been taken in 1984, when all those police, acting according to Mrs. Thatcher—who was Prime Minister at the time—were sent to every coalfield to allow the scabs to get into the pits. The net result was that they did not care about their own pay then. I have a proposition to make: I have a gang of ex-miners who will sit on the national reference tribunal to settle this issue.

Mr. Blunkett: I am almost inclined to take up my hon. Friend's generous offer. On a slightly more serious note, I live in Sheffield, half a mile away from Orgreave, and I am well aware of the situation. That is why I scratched my head when I saw a BBC film—which was shown as the introduction to "On the Record" yesterday, and produced by somebody called Grossman, I think—which tried to suggest that the police reform agenda was tantamount to using the police in the way in which they had been used at Orgreave in 1984–85. I have to say that when those in short trousers make these films, they can have no clue whatsoever about the history they are dealing with, and it would be better if they got themselves another job.

Mr. David Miliband (South Shields): May I reassure my right hon. Friend that I am not wearing short trousers? Does he agree that the key to reform lies not in books of theory, but in what is happening on the ground? He will know that in Northumbria the detection rate has risen by about one third in the past seven years, and that each and every one of the 60 extra police officers who are being assigned to south Tyneside will be community beat managers working on the street, tackling local problems. Will my right hon. Friend consider convening a seminar of chief constables from around the country so that they can learn from the Northumbria experience?

Mr. Blunkett: I am deeply relieved by my hon. Friend's reassurance at the beginning of his question. I will not carry out an examination in person. His force is one of the best in Britain. It is at command unit level and it is well led. I have every intention of calling together those both at chief constable and at command unit level to share experience and to spread that experience, so that the kind of improvements that my hon. Friend outlined can be the experience of everyone, everywhere in the country.

Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): Is it not the case that the Police Federation's figures show that almost two thirds of the officers who rejected the proposals did so on the basis of overtime, not because of the wider issues that have been raised by the Opposition? Are not the real issues the need to get more police officers on the beat, deal with the variation in performance and improve standards, as mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Mr. Miliband)? The performance in my operation command unit is very good, but were it to come up to the best in the country, the constituents in Dudley, North would be extremely pleased.

Mr. Blunkett: I entirely agree. That is what the reform agenda is about. I welcome the advertisement placed today by the Police Federation, as it indicates that the Police Federation is prepared to support and give backing to the vast majority of the reform agenda. If we can find a way forward, not simply by capitulating on the level of overtime, thereby bringing about a substantial mismanagement of resources, but by managing overtime down without putting fear and apprehension into officers who have been misled about our proposals, we will seek to do so.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): Contrary to the Home Secretary's earlier assertions, the Opposition stand four-square behind the need for a more modern and flexible system of pay and conditions for the police service, whatever he might like to think. However, we do not stand four-square behind a hectoring and bullying style which has caused so much demoralisation and led to the spectacular defeat of the Home Secretary in the ballot. Will he confirm to us—or, indeed, deny—the reports over the weekend that he will at last accept the view of all levels of the police service, plus the Opposition, plus the majority of the other place, and drop his proposals for centralised powers of control over the police in clauses 5 and 7 of the Police Reform Bill?

Mr. Blunkett: First, I am not seeking centralised control. I am not seeking operational control at any level, and it is a simple lie by those who have said the opposite. Secondly, I do not expect—I say this to the shadow Home Secretary—any member of his party to ask the Home Secretary to take responsibility for the level and quality of policing in this country, unless the Home Secretary has the power as well as the responsibility to do something about it. In the words of *The Daily Telegraph* leader a week last Saturday, I should simply eulogise or appeal to people to change. I am afraid that the electorate expects something better than that. It expects us to work with the police service, retaining its operational responsibility but ensuring that if we are to answer to Parliament and to the electorate, we have some means—some levers—to deal with the variation and improve the delivery of police services everywhere in the country.

Youth Crime

3. **Mr. Gareth R. Thomas** (Harrow, West): What plans he has to tackle youth crime in London. [38875]

The Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs (Mr. John Denham): We are determined to tackle youth crime in London. We support the Metropolitan police service's safer streets campaign, which has already had an impact on street robbery, and we are working with 11 London boroughs to target those young people most at risk of offending. The new taskforce of the police, local authorities and criminal justice agencies will bring together the efforts of every part of the criminal justice system to work together to tackle youth crime.

Mr. Thomas: Does my right hon. Friend recognise that one particular crime in London of which young people have generally, but not exclusively, been the victims is mobile phone crime? Can he tell the House what further action he intends to take in that regard, and can he assure the House that he has the co-operation of all the big mobile phone companies in his efforts to crack down on such crime?

Mr. Denham: My hon. Friend is right to raise the issue of mobile phone crime, as it is probably the largest single factor in the rise in robbery rates. As he will know, for many months Ministers have been putting pressure on the industry to act on this problem. I am pleased that over the past few weeks all the mobile phone operators have announced measures to cut off mobile phones once they are stolen and to share the identifying numbers among the companies so that the phones cannot be switched from one part of the system to another. I believe that that, together with other action that we are taking, such as education campaigns in schools about where to use mobile phones and so on, will make a difference.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): Will the Minister confirm that, in the last nine months for which figures are available, street crime in London has risen by a shocking 39 per cent.? Will he further confirm that most of that crime has been committed by young people? Although we welcome the Metropolitan police's short-term strategy for dealing with problems on our streets, what long-term strategy have the Government got to tackle this serious matter?

Mr. Denham: The hon. Gentleman's question is a very good one. We need to ensure that we catch the young people who are offending and take measures to protect the public from them. It is also important to minimise the numbers of young people in the rising generation who are likely to become involved in offending. The work that we are doing with the Metropolitan police, 11 London boroughs and the Government regional office is designed to bring together schools, social services, the police, the probation service and other agencies to identify the young people who are at risk of getting involved in offending and to divert them into other activities.

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): Does my right hon. Friend agree with me that good community relations are not an alternative to, but a prerequisite for, effective policing? Furthermore, does he agree that although stop and search is an essential tool in the battle against street crime, the issue is not merely the level of stop and search, but how effective it is in terms of the number of arrests that it leads to? Will he continue to support police officers who are working with a focused and intelligence-led approach to stop and search in partnership with the local community?

Mr. Denham: A fundamental principle of policing in this country is that it is by consent. The police must be able to take the effective measures that are needed to tackle crime, and to do so with the support of the communities that are being policed. My right hon. Friend has today set out how we will do that. We need to ensure that stop and search can be used, but as my hon. Friend said it must be intelligence-led and targeted. It must also enjoy the growing confidence and support of communities which are the victims of crime and need effective action taken against it.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Is not it a fact that a great deal of crime, including that perpetrated by young people, has a drug-related element? Can the Minister reassure Londoners that the drug problem in the capital will be vigorously tackled? Does he share the permissive attitude of the Liberal Democrats, or does he think that that is a thoroughly retrograde step?

Mr. Denham: I can give the hon. Gentleman an absolute assurance that, unlike the Liberal Democrats, the Labour party will not propose the legalisation of heroin. *[Interruption.]* A serious issue lies behind the hon. Gentleman's question. We must ensure that the efforts of the police in London are focused. *[Interruption.]* The Liberal Democrats do not like what they did at the weekend, which is why there is a certain amount of background noise.

We will ensure that the efforts of the police and other agencies are focused on class A drugs, which wreak havoc, have a spin off and cause most crime. We will also step up efforts on drug treatment, so that young people who have got involved in drugs have help to break their habit and to break the criminal way of life that they have drifted into.

Violent Crime

6. **Mr. Paul Goodman** (Wycombe): What recent discussions he has had with the chairman of the Police Federation on violent crime. [38878]

7. **Mr. John Baron** (Billericay): What initiatives he will introduce to combat violent crime. [38879]

The Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs (Mr. John Denham): Despite the overall fall in violent crime under this Government, we remain determined to make the fight against violent crime a priority, and in particular to tackle the rise in street crime that has taken place in some of our major cities. We regularly meet the Police Federation to discuss policing matters, and will support the police in their action against violent crime. The action that we have taken includes measures announced today by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to ensure that the police can make effective use of stop-and-search powers.

Mr. Goodman: Can the Minister explain to the Police Federation how it reduces the amount of violent crime to ask those who are stopped, but not searched, for their names, addresses and self-defined ethnicity? Some who were asked those questions in pilot projects have declared themselves to be "Martian" or "Jedi knight".

Mr. Denham: As I said earlier, it is important for the police to be able to make effective use of stop-and-search powers, but in implementing the recommendations of the Lawrence inquiry we are taking measures to ensure that that is done with the confidence of all communities. The approach has been piloted and we can pilot it further to make sure that it works effectively, but the police must be equipped with the tools that they need to do their job properly.

Mr. Baron: Although the latest figures show that violent crime is rising—particularly in Essex, where there has been a 33 per cent. increase since 1998—the number of police constables has fallen. Will the Minister stop picking a fight with the police and learn from Mr. Giuliani, the former mayor of New York, that the best way of reducing all categories of crime is substantially to increase the number of police on the streets, and work with them rather than against them?

Mr. Denham: The hon. Gentleman has not been in the House for long. If he had been here longer, he would know that the cut in the number of Metropolitan police was started by the last Government—his party—in 1990, and that the cuts in other forces followed the same pattern under that Government. What makes our party and our Government different is that we have reversed the decline, and are on track for record police numbers. We will have 130,000 by next year. If any party in Parliament is meeting the need for more police officers, it is this party. The hon. Gentleman's party failed.

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): A Nottingham magistrate whom I visited at home yesterday told me that recent statements by the Lord Chief Justice had left him unsure about what policy to follow in imprisoning offenders. Does the Minister agree that, while we are keen to explore alternatives to prison in the case of a range of offences, we should ask magistrates to take a firm line in the case of violent offenders who pose a danger to the public?

Mr. Denham: I do not think it is for me to comment directly on Lord Justice Woolf and sentencing policy. If I did so, I might risk committing some terrible constitutional crime. I think the message is pretty clear, however: those who pose a real threat to the public through violent crimes such as street robbery must face severe penalties. Other sentences may be more appropriate for those who do not pose such a threat, but we hope and expect that the courts will protect the public when violent offenders are brought before them.

Mr. Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford): During his discussion with the Police Federation, will my right hon. Friend mention the misuse of air weapons? Each year some 1,500 people are injured, sometimes seriously, and some 10,000 animals are killed or maimed by such weapons. Although they are pretty lethal, children as young as 14 are allowed to use them unsupervised. Is it not time we seriously considered the misuse of these weapons and raised the age at which they can be used to 17, in line with the age for other gun usage?

Mr. Denham: There is a real problem with the misuse of weapons. It is one of the symptoms of antisocial behaviour among young people that we need to tackle. A few weeks ago we received the report of the firearms consultative committee, which considered air weapons, firearm use and age limits, among other issues. We are currently examining its recommendations.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Given recent welcome and high-profile contributions to the debate on the future of the criminal justice system by senior judges, senior police officers and Ministers, can the Minister confirm that the interests of victims and witnesses will motivate the reforms that the Government have in train? Although we have reservations about the associated bureaucracy, we support the new initiatives announced by the Home Secretary. However, if we are to deal with violent crime effectively, including through the effective use of stop and search, we must remember that it is not the court system that is failing—three out of four people brought to court are found guilty—but deterrence and detection of crime on the street. Only one in four of those who commit crime is arrested, and in London only one in eight is likely to be caught. Will he confirm that catching people and deterring crime are the priorities on which we should concentrate, rather than worrying too much about people getting off at the end of the process, given that—by and large—they do not?

Mr. Denham: The most unproductive way to approach this issue is to debate which part of the system is to blame. The reality is that reforms are needed in the police, in sentencing and in the courts. It is wrong to argue that the entire problem lies in a particular place. In discussing the criminal justice system last week, Sir John Stevens of the Metropolitan police did not say that the police are not in need of reform; he said that they, too, are in need of it.

It is, of course, right that we need to ensure that the police are well equipped to detect crime. The safer streets campaign of the Metropolitan police is not simply about putting more police officers on the streets, but about using people in a targeted way to produce the right evidence. The protection of witnesses and victims must run right through the system—from the way that they are treated by the police at the beginning of the process, to what happens when they go to court, including whether they feel safe and protected from those about whom they are giving evidence. Instead of debating which part of the system should be blamed, as the hon. Gentleman suggests, let us recognise that reforms are needed in each part of it.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): If stop and search is to be one police weapon against criminality, do the police not have a responsibility to carry out their operations in such a way that claims of discrimination will simply not be justified? Previously, stop and search was largely discredited, and one hopes that it will be conducted differently in future.

Mr. Denham: My hon. Friend is right, but we should recognise that, although not everything is yet perfect, in recent years the police service across England and Wales has made huge efforts and great strides—especially since the Lawrence report—in tackling the problems that have been identified, and in improving the policing of minority communities in particular. That is one reason why members of those communities are calling for police action in a way that they would not have done five or six years ago, and we should acknowledge that.

The measures proposed today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State are intended to underline and demonstrate precisely what my hon. Friend is saying, which is that every part of every community can be confident that police measures are being used properly.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I agree with what the Minister has just said, and like others on both sides of the House we support the Home Secretary's backing for stop and search—a power that the police need to fight crime on our streets. However, having listened to the Minister, I confess that I am still at a loss to understand how the new code's bureaucratic requirements will help police officers to use that power. He implied that the code will increase the level of consent to stop and search, but can he explain why receiving a report will make someone happier to be stopped by the police?

Mr. Denham: The point is that, over time, it will be possible to establish clearly who the police are stopping in order to make inquiries and to ask them to account for themselves. That is the best way to settle arguments about whether people are being picked up because there is reason to believe that they are committing—or planning to commit—an offence, or simply because of the colour of their skin. Showing that they are being picked up for the former reason, and not the latter, is critical to maintaining public confidence in the use of those policing powers.

Mr. Letwin: Although the Minister has an argument, an opposing one exists that is of greater force. The bureaucratic requirements do not match the realities of everyday policing—a point made abundantly clear by the police. The Home Secretary said in the police debate, on 5 December 2001 at column 347, "We will cut bureaucracy". He rightly recognised that bureaucracy imposes severe constraints on policing, but how is the new code consistent with that theme?

Mr. Denham: The key reason why we want to cut the bureaucracy that ties police officers to police stations is to free them up to be out in the community fighting crime and using their powers where they have the chance to protect the public and reduce the level of crime. We will drive that agenda forward. The present proposals were produced in outline after careful consideration in the Lawrence inquiry. The group that has been advising my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and me on the implementation of those recommendations includes senior members of the police service from the Association of Chief Police Officers. They have signed up to the proposals and they have worked with us on the details.

The proposals have been tested in practice with officers on the front line and, as we pilot them further, no doubt further revisions will be needed. However, the truth is that if we want police officers to use the powers of stop and search to tackle street crime, they have to do so in a way that enjoys the public's confidence. The proposals produced today balance those two requirements.

National Asylum Support Service

8. **Mr. Neil Gerrard** (Walthamstow): If he proposes to develop the regionalisation of the National Asylum Support Service. [38880]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Angela Eagle): The internal review into the operation of dispersal recommended that the National Asylum Support Service should establish a greater regional presence. While plans are at an early stage, we are considering how NASS can have the capacity to answer more inquiries and solve problems at local levels. We are also considering outreach so that people who have been dispersed in regional clusters can be visited by NASS employees.

Mr. Gerrard: My hon. Friend will know of the serious concerns about administrative inefficiencies in NASS that have led, in far too many cases, to people being left without support for weeks on end. I welcome what she has said about setting up a regional structure, but I would like her assurance that it will not be only administrative. We need local access points where asylum seekers or their representatives can contact NASS directly, with telephone numbers that—unlike at present—do not continually change. Problems that should be straightforward could then be sorted out at local level by direct contact, which does not happen at the moment.

Angela Eagle: I agree that we need to ensure that NASS works more efficiently in the service that it gives to people once they have been dispersed, but we are not considering establishing counter services in the regions at this stage. Such innovations as the voucher inquiries line have improved service from what was an unacceptable level. The line turns inquiries round within 48 hours of the call being made, so that aspect of the national service is improving, but we do recognise the need for more outreach in the regions.

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire): The success of NASS depends crucially on the degree of confidence that asylum seekers have in the Home Office. Is the Minister aware that that confidence is severely under pressure because of reports that the Home Office is still unable to give details of which asylum seekers were being held at the Yarl's Wood centre on 14 February, the night of the disturbances, and that the immigration service had refused an offer from Bedfordshire police to check the backgrounds of those likely to be moved to Yarl's Wood? Can she comment on that allegation and will she publish immediately a list of those detainees and asylum seekers who were at Yarl's Wood in order to dispel local rumours that, contrary to assurances, low-risk asylum seekers were held with those with criminal convictions, those who might be prone to violence and—possibly—those who might have terrorist connections?

Angela Eagle: The immigration service holds the definitive list of those who were in Yarl's Wood, although it is not my intention to publish it. The difficulties in providing a definitive list of those present at the time of the incident were the result of the destruction of the records that were held there and the fact that detainees had been transferred in and out of the centre after the last roll call at 6 pm but before the disturbance. We had to reconcile the figures that the immigration service holds because of that transfer. Group 4's records were destroyed in the fire, but I assure him that we have the immigration service figures.

It is true that there were approaches from Bedfordshire police to check the police national computer, but they wished to check for every single person. Many of those who present for asylum at the ports do not have police national computer issues. Those who present in-house would also not necessarily be checked in that way. There are data protection concerns as to why there was not a wholesale transfer of that information, but this is an issue that we are looking at.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): My hon. Friend has seen the nasty, despicable little racist leaflet circulating in my constituency that has been promoted by a right-wing party in an attempt to raise fear within the community. I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House will condemn that activity. Will my hon. Friend seek to focus the discussions about the Government's proposals so that people in the community know that they have been told downright lies by that right-wing racist bunch?

Angela Eagle: I agree with my hon. Friend that attempts to exploit racial tension of the sort to which he refers and the despicable leaflets that he has shown me are unacceptable. Clearly, the sooner we are in a position to make choices about sites for accommodation, the sooner we will be able to dispel people's worries about this.

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking): Given that the National Asylum Support Service currently houses over 40,000 asylum seekers, does the Minister accept that the recent fire and break-out from Yarl's Wood removal centre has severely damaged the Government's ability to manage the asylum system efficiently? How many of those who absconded are still on the run? How many persons have been charged with criminal offences arising out of this incident, and how many people whose asylum appeals are still current have been moved from Yarl's Wood into prison? Finally, when will the official inquiry into these events be available and ready for debate in the House?

Angela Eagle: I do not accept that the events at Yarl's Wood have made it harder or impossible for us to control the asylum system. Off the top of my head, 41 people were moved back into prison following the events at Yarl's Wood. The hon. Gentleman will know that a search is ongoing in the debris of the part of Yarl's Wood that was destroyed by fire to check the forensics. The last count that I saw—again this may not be the most up-to-date figure—showed that 22 people were missing, presumed on the run. I will check the list of the hon. Gentleman's other questions and write to him, but he has to realise that we are in the middle of an inquiry about this. There are also ongoing police inquiries. We are simply not in a position at this stage to give the hon. Gentleman detailed answers to his questions. However, I assure him that, when the answers come out of the inquiries, they will be made public.

Police Service Reform

10. **Mr. Tim Boswell** (Daventry): What recent discussions he has had about the reform of the police service. [38882]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): We have been in discussion with key stakeholders since October 2000 and that will continue as the reform programme is taken forward. The Police Reform Bill makes provision for some of the measures in the White Paper, but the reform agenda is much wider than that. The steering group is due to meet on Thursday, and will include representatives of all the key stakeholders. Reform of police pay and conditions of service is an important part of our agenda. We are in conciliation with the main organisations on the Police Negotiating Board.

Mr. Boswell: I thank the Minister for that reply, but does he recognise that for the reform programme to be a success it is essential for him and his colleagues to regain the confidence of community beat officers, whether urban or rurally based, and their sergeants? In that connection, will he pay particular regard to the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) about the propensity of the Metropolitan police force to recruit from county forces because of its more attractive pay and conditions and also to the growth and proliferation within county forces of specialist police units, often with more attractive terms and conditions, which are tending to suck officers away from the beat?

Mr. Ainsworth: The hon. Gentleman heard the answer that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary gave earlier. Some of the issues raised are exactly those that we wish to address in our reform agenda with regard to pay. We want to get money to people when it is appropriate, when they are doing a job at the front line in the police service and when they are doing a particularly onerous duty. People in those situations should be recognised and rewarded. We accept that there are problems, which we are addressing as part of our proposals on the table. It is unfortunate that we must go to conciliation in order to get those proposals across and to get them agreed.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling): The vast majority of hon. Members and of people in the country support my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary's reform programme for the police. In connection to earlier questions, one important part of that reform programme will be to ensure that there is a proper career structure for the ordinary policeman on the beat—the beat manager, the bobby or whatever—so that they can gain promotion and obtain better pay and conditions. A constable could therefore be rewarded simply for being a good policeman on the beat, dealing with antisocial behaviour, street crime and so on, without having to be rewarded by being promoted to a desk job or to a role other than that in which he has proved his worth.

Mr. Ainsworth: My hon. Friend has hit on an important point, which applies in other professions as it does in the police. One of the most important jobs in the police service is that of constable, and one of the most important parts of the police reform programme is to give that job due recognition.

Norman Baker (Lewes): Does the Minister recognise that, although the Police Reform Bill contains many good proposals, genuine concern exists in all quarters about the proposals to give the Home Secretary of the day more power to intervene in operational police matters? Does he recognise that that challenges the traditional tripartite structure between the Home Secretary, police authorities and chief constables. As a consequence, the axis is being moved very much in the Home Secretary's direction. Will consideration be given to changing those proposals, particularly with regard to the draconian authority that such operational proposals might give to a right-wing Tory Home Secretary in the future?

Mr. Ainsworth: The hon. Gentleman is simply wrong. There are no proposals in the Police Reform Bill to take over operational issues. The hon. Gentleman ought to accept that the Home Secretary and Ministers are accountable to Parliament, and, through Parliament, to the nation. On the subject of right-wing Home Secretaries, surely he would not want to return to the days when the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) was in office—the days of the "Not me Guv" Government. We are responsible for policy in the broadest terms, and we therefore need to have the powers that go with that accountability.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): Given wider police powers and the wider police community, does my hon. Friend believe that the police will have better facilities to deal with disturbances and violent crimes such as those which took place in Burnley in June last year? In particular, will police be enabled to get to know those who are stirring up that type of trouble and to take action before problems of that type arise on the street?

Mr. Ainsworth: During meetings up and down the country to discuss police reform, we have tried to say simply that it is the police, not the Government, who need that reform. They are stretched in every direction by the expectations placed on them by the public, who expect them to be everywhere, to meet response times, and to be able to tackle the kind of serious problems that occurred last year in my hon. Friend's constituency. The police reform package is about enabling the police to deal with all those issues as effectively as possible.

Street Crime

11. **Mr. Mark Francois** (Rayleigh): If he will make a statement on the level of street crime in London. [38883]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis and I agree that the increase in street robbery that has occurred over the past year is unacceptable. Post 11 September, there was a diversion of resources in the Metropolitan police area away from police on the streets, but that has now been reversed by the safer streets programme, which I welcome very strongly and which has seen a halving of the increase in street robbery over the past five weeks. Equally, the measures that the mobile phone industry has at last agreed to take will make a difference.

However, in the end, we all agree that we need more police on the beat and that they need to be better backed up and better supported by the community. We need to send out the message clearly that we are not prepared to put up with the violence, street robbery and thuggery that has occurred over recent months.

Mr. Francois: I thank the Home Secretary for that reply. He referred to what happened in New York, but is he aware that, according to last year's figures, a Londoner is now twice as likely to be mugged as a New Yorker? What material action is the Home Office, under his leadership, planning to take to reduce the soaring level of street crime in our capital? Clearly, what Ministers are attempting to do at the moment is not working.

Mr. Blunkett: I mentioned mobile phones, and it is estimated that 51 per cent. of the street crime in London involves that form of robbery. We now have a programme with the industry to deal with that problem. We are also targeting advice at young people, and that campaign has been helpfully backed up by the London *Evening Standard*. We have 1,100-plus additional officers on the streets of London since last March, and we have a budget that is only marginally less than that for New York, but with 12,000 fewer officers. That, of course, begs the question about the use of resources and prioritisation, and that is why the Metropolitan police authority, the Commissioner and Ministers are all determined to make sure that we use those resources to get a visible police presence when it is needed and that it is backed up by the technology that the police deserve to be able to do the job of reducing the unacceptable level of street crime and robbery to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Martin Linton (Battersea): Will my right hon. Friend provide us with any more details about the success of the safer streets campaign in reducing crime in some of the nine boroughs in which it was originally introduced? Does he appreciate that there will be a warm welcome in Wandsworth for the extension of the operation to other London boroughs, including Wandsworth? Can he give us any assurances about the extension of the scheme beyond 31 March, which is when it is currently due to end?

Mr. Blunkett: I shall be having discussions this week with the commissioner about the potential for retaining the diversion of resources from traffic duties into the safer streets campaign—which I believe has contributed considerably to the reduction in street crime—about the potential for carrying forward the additional resources for anti-terrorism work that we provided just before Christmas and about the ability to continue the programme for the urgent recruitment of additional police officers in a way that has not occurred for many years.

However, as requested by the Metropolitan police, we are also committed to providing back-up community support officers combined with local street wardens so that there can be an effort that mobilises the community as a whole and not just the police service in tackling the problem of street crime.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): I hope that the Home Secretary will recognise that one of the factors that leads to an increase in street crime is the lack of respect that sections of society, particularly young people, have for the police force. What measures is he putting forward to address that problem?

Mr. Blunkett: We have drawn together a youth taskforce of all the agencies, including those in education, that have a role to play. I have worked with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills to ensure that schools welcome the police service and work with the police not only to build respect but to develop an understanding of their common cause. We are working with black and Asian community leaders to ensure that people understand that much violent crime and street robbery is black on black and that it often involves young black people being attacked by other young black people. That is why I strongly welcome the brave stand taken by Mike Best, the editor of *The Voice*, who simply told the truth and has focused attention on the issue, as we have been doing today by revising the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 code A on stop and search to ensure that we protect those members of the community who are most vulnerable from those who are most violent.

Crime and Terrorism

13. **Mr. Philip Hammond** (Runnymede and Weybridge): What assessment he has made of the role of air support to police forces in combating crime and terrorism. [38885]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): Guidance on the use of air support on good practice is provided by the Association of Chief Police Officers air operations committee, which includes the Home Office. The role is kept under constant review. Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary also carries out inspections of air support units. Operational support—whether in the fight against crime or terrorism, or in other areas such as searching for missing persons—is a matter for individual police constables, but aircraft can provide a unique additional resource in such circumstances.

Mr. Hammond: The Minister will be aware that, in response to budgetary pressures, the Metropolitan police have had to cut their flying hours by nearly a third. They have now announced that they will try to sell one of their three helicopters, leaving just two. That compares with the seven that are available to the New York police, and 10 to the Berlin, Tokyo and Los Angeles police forces. Having only two aircraft will mean that no more than one will be operational at any one time. In the face of rising crime and the constant threat from terrorism, that represents a real threat to the security of London and the safety of police officers and the public alike. What is the Minister going to do to rectify this appalling state of affairs and ensure a proper level of protection to London and Londoners?

Mr. Ainsworth: The hon. Gentleman should tie up more closely with his hon. Friends. Last year saw a 30 per cent. increase in capital allocation—in revenue terms, a 6 per cent. increase overall. We are a Government who put money into the police service to increase police numbers, following the pause under the Conservatives. Most Conservative Members say that they do not believe in operational control, yet the hon. Gentleman says that we should tell the police exactly how they should spend their money and how many helicopters they should buy. The Conservative party cannot have its cake and eat it. Either it believes in operational independence, or it does not. Clearly, the hon. Gentleman does not, but some of his hon. Friends do. There is something strange going on.

Points of Order

3.32 pm

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I ask you to examine the circumstances surrounding the tabling of early-day motion 949 entitled, "Introduction of progressive beer duty" tabled last Wednesday by the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker)? I ask you to do so, Mr. Speaker, because the early-day motion printed on the Order Paper the following day contains the names, including my own, of several hon. Members who did not sign it. Inquiries at the Table Office revealed that the names were submitted—clearly without permission of some hon. Members, who are seriously concerned that a breach of procedure may have occurred.

Norman Baker (Lewes): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let me deal with the first point of order, and the hon. Gentleman can decide whether a further point of order is necessary. I assure the hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) that I will look into this matter.

Norman Baker: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) had not contacted me to inform me that he was going to raise that point of order, so it is fortunate that I am present to clear it up. Every Member whose name appears on the early-day motion had signed an earlier motion. I contacted—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Rather than the hon. Gentleman clearing up the matter now, I shall look into it further. That is the best course of action.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. This arises from Home Office Questions, so I am sorry that the Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs has just left the Chamber. May I ask that the Minister correct, when next he can, a possibly unwitting misrepresentation of our party's drugs policy? We debated drugs policy at the weekend and we decided on reform proposals. However, we absolutely did not decide to legalise any drug—international conventions preclude it—and we specifically did not recommend the legalisation of heroin, which we oppose.

Mr. Speaker: I am sure that the Home Secretary will read what the hon. Gentleman had to say in tomorrow's *Hansard*.

Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill *[Lords]* (Programme) (No. 3)

3.34 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Michael Wills): I beg to move,

That the Orders of 8th January (Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill [*Lords*] (Programme)) and 31st January (Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill [*Lords*] (Programme) (No. 2)) shall be supplemented as follows—

Consideration

The proceedings on consideration shall be taken on each of the allotted days as shown in the first column of the following Table and shall be taken in the order so shown, and each part of the proceedings shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at the time specified in the second column of the Table.

Table

Proceedings	*Time for conclusion of proceedings*
First allotted day	
New Clauses relating to Part 1, amendments relating to Clauses 1 and 2, Schedule 1, Clauses 3 and 4, Schedule 2, Clauses 5 to 34, Schedule 3, Clauses 35 to 58, Schedule 4, Clauses 59 to 68, Schedule 5, Clauses 69 and 70, new Schedules relating to Part 1.	7 p.m.
Remaining new Clauses (other than Government new Clauses 9, 10 and 11 and other new Clauses relating to forfeiture of leases).	10 p.m.
Second allotted day	
Amendments relating to Clauses 71 and 72, Schedule 6, Clauses 73 to 102, Schedule 7, Clauses 103 to 123, Schedule 8, Clauses 124 to 149, Schedule 9, Clauses 150 to 155, Schedule 10, Clause 156, Schedule 11, Clauses 157 to 162, Government new Clauses 9, 10 and 11 and other new Clauses relating to forfeiture of leases, amendments relating to Clauses 163 to 168, Schedule 12, Clauses 169 and 170, Schedule 13, Clauses 171 to 174, Schedule 14, Clauses 175 to 177, remaining new Schedules and remaining proceedings on consideration.	9 p.m.

We believe that this motion will allow appropriate time to consider each part of this important Bill. The second programme motion amended the original motion at the request of the Opposition by allowing a second day's consideration on Report. This motion has also been discussed with the Opposition—I am extremely grateful to the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) for his co-operation—and it simply sets some timings for the two days of consideration.

Hon. Members will see that the lion's share of the ample time available will be devoted to considering part 2, which relates to leasehold reform, on which most interest has been focused hitherto. To achieve that, hon. Members will see that the usual order of consideration has been changed slightly to allow full consideration of part 1 before moving on to part 2, and consideration of part 2 will begin no later than 7 pm today and continue on the second allotted day, which will be Wednesday next. The usual order has also been changed to allow new clauses relating to forfeiture to be taken out of order on the second allotted day to allow as full a discussion as possible. I hope that the House will feel that that is a satisfactory use of the allotted time.

3.35 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stone): I hear what the Minister has to say, and agree with most of it. The fact is that there has been a very full discussion of the Bill in the other place. It has undergone about five separate procedural stages, so many of these matters have been discussed exhaustively. However, a number of important matters were discussed at length in Committee in this House, and every member of that Committee concluded that we had had a good Committee stage on this fairly esoteric subject. Labour Back Benchers made some extremely coherent arguments, as did Opposition Members, and some of my hon. Friends made some notable speeches. As a result we eventually managed to create a climate in which the Government were prepared to consider making a number of important amendments and, in certain respects, to break new ground. Those amendments may not go as far as we should like, as we shall no doubt find as we proceed on Report.

Some important changes are proposed in relation to forfeiture, which we shall discuss on Wednesday. That issue has been embedded in the law of property since well before 1925—in fact, from the middle ages onwards. We may not agree with every aspect of what is proposed, but, by the same token, real progress is being made, so I am glad to be able to say that we do not want to delay matters on Report by dividing the House on the programme motion.

In my view, two days will be sufficient to deal with these matters, but I hope that there will be vigorous debate because we are not content with all the Government's proposals. Indeed, we have tabled our own amendments, which we intend to pursue vigorously, especially on unanimity with regard to commonhold and on forfeiture. The Opposition believe that the programme motion should be agreed to without Division.

3.39 pm

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): It is logical to consider the Bill on two days and to have a break between them, but I hope that there will be flexibility if it looks as though we might go over a time barrier on one or two issues. The reason, ably set out by the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash), is that there are some contentious issues. We have a contribution to make on forfeiture and are particularly interested in marriage value. Although I do not expect that our amendments and new clauses will take an inordinate amount of time to debate, I hope that there will be time to put them to bed.

3.40 pm

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): Given the prevailing climate, in which statements are sprung upon us, may I urge the Minister to persuade his colleagues not to make statements before the Bill's proceedings on Wednesday?

Question put and agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill *[Lords]*

[1st Allotted Day]

As amended in the Committee, considered.

New Clause 17

Judgement creditor of commonhold association

'(1) A judgement creditor of a commonhold association may apply to the court for an order enabling him to enforce payment of all or part of his debt against a unit-holder.

(2) In considering whether to make such an order the court shall—

(a) not order a unit-holder to pay a greater part of the debt than the amount he would be expected to have contributed to it by payments under section 37 or 38, and

(b) give due credit for the payments which the unit-holder has made under those sections.'.—*[Mr. Cash.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

3.41 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stone): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

We have tabled the new clause on judgment creditors of commonhold associations because, in discussion with the Law Society, we came to the conclusion that there is inadequate provision for dealing with questions of liability for the viability of the commonhold system. The problem that arises relates particularly to the form of the commonhold association memorandum and articles of association.

The Bill provides that there must, understandably, be a commonhold association that will own and manage the common parts of the commonhold development. It will be a private company limited by guarantee, with members consisting exclusively of all the unit-holders in the development. The issue concerns the nature of the company that is being created and the extent to which it is the appropriate structure for the commonhold association. We concluded that a private company limited by guarantee would be appropriate, but there is still the problem of what the liability would be in relation to such a commonhold association. We believe that strict limitation of liability is not appropriate for commonhold associations—indeed, it is likely to harm the viability of the entire commonhold system.

There is a real problem here. Contractors are likely to be cautious about dealing with commonhold associations if the limited liability may make it impossible to collect sums owing. That is important, because the extent to which repair and maintenance will be properly catered for is part and parcel of the commonhold association's duties and functions. Recovery of work costs and related matters lie at the heart of the system and whether it will work. If contractors are not prepared to go along with the system because they are concerned about the strictly limited liability currently scheduled for commonhold associations, the physical state of the building in question could be brought into question. Indeed, such strict liability could even lead to physical neglect of buildings. For example, if contractors were unhappy with the liability for

[Mr. William Cash]

costs and other responsibilities in respect of the commonhold association, long-term lift maintenance contracts might be vitiated by the fact that no one was prepared to enter into them. That would be a serious problem, and we urge the Government, even at this late hour, to consider it seriously.

3.45 pm

Home owners with freehold houses are not protected by limited liability, yet they expect to meet the cost of repairs. It seems appropriate that primary liability should rest with the commonhold association, which would make contracts. Secondly, if one unit-holder defaulted—if he were bankrupt, for example—it should be possible to reallocate his share of service charges among the remaining unit-holders. Thirdly, on final default by the association, it should be possible for individual unit-holders to be held accountable for their respective shares of the debt.

Our proposals are contained in new clause 17. The Law Society supports the proposal that, in the case of final default by the association, judgment creditors should be offered the chance to obtain a court order against individual unit-holders. That would limit cases to those in which a court had adjudicated that a debt was due and allow the court flexibility to take account of the circumstances that affect each unit-holder—in other words, it may consider what they have already paid.

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): We support the new clause. In Committee, I questioned whether a limited liability company would be the correct constitution for commonhold associations. The new clause would helpfully reduce the onerous responsibilities that would be placed on people who wished to form such a company. We hope that the Government can move along those lines.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): I have one brief question for the Minister on this complex issue. Does a commonhold association have the right to ask part of its membership to make a payment for a development that is contrary to the rules that the association has itself laid down? I ask simply because leasehold arrangements, such as those that exist in some parts of Southend, may contain a restriction to the effect that only single properties may be built, or a further restriction on the size of such properties. In such cases, an individual can say that he wants to add an extra part to a proposed building and to be considered to be allowed to build flats where others may not do so. Even if the freehold rules lay it down that that cannot be done, the freeholder would have the right to agree to it so long as the person paid him some money. I do not like that idea on principle.

It would be helpful to know whether the restrictions on freehold or leasehold contract arrangements can be passed on to the commonhold associations. Will such associations have the power to insist on restrictions and to charge a fee if the restrictions are ignored? Will the Minister explain whether that would be covered by the new clause?

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Michael Wills): Before I answer the hon. Gentleman's question, I shall address the substance of the new clause that the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) urged us to consider. I assure him that we have considered it, but we are going to reject it.

First, new clause 17 would allow someone who has a judgment against a commonhold association to proceed against an individual unit-holder to recover the debt owed—but to what end? Such a course would have serious and unwelcome consequences. The hon. Gentleman accepted that a company limited by guarantee is an appropriate form for a commonhold association, but the new clause would breach a fundamental principle of company law—that a company is a distinct legal entity separate from its members.

Secondly, the proposal would put the unit-holder at a distinct disadvantage when compared with an enfranchised leaseholder in similar circumstances. The leaseholder would be protected by existing company law from being pursued personally by a creditor of the company owning the freehold but, in similar circumstances, the commonhold unit-holder would not have that protection. Given the concerns that have been widely expressed about the threshold of 100 per cent. consent that we have set for conversion to a commonhold—I am sure that we shall return to those arguments later—I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that the new clause hardly provides an incentive for leaseholders to move to commonhold as opposed to a right-to-enfranchise company.

Nor do I share the hon. Gentleman's concern that contractors would be cautious about dealing with such limited liability companies. I am surprised that such a worldly gentleman should take that view. Contractors deal with limited liability companies all the time—they are hungry for such business and I do not think that they would be less hungry in these circumstances.

Notwithstanding all that, is the new clause really necessary? If a judgment creditor cannot get the commonhold association to pay him what he is due, he has the ultimate deterrent—he can threaten to put the association into receivership and eventually to wind it up, with access to the association's assets in liquidation. The unit-holders would be aware that the demise of the association risks the ultimate termination of the commonhold if a succession order is not made. That would leave them in a difficult position because if there is no association there is no commonhold, and if there is no commonhold, they risk becoming the owners of flying freeholds that are difficult to manage and unsaleable.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): The Minister has put what seems a salient point in legal terms but how could a contractor go through all those hoops in practice? In reality, if the straightforward option proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) is not accepted, a contractor would find himself in far greater difficulty.

Mr. Wills: I am happy to assume that the hon. Gentleman believes what he says, although I can see no reason whatever for his belief. I have just explained that contractors deal with limited liability companies all the time. To breach our company law as the new clause proposes seems wholly inappropriate. There is no evidence to suggest that there would be any such caution.

Mr. Cash: The Minister may be guilty of misleading himself about the nature of the companies concerned. There is no doubt that contractors deal all the time with limited liability companies. He may be missing the fact that we are talking about a company limited by guarantee, which is not a normal company with shareholders. Companies limited by guarantee are frequently controlled by just a couple of people. In the case of a block of flats, for example, one is dealing with a company limited by guarantee and a large number of unit-holders. The point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) should not be forgotten. As the Minister was speaking, I was conscious of—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister was indeed speaking, and the hon. Gentleman's intervention has gone on far too long. He should let the Minister continue.

Mr. Wills: We are going round the houses here, I am afraid. I hope that I am not guilty of misleading myself. I am not perhaps the best judge of that, but I do not think that I am. Conservative Members fail to make the distinction between a corporate entity and an individual. That is the distinction on which we are resting. Of course a company limited by guarantee is a different corporate entity—

Mr. Cash: That is the point.

Mr. Wills: It is a point, but not the one that is relevant here.

There is no evidence that contractors will be any more wary about dealing with commonhold associations than they are with any other corporate entity. The point is that there is a remedy available to such contractors, and it is a pretty severe deterrent to the commonhold association. If people do not discharge their obligations, they could end up with unsaleable properties.

Even if all that were not the case, and there were to be a power such as that in the new clause, who is to pay the extra costs of chasing the individual unit-holder through the courts—both the cost of the order committing the enforcement action and that of the enforcement itself?

The new clause would bring about an iniquitous position. It would introduce an unjustifiable and unnecessary provision in what is likely to be the real world of commonhold management.

In response to the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor), if something is contrary to the articles of association, there can be no obligation on the members of that association to be bound by it. However, it is of course possible for an association to change its articles and then oblige any individual member to contribute. I hope that I understood his question correctly and have been able to reassure him.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Clause 1 says:

"a commonhold community statement makes provision for rights and duties of the commonhold association and unit-holders".

How can the association ensure that an unwilling individual fulfils his duties?

Mr. Wills: That takes us rather away from the new clause, and we covered this ground extensively on Second Reading and in Committee. Various options are available to the association to pursue obligations that are properly incurred by individual unit-holders. I will be happy to give the hon. Gentleman further details, but I will not pursue the point at length now.

I understand that Opposition Members are genuinely concerned to ensure that commonhold works effectively in the real world and that scenarios such as those outlined by the hon. Member for Stone do not arise, but I hope that I have given sufficient reassurance that the new clause is not necessary. I urge the hon. Gentleman to withdraw the motion.

4 pm

Mr. Cash: I am afraid that I am not persuaded by the Minister's comments. He suggests that we should not impose unnecessary liabilities on individual unit-holders. On use and maintenance, the Bill sets out that the commonhold community statement must make provision that the obligation to insure, maintain and repair each unit is subscribed to. However, there must also be the flexibility to allow each of those responsibilities to be imposed on either the unit-holder or the commonhold association.

Perhaps the Minister is familiar with my argument, but let me give him an example of the problem. The explanatory notes say that the statement could require the unit-holder to take out an insurance policy on the fabric of a flat while making the commonhold association responsible for insuring and maintaining a balcony. It could also require a unit-holder to be responsible for the decoration of the inside of window units while making the commonhold association responsible for the outside of the same units. In other words, a division of responsibility is inherent in the Government's explanation of the difference between the responsibilities of the unit-holder and the commonhold association. So the Minister's argument that the liability of the commonhold association should be inviolate is extraordinary.

We could spend hours discussing that problem, and no doubt in due course the Court of Appeal, the House of Lords and, for all I know, the European Court of Human Rights will debate it. The bottom line is that for practical purposes we are concerned with whether buildings are likely to be better looked after under the arrangements.

The Law Society might reasonably claim to know a little about the law as it relates to leasehold and commonhold, and the practical effects of the arrangements. Although I am a solicitor, I would not claim that I know a great deal about every aspect of the law. We all learn as we go along. However, the Law Society is a chartered body with a repository of knowledge that I am sure that the Minister is happy to accept. Irrespective of the manner in which he presents his arguments, the plain fact is that it takes a contrary view, and I agree with it. My hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) disagrees with the Minister, as I suspect do other Conservative Members. Indeed, I do not notice vast enthusiasm among Labour Members for his arguments. However, as is often the case with legislation that deals with a niche market, there are not as many hon. Members present as one might hope.

We are dealing with a practicality. I gave the example of lift maintenance contracts, which are long term. It could be that other contractors are put off by the

[Mr. Cash]

arrangements because they are insufficiently flexible, in which case we are making the situation unnecessarily difficult. We therefore intend to divide the House on the new clause. As the Minister knows only too well, there was much mutual indulgence in Committee and we have not engaged in terribly bitter conflicts, although we have had our disagreements. None the less, on this occasion, I shall press the motion to a Division.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 140, Noes 241.

Division No. 187] **[4.5 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Doughty, Sue
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Grieve, Dominic
Hammond, Philip
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
(Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Key, Robert
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Rendel, David
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Dr. Julian Lewis and
Mr. Desmond Swayne.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
(Swansea E)
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Goggins, Paul
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*

Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe and
Mr. Graham Stringer.

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 18

RESTRICTION ON BUILDING

'(1) In this Part "a partial building" means part only of a building, unless that part is divided vertically from the remainder of the building and is not structurally dependent on it.

(2) No person shall erect a partial building on commonhold land.'.—*[Mr. Cash.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Cash: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 81, in schedule 2, page 92, line 5, leave out paragraph 1 and insert—

'*Partial building*

(1) An application may not be made under section 2 in relation to land which consists of, or includes, a partial building.'.

No. 82, in clause 70, page 33, line 9, at end insert—

'Partial building Section [ ]'.

Mr. Cash: The new clause deals with restrictions on building. We propose that, in relation to this part of the Bill, "a partial building" means part only of a building, unless that part is divided vertically from the remainder of the building and is not structurally dependent on it. We are also proposing that no person shall erect a partial building on common land.

To put that into more straightforward language, that means that commonhold ownership should not be available for only parts of buildings. Indeed, to allow that to happen would undermine the integrity of the new commonhold system in various ways. First, if, as the Bill proposes, a commonhold could consist only of those parts of a building above ground level—this arises under paragraph 1 of schedule 2—it would be possible for a commonhold to consist of the whole of a building, excluding its foundations. If it became necessary to rebuild, whether for voluntary redevelopment or, for example, as a result of a fire or other similar disaster, that would be impossible without foundations. Hence, the proposed rule seriously undermines the value of such commonhold units.

Secondly, as I am sure the Minister would agree, one of the aims of introducing commonhold is to overcome a technical deficiency in the common law, which provides no satisfactory way in which a positive obligation can be enforced against successors in title of the person originally undertaking it. Because that affects, among other matters, duties to repair, insure and pay service charges, it has hitherto made freehold an unsatisfactory way to own flats. However, if the lower part only of the building consists of a commonhold and the upper floors are outside it, as the Bill permits, all the common law inconveniences remain in the relations between the commonhold and the other parts of the building. That, again, would undermine the value of the commonhold units.

The purpose of the new clause and amendments is to ensure that if a commonhold consists of a building, all of it is included. However, it is not essential that there should be a building on a commonhold—for example, it could consist of a car park. That would be permitted, but it would be necessary to ensure that after a commonhold had been created, nothing was built partly within the commonhold and partly outside it. For that reason, we suggest that there should be a general prohibition against building in that way.

[Mr. Cash]

As the new clause suggests, "a partial building" would mean

> "part only of a building, unless that part is divided vertically from the remainder of the building and is not structurally dependent on it."

It follows that, as proposed subsection (2) states:

> "No person shall erect a partial building on commonhold land."

Mr. Wills: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for explaining what is intended by the new clause and amendments. As so often during the Bill's progress through the House, I have some sympathy with his desire to make commonhold work. However, regardless of his good intentions, it is our view that in their current form, the new clause and amendments would give rise to some surprising and, I am sure, wholly unintended consequences, and would probably end up forbidding anything other than detached properties being built as commonholds.

Consider, first, new clause 18, and then consider a first floor flat. It is certainly part of the building, so it passes the first test. It is divided vertically from other first floor flats, but not from the remainder of the building, from most of which it is divided horizontally. It is also obviously structurally dependent upon "it", which I take still to mean the remainder of the building, so it fits comfortably into the "partial building" category of the new clause and thus cannot be built on commonhold land. The scope for argument about the definition in relation to terraced houses and even semi-detached ones is wide. I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman meant first floor flats to be caught in that way by the new clause, and we would not consider that a welcome development.

That prohibition might seem odd enough, preventing, as it does, any development of a commonhold by new building, certainly of flats and possibly of other structurally interdependent buildings, but to cap it all, amendment No. 81 would amend schedule 2 to forbid any application for commonhold status where any existing building meets the definition. We have been criticised in this House and in the other place for our 100 per cent. rule for consents to conversion to commonhold, but that is as nothing in comparison with the proposals before us.

Under the new clause, no development, including flats, would be able to become a commonhold, whether the application was made for an existing building which was newly re-developed, or for a development which had triumphantly achieved its 100 per cent. consent target. Amendment No. 82 would add the definition to the index of defined terms.

Although I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his good intentions, I ask him to withdraw the motion, given the unintended consequences that I have graphically outlined to him.

Mr. Cash: This matter is highly technical, and has certain engineering implications relating to foundations; support; where a building is; and whether it is in fact a building, a car park, or whatever else. We are primarily dealing with normal circumstances in which such situations may not arise. The new clause and amendments would deal with a situation that we believe could arise. The Minister takes a contrary view, but in due course we may find that he is wrong. The likelihood could even be as high as 50:50. We do not agree with the Government's view, but this issue does not go to the heart of all matters relating to commonhold, and deals only with limited circumstances in which we believe restrictions should be imposed.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): Before my hon. Friend makes up his mind on whether to withdraw the motion, would he help me? Perhaps because my background is not in the law, I did not understand what the Minister was talking about in relation to amendment No. 81. If commonhold property were built on top of something that was not commonhold and the building was damaged, the people in those flats would not necessarily be able to repair it as quickly as possible. Would my hon. Friend throw a little light on that particular concern?

Mr. Cash: That is true. It is difficult to say with any certainty exactly what kind of building it would be in those circumstances. My hon. Friend may hope to nudge me further down a line than I am not disposed to take. We should deal with that situation in the context of the Bill as a whole, which we support. We have serious reservations about certain aspects, as will no doubt emerge in due course, but the bottom line is that this is not a matter on which we want to divide the House. The Minister may turn out to be right, but I think that he is more likely to be wrong, and it will be a matter of judgment. His officials and the Law Society, which wholly supports these proposals, will be watching the situation carefully. If we are right and the Minister is wrong and problems arise, I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman will be more than happy to introduce amendments to deal with them. Will the Minister give us an assurance that he will deal with problems if they arise? If he is good enough to give me a response on that, I shall be grateful to hear what he has to say.

Mr. Wills: Of course we will continue to monitor the situation. It is a remote possibility, but if it transpires that I am wrong about this, we will consider how we can put it right. I hope that that reassurance enables the hon. Gentleman to withdraw the new clause.

Mr. Cash: In those circumstances, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 3

CONSENT

4.30 pm

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 2, line 22, leave out "anyone who".

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 3, in page 2, line 23, leave out "is".

No. 4, in page 2, line 25, leave out "is the registered proprietor" and insert—

> 'not fewer than 75 per cent. of the registered proprietors'.

No. 5, in page 2, line 27, after "(c)", insert "anyone who".

No. 6, in page 2, line 29, after "(d)", insert "anyone who".

No. 7, in page 2, line 30, after "(e)", insert "anyone who".

Mr. Sanders: There seems to be no compromise between those who want a majority to move to commonhold and the Government, who want 100 per cent. of people to do so.

Only a few things in life require 100 per cent. consent, but the Government seem to think it undesirable for a block of flats to contain both commonhold and long-leasehold units. We want the Bill to help with the establishment of commonhold, and to make it as easy as possible for people to become unit-holders in a commonhold association. Although that might be complicated and less than ideal in mixed blocks, we do not think it worth opposing in view of the benefits of commonhold.

The unanimity clause will make the Bill effective only in relation to new developments. I do not see how anything other than a spanking new development can ever gain the title commonhold as things stand.

It has been argued that a commonhold association would need to create separate accounts for service charges. Would that really be the case? Would the association not draw up a budget for works that would form the basis of service charges for both unit-holders and long leaseholders? There should be no need for separate accounts.

The Government fear that freeholders would be subject to compulsory buy-outs if their buildings became commonhold against their wishes. They could, by regulation, choose between being completely bought out and maintaining their flats as commonhold units and receiving compensation for the value of their freeholds.

All the Government's objections to majority consent can be countered. It has been claimed that an individual's property title would be interfered with against his or her will, but legal precedent allows for that. Under section 36 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987, the county court can make an order amending all leases in a building on the basis of majority support by the leaseholders. The argument in favour of clause 3 on the basis of possible legal challenges due to interference does not hold up.

Could the Government be concerned about precedent? As was said in Committee, precedent exists for not requiring 100 per cent. agreement. The best example is large-scale voluntary transfer, in which council house tenants can choose a new landlord. In that instance, unanimity among tenants is not required.

There are problems with achieving unanimity. For instance, there are the disparate interests of tenants, especially in large blocks. A small minority could stand in the way of the majority's realising their desire to convert to commonhold. Some people have mortgages, or other financial reasons for withholding consent. Prior disputes between neighbours may lead to one trying to spite the other by refusing to grant consent. Some people may refuse to consider commonhold simply because it is difficult. Older residents may not consider conversion worth the trouble, or they may be too ill or frail to participate.

Someone trying to sell a property probably would not wish to participate either. Absentee leaseholders who sub-let their property for investment purposes may not be interested in purchasing a commonhold. An unreasonable tenant could exact payments from fellow tenants to buy his or her agreement for a commonhold scheme. Hon. Members can probably think of other situations in which tenants could show such reluctance. In achieving the unanimity that the Bill demands, tenants could prove the last piece in the jigsaw.

Unanimity makes the concept of commonhold difficult, if not impossible, to achieve for existing tenants. We want a system in which a majority is sufficient to help establish commonhold. Although the Government want to achieve commonhold, they have yet to convince us that their mechanism is the right way to do so.

Mr. Wiggin: Before the last election, the Government promised to introduce these new laws without hesitation, but there is serious concern on both sides of the House that the unanimity requirement will make it even harder to bring about commonhold. Although the amendment was not tabled by my party, Conservatives are nevertheless greatly concerned that we have gone through this process only to discover that the Bill could go the way of its 80 predecessors because we have made it too difficult to achieve 100 per cent. consent.

Mr. Cash: As my hon. Friend may know, I addressed that very issue on Second Reading, and extensively in Committee. Perhaps because it had indeed been dealt with extensively, the amendment that we tabled was unfortunately not selected. Notwithstanding that, the issue goes to the heart of the Bill. If the Bill will not work because of the unanimity requirement, that is a very serious matter. I am therefore glad that my hon. Friend is addressing this issue, as shall I later on.

Mr. Wiggin: I am grateful for that intervention. Throughout our proceedings on the Bill—my hon. Friend will doubtless express the point better than me—we have done everything that we can to co-operate. We all agree that commonhold is a positive measure that should be introduced properly and speedily, but unanimity is an unnecessary stumbling block.

Even the vice-chairman of the Federation of Private Residents Associations said, "The one big disappointment with the Bill is the extreme difficulty it poses for converting existing long leaseholds into commonholds. The Government have said that you will have to get 100 per cent. consent from the leaseholders in the property, and in many cases of larger blocks of flats this will be practically impossible to achieve." He is absolutely right. His organisation is also anxious to ensure that the reforms do not render unmanageable existing residents' owned and managed leaseholds, thereby enabling groups to mount coups within blocks.

The 100 per cent. rule will lead to all manner of problems, and anyone who wants residential leasehold to be abolished will be as uneasy as I am about such a commitment. I look forward to hearing the Minister explain why the rule is a good idea. The Bill risks repeating the failure of its 80 predecessors during the previous century, and unless we get it right, we will be tinkering at the edges and failing to give leaseholders the means to win their own homes.

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): I find it astonishing that the Government are not prepared to

[Andrew Selous]

accept the amendment, because their failure to do so will mean that almost no leaseholders will be able to benefit from the opportunity to achieve commonhold status. It beggars belief, and I shall listen carefully to what the Minister says to try to justify his insistence on unanimity or the 100 per cent. rule.

The Government's position is strange for several reasons. In company law, we are well used to minority shareholders being bought out. They are treated fairly by the law and compensated, but they are not allowed to hold up a company takeover that has been agreed by the majority of shareholders. That is established custom and commercial practice in English law, so the Government have no reason to claim that they could not similarly vary rights in the property field.

We will have cases in which the majority of leaseholders in a block—or even all, bar one—want to convert to commonhold status, but are prevented from doing so. If just one person holds out, they could effectively demand a ransom from all the others. The dissenting leaseholder could extort considerable sums of money for their agreement to allow all the other leaseholders to convert.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the situation could be even worse than he describes? The landlord is included in the list of those eligible to vote, so 100 per cent. of the leaseholders could vote to convert to commonhold but that would still be prevented under the Government's proposals.

Andrew Selous: The hon. Gentleman is right. Indeed, one mortgage company or secured creditor on one leasehold property in a block could put a stop to conversion. As I have said, it beggars belief that the Government are not prepared to move on this issue. The Opposition support the Bill and wish to see it work, and even at this late stage I hope that the Minister will bear in mind our views and, possibly, those of some Labour Members.

The Government have said that it would not be right to vary the legal title of property owners. However, as I said in Committee, I fail to see how the Government can use the defence that they are unwilling to vary the rights of leaseholders in the rest of the UK when one considers what is happening in Scotland, with owners of large estates having the title to their property varied under measures passing through the Scottish Parliament.

I did some research on the subject and discovered that other jurisdictions around the world do not require unanimity for the conversion to commonhold status. In Honolulu—a somewhat exotic location—under legislation of 1998, the law requires only that 25 owners of units in a condominium development, or at least 50 per cent., need to agree to the conversion. Other jurisdictions do not require unanimity and the onus is now on the Minister to explain why it is uniquely a problem in the UK.

4.45 pm

Mr. Mark Field: I was not on the Committee that considered the Bill. I would like to make a brief declaration, which probably has a certain significance given the importance of this issue in my central London constituency. I own property, a house in Belgravia, in what is typically Grosvenor property land. However, it is a freehold. It was for that reason that I decided to buy the property and not to buy anything else, even on a long Grosvenor lease. I wanted to put that on the record at the outset in discussing these complicated issues, which are of great importance to many people who live in my constituency and in the surrounding area.

I confess that I had some strong reservations initially about the confiscatory element of some of the proposals, but it seems that the requirement for unanimity on commonhold effectively runs the risk of putting a coach and horses through the entire intention of the Bill. That seems a foolish way of moving forward. On the basis that we are to have reform legislation that is supported both by the Conservative and by the Liberal Democrat Opposition, we should at least ensure that such legislation works.

This issue goes almost to the root of the question whether commonhold itself will be popular. Under the current Bill—I know that this has been discussed by a number of colleagues—it will be very difficult for any existing building to be converted into commonhold if a very small minority of dissident tenants object. A dissident tenant may even be in league with the freeholder in order to try to stop the process going through. In essence, if we do not throw away the unanimity rule, we will run the risk of the entire legislation beginning to fall apart.

Mr. Wiggin: Does my hon. Friend not feel that a person might think it worth while to block the commonhold procedures to receive the money? It is in the interests of any individual faced with a commonhold procedure to say to their fellow leaseholders, "Give me the money." They can wreck, to use the trendy term, the commonhold procedures. It is almost worth their while to put up that sort of resistance. That will have such a bad effect on the whole thing. At the same time if that one person does not ask for the money, more fool him. We should not be legislating to open opportunities of blackmail within small communities or blocks of flats.

Mr. Field: I thank my hon. Friend for what was a rather long intervention. I could see the Deputy Speaker's eyebrow being raised. We are all wreckers now perhaps, but I think that my hon. Friend's point is spot on.

I agree with what my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) said. I hope that I will be able to join him on the fact-finding mission to Honolulu at some point to discover how these processes work in foreign jurisdictions. He made a point in relation to company law. It is already established that if 90 per cent. of shareholders agree to a takeover, the position is regularised by the remaining 10 per cent. also being subject to the offer, even if they have voted against it. It should not be beyond the wit of the Government and indeed of legislators to find a similar formula where a small minority try to oppose the proposal for a commonhold.

I hope that the Government will rethink the provision. If we allow the unanimity rule to remain in place, realistically the great intent of the Bill will entirely fall apart, and in 10 or 15 years' time commonhold will be remembered as a small part of a Bill that was supposed yet again to sort out property law but that succeeded only in making it more complicated.

Gareth Thomas (Clwyd, West): I sat on the Standing Committee, and I confess that there were times during the Committee stage when I would have liked to be part of a fact-finding mission to Hawaii or Honolulu.

The fact remains that there has been ample opportunity to test the argument on the unanimity point. I am prepared to accept that the Government have considered the position carefully in this place and another place. I have taken the opportunity to re-read the *Official Report*—particularly the first Sitting of the Committee, when my hon. Friend the Minister outlined the Government's position. The Government take the view not that it is impossible to draft an appropriately worded amendment or to formulate a form of words that would enable a dual scheme to exist, but that it would be contrary to the purpose behind the Bill to introduce that degree of complexity. If commonhold has one great advantage—I speak as a lawyer who has knowledge of this area of law—it is that it does away with some of the complexity inherent in the current tenure of leasehold, and that it introduces a system of tenure

"based firmly on parity of interest, uniformity of structure, and standardisation, as far as possible, of the documentation."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D,* 15 January 2002; c. 18.]

Those were the words of my hon. Friend the Minister on this issue in Committee.

The Government are adopting a pragmatic approach. I well understand that there would be extreme difficulties in allowing long leaseholders to co-exist with commonholders, and that serious practical problems would arise that would undermine the attractiveness of that form of tenure.

Andrew Selous: Will the hon. Gentleman be kind enough to tell the House how many existing leasehold developments will be able to convert to commonhold status under the Bill in it current form? Is not the reality of the Bill that the only new commonhold developments will be new developments? We are selling the commonhold path to existing leaseholders up and down the country, but they will not be able to take the commonhold route. How many commonhold developments does the hon. Gentleman estimate there will be?

Gareth Thomas: I cannot answer that question—nor, realistically, do I think the hon. Gentleman expected me to. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will have a stab at it. Surely the point is that such schemes have a reputation for being too unwieldy and complex and for being the scene of constant dispute, and that they will therefore be a disincentive for the take-up of commonhold. I refer to the practical difficulties that arise when there are two statutory sets of regimes and two sets of money that have to be accounted for. Indeed, when conversion takes place it will be necessary for those who consent to conversion to find the extra money to buy out the freehold interests of those who are not consenting. Again, that would add to the cost of allowing a lower threshold. The commonhold community statement, which is an essential part of the regime, would become unwieldy and unnecessarily complicated.

Mr. Wiggin: As I understand what the hon. Gentleman has said, to achieve commonhold, other tenants or people living in the same block of flats would be obliged to buy the flat of the person who did not consent to the commonhold. Does that not add to the cost? Will the hon. Gentleman explain what he means?

Gareth Thomas: The hon. Gentleman did not mishear me. That is how I understand the position. Those who convert would have to find the means to buy the freehold in respect of the co-existing leaseholds. Another complication that would arise is that existing leases would have to be amended to take into account the dual regime.

I am sure that the Government have considered the disquiet that Labour Members have voiced and weighed the pros and cons. The Bill's purpose is to introduce a simple form of tenure, so this provision must be considered in the context of the radical reforms relating to the right to manage that the Government are introducing in other parts of the Bill. In many respects, those reforms will deal with the problems that have been raised, but to cut across the Bill's purpose by introducing a large element of complexity would be entirely undesirable.

Mr. Cash: I am fascinated and slightly appalled by what I have heard—or not heard—from Labour Members. On Second Reading, the hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) and other Labour Members made powerful speeches saying that the Bill could not possibly succeed with the unanimity provision in it. I cannot say that I was persuaded by what they said, because I made exactly the same points on Second Reading. Indeed, as the Minister will no doubt remember, I made similar points in Committee and perhaps so forcefully that the amendment that we tabled was not selected. I was sorry about that, because I have great sympathy for the principles that underlie these amendments. However, other matters also require elaboration.

The unanimity rule simply will not work. The hon. Member for Clwyd, West (Gareth Thomas) was no doubt persuaded to speak by the Whips.

Gareth Thomas *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Cash: Perish the thought that he was so persuaded. However, does the absence of the other Members who spoke so strongly on Second Reading mean that they have suddenly changed their minds or have the Minister's gentle charms persuaded them to think again?

Mr. Wills *indicated assent.*

Mr. Cash: We must therefore conclude that Labour Members were persuaded to think again. However, I do not think that logic lay at the heart of that conversion. It probably had much more to do with the embarrassment of seeing the Government being harried and hunted like a fox on the question whether the Bill would work at all. I do not believe for a minute that it is possible for the Bill to work in relation to anything other than new developments and circumstances unless the unanimity rule is removed.

[Mr. Cash]

We should consider how the questions of consent that are referred to in the amendments arise. Clause 3(1) refers to consent and states:

> "An application under section 2 may not be made in respect of a freehold estate in land without the consent of anyone who—
>
> (a) is the registered proprietor of the freehold estate in the whole or part of the land,
>
> (b) is the registered proprietor of a leasehold estate in the whole or part of the land granted for a term of more than 21 years,
>
> (c) is the registered proprietor of a charge over the whole or part of the land,
>
> (d) is registered as a cautioner in respect of the whole or part of the land,
>
> (e) falls within any other class of person which may be prescribed."

[Interruption.] If the Minister has something to say, perhaps he would be kind enough to say it now.

5 pm

Mr. Wills: In due course.

Mr. Cash: He will in due course.

The restrictions are confined to the consent of anyone in certain circumstances, as described in the Bill. The problem arises as to whether that might prevent the Bill from working at all. The arrangements that I believe ought to apply should be directed towards ensuring that the proposals are workable.

Will commonhold be popular? Irrespective of my earlier comments about Labour Members, hon. Members from all parts of the House, and even many people outside, believe that the requirement of unanimity is unnecessary, counter-productive and will put a needless fetter on the use of commonhold.

Under the Bill in its present form it will be difficult to convert any existing building into commonhold. Only if everyone with an interest in the building consents to conversion will it be permitted. Thus the consent of every single leaseholder will be necessary, as will that of every single finance house that holds a mortgage for any flat in the block, that of any single judgment creditor who has a charging order over a flat in the block and that of the freeholder. Any of those persons can exercise a veto over conversion.

The key point remains whether the word "anyone" is appropriate in these circumstances. Whenever a veto applies, we will be up against the awkward customer. In any sort of collective activity—whether in a golf club or in relation to charging orders on repairing roads—there is always someone who may want to exercise his rights. I mentioned in Committee that there are already precedents for the exercise of similar rights. For example, a line of garages may abut on to a road and some people in the road may want to carry on with developments. Under many enactments it has been prescribed that those on that road should not be held to ransom by any one person who might try to hold out on the grounds suggested by the hon. Member for Clwyd, West—to gain through an increase in the value of a flat so that he could be bought out.

The application of the unanimity rule will frustrate the entire object of the process. The result will be, in practice, that commonhold will be limited to new developments. I shall be interested to hear the Minister's arguments that that will not happen. No doubt he has given it a great deal of thought.

Mr. Wiggin: I hope so.

Mr. Cash: We hope so, as my hon. Friend says. In fact, we are more than dubious; we are convinced that it will not be possible for the Bill to work.

We support this important Bill in principle, but it simply will not work given the stubborn attitude of the Minister and the Government. It is very retrograde for the Minister to take such an obtuse and stubborn position. Indeed, that has been the case throughout consideration in the House of Lords and in Committee, but not, curiously enough, in respect of one or two other matters, on which the Government have moved towards our position. For example, on leasehold and forfeiture, Labour Back Benchers argued just as strongly with respect to unanimity, and the Government moved on that issue, yet we see no movement whatever on this issue. I am intrigued, as well as puzzled and appalled, about the way in which the Government are sowing the seeds of the destruction of their own Bill in this way.

Gareth Thomas: As the hon. Gentleman has said, the Government have given way and made concessions on other contentious issues. Does not that rather undermine his point that the Government's opposition on this issue is not principled and that they are stubborn?

Mr. Cash: Our support for the Bill is principled. Indeed, that is why we took the line that we took on Second Reading and why we dealt with the Bill so responsively in Committee, but we are now on Report and I am fascinated to know why some of the more vociferous objectors on this issue from the Government Benches are not prepared to come to the Chamber, or perhaps they are not able to do so. Perhaps they are incapacitated in some way by the Whips or someone else.

The gentle giant of the Whips Office has been most considerate throughout the consideration of the Bill and he has worked as well as possible through the usual channels. We register no personal complaint against him. What worries me is the health and well-being of Labour Back Benchers; he seems to have leant on them in a manner that suggests that he has been highly effective in his discreet fashion; otherwise Labour Members would be jumping to their feet, as they did on Second Reading, but there is no sign of them now. In fact, I think that I am right to say that at least one hon. Gentleman, who is sitting on the Labour Back Benches at the moment in unaccustomed monk-like silence, expressed himself vociferously on Second Reading, but he does not seem to feel it necessary to do so on this occasion.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): At this stage.

Mr. Cash: I am delighted to hear those words. They are very important because they suggest that, in due course, we may perhaps have a blast of 25 pounders or better from Labour Members on other matters.

This is a question of principle, which is why I raised the issue on Second Reading—the occasion on which the principles of a Bill are debated. If it then becomes apparent that its entrails make a Bill unworkable, the Government effectively undermine their own legislation. The arrangements that they propose in clause 3 will prevent their Bill, which we support, from working effectively. That is not only counter-productive, but extremely foolish.

We do not know how many people will take up the proposals, but given all the people who live in blocks of flats throughout the country, I would guess that we must be talking about millions of our fellow citizens. It is so obvious. We concede the principle of the Bill and we want it to work, but we find that the Government are bent on the destruction of their own proposals. Although there will always be awkward people, arrangements in law mean that a majority vote ensures a proper decision.

The Minister referred to the nature of commonhold associations and how they will operate. I think that I heard him say—at any rate, it was implied in what he said—that we must have regard to the balance of opinion in decisions taken by a commonhold association. That is a majority vote. According to the application of the arrangements put forward by the Government there is an assumption that not everything will have to be decided unanimously but by majority vote. The running of the properties and their repairs and maintenance will be decided by majority vote. However, when it comes to whether the Bill will work, the Government say, "Oh no, we will not allow people to decide by majority vote but will insist on unanimity." That is, I am afraid, a form of totalitarianism. By imposing a completely unnecessary rule, the Government are insisting that nobody will have the freedom to exercise the rights that they have introduced, with our support and that of the Liberal Democrats, to increase the opportunities for holding property in a better way.

Mr. Mark Field: What does my hon. Friend consider to be the right level of approval? We have talked about majority approval. Presumably he does not accept that a vote of 51 per cent. of people should drive through a decision for the remaining 49 per cent. In the spirit of improving the legislation, does my hon. Friend have some thoughts on the matter?

Mr. Cash: Yes, indeed. I refer my hon. Friend to amendment No. 86, which is identical to one that we moved in Committee. It would ensure that where certain conditions set out in the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993 were satisfied in respect of certain provisions, regulations made under clause 3(2) could, under certain circumstances, dispense with the consent of the person in question. It is not an arbitrary arrangement; it would all be dealt with by regulations, which would have to be debated. The bottom line is that we believe that the many millions of people who will be affected by the Bill deserve better and more informed argument and arrangements than are provided.

Clause 3(1) refers to

> "the registered proprietor of the freehold estate"

and

> "the registered proprietor of a leasehold estate in the whole or part of the land granted for a term of more than 21 years".

We suggest that where no more than 20 per cent. of the qualifying tenants within the meaning of the 1993 Act refuse to consent, their consent could be dispensed with.

In answer, then, to my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field), we have in mind a refusal figure of 20 per cent. The Liberal Democrats, in amendment No. 4, propose not fewer than 75 per cent. of registered proprietors registering their consent, so we are all talking in similar terms. There is a margin between us, but no difference of principle. I do not mean to encourage too much support from the Liberal Democrats, but my family were Liberals once upon a time and founded, among other things, the Abbey National building society and the Rochdale co-operative society. I come from a background of seeking to be reasonable and co-operative, but I want the maximum number of people to be able to exercise their rights because I believe in democracy.

5.15 pm

What I do not believe is that everyone should be automatically able to enforce his or her rights against other people. The unanimity rule is draconian. We need flexibility, and I appeal to the Minister to think about that. I am truly surprised that the Government do not understand that some people will be awkward and that others will try to engineer situations that will prevent the Bill from working. I cannot believe that the Government do not know that that will happen.

I shall be fascinated to hear what the Minister has to say. He has heard the arguments in the other place and in Committee, and I know that he periodically rewrites his speech to accommodate them. The Government have taken a tough line throughout the Bill's progress, but it is not sensible to be tough in suppressing the rights of millions of people to have their way and to own a better form of property.

I know that when the Minister was at Cambridge, he wrote the whole or part of his thesis on the Primrose League. I am much associated with that myself, and I know that it had much to do with the working man, democracy and the manner in which we guarantee that the maximum number of people obtain the maximum benefit. In the past 150 years or so, an enormous amount has happened. Democracy has been established, and it is a property-owning democracy. I do not want to be too effusive about a Government Bill, but their commonhold proposals are an enormous step in the right direction. Yet they are kicking the house down on the point before us, and I find that strange.

I shall be glad to hear what the Minister has to say. The Government have repeated, here and in the other place, that they are determined to stand by what they have already said. Consequently, commonhold will be limited in practice to new developments and only in the smallest block of flats will there be any prospect of obtaining all the consents necessary to effect conversion to commonhold.

Why are the Government insisting so steadfastly on unanimity? They have advanced two arguments, although there may be more to come. One thing I know about the Minister is that when he is in stubborn mood, he relies on not just two arguments, but has others lined up which he will produce both this afternoon and on Wednesday.

I have no doubt that there are more arguments to come, but so far the Government have made two. In Committee, they said that if one allowed conversion to commonhold with the agreement of fewer than 100 per cent. of the

[Mr. Cash]

tenants, commonhold blocks would have a mixture of commonhold units and long leases. Tenants who wanted to convert would receive commonhold units, whereas tenants who did not want to convert would be left with long leases. The hon. Member for Clwyd, West made that very point with reference to the Minister's speech on Second Reading.

The Government say that such a result would complicate the administration of the block as two sets of accounts would need to be kept—as the hon. Gentleman pointed out. Furthermore, a mixture of commonhold units and long leases would destroy the perfect beauty—the utopia—of a block owned by lots of happy commonholders working in harmony in a commonhold association. There would be an ongoing relationship between the landlord—who would have become the commonhold association—and some tenants who would maintain their previous arrangements.

Does the Government's argument stand up? It is true that any departure from unanimity would make commonhold less neat and tidy—there would still be tenants with long leases. I am happy to concede that. A block consisting only of commonhold unit-holders would undoubtedly be more elegant. However, it is not merely a matter of elegance but of the interests of all the people in the country. The provisions would affect a huge number of people.

We are not in this place merely to devise an aesthetically pleasing legal construction. Over and over again, my hon. Friends the Members for Cities of London and Westminster, for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) and for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) have been making practical points but we want practicality and philosophy to run together. That is one of my main concerns. We are interested in ensuring that there is a property-owning democracy. We want more people to have more rights in their property.

Furthermore, we are dealing with new Labour and the middle way—as well as the patriotism for which the Minister is primarily responsible. Surely the Minister and the new Labour cohorts want more people to have enhanced property rights. They did not get to power by arguing against such rights—far from it. They would not have cadged all those votes from us without, in effect, making a spurious claim that is undermined by the Bill's proposals. If people heard the arguments in this debate, they would say, "Oh, is that the real attitude? Every person in our block of flats will have to go down that route if we are to have that enhanced property value". Many people, including good honest Labour voters—especially new Labour voters—would realise that they were not getting what new Labour offered them. Of course, now it is a matter for the press. There is no more that we can do once we have discharged our functions at the Dispatch Box.

I hope that people will understand that, in practice, they are not getting what new Labour offered them. These provisions are a good example. I suspect that that is why the hon. Member for Brent, North made such a strong case on Second Reading, when I think that the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) made some similar points.

The whole point of the change in our approach to property over the past 50 years has been the practical advantage that people gain by owning property rather than living in state-subsidised or council housing. We are not here to devise an aesthetically pleasing legal construction. Indeed, we are surprised to find that new Labour Ministers have any interest in aesthetics. For many of us, the idea of an aesthetically pleasing legal construction is an oxymoron, like a welcome Labour stealth tax—but let us not rough it up too much this afternoon.

We are trying with commonhold to produce something practical and popular. The Government's only practical argument against having both commonhold units and long leases in the same block concerns the difficulties with accounts.

Andrew Selous: Does my hon. Friend agree that we should not consider our country's accounting and legal skills to be in any way inferior to those of a jurisdiction such as Honolulu, which seems perfectly able to cope with mixed tenures within blocks?

Mr. Cash: I was most attracted by the Honolulu argument, which took me back to that wonderful film, "South Pacific". My hon. Friend is right, and there are many other places where the unanimity rule does not apply—for example, there are the strata arrangements in America, Australia and elsewhere in the western world.

It is certainly true, as the Government say, that a commonhold association would have to make arrangements so that service charges could be collected from commonhold unit-holders in accordance with the commonhold community statement, and from long leaseholders in accordance with the terms of their leases, but it is absurd, with respect, to suggest that this presents any practical difficulties.

Mr. Mark Field: Does my hon. Friend agree that there is an analogy with the situation in a council block in which some of the flats have been sold to long-standing tenants? In that case, two sets of accounts have to be dealt with in a way that the Bill seems to suggest is impossible.

Mr. Cash: I could not agree more. The same situation arises in many different contexts. Having to have two sets of accounts is no reason to give up on the many advantages that people will gain in respect of the important principle that lies at the heart of the Bill.

There are frequently different leases for different flats in the same block, with different service charge and rent provisions. That is an absolute fact that the Minister must acknowledge. No managing agent has the slightest difficulty in keeping accounts that distinguish between the liabilities of different flats. Why should managing agents be worried about different accounts for commonhold arrangements? I challenge the Minister to tell me now.

Mr. Wills: In due course.

Mr. Cash: Very well.

The situation would be exactly the same in a block with commonholders and leaseholders: the managing agent would calculate the service charge for each flat, based on the relevant legal principles.

The Government's second argument is even more far-fetched. They say that, okay, one could allow a commonhold without a unanimity requirement but that, with all the recent reforms to leasehold, leasehold is now such an attractive option that there is no need for existing leaseholders to convert to commonhold.

What is one to make of that argument? Commonhold is about choice, and about expanding choice. That is the gravamen of the argument that I urged on Second Reading and in Committee and that I repeat today. People with leases should have the right to choose whether to carry on with leasehold or to convert. That is the key consideration, and it affects millions of people. It is not for the Government to dictate whether people should convert or not. The Government stand condemned for wrecking their Bill and removing that choice from those people. It is incredibly obtuse of them and I do not understand their decision.

5.30 pm

It is true that leasehold has been improved as a result of various reforms, most notably those contained in the Housing Act 1996, which was introduced by the last Conservative Administration, although the Government do not admit to that. As a consequence of those reforms, leasehold is a much more satisfactory form of tenure. However, there remains a widespread dissatisfaction with it. It is wrong to prevent tenants in blocks from converting to commonhold when there is a widespread desire to do so just because one tenant or mortgagee does not agree. The veto should go. The amendment would achieve that purpose. The most important consideration is that we enlarge the property opportunities for the people of this country. Millions will be affected by the proposals and the Government are obtuse, wrong and arrogant in their refusal to accept that unanimity must go.

Mr. Wills: I am glad finally to be given the chance to address the points raised. We have covered this ground over and over again. The indignation of the rhetoric used by the hon. Members for Stone (Mr. Cash) and for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) outstripped their attentiveness to the arguments. The words "appalled", "obtuse", "it beggars belief" and "astounding" were used frequently. They might disagree with us, but had they listened carefully they would understand that there is a clear logic to our decision.

The Opposition once again made the same old arguments and they gave only a partial view of the problem. The hon. Member for Stone, in a lengthy disquisition on all sorts of things including the amendments, airily brushed away the problems with the alternative approaches and the opportunities that the alternative choices present for leaseholders. It is not adequate to make a case by dismissing the problems in such a way.

Government amendment No. 10 will render amendment No. 6 unnecessary, and we are not prepared to accept the other amendments in the group. I hope that the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) will forgive me if I pass quickly over amendments Nos. 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7. They are drafting devices aimed at getting to the meat of the group, contained in amendment No. 4. That amendment makes another attempt to introduce a consent level that is less than the 100 per cent. on which the Government still insist for conversion from leasehold to commonhold. Despite the hon. Gentleman's heroic efforts, we looked in vain for recognition of the extremely complex tasks posed by conversion and the subsequent management arising from such a change.

Amendment No. 4, like all the others that have aimed at reducing the hurdle, fails to take into account the practical problems that the poor souls who try to take advantage of conversion will face. We repeatedly said on Second Reading, in another place and in Committee that had we been able to find a way both to lower the hurdle and to provide for a sensible, practical and, above all, simple way of accommodating the resulting procedures, we would have done so, but it has proved impossible. We went through the arguments in considerable detail at every stage of the Bill in both Houses and, of course, in the three stages that were completed in another place before the last election. It is a matter not of being stubborn or obtuse, as the hon. Member for Stone alleges, but of considering the problem practically, in a cold-eyed way, and making a judgment on the best evidence available. There is not much to add to those discussions, but none the less—

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East) *rose*—

Mr. Wills: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment. I am glad to see that he has joined us for the latter part of these proceedings. I was about to say that, as there is such concern among Opposition Members, I shall explain the arguments again in the hope that they may finally penetrate.

Dr. Lewis: I thank the Minister for giving way. In case he has not noticed, I was present for the earlier part of the proceedings; there was merely a slight intermission. Does he accept that the import of his remarks is an admission that the Government are accepting the fundamental point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) because they cannot get round the problem? Are they not admitting that the benefits of the Bill will apply only to people in new properties and not to those in existing leasehold properties, with hardly any exceptions?

Mr. Wills: No, I do not accept that. The truth is that nobody in the House has any idea of exactly what will happen in future. As we have always said, the market will decide the issue. As the hon. Gentleman will no doubt be aware, the market, by its very nature, cannot be predicted with any degree of certainty. None the less, I shall go on to reassure him about some other matters that have not fully percolated into Opposition Members' consciousness.

Dr. Lewis: May I remind the Minister of the point that I made in Committee when another Minister was dealing with the Bill? If a freeholder does not want leases on his property to be converted to commonhold, is it not a racing certainty that he will take either personally or by proxy a single lease on one small part of the property so that he can block conversion? Is not that an absolute certainty that does not depend on the vagaries and unpredictability of the market?

Mr. Wills: A similar point was made by the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) some considerable time ago, and I shall deal with it in due course.

[Mr. Wills]

As the hon. Member for Stone eventually got around to acknowledging, there are two good reasons for our persistence with the 100 per cent. threshold. If I may, I shall deal with the matter relatively briefly. Let us consider once again the nature of the problems that will arise if long leaseholders continue to live under the terms of their lease in a commonhold development. There will be two classes of occupant, so self-evidently there will be two management streams under two different statutory regimes. There will also be two sets of moneys to collect and two sets of accounts to produce, because the calculation of service charges for the remaining leaseholders will continue to be set by the terms of their lease, which is a legal contract.

Existing landlord and tenant legislation provides for appeals against the determination of service charges. There would be no such appeal for a commonhold, because commonhold assessments will be set by members of the association at a general meeting. That is why the two streams of accounts and two different sets of moneys would persist. There could be an almost infinite variety of tailor-made schemes to design and operate, and they would bring with them all the potential for the drafting problems that have helped to bring leases into such disrepute and which the Bill sets out to address.

This is a matter not of aesthetics—curiously, that is what the hon. Member for Stone appears to believe—but of practicality. As my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, West (Gareth Thomas) so cogently pointed out, complexity, burdensome bureaucracy and all the consequent costs should worry deeply anybody who is concerned about the future of commonhold. If anything will strangle commonhold at birth—another bit of the Opposition rhetoric that I recall from Second Reading—it is the complexity, bureaucracy and cost that would flow from accepting a hurdle of less than 100 per cent. for conversion.

Of course, there are issues in terms of minority holdings, which were mentioned by the hon. Member for Torbay and also the hon. Member for Bath, who referred to landlord blocking. However, all that discussion merely brushes aside the option now available under part 2: the right to enfranchise, which can be triggered by two thirds of leaseholders. Under the right-to-enfranchise provisions in part 2, the landlord's interest can be bought out regardless of whether those who must consent have done so. If the landlord is bought out under those provisions, in due course the right-to-enfranchise company can transform into commonhold, which would in itself stop the blocking potential of a landlord.

Of course important issues are involved, but we must consider what is most likely, in practical terms, to ensure that the new form of tenure takes hold. As we have said many times, in the end the market will decide. I do not want to rehearse those arguments at great length. I merely remind the House that if commonhold has the virtues that we believe it has, it will take root not only in new developments and redevelopments of existing properties without leaseholders, but in the conversion of existing leaseholds.

I hope that the existence of the remedy in part 2 and all the changes that it makes possible, coupled with the fact that profound problems are associated with making the consent level less than 100 per cent., will enable the hon. Member for Torbay to withdraw the amendment.

Mr. Cash: I remain puzzled by the Minister's remarks. He told us that he would go through all the arguments and give us a full explanation, but he has done nothing of the kind. Furthermore, he says that a market will operate, but how can that happen if one puts an enormous roadblock in its way by saying that the unanimity rule will prevail? There will be no flexibility and no marketplace in such circumstances. On the one hand he suggests that he wants more freedom of action and opportunity, but on the other hand he takes it away.

Mr. Wills: I shall try again to illuminate the matter for the hon. Gentleman. With respect, he must focus on the purpose of the Bill—that is, for commonhold to take root. It is all very well for him to say, "Let's have a threshold of less than 100 per cent. Let's not worry about all the problems that will result or the burdensome bureaucracy, complexity and cost. Let's just assume that this will not have any deleterious effect on commonhold taking root"—

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Wills: In a moment; I want first to deal with this point. We have gone over it again and again, and I want to have one last shot at convincing the hon. Member for Stone, after which I shall abandon all hope.

The hon. Gentleman must consider these matters in the round; one should never focus on just one aspect. I hope that he will finally be prepared to change his mind; that he will not be stubborn and obtuse about the matter; and that he will focus on the problems that would result from the amendment. In doing so, he should bear in mind the fact that the right-to-manage and right-to-enfranchise provisions in part 2 give leaseholders—whose concerns are in the forefront of all our minds—an effective remedy against the problems that Opposition Members have described at some length in relation to the amendment—and many times previously. Those are important advances that will benefit leaseholders everywhere, and I ask the hon. Gentleman to bear that in mind.

Mr. McWalter: Many Labour Members are worried about the matter, and I am grateful for my hon. Friend's arguments. Fears have been expressed that ultimately the Bill may be a dead letter because it is extremely difficult for people to get these associations off the ground. Will my hon. Friend undertake on behalf of the Government to reconsider the matter with a view to making such modifications as are necessary in the light of experience?

Mr. Wills: Of course I understand the concerns of my hon. Friend and of other hon. Friends who are not here, as well as those of Opposition Members, because this matter is important to their constituents. We are a flexible and responsive Government who want to deliver for the people of this country. If changes need to be made, of course we shall consider making them.

Having given my hon. Friend that reassurance and, I hope, finally broken through the barriers to understanding on the part of Opposition Members, I hope that the hon. Member for Torbay will feel able to withdraw the amendment.

5.45 pm

Mr. Sanders: We have spent an extraordinarily long time on this subject in Committee and on the Floor of the House, and a great deal of time was devoted to it in the other place. As the Minister said, the purpose and principle of the Bill is to let commonhold take root. The amendment would do precisely that by removing the barriers that might prevent it from happening. We have heard some effective arguments from Opposition Members; in fact, the only unanimity has been on this side of the House.

The hon. Member for Clwyd, West (Gareth Thomas) made a good argument about the practicalities of the amendment being in place—that is, that leaseholders who voted in favour of commonhold would have to buy out the leases of those who did not. Given that the amendment calls for a 75 per cent. majority, the maximum number of leases that would need to be bought out would be to the value of 25 per cent. It is possible that those would not need to be bought out because the existing freeholder would only sell the 75 per cent. to those who wished to become commonholders. The leaseholders would not have to buy out in every event. On the other hand, if they did, the value of their commonhold association would be significant, and they would have little problem in raising the money. Of course, if they wished not to go ahead in the light of the figures, they would be at liberty not to do so. There is not, therefore, the blockage suggested by the hon. Member for Clwyd, West.

The British Property Federation believes that achieving the 100 per cent. requirement will be impossible in practice. One would not have expected that organisation to be a great ally of a Bill allowing people to enfranchise themselves with greater ease. If, as I suspect, the federation has decided, "This isn't going to work; it will be impossible for people to become commonholders", that is a good reason for Labour Members who believe in leasehold reform to support the amendment. I duly wish to press it to a vote.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 148, Noes 276.

Division No. 188] **[5.48 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
  (Chipping Barnet)
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
  (Rushcliffe)
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Gibb, Nick
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Grieve, Dominic
Hammond, Philip
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heath, David
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
  (Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell–Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Tom Brake and
Mr. Desmond Swayne.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Banks, Tony
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
  (Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris

Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobbin, Jim
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ivor Caplin and
Mr. Graham Stringer.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Wills: I beg to move amendment No. 10, in page 2, line 29, leave out paragraph (d).

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): With this it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 11 to 22.

Mr. Wills: As many hon. Members are aware, the Land Registration Act 2002 has achieved Royal Assent and will be implemented ahead of the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill, assuming that the Bill completes its last stages successfully. For this reason, we found it necessary to take another look at those parts of the Bill which rely on the 1925 Act or will be affected by the provisions in the 2002 Act.

The amendments in this group are rather technical and are required so that the provisions in our Bill work in tandem with the scheme created by the Land Registration

Act 2002. To avoid repeating myself ad nauseam when speaking to this group of amendments, let me explain that references to the 1925 Act are to the Land RegistrationAct 1925, and references to the 2002 Act are to the Land Registration Act 2002.

Subsection (l)(d) of clause 3 provides that one of the consents required before land can be registered as commonhold land is that of a person who is registered as a cautioner of the whole or part of the land. I announced on the first day of the Committee stage of the Bill that we would table an amendment to remove cautioners from the list of persons who must consent to registration of land as commonhold. Amendment 10 would do that by removing subsection (l)(d) from clause 3.

There are two reasons for doing that. First, it will honour a commitment that I made in Committee to simplify the consent requirement in the Bill, as a class of interests would be removed from the blanket protection of the consent requirement and, so far as may be necessary, would be dealt with under clause 3(l)(e). Secondly, it would give room to manoeuvre to take the provisions of the new scheme in the 2002 Act into consideration. The 2002 Act makes changes to the scheme of protection of interests on the register which makes the reference to "a cautioner" in clause 3(l)(d) no longer effective or appropriate. Under the 2002 Act it is still possible to enter cautions against first registration, and transitional arrangements mean that existing entries on the register are retained. However, it will no longer be possible to enter cautions against dealings on the register.

Instead, under the 2002 Act, cautions against dealings are, for the most part, replaced by unilateral notices. Some types of interest that are at present protected by a caution will in future be protected by a restriction. Some interests may be able to be protected by both a notice and a restriction under the new regime—the notice to protect the priority of the interest, and the restriction to ensure that certain procedural requirements of the interest are complied with.

The policy behind the inclusion of cautioners, as opposed to any other interest holder, in subsection (1)(d) was based not on a need for additional protection for cautioners, but rather on the fact that a caution is regarded as a hostile entry on the register, and is subject to the warning-off procedure. Including a requirement for the consent of cautioners in clause 3 effectively brought forward to the pre-application process any dispute under the warning-off procedure that might otherwise delay the registration of the land. Bringing potential disputes to the fore at an early stage was felt to contribute to streamlining, which we considered sufficiently necessary to include it in the Bill.

We want to continue with this policy of early discovery of potential disputes. We will also need to consider whether provision for consent by holders of interests which were protected by entering a caution is necessary. Further consideration will need to be given to whether, and if so what, consent provisions are required for beneficiaries of notices and restrictions as defined in the 2002 Act who would not previously have been cautioners under the 1925 Act.

As we want to be certain that we have given sufficient thought to the consent requirement and those interests, taking into careful consideration the implementation of the 2002 Act, it would be difficult and foolhardy to prescribe in the Bill the holders of which interests should be required to give consent under clause 3. We are certain that further work will need to be done on the matter in conjunction with the implementation of the 2002 Act.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson (Coventry, North-West): On consents, I am not sure whether this part of the Bill relates to the issue of Millendreath in Cornwall, a village with many holiday homes, which was part of the National Union of Mineworkers, and which has a long-standing link to the former Coventry colliery, very near my constituency. Will holiday homes be covered by the provision; and what special consents, if any, might be required?

Mr. Wills: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Other hon. Members have raised in various forums the question of whether commonhold can apply to holiday homes. I am happy to tell him that commonhold can apply to any development where there are at least two interdependent units and common parts. A development consisting entirely of holiday homes is possible, or a few holiday homes in an otherwise owner-occupied development. Commonhold as a form of tenure is flexible enough to allow for any such developments. I hope that that satisfies my hon. Friend's interests.

We are certain that further work will be necessary on the matter to which I referred, in conjunction with the implementation of the 2002 Act. In order to deal with these interests, therefore, the Government would rely on the power as it stands in subsection (l)(e) of clause 3 to prescribe other classes of persons whose consent should be required.

Clause 6(2) refers to section 82(1) of the 1925 Act, which deals with rectification. It excludes the register being rectified under section 82(1) in the specific circumstance of errors in the process leading up to the registrar registering land as commonhold land, and creates a specific procedure in respect of commonhold land for matters that are specific to commonhold.

The 2002 Act provides for a more limited scheme of rectification in clause 65 and schedule 4 than was provided under section 82(2) of the 1925 Act. However, for the purposes of clause 6, because subsection (2) of the clause paves the way for provision on rectification in error of commonholds, the more limited nature of the new scheme is not relevant. The minor change in amendment No. 11 is necessary simply to correct the reference in subsection (2), so that it refers instead to the rectification provisions of section 65 of, and schedule 4 to, the 2002 Act.

On amendment No. 12, in listing various courses of action that a court may take when making an order under clause 6, the Bill provides that the court may order the rectification of the register. This amendment would substitute the word "alteration" for "rectification".

"Rectification" under the 2002 Act has a narrower meaning than was provided under the 1925 Act. We do not want unnecessarily to restrict the power of the court under clause 6(6)(b) to ordering rectification in the new, narrower sense of the word. If there is a defect in the process leading up to registration as a commonhold rather than a mistake on the register preceded by correct registration process, we want to give the court a wide power to make an order that it feels appropriate. In those

[Mr. Wills]

circumstances, which may have very little to do with the register, it is proper that the registrar should not be asked to consider issues not strictly involving the correctness of the register itself. It should be left to the court to consider the appropriate course of action. The amendment, by replacing the word "rectification" with "alteration", would ensure that defects in the process of application not calling for rectification in the new stricter sense of schedule 4 to the 2002 Act do not fall within the registrar's competence.

Government amendment No. 13 is the fourth of the Government amendments to take into consideration the provisions of the 2002 Act. Clause 6(6)(g) refers to sections 83 and 84 of the 1925 Act, which are provisions in respect of indemnity. That indemnity scheme has been replaced by a scheme contained in section 103 of, and schedule 8 to, the 2002 Act. As with amendment No. 11, because clause 6(6)(g) confers a power to apply, disapply or modify for the specific commonhold context a provision of the indemnity scheme, the differences between the scheme in the 1925 Act and that in the 2002 Act are not relevant for the purposes of the Bill. This amendment would correct the reference in clause 6(6)(g) so that it refers instead to schedule 8 to the 2002 Act.

Amendments Nos. 14 to 19 amend clause 65 of the Bill, which empowers the Lord Chancellor to make rules about registration specifically in relation to commonhold land. In making provision about how these rules are to be made, what they may cover and how they are to have effect, clause 65(2) relies on references to section 144 of the 1925 Act. Clearly, those references cannot survive the repeal of the 1925 Act by the 2002 Act. Therefore, amendments Nos. 14 to 16 would remove reference to section 144 in clause 65(2) and refer instead to the "land registration rules" within the meaning of the 2002 Act. Section 132(1) of the 2002 Act defines land registration rules as any rules to be made under the 2002 Act. That is a useful definition for our purposes, as it catches all the land registration rules in the 2002 Act. As those rules, which are equivalent to those in section 144 of the 1925 Act, are separated out over a number of sections in the 2002 Act, it would be impractical to list them clause by clause.

Amendment No. 17 would remove clause 65(3)(b), which provides that commonhold registration rules may make provision disapplying section 64 of the 1925 Act in certain circumstances. Section 64 dealt with the production of certificates. It is not directly replaced in the 2002 Act, but paragraph 4 of schedule 10 of that Act provides a power to make provision about the production of certificates. The disapplication of general rules for certain circumstances can be done under that power without the need for specific provision to that effect in the Bill, as section 128(1) of the 2002 Act allows "different provision for different cases" to be made by land registration rules. In tabling this amendment, therefore, we seek simply to disapply clause 65(3)(b).

Clause 65(5) requires a commonhold registration document to be accompanied by such fee as specified by order under section 145 of the 1925 Act. Section 145 is replaced by section 102 of the 2002 Act for all relevant purposes. Amendment No. 18 would replace the reference to section 145 of the 1925 Act with a reference to section 102 of the 2002 Act.

6.15 pm

Clause 65(6) of the Bill defines "commonhold registration document" and "general registration document", and does so for the latter by referring to a document sent to the registrar under a provision of the 1925 Act. Amendment No. 19 would correct that to a reference to a document sent to the registrar under the 2002 Act.

On Government amendments Nos. 20 and 21, clause 67(1) defines "the register" as that kept under section 1 of the 1925 Act. That section is repealed by section 1 of the 2002 Act. Amendment 20 would correct the reference in clause 67(1) so that it refers instead to section 1 of the 2002 Act.

Amendment No. 21 would amend clause 67(6) to remove reference to an insertion in the 1925 Act after section 126(4), which made provision for the expenses of the registrar—principally salaries of staff—to be provided out of money given by Parliament. Clause 67(6), as it stands, extends the scope of that provision so that expenses relating to commonhold registration functions can be similarly provided. Provision of the registrar's expenses out of money given by Parliament is no longer appropriate, given the Land Registry's trading fund status, and the 2002 Act does not reproduce section 126 or make provision in the same way. Land Registry expenses will be met in different ways. The provision to be inserted by subsection (6) is therefore no longer required.

Government amendment No. 22 affects clause 69(3), which provides for any provision of the 1925 Act defining an expression to apply to the use of that expression in part 1 of the Bill unless the contrary intention appears. The reference to the 1925 Act in clause 69(3) should now be to the 2002 Act, and amendment No. 22 would do that.

Mr. Cash: The Minister rattled through these complicated but not very interesting amendments, although there are some important exceptions. I am put in mind of the famous occasion when it was said—I believe that it is true—that a town clerk added a clause to a private Act by burying in the verbiage a provision that "the town clerk shall hereby be divorced". When I heard the reference to the Land Registry and the state trading unit—or whatever it was described as—my ears pricked up. However, I am sure that, given the Minister's integrity, we have not landed ourselves with an enormous problem that we will live to regret; far from it. We are thoroughly gratified by the speed with which he dealt with the amendments.

In my comments on unanimity, I rightly included—because the amendment had not been tabled—a reference to cautioners as those whose consent would be required under clause 3(1)(d). Now I see that—of course, I observed this before—cautioners will be taken out of the Bill by an amendment that was about to be tabled. We are grateful that, as a result of our powerful arguments in Committee, the references in clause 3(1)(d) have been excluded from the Bill. As the House will know, my view is that the amendments do not go anything like far enough. The unanimity problem will prevail for all the other circumstances described in clause 3.

We have had an extensive debate on that issue, so I have no further comments to make on the amendments. We will certainly not divide the House on them.

Mr. Don Foster: The Liberal Democrats congratulate the Minister on a 14-minute tour de force covering a wide range of important issues. I merely invite him to tell us which bit of his speech he considers the most important, and would tell the editors of either "Today in Parliament" or "Yesterday in Parliament" to concentrate on.

Mr. Wills: They would disregard anything that I have said at their peril.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 6

REGISTRATION IN ERROR

Amendments made: No. 11, in page 3, line 31, leave out from "be" to end of line 32 and insert—

'altered by the Registrar under Schedule 4 to the Land Registration Act 2002 (alteration of register).'.

No. 12, in page 3, line 41, leave out "rectification" and insert "alteration".

No. 13, in page 4, line 8, leave out from first "of" to "(indemnity)" in line 9 and insert—

'Schedule 8 to the Land Registration Act 2002'.—*[Mr. Wills.]*

Clause 19

LEASING: SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Cash: I beg to move amendment No. 75, in page 9, line 39, at end insert—

'(6) On the grant of a lease of a commonhold unit, the landlord shall inform the tenant of the effect of section 48( )—

(a) by including an explanation in any written lease, and

(b) in any other case by giving the tenant notice in a prescribed form.'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Government amendment No. 32.

Amendment No. 76, in clause 27, page 12, line 41, at end insert—

'(3) On the grant of a lease of common parts, the commonhold association shall inform the tenant of the effect of section 48( )—

(a) by including an explanation in any written lease, and

(b) in any other case by giving the tenant notice in a prescribed form.'.

Amendment No. 80, in clause 49, page 24, line 6, at end insert—

'(3A)(a) The landlord may terminate any lease of the whole or part of the commonhold land by giving to the tenant three months' notice in writing and on quitting the tenant shall be entitled to be paid compensation by the landlord.

(b) The amount of the compensation shall be—

(i) if the Part II of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954 applied to the lease, the amount which would have been payable under section 37 of that Act had the court been precluded from making an order for the grant of a new tenancy on any of the grounds there specified,

(ii) in any other case, a sum equal to one year's rent at the rate payable when the notice was served.'.

Government amendments Nos. 23 and 24.

Mr. Cash: The amendments are intended to deal with the serious risk that one unit-holder who grants a lease on his own unit will prejudice the value of other units. That is because redevelopment of the whole commonhold will not be possible under the Bill if any of the units is let. In some cases, lettings may well be common. We think that it would be wrong to curb that, but there is a need—for the common good—for all the leases to be made to end at the same time to facilitate redevelopment, whether it is necessary after major accidental damage or voluntary.

The same difficulties could arise if the commonhold association had let some of the common parts. We think, and the Law Society thinks, that the appropriate solution is for leases to end automatically if the commonhold association is wound up. Linking the effect to winding up would ensure that unit-holders could not end the leases capriciously, because the effect would be linked to a court procedure.

The interests of tenants would clearly need protection. The amendments offer it, in three ways. First, the lease would contain a warning, or in the case of a verbal letting the landlord would give the tenant written notice. Secondly, the tenant would be entitled to three months' notice to quit. Thirdly, the tenant would be entitled to compensation, calculated according to a formula to avoid disputes.

Mr. Wiggin: Having seen the Government get their unanimity proposal through, we may wonder whether the Bill has been completely wrecked. Now, once again, we are trying to improve what may already be damaged goods.

Once the Government have released leaseholders from their burden and allowed them to proceed to commonhold we find ourselves talking, in an almost Orwellian fashion, about re-leasing what is currently commonhold. This is a curious part of the Bill. Amendment No. 80 at least makes it clear that a new type of lease on a commonhold will be very different from those with which we currently live. At some stage people will know that if they are to lose their leases they will be given proper notice, and will be entitled to

"a sum equal to one year's rent at the rate payable when the notice was served."

There is, then, some good in these worthy amendments, although following the earlier vote, I think it unlikely that we shall have commonhold in the form that the Government would—I hope—have wanted.

Mr. Wills: Amendments Nos. 75 and 76 are intended to provide potential leaseholders, in the commonhold context, with information about the process by which a commonhold tenancy could be ended if the scheme imposed by amendment No. 80 were in force. The first requires information to be given to a leaseholder of a unit; the second requires the information to be given to the leaseholder of common parts. Amendment No. 80 would add to clause 49 a scheme allowing the landlord to terminate a commonhold lease with three months' notice, and with compensation.

The thinking behind the amendments appears to be that if a specific ground for ending leases of commonhold land on termination of the commonhold is not provided, it may in some cases be impossible, in practical terms, to secure the requisite level of agreement to the termination resolution, because members of the commonhold association who are landlords will be unwilling or unable to consent owing to uncertainty about how they may terminate the leases of their properties.

[Mr. Wills]

The problem strikes us as exiguous. There will be very few cases in which the lease of a commonhold unit, taken with the landlord-and-tenant legislation, does not provide a ground for its termination; and the solution to the perceived difficulty is so inflexible that it might have the opposite effect to that intended, making such a lessor of a commonhold unit less likely to terminate the lease because of the cost to him or her of doing so.

The devotion to practicality normally evinced by the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) seems—temporarily, I hope—to have deserted him on this occasion. There is a lack of flexibility here. We do not expect many commonholds to be terminated; indeed, in other jurisdictions—such as Honolulu's, no doubt—the equivalent organisations have been found to be stable, and good financial risks. Certainly, we believe that the circumstances of any terminations will differ, and the straitjacket of amendment No. 80 is not welcome. For instance, it is hardly equitable to suggest that one year's rent is likely to compensate satisfactorily a tenant with six years of his or her lease to run, and it might be considered too much for a tenant with three months and two days to run. We believe that such matters should be for the parties to arrange on the basis of the facts in each termination, and I therefore hope that the hon. Gentleman will feel able to withdraw the amendment.

Clause 20 deals with the creation of interests and charges in commonhold units. Subsection (3) provides that it is not possible to create an interest in a commonhold unit other than a lease unless the commonhold association is party to the creation of the interest or consents in writing. The policy behind the restriction on the creation of interests in units was to prevent unit-holders creating easements and profits à prendre from their units, or any other interests that might cause nuisance or annoyance to other unit-holders or otherwise cause problems for the commonhold association as a whole. The Bill therefore provides that the creation of interests in units must be approved by the commonhold association. Thus the assessment of what interests in units are likely to cause problems and should not be permitted to be created should be left to the commonhold association.

After the Committee stage, however, it was brought to our attention by one of our consultees that we might inadvertently have excluded the possibility of a unit-holder's creating an express trust of land, for example in a will, without first gaining the consent of the commonhold association. We did not intend to require the association to consent to such day-to-day innocuous and commonplace transactions as this, and we now no longer believe that it is necessary to cast such a wide net to catch any potentially problematic interests.

If amendment No. 32 is accepted, clause 20(3) will read

> "It shall not be possible to create an interest of a prescribed kind in a commonhold unit unless the commonhold association is a party to the interest, or consents in writing to the creation of the interest".

Regulations will then prescribe the interests to which the clause applies. They are likely to include easements and profits à prendre but may be more specific, depending on the outcome of widespread consultations.

6.30 pm

Amendment No. 23 amends paragraph 2 to schedule 5, which deals with consequential amendments. The intention behind paragraph 2 is that a mortgagee's power of sale under the Law of Property Act 1925 should in commonhold be subject to the restrictions in clause 21 on dispositions of part-units. The intention is that a mortgagee will not purport to sell part of a mortgaged unit without reference to the commonhold association. To achieve such an effect, it is necessary to subject section 101(1) of the 1925 Act to the entirety of clause 21, rather than to just subsections (1) and (2). Amendment No. 23 will achieve precisely that.

Amendment No. 24 is consequential to amendments to clause 21 that were made in Committee. One result of those amendments was the splitting in two of provisions relating to interests in, and charges over, part-units previously contained in clause 21. Clause 21 now deals with interests in part-units, and clause 22 deals with charges over part-units. It is necessary to amend paragraph 8 to schedule 5 to take account of that change, and to maintain the intention that trustees' power to partition land and to distribute the proceeds among beneficiaries be subject to clauses 21 and 22.

Mr. Cash: The Minister will be glad to know that I do not intend to divide the House on the amendments. Our discussions in Committee—through which we raised a number of matters such as profits à prendre—demonstrated that Standing Committees have their value. This is very complicated territory, involving a series of technical points that are important to the law of property. It is important that we take this opportunity to clear out some dead wood, and to make amendments after a period of reflection.

Having said that, I am glad that the Government are making further improvements to the Bill. That shows the value of our procedures. Some other countries tend to legislate by decree, but it is not possible to get such matters right first time round—a point that is illustrated amply by the Government's approach. With some exceptions, which I need not return to at the moment, the process has been one of continuous improvement, so I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 20

OTHER TRANSACTIONS

Amendment made: No. 32, in page 10, line 4, leave out—

> 'other than a term of years absolute'

and insert "of a prescribed kind".—*[Mr. Wills.]*

Schedule 3

COMMONHOLD ASSOCIATION

Mr. Cash: I beg to move amendment No. 68, in page 96, line 25, at end insert—

> '(3) Sections 364 and 365 of that Act (annual return (company not having a share capital) and time for completion of annual return) shall not apply to a commonhold association.'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 87, in clause 37, page 18, line 3, at end insert—

'(5) Any monies payable by a unit-holder to the commonhold association under:

(a) the commonhold community statement;

(b) the memorandum or articles of the commonhold association; or

(c) regulations made under subsections (1) and (2) hereof

shall be a charge over that unit-holder's unit ("a commonhold association charge") and enforceable as a first legal charge in priority to all other charges or encumbrances over that unit-holder's unit.

(6) The existence or potential existence of a commonhold association charge shall not prevent any person who is restricted or prohibited whether by statute or otherwise from lending money save on the security of a first legal charge from lending money on the security of a charge which, but for the existence or potential existence of the commonhold association charge, would have been a first legal charge.'.

No. 77, in clause 38, page 18, line 11, at end insert—

'(ba) enabling the directors to add to their estimate any sum which a unit-holder was previously required to pay under this section but which remains unpaid despite all reasonable efforts by the directors to enforce payment,'.

No. 78, in page 18, line 13, at end insert—

'but permitting the directors not to allocate any part of a sum added under paragraph (ba) to the unit to which it was previously allocated but unpaid,'.

No. 79, in page 18, line 23, at end insert—

'(3)(a) Payment of any sum allocated to a unit under this section shall be secured on that unit in priority to all other sums secured on it;

(b) The Registrar shall note the effect of this subsection on the register relating to each unit.'.

Mr. Cash: Amendment No. 68 relates to some of our earlier arguments. In our experience, tenant co-operative companies—freehold companies that are closely analogous to commonhold associations, the members of which are long leaseholders—are notorious for neglecting formalities such as filing annual returns. *[Interruption.]* I know that the Minister has to attend to other matters, and I do not criticise him for that, but I hope that he will listen to this point, which relates to a distinction drawn in current companies legislation. I almost referred to it as the Companies Act 1948, which would have betrayed my fine knowledge of that Act. Of course, the legislation has been amended many times since.

Tenant co-operative companies are notorious for neglecting the rules, and formalities such as filing annual returns, precisely because they are not of the same nature as other shareholder companies. They number among the most common types of companies that are struck off the Companies House register for neglecting to file. It is most undesirable that that should happen to commonhold associations. Although formalities exist to enable reinstating the registration of such companies, they take time and are costly. The need for them could quite unnecessarily undermine the commonhold system's reputation. From a practical point of view, we should beware of the fact that such companies have a strong record of non-compliance with the requirement to file returns. If a similar situation arises in respect of commonhold associations, which are companies limited by guarantee, there will be a problem.

Importantly, the Law Society considers that no reason exists to insist on associations' filing returns. In other words, there is resistance to unnecessary regulation, or a deregulation arrangement, as it were. Full information will be available internally to members. They will give it freely to prospective buyers of units, and to people with whom they wish to contract. There is no wider general interest.

Amendment No.87, which would amend clause 37, is important. It attempts to remedy the question of enforcement, which is one of the Bill's most glaring holes. Every commonhold block needs to be kept in repair, and the only source of funds for repairs is the commonholders themselves. The efficient collection of service charges from the unit-holders will be essential to the success of commonhold. In leasehold blocks, a very efficient method—the sanction of forfeiture—exists to ensure that lessees pay their service charge. Forfeiture is a draconian remedy, and we will propose an important amendment when we discuss the relevant part of the Bill on Wednesday.

The critical feature of forfeiture, however, is that the landlord has a remedy against not just the tenant, but the tenant's mortgagee. If the mortgagee does not pay, the lease is liable to be forfeited and the mortgagee loses the security. Accordingly, it is generally the mortgagee who can be prevailed upon to pay the service charge if the tenant becomes impecunious. Those are the practicalities, which I have already discussed with the British Property Federation and others.

The Government do not propose any special remedy for commonhold associations against defaulting unit-holders. They propose that, if a unit-holder does not pay his service charge, the commonhold association should bring proceedings in the usual way in the county court, recover judgment and use ordinary methods of enforcement to recover the judgment debt. In particular, the Government envisage the commonhold association's obtaining just a common or garden charging order over the commonholder's unit.

Just about everything in that idea is deficient. First, county court proceedings are slow, and anything to do with service charges is particularly slow. Secondly, the commonhold association would almost certainly be out of pocket on the legal costs associated with bringing any county court proceedings. Thirdly, the association would have a remedy against only the unit-holder, not his mortgagee, although the mortgagee benefits from repairs carried out with the service charges because the value of the security is maintained.

Fourthly, unit-holders who do not pay are likely to be impecunious. A charging order is worthless if no equity exists in the property over which the charging order is granted. The commonhold association would rank lower in priority to the mortgagee. I address that point to the Under-Secretary in particular, because she knows what I am getting at. *[Interruption.]* Apparently, so does the Minister who is responsible for this part of the Bill. Excellent—now we have two Ministers who know what they are talking about.

The effect of those deficiencies is significant. First, it will place an unfair burden on those unit-holders who pay their service charges. All the money for running a commonhold block comes from the commonholders. If one commonholder does not pay, the other

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

[Mr. Cash]

commonholders must pay—an effective and cheap way of enforcement. Secondly, one of the questions that mortgagees always ask solicitors to confirm when someone takes out a mortgage is whether satisfactory arrangements have been made for the repair and maintenance of buildings. Any solicitor who considers the matter in relation to a commonhold development would be bound to answer no. If one unit-holder refuses to pay service charges, then—for the reasons I have outlined—the commonhold association will have a job getting the money in. There is the substantial risk of a domino effect starting, when other unit-holders see the ease with which service charge obligations are avoided.

If solicitors were unwilling to confirm to mortgage lenders that there were proper procedures in place for the proper collection of service charges, that would inevitably mean that commonhold units became unmortgageable. Without being melodramatic, it can be readily seen that the consequences of that would be disastrous for the commonhold concept.

The amendment would meet that point in a simple way. Moneys owed to the commonhold association by a unit-holder would become a first legal charge on the unit. Critically, that charge would arise automatically without any court proceedings and, equally critically, it would take priority to any mortgage over the unit, so that the commonhold association could—as with forfeiture—in practice obtain payment from the mortgage lender.

The proposed new subsection (6) in amendment No. 87 is simply a technical provision. There are still some bodies that are restricted in their ability to lend, so that they can lend only on the security of a first legal charge over land. The subsection makes it clear that the proposed commonhold association charge does not affect those lenders' ability to lend. In other words, a first legal charge will remain a first legal charge even when there is a commonhold association charge in priority to it.

6.45 pm

Amendment No. 87 is important in ensuring that commonhold works as we want it to work, so that defaulting unit-holders are properly held to account and so that other unit-holders who honour their obligations are not left paying for their defaulting neighbours' debts. I commend the amendment strongly for those reasons and I hope that, even at this late stage, we can deal with those serious and practical points.

It is essential to the solvency of a commonhold association that every unit-holder pays his share of the association's expenses, in the form of the service charge. Because there is no landlord and tenant relationship, and therefore there can be no threat to forfeit the unit if the unit-holder's dues are not paid, there is a serious risk that there will be defaults. That problem lies at the heart of the amendments to clause 38. Payment of the service charges will not be a condition precedent to the sale of the unit, so there will be no incentive for an incoming unit-holder to ensure that his predecessor has made all the payments to date and there will be no incentive for mortgagees to insist that their mortgagor/unit-holder pays. While it is true that if the association has to take proceedings to recover the debt, it will be able to obtain a charging order secured on the unit as an enforcement measure, that will not greatly alleviate the position because the order will rank in priority after existing charges—in other words, existing mortgages would take precedence.

The Law Society considers—and I agree—that securing the service charge automatically, and with priority to other mortgages, is important for the smooth working of the commonhold system. I am trying to be constructive and positive. The provision should not be regarded as prejudicial by mortgagees: their practice in leasehold cases is to make payments when necessary and assess the amounts to the mortgage debt. Those dealing regularly in the residential market have a clear interest in ensuring the continuing viability of commonhold associations.

Amendment No. 78 addresses the relationship of directors to the strict limitation of liabilities. The Law Society considers that strict limitation of liability is not appropriate for commonhold associations, and is likely to harm the viability of the commonhold system. I have dealt with the issue of contractors and I have already made the case on strict liability. It would not be appropriate to regard the company limited by guarantee, and the strict limitation of liability that goes with it, as appropriate models for commonhold associations. We need the flexibility that will relieve directors of the strict liability that a company limited by guarantee would require.

On amendment No. 79, it is essential to the solvency of a commonhold association that every unit-holder pays his share of the association's expenses, in the form of the service charge. Because there is no landlord and tenant relationship, and therefore there can be no threat to forfeit the unit if the unit-holder's dues are not paid, there is a serious risk that there will be defaults, as I have said before. Payment of the service charges will not be a condition precedent to the sale of the unit, so there will be no incentive for an incoming unit-holder to ensure that his predecessor has made all the payments to date and there will be no incentive for mortgagees to insist that their mortgagor or unit-holder pays. I made those arguments in respect of a previous amendment and I conclude by repeating that those dealing regularly in the residential market have a clear interest in ensuring the continuing viability of commonhold associations.

Mr. Wills: This is an interesting group of amendments, and the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) made a good job of outlining them. However, we will reject all of them. Amendment No. 68 would amend paragraph 15 of schedule 3 by adding to it an exemption for commonhold associations from the requirement to supply annual returns to Companies House.

Incidentally, the hon. Gentleman mentioned the numbers of Companies Acts and feared that he might not have been up to date with them. He may be right, because the Companies Act 1985 has been amended by the Companies Act 1989, and the sections that apply to the duty to deliver annual returns and that governing their contents are new sections 363 and 364 respectively. However, the substance of his argument remains.

We do not accept the amendments because the information required is not onerous to provide and it is important that it should be provided. There are very few disciplines imposed on commonhold associations by outside agencies. One is the production and submission of annual returns. There is a prescribed form and the return has to be submitted within 28 days of the appropriate due date. The contents of the report include—the list is not exhaustive—the address of the registered office, the type of company it is and its main business activities, the name and address of the company secretary, names and addresses of directors and certain other information relating to them, and where the register of members is kept if that is different from the registered office. All that information is important—if not essential—to people who may be thinking of buying in to the commonhold. It is therefore essential that it be kept up to date and readily accessible.

For the great majority of associations, the provision of the form will be a simple and routine task year after year, but will provide important information for all those with an interest in it. For those associations that are large and complex enough for it to be a more significant task, the provision of the information becomes even more important. I hope that that explanation has persuaded the hon. Gentleman to withdraw the amendment.

Amendments Nos. 87 and 79 return to ground that has already been extensively trodden. Both would secure moneys payable to the commonhold association by the unit-holder by way of first legal charge. We are opposed to both amendments. Although they are of rather different scope and effect, both would impose on unit-holders in a commonhold strictures that do not exist for similar purposes elsewhere. Although it may be argued that that is itself a pity, we are convinced of two things. First, if commonhold is hedged around with unnecessary special requirements, it will not prove popular; the need to sell the concept and to popularise it has been a recurring theme from Opposition Members at all stages of the Bill. Secondly, ample routes to the settlement of debt are available in law at present. The hon. Gentleman mentioned some of the problems with the routes available. The fact is that they are available in other areas of life, and we see no reason for commonhold to be given any special provision. Indeed, for the reasons that I have just stated, we believe that that could be damaging.

Amendments Nos. 77 and 78 are unnecessary. There will be detailed best practice guidance to directors and company secretaries of associations in due course. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we will consider whether it is necessary to spell out the matters that have been raised. Until that time, I hope that he will feel able not to press those amendments.

Mr. Cash: The Minister has said in his usual pleasant manner that under no circumstances will the Government take notice of what we are saying. I am equally obdurate in my determination to ensure that the Bill will be improved. We have made some progress and we have even more progress to come. No doubt we can all reflect happily on the fact that the Government's amendments in part reflect the deliberations in Committee and the representations that have been made, so the process continues to improve the Bill. However, in this particular case, I have every intention of dividing the House.

The Minister knew that this was coming. I noticed that there was a certain amount of discussion between him and the Under-Secretary, who will deal with the leasehold arrangements of the Bill. Some aspects of this issue will recur when we get on to those on Wednesday this week, but we intend to divide the House. We believe that we are right. Only time will tell.

Question put, That the amendment be made:

The House divided: Ayes 152, Noes 281.

Division No. 189] **[6.52 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
(Rushcliffe)
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul

Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*

Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Desmond Swayne and
Mr. Julian Brazier.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles
(Norwich S)
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack
(Copeland)
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David

Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ivor Caplin and
Mr. Graham Stringer.

Question accordingly negatived.

It being after Seven o'clock, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *pursuant to Order [31 January and this day], put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that hour.*

Clause 64

ORDERS AND REGULATIONS

Amendment made: No. 33, in page 30, line 5, leave out from beginning to "by" in line 7.—*[Mr. Wills.]*

Clause 65

REGISTRATION PROCEDURE

Amendments made: No. 14, in page 30, line 22, leave out from "as" to end of line 24 and insert—

'land registration rules within the meaning of the Land Registration Act 2002,'.

No. 15, in page 30, line 26, leave out "rules under section 144" and insert "land registration rules".

No. 16, in page 30, line 27, leave out "rules under section 144" and insert "land registration rules".

No. 17, in page 30, line 33, leave out paragraph (b).

No. 18, in page 31, line 9, leave out—

'145 of the Land Registration Act 1925 (c. 21)'

and insert—

'102 of the Land Registration Act 2002'.

No. 19, in page 31, line 15, leave out "1925" and insert "2002".—*[Mr. Wills.]*

Clause 67

THE REGISTER

Amendments made: No. 20, in page 31, line 30, leave out "1925" and insert "2002".

No. 21, in page 32, line 1, leave out subsection (6).—*[Mr. Wills.]*

Schedule 5

COMMONHOLD: CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendments made: No. 23, in page 98, line 6, leave out "(1) and (2)".

No. 24, in page 99, line 25, leave out "section 21" and insert "sections 21 and 22".—*[Mr. Wills.]*

Clause 69

INTERPRETATION

Amendment made: No. 22, in page 32, line 19, leave out from "(c. 20)," to "defining" in line 20 and insert—

'the Companies Act 1985 or the Land Registration Act 2002'.—*[Mr. Wills.]*

New Clause 12

CHARGES UNDER ESTATE MANAGEMENT SCHEMES

'(1) This section applies where a scheme under—

(a) section 19 of the 1967 Act (estate management schemes in connection with enfranchisement under that Act),

(b) Chapter 4 of Part 1 of the 1993 Act (estate management schemes in connection with enfranchisement under the 1967 Act or Chapter 1 of Part 1 of the 1993 Act), or

(c) section 94(6) of the 1993 Act (corresponding schemes in relation to areas occupied under leases from Crown),

includes provision imposing on persons occupying or interested in property an obligation to make payments ("estate charges").

(2) A variable estate charge is payable only to the extent that the amount of the charge is reasonable; and "variable estate charge" means an estate charge which is neither—

(a) specified in the scheme, nor

(b) calculated in accordance with a formula specified in the scheme.

(3) Any person on whom an obligation to pay an estate charge is imposed by the scheme may apply to a leasehold valuation tribunal for an order varying the scheme in such manner as is specified in the application on the grounds that—

(a) any estate charge specified in the scheme is unreasonable, or

(b) any formula specified in the scheme in accordance with which any estate charge is calculated is unreasonable.

(4) If the grounds on which the application was made are established to the satisfaction of the tribunal, it may make an order varying the scheme in such manner as is specified in the order.

(5) The variation specified in the order may be—

(a) the variation specified in the application, or

(b) such other variation as the tribunal thinks fit.

(6) An application may be made to a leasehold valuation tribunal for a determination whether an estate charge is payable by a person and, if it is, as to—

(a) the person by whom it is payable,

(b) the person to whom it is payable,

(c) the amount which is payable,

(d) the date at or by which it is payable, and

(e) the manner in which it is payable.

(7) Subsection (6) applies whether or not any payment has been made.

(8) The jurisdiction conferred on a leasehold valuation tribunal in respect of any matter by virtue of subsection (6) is in addition to any jurisdiction of a court in respect of the matter.

(9) No application under subsection (6) may be made in respect of a matter which—

(a) has been agreed or admitted by the person concerned,

(b) has been, or is to be, referred to arbitration pursuant to a post-dispute arbitration agreement to which that person is a party,

(c) has been the subject of determination by a court, or

(d) has been the subject of determination by an arbitral tribunal pursuant to a post-dispute arbitration agreement.

(10) But the person is not to be taken to have agreed or admitted any matter by reason only of having made any payment.

(11) An agreement (other than a post-dispute arbitration agreement) is void in so far as it purports to provide for a determination—

(a) in a particular manner, or

(b) on particular evidence,

of any question which may be the subject matter of an application under subsection (6).

(12) In this section—

"post-dispute arbitration agreement", in relation to any matter, means an arbitration agreement made after a dispute about the matter has arisen, and

"arbitration agreement" and "arbitral tribunal" have the same meanings as in Part 1 of the Arbitration Act 1996 (c. 23).'.—*[Ms Keeble.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: New clause 4—*Enfranchised properties located within 'scheme area'*—

'.—(1) This Chapter shall from the commencement of this Act apply to a dwelling within the meaning of the Leasehold Reform Act 1967, as amended, and the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993, as amended, which—

(a) has been enfranchised;

(b) is situated within an area ("scheme area") in respect of which a scheme of management has been approved and is in force pursuant to section 19 of the Leasehold Reform Act 1967 or Chapter IV of the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993.

(2) The right to manage provisions of this Chapter shall come into operation two months after a notice has been served by, or on behalf of not less than one half of the owners of enfranchised properties within the scheme area, and the form of notice shall be prescribed by regulations and shall be deemed to have been served from the seventh day after the notice has been sent by first class recorded delivery post addressed to the landlord or his agent at his last known address or left at such premises.

(3) On demand, the landlord shall provide an enfranchised owner intending to join with others to serve a notice of right to manage with the names and addresses of all enfranchised owners within the scheme area.'.

Amendment No. 25, in clause 72, page 34, line 20, at end insert—

', or—

(d) they consist of individual houses and blocks of flats comprised in an estate management scheme.'.

Government amendment No. 35.

Ms Keeble: These new clauses and amendments deal with estate management schemes. I hope that they improve current arrangements.

I shall deal first with new clause 4 and amendment No. 25. The Government have considerable sympathy with the suggestion that leaseholders of an estate of leasehold properties managed as a single entity should be able to exercise the right to manage en bloc rather than on a property-by-property basis. However, several difficult technical problems would need to be addressed and overcome before we could introduce such a measure with confidence. There would be difficult questions as to how best to deal with situations in which a majority of leaseholders in the estate as a whole favoured exercise of the right to manage but in which leaseholders of one or more individual blocks were opposed. Furthermore, many leasehold estates are a mixture of flats and houses, and problems would therefore arise from differences between the existing leasehold law on flats and on houses. It is also not uncommon for estates managed as a whole to include freehold as well as leasehold properties. Clearly, much work would have to be done before a regime could be devised for such estates, and that would have to await a future legislative opportunity.

I shall now deal with new clause 12 and Government amendment No. 35, which will go some way towards dealing with some of the issues that hon. Members have legitimately raised. In the other place, my noble Friend Lord Falconer gave an undertaking that the Government would introduce an amendment on estate management schemes if possible. I am pleased to inform the House that we are now in a position to do so.

Since estate management schemes were first permitted under the Leasehold Reform Act 1967, Parliament has legislated to provide protection for tenants in respect of service charge payments. As hon. Members are aware, leaseholders who pay service charges have rights and protections against unreasonable charges. The Bill will improve and extend those rights and introduce comparable ones for administration charges made under a lease. There are not, however, any similar provisions in respect of charges made under estate management schemes. At present, therefore, anyone who enfranchises and is subject to a scheme will move from having protection against unreasonable charges under their lease to having no protection against unreasonable charges under the estate management scheme. That seems to be an anomaly.

Leaseholders who enfranchise in an area that is subject to an estate management scheme will find that, where they are obliged to contribute to the costs of services or maintenance charges provided or incurred by the landlord, they lose the right to challenge the level of charges for such services that they would have had as tenants under section 19 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985. We have introduced the new clause to remedy this situation. It will provide that charges under estate management schemes should be payable only to the extent that they are reasonable, and the leasehold valuation tribunal will have the power to determine the extent to which such charges are reasonable. I am sure that hon. Members will see the merit of the new clause, which will improve the position of those involved.

Amendment No. 35 is a technical amendment that is intended to ensure that it continues to be possible to request consent for the making of an application for the approval of an estate management scheme in connection with acquisitions under chapter I of part I of the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993. It has come to our attention that, once clause 116 comes into force, we will remove an existing right to make an application for an estate management scheme under section 69 of the 1993 Act. That is clearly not our intention. The amendment will preserve the existing right.

I commend new clause 12 and amendment No. 35 to the House and, in the light of what I have said and the assurance that I have given about the extension of rights, I invite the hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) not to press new clause 4 and amendment No. 25.

Sue Doughty (Guildford): New clause 4 was tabled because we want to extend the same rights of self-management given to leaseholders in blocks of flats to enfranchised owners in estate management schemes. Under those antiquated schemes, leaseholders who buy their freehold might find themselves with fewer rights than they had before and face higher charges despite the substantial expenditure and administrative difficulty of enfranchisement.

The annual fee payable to their previous landlord for managing the scheme can be higher than their erstwhile ground rent and landlords frequently impose onerous charges in respect of consents for alterations and supervision of work. That aspect of being forced to pay a landlord's surveyor—often at extremely high rates—to agree and supervise work evolved long before the days of conservation areas and careful planning controls by local authorities. Enfranchised owners subject to such charges and double surveillance are understandably resentful. Now that leaseholders in blocks of flats are being given a no-fault right to manage their own affairs, the anomalous position of freehold owners in the outmoded estate management schemes is even more inequitable than it was.

I appreciate that, since the new clause was tabled, the Government have introduced a new clause that certainly goes some way to dealing with the concerns that I have expressed. However, we want to know how far the new clause will go towards dealing with the problem. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

Mr. Cash: This group of new clauses and amendments, including the Liberal Democrat proposal, deals with an extremely important issue. However, I was slightly surprised by the fact that the Minister hardly provided the type of explanation that one would have expected in relation to new clauses—I refer in particular to new clause 12—that are not only extremely long but contain very complicated arrangements.

7.15 pm

New clause 12(1) says that the new clause applies to schemes under

> "(a) section 19 of the 1967 Act (estate management schemes in connection with enfranchisement under that Act),
>
> (b) Chapter 4 of Part 1 of the 1993 Act (estate management schemes in connection with enfranchisement under the 1967 Act or Chapter 1 of Part 1 of the 1993 Act), or
>
> (c) section 94(6) of the 1993 Act (corresponding schemes in relation to areas occupied under leases from Crown)".

Subsection (1) also includes provision for

> "imposing on persons occupying or interested in property an obligation to make payments ('estate charges')".

I have described the three types of schemes to which the new clause will apply.

Subsection (2) adds:

> "A variable estate charge is payable only to the extent that the amount of the charge is reasonable; and 'variable estate charge' means an estate which is neither—
>
> (a) specified in the scheme, nor
>
> (b) calculated in accordance with a formula specified in the scheme."

Given the size of the Government's majority in the House, we should not imagine that the new clause will not be enacted. Subsection (3) states:

> "Any person on whom an obligation to pay an estate charge is imposed by the scheme may apply to a leasehold valuation tribunal for an order varying the scheme in such manner as is specified in the application on the grounds that—
>
> (a) any estate charge specified in the scheme is unreasonable, or
>
> (b) any formula specified in the scheme in accordance with which any estate charge is calculated is unreasonable."

We all know that the word "unreasonable" means what a court—or tribunal in this case—regards as unreasonable. The question of whether something is unreasonable is determined by the court. That does not necessarily mean that everything will work out in the way that the Government intend, so I will be interested to hear what the Minister has to say about that. I doubt whether the hon. Lady will be able to say what would be regarded, in given circumstances, as being unreasonable, although had she spent more time on her explanation, she might have been able to make the position clearer.

Subsection (4) states:

> "If the grounds on which the application was made are established to the satisfaction of the tribunal, it may make an order varying the scheme in such manner as is specified in the order."

Again, we have no idea as to the manner in which the tribunal would make such an order. The phrase

> "varying the scheme is such manner as is specified"

invites the question: what will the tribunal actually do? The Government might know, but they have not told us and the Minister's opening remarks did not tell us what grounds on which the application was made would be likely to satisfy the tribunal. However, the tribunal will be able to vary the scheme in the manner that it determines.

Subsection (5) states:

> "The variation specified in the order may be—
>
> (a) the variation specified in the application, or
>
> (b) such other variation as the tribunal thinks fit."

We know what "thinks fit" means in these circumstances, because it is a well-established principle of law that where, for example, those words—or, in analogous circumstances "in the opinion of"—are used, they are non-justiciable in the general context of the deliberations. An enormous power is granted to the tribunal. The variation specified in the order is immensely important to those who are assessing the variation in any given scheme.

Subsection (6) provides:

> "An application may be made to a leasehold valuation tribunal for a determination whether an estate charge is payable by a person and, if it is, as to—
>
> (a) the person by whom it is payable,
>
> (b) the person to whom it is payable,
>
> (c) the amount which is payable,
>
> (d) the date at or by which it is payable, and
>
> (e) the manner in which it is payable."

Clearly, an enormous range of matters go before the tribunal, but the Minister has provided no explanation of the implications lying behind the provision. It may be

[Mr. Cash]

beneficial, but we have had no explanation. The Minister disposed of all the new clauses in about five minutes at most, yet these matters are crucial to those affected.

Subsection (7) goes on to say that the matters to which I referred—the application made to the leasehold tribunal in the respects that I outlined—

> "applies whether or not any payment has been made."

That moves us into deeper territory because the subsection will apply irrespective of whether a payment has been made, yet, as we saw, subsection (6) makes it clear that the question arises in relation to whether an estate charge is payable. A distinction is being made between what is payable and what is paid, which leaves an enormous amount at large.

Subsection (8) continues:

> "The jurisdiction conferred on a leasehold valuation tribunal in respect of any matter by virtue of subsection (6)",

to which I have twice referred,

> "is in addition to any jurisdiction of a court in respect of the matter."

Frankly, that is exceedingly wide. It is not just a question of the functions of a tribunal: it extends to a wide arena, which is almost impossible to identify.

Subsection (9) states:

> "No application under subsection (6) may be made in respect of a matter which—
>
> (a) has been agreed or admitted by the person concerned,
>
> (b) has been, or is to be, referred to arbitration pursuant to a post-dispute arbitration agreement to which that person is a party,
>
> (c) has been the subject of determination by a court, or
>
> (d) has been the subject of determination by an arbitral tribunal pursuant to a post-dispute arbitration agreement."

All those matters are excluded, but the impact on the scheme and the persons concerned remains serious.

Subsection (10) continues:

> "But the person is not to be taken to have agreed or admitted any matter by reason only of having made any payment."

The fact that a person has paid up, when the gravamen of the situation depends on payment, means that the person's agreement or admission cannot be assumed to mean anything by reason only of having made a payment. The Minister should have provided a proper explanation of the proposals, but she only skipped through them.

Under subsection (11):

> "An agreement (other than a post-dispute arbitration agreement) is void in so far as it purports to provide for a determination—
>
> (a) in a particular manner, or
>
> (b) on particular evidence".

We are dealing with a range of generalities and a series of propositions here. There are some sensible provisions such as assisting people through these schemes, but we have no idea whether they are capable of working effectively or whether people will be prejudiced by these arrangements.

I acknowledge that Bills need definitions, but a degree of opaqueness is apparent in the wording of subsection (11)—particularly where it states that an agreement

> "other than a post-dispute arbitration agreement"

is void—when in subsection (12), the definition subsection, it states that a

> "'post-dispute arbitration agreement', in relation to any matter, means an arbitration agreement made after a dispute about the matter has arisen".

It goes on to provide further definitions with which I would not disagree, according to which

> "'arbitration agreement' and 'arbitral tribunal' have the same meanings as in Part I of the Arbitration Act 1996".

For all those reasons, it is difficult to understand how the Minister can make such a brief statement saying what the measure provides. The Government know that they will get their way because they have a majority. Nevertheless, a full and proper explanation is expected.

Let us move on to new clause 4, tabled by the Liberal Democrats. The hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) provided a brief explanation of what she wanted, but accepted that the Government have produced their own version. With respect to types of dwellings affected, the new clause states:

> "This Chapter shall from the commencement of this Act apply to a dwelling within the meaning of the Leasehold Reform Act 1967 as amended, and the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993, as amended, which—
>
> (a) has been enfranchised;
>
> (b) is situated within an area ('scheme area') in respect of which a scheme of management has been approved and is in force pursuant to section 19 of the Leasehold Reform Act 1967 or Chapter IV of the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993."

It then goes on to say:

> "The right to manage provision of this Chapter shall come into operation two months after a notice has been served by, or on behalf of not less than one half of the owners of enfranchised properties within the scheme area, and the form of notice shall be prescribed by regulations and shall be deemed to have been served from the seventh day after the notice has been sent by first class recorded delivery post addressed to the landlord or his agent at his last known address or left at such premises.
>
> On demand, the landlord shall provide an enfranchised owner intending to join with others to serve a notice of right to manage with the names and addresses of all enfranchised owners within the scheme area."

7.30 pm

I do not know for sure, because I have not heard, whether the Liberal Democrats will pursue new clause 4, but, if they do not, it will not be because of any explanation from the Minister as to the manner in which the proposals in new clause 12, which is extremely extensive, have been understood by the House. No one could possibly have understood from what the Minister has said exactly what is at stake and how the proposals would operate. I am sorry to have to say this, but the Minister's explanation was rather truncated, to say the least, and the House deserves better than that.

The Liberal Democrats also tabled amendment No. 25 to clause 72 on the qualifying rules in relation to the right to manage. Under their amendment, they propose to insert a new provision at the end of line 20 on page 34, which relates to the premises to which chapter 1 applies. The Bill states that chapter 1

> "applies to premises if—
>
> (a) they consist of a self-contained building or part of a building, with or without appurtenant property,
>
> (b) they contain two or more flats held by qualifying tenants, and
>
> (c) the total number of flats held by such tenants is not less than two-thirds of the total number of flats contained in the premises."

Under amendment No. 25, the Liberal Democrats would add:

> "or—
>
> (d) they consist of individual houses and blocks of flats comprised in an estate management scheme."

I may have missed something, but I heard no clear explanation of how amendment No. 25 interacts with the provisions that I have already described.

We then come to Government amendment No. 35, which, by any reasonable standards, is pretty convoluted, but for the benefit of the House, I should say that it would amend clause 116, which refers to qualifying leases. Clause 116 refers to the 1993 Act to which we have already referred and states:

> "In section 5(1) of the 1993 Act (which provides that a qualifying tenant is a tenant under a long lease which is at a low rent or for a particularly long term), omit 'which is at a low rent or for a particularly long term'".

The Government then propose to add subsection (2), which states:

> "In section 69(1)(b) of the 1993 Act (estate management schemes), for the words 'by virtue of the amendments of that Chapter made by paragraph 3 of Schedule 9 to the Housing Act 1996 (c.52)' substitute 'in circumstances in which, but for section 116(1) of the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002 and the repeal by that Act of paragraph 3 of Schedule 9 to the Housing Act 1996 (c.52), they would have been entitled to acquire it by virtue of the amendments of that Chapter made by that paragraph'."

We all know that legislation can be convoluted, but, by no reasonable standards can we regard with equanimity the insertion of provisions of that kind into clause 116 without the Minister fully explaining exactly what the Government have in mind. No one reading their proposals—a member of the public, anyone involved in leaseholds or anyone other than a lawyer who specialises in such matters—could possibly follow all that.

For the reasons that I have already given, it is by no means satisfactory that the Government have simply introduced those proposals without adequate explanation and at this late stage. After all, let us face it, the Bill started out many months, if not years, ago. It has been through about five stages in the other place and it has been debated on Second Reading and in Committee in this House, and we are now on Report. We are all in favour of improving the Bill. I have repeatedly said that we want it to be improved and, furthermore, that we want to be sure that it makes improved and enhanced provision for the benefit not only of commonhold but of leasehold arrangements. However, it certainly does not improve the quality of debate in the House if, in fact, no explanation or description of the proposals is given.

I do not want to make any invidious comparisons, but certainly with regard to the issues that we discussed earlier, we heard an extensive description of the Government's arguments. Sometimes their proposals were not adequate and we had to vote against them, but that does not alter the fact that, in matters of such importance affecting so many people, we must have a proper explanation. The best thing that the Minister could do—if she would be good enough—is to do as I have asked and, even if we have to sit here for a little time, provide a proper explanation of what these provisions involve. I have no doubt that we would then all be the wiser and the explanation would be on the record.

We need to make another point in this context: under the current rules of statutory interpretation, which have changed considerably over the many years during which I have been involved in this sort of business, it is now far more likely that the courts will consider what the Minister has said and the nature of the debate in Parliament, and as we move further down the route of other jurisdictions which seem to impinge on our legislation, that rule will become even more readily applicable. Therefore, it is absolutely incumbent on Ministers to explain fully what they are up to.

The reason why we are legislating is to ensure that the people of this country have the opportunity to hear a full explanation. Not everyone would expect to be able to understand every word of the Bill's drafting. It is complicated; we all know that. However, it is important that these matters be fully and adequately explained to the House and put on the record. *Hansard* comes out every day; some of it is extremely tedious to read, but for those who are affected by these important provisions, a proper and full explanation is required.

I invite the Minister, if not to go back to square one, to give us a proper and full explanation of these provisions, because her introduction of new clause 12 left us not much the wiser.

Mr. Mark Field: The Minister will be relieved to know that I will not speak at length, in view of the comprehensive comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash).

I understand that there are about 3.8 million leaseholders in this country. At times, when the Bill has been making its slow and steady way towards the statute book, I have wondered whether all of them live in my constituency—I think that a fair number of them do.

Mr. Sanders: The amendments cover people who are not leaseholders but have enfranchised. I am on the same side as the hon. Gentleman on this issue, but I emphasise that these amendments are very important and cover far more people than leaseholders alone.

Mr. Field: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention.

The high and somewhat uncertain cost of enfranchisement, which has been discussed, is very much a live issue, particularly in central London. The comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Stone reflected the concern about the enormous associated bureaucracy. If the Government are unable to tell us at this juncture how they envisage the estate management schemes working, lawyers will have a field day. I should perhaps say that I am a former member of that profession. We will see an expensive and protracted exercise in bluff and counter-bluff, based on little decisive evidence.

I hope that the Minister will go into some detail to explain how she envisages new clause 12 and Government amendment No. 35 working. The terms of

[Mr. Field]

the new clause are very extensive; the worry is that it will do little good for the many former leaseholders and those who are enfranchising and want to see the benefit of the legislation. If, as has so often been the case, it has not been thought through properly and is too complicated, this worthwhile effort to introduce another piece of legislation—we have had a number of Acts going back to the Leasehold Reform Act 1967, which was the trailblazer in this area—will simply create problems. Without sufficient improvement and clarification, the Bill will cause great problems. I hope that the Minister will be able to elucidate these matters.

Simply putting into place a new layer of complicated legislation will not achieve the trailblazing goals of six or seven years ago that the Labour party made great play of, particularly before the 1997 election. The worst thing is that many millions of leaseholders will find themselves still in a problematic situation with a lot of new legislation on the statute book that achieves very little. I hope that, given the comments of the hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) and my hon. Friend the Member for Stone, we will have more explanation from the Minister about how the new clause will work.

7.45 pm

Ms Keeble: I shall start by commenting on the points raised by the hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty); I will then deal with those of the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash). There are also some general points to consider as well as specific ones.

The hon. Member for Guildford spoke about the right to manage—the right to manage is for blocks of flats, but we are dealing with whole estates. She also referred to the reasonableness of the costs of estate management schemes. We brought forward new clause 12 to deal with that issue. It will provide that the charges under estate management schemes will be payable only to the extent that they are reasonable. The leasehold valuation tribunals will have the power to determine the extent to which such charges are reasonable. I will give an explanation of the definition of "reasonableness" that I hope will keep the hon. Member for Stone happy. It is precisely to deal with some of the issues referred to by the hon. Lady that we introduced the new clause.

The thrust of the hon. Gentleman's argument was that the new clause is very long and has been introduced at a late stage of the Bill's proceedings. Nobody could gainsay that. However, we have constantly brought forward amendments to refine the Bill. It has been a long process; before the Bill even reached this House, it was introduced twice in the other place, so there has been constant refinement. We have accepted throughout the process that it is still possible to make amendments. The hon. Gentleman has paid tribute to the fact that the Government have brought forward many amendments, even at this stage, to deal with concerns that were raised in Committee by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

As I will probably say ad nauseam, tonight and on Wednesday, many of the issues in the Bill are extremely complex. Many provisions are interrelated and have knock-on effects on various pieces of legislation. We are dealing with people's homes and must ensure that provisions are watertight; people get very sensitive if changes are made to legislation that affects their home and there are unintended consequences. Therefore, the changes tend to be complex. We run into problems if a simple amendment has unforeseen consequences or has not been thought through properly.

The hon. Gentleman said that new clause 12 is not clear, but I think that it is startling clear. It sets out the arrangements for ensuring that people know their rights and are able to exercise them. I understand that guidance will not be forthcoming because all the steps in the process are clearly set out in new clause 12. It refers to two Acts because two Acts have been involved in enfranchisement. That point has been raised repeatedly on both sides of the House—perhaps more often from my hon. Friends, whose constituents have enfranchised under various pieces of legislation. I argue that these arrangements—unusually, perhaps, for a complex piece of legislation—are set out as a clear process.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the use of "reasonable". I understand that that was first applied to variable charges under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985. Applying it to charges made under the estate management schemes merely follows the long-established precedent for service charges. The LVT will consider all circumstances in reaching a view on reasonableness, just as it does now.

If arbitration takes place on estate management schemes, it is up to the parties to agree an arbitrator. The purpose of the new clause is to prevent binding arbitration clauses in schemes that would deny access to the LVT. The drafting follows the general approach taken in the Bill towards service and administration charges, and the hon. Gentleman will understand that we need such regimes to be as close to one another as possible.

The hon. Member for Stone asked for information on the point contained in amendment No. 35. As I have said previously, the Bill includes several points at which an amendment in one place would have an unintended consequence elsewhere. Several later amendments would also do just that. In this case, once clause 116 came into force, we should be removing an existing right to make an application for an estate management scheme under section 69 of the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993. That was not our intention.

Mr. Cash: I am intrigued that new clause 12(1)(b), as drafted for the Government by parliamentary counsel, refers to "Chapter 4" while the 1993 Act contains "Chapter IV". The point may seem trivial, but can the Minister explain that? Chapter IV contains important provisions, and if amendments are being made to it in such a way, who is to say that they may not contain other similar mistakes?

Ms Keeble: I do not have the 1993 Act in front of me, but I shall ensure that that point is checked and give the hon. Gentleman an answer shortly.

Mr. Cash: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am surprised to hear the Minister say that she does not have the 1993 Act in front of her. I do not want to make a meal of the point, but it is impossible for her to give the explanation that I have asked for unless she has the 1993 Act. Indeed, the Minister has not explained the point, except by a vague reference to reasonableness. We cannot possibly carry on trying to extract explanations from a Minister who does not have with her even the Act that she would amend.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): The hon. Gentleman is experienced enough to know that that verges on the matters for debate and is not a point of order for me. I can recall, however, that we have managed, with greater disability, to debate matters in the past.

Ms Keeble: I am grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If I had to have with me every piece of legislation to which the Bill refers, the Table would be entirely covered.

The hon. Member for Stone probably knows much better than I do the different arrangements made in different Acts for enfranchisement. I shall ensure that his point of detail is dealt with.

Amendment No. 35 is necessary to ensure that our proposals do not have unintended consequences. We want to ensure that it continues to be possible to request consent for the making of an application for the approval of an estate management scheme. With that explanation, I urge the House to support the Government new clause and amendment, and I ask those who tabled the new clause 4 and amendment No. 25 to withdraw them.

Mr. Cash *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot speak again.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

Mr. Cash: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Having relatively recently come to the Front Bench, I wonder whether I might be able to speak on new clause stand part?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has been a Member of the House for long enough to appreciate that we do not have stand part debates on consideration. They are a feature only of deliberations in Committee.

Sue Doughty: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Minister invited me to withdraw new clause 4. Should I be given the opportunity to respond to that request?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No. What the Minister said was unnecessary. We were dealing with the lead new clause in the group—new clause 12—and new clause 4 fell when that was decided.

New Clause 13

PREMISES INCLUDING RAILWAY TRACK

'In section 4 of the 1993 Act (premises in the case of which right does not apply) insert at the end—

"(5) This Chapter does not apply to premises falling within section 3(1) if the freehold of the premises includes track of an operational railway; and for the purposes of this subsection—

(a) "track" includes any land or other property comprising the permanent way of a railway (whether or not it is also used for other purposes) and includes any bridge, tunnel, culvert, retaining wall or other structure used for the support of, or otherwise in connection with, track,

(b) "operational" means not disused, and

(c) "railway" has the same meaning as in any provision of Part 1 of the Railways Act 1993 (c.43) for the purposes of which that term is stated to have its wider meaning.".'.—*[Ms Keeble.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Ms Keeble: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

I hope that this new clause will prove luckier than the last.

We have already had a long and detailed debate with many references to clauses and subsections. The aim of presenting new clauses is also to give hon. Members some idea of our general intent, and this new clause is intended to deal with a pressing and practical problem—what to do about railway tracks and properties.

It has recently been brought to our attention that the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993 did not adequately provide for cases in which flats are built over a railway track, such as the case in which a block has been built on top of a bridge or tunnel under which the railway runs. Nothing in existing law prevents leaseholders living in such flats from buying their freeholds. Freeholders have the right to take out 999-year leases on the commercial parts of the building when leaseholders buy their freeholds, but there is reason to doubt whether that would apply to land over which a railway runs, as that does not form part of the block itself. That could clearly lead to serious difficulties.

The new exemption would prevent leaseholders from exercising their right to enfranchise if the freeholds that they would otherwise be entitled to buy would include land over which a railway track runs or where it would include structures used for the support of the railway. It would ensure that the right to enfranchise cannot be exercised under circumstances in which it could seriously hinder the continued operation of a railway. That is a practical amendment.

Mr. Cash: I have no doubt that the Minister regards the new clause as extremely important. On the face of it, it seems to cover many matters of considerable interest to those affected by chapter I of the 1993 Act. The new clause states:

"In section 4 of the 1993 Act (premises in the case of which right does not apply)."

However, section 4 of the Act refers to premises excluded from right.

8 pm

Why does the new clause not describe section 4 of the Act? It is certainly not the same description as the one in my copy of the Act. For some reason the words have been changed. "Premises excluded from right" is not the same as

"premises in the case of which right does not apply".

That is extremely curious and no doubt the Minister will want to explain.

That is the second point that I have had to raise as regards the drafting. My points may seem trivial but there seems no reason for the changes. At the very least, the drafting is sloppy. That is not the way to legislate. It is extraordinary that although parliamentary counsel and the

[Mr. Cash]

Department's solicitors must have been involved, we have ended up with no more than a semantic difference. That does not seem necessary.

We have not even received a minimal explanation of the new clause. The new clause provides that chapter I of the Act—headed "Collective Enfranchisement in Case of Tenants of Flats"—

"does not apply to premises falling within section 3(1)".

That section is headed

"Premises to which this Chapter applies",

but those words are not included in the new clause. That is an important point. The new clause states:

> "This Chapter does not apply . . . if the freehold of the premises includes track of an operational railway, and for the purposes of this subsection—
>
> (a) 'track' includes any land or other property comprising the permanent way of a railway (whether or not it is also used for other purposes)".

That is a new definition of "track" and it raises several questions. The sentence continues:

"includes any bridge, tunnel, culvert, retaining wall or other structure used for the support of, or otherwise in connection with, track."

The words

"or otherwise in connection with, track"

are very curious, because they refer back to the attempt to define track at the beginning of sub-paragraph (a). It seems to me that those words need to be distinguished from the definition of "track" at the beginning. At best, that is a curious way to set out such an important provision.

Furthermore, the words

"includes any land or other property comprising the permanent way of a railway"

are not a self-contained definition, as

"any land or other property"

includes

"any bridge, tunnel, culvert, retaining wall or other structure."

The word "other" is used twice and I am sure that the Minister will have heard that, as a matter of statutory interpretation, where the word "other" appears it has to be taken ejusdem generis with the other words.

There is thus a double problem. The first is that the word "track" is apparently defined as including "land or other property" and we do not know what that other property might be, because property ejusdem generis with land cannot refer to any property that is not land. The second problem involves the use of the word "track". It is used twice; it is defined in one case but not in the other.

That raises some serious questions. For example, to introduce a substantive issue, there might be a difficulty as regards the Railway Clauses Consolidation Act 1845. That Act contained rights of pre-emption with which I am extremely familiar, because for many years I had to examine such questions. The Act also contains provisions on surplus lands.

The rights of pre-emption and the problems of surplus lands are extremely contentious. They are directly relevant to the new clause because it states that track

"includes any land or other property comprising the permanent way of a railway (whether or not it is also used for other purposes)".

If, according to the law, those surplus lands are part of the permanent way of a railway, so be it. However, that may not be the case. The existing legislation gives rise to serious questions.

I was involved in the passage of the British Railways Act 1968 and we held some extremely difficult discussions with people who had acquired land and subsequently wanted to develop it to increase its value. That was an extremely contentious issue. Much of the problem turned on the question of whether the land was subject to rights of pre-emption or surplus land.

The railwayland developments were considered important because they increased the value of the property available to British Rail, but unfortunately they gave rise to a great deal of litigation. Under the rights of pre-emption and of surplus land, it became necessary to determine who owned the land, which introduced the difficult question of the limits of deviation. The railways were provided for under enactments going back to about 1830, and the question of who owns land, including the land within the limits of variation, is directly linked to the determination of what comprises the permanent way of a railway.

The new clause says:

"This Chapter does not apply to premises falling within section 3(1) if the freehold of the premises includes track of an operational railway".

That gives rise to a real problem. In the light of the 1845 provisions, it will be very hard to determine what comprises the track of an operational railway—defined as in the new clause—including

"any bridge, tunnel, culvert, retaining wall or other structure."

I do not pray in aid any special knowledge, other than to say that my great-great-grandfather founded the London-Brighton railway. No doubt, those involved had to pay well over the odds in the early 1830s in determining whether they would be able to acquire the land that they needed for the permanent way.

The permanent way can in fact go much wider than the track, within the limits of deviation, to take in land that has now become very valuable because properties have been built on it. Because in those days there was no land registration and no clear way of knowing what the limits of deviation were, other than looking at the maps and plans deposited in Parliament, it was hard for conveyancers to determine what was within the land management of the railway system. Properties built along railway lines could well fall within the estate management scheme in the Bill.

The new clause says that "operational" means "not disused". I do not know whether my hon. Friends are with me on this—

Mr. Wiggin: Yes, 100 per cent.

8.15 pm

Mr. Cash: I am very glad to hear it.

Why on earth is it necessary to use a double negative to define what is operational? Would not it be simpler to say "used"? It is very strange.

The new clause says:

"'railway' has the same meaning as in any provision of Part 1 of the Railways Act 1993 . . . for the purposes of which that term is stated to have its wider meaning."

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): The definitions have been troubling me somewhat and I wonder whether my hon. Friend can help. Does he think that "operational" in new clause 13 would cover a tourist attraction that is a railway but not in the sense that it carries passengers from one city to another?

Mr. Cash: That is another extremely important point. It so happens that the Severn Valley railway operates very near where I live in Shropshire. I have just realised that I ought to declare an interest, because I have one share in the Churnet Valley railway in my constituency, which is a railway of the kind that my right hon. Friend describes.

The Minister has certainly not explained to us what is in the Railways Act 1993. Some of us would be extremely grateful to be enlightened about that. Further complication is added when we are told that the term is

"stated to have its wider meaning".

If I look at a tree, for example, under its wider meaning could it not also be a bush? We do not know what the wider meaning could convey, and that could be extremely important in dealing with an estate management scheme.

The vagueness of the drafting does not allow us to determine exactly what "railway" means. That reminds me of Humpty Dumpty telling Alice that words mean whatever he chooses, and

"The question is . . . which is to be master—that's all."

That characterises the drafting. The definition in the new clause leaves open the question of what the wider meaning is, and that is problematic.

I have already exposed, as a matter of logic and law, a whole series of internal contradictions and uncertainties in provisions that the Minister has declared are very important. That certainly does not help the House or those who will soon be affected by the provisions. That problem should concern us at such a late stage in our proceedings. As the Minister said, there were five opportunities to examine the Bill in the other place and we have had the chance to discuss it in Committee and on Report. Yet the explanation for the provision is vague and uncertain.

The new clause refers to section 4 of the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993. It is all very well to jam in at the bottom of a provision something that is so vague and uncertain, but it must be related to the relevant provisions of that Act.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman may have unintentionally diverted himself on to a loop line and may therefore take longer to reach his destination. He would do the House a service if he focused more directly on the new clause.

Mr. Cash: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for that guidance. However, I do not believe that I have departed from the new clause. I have explained its vagueness, contradictions and uncertainties. It is not possible to explain it in full without going into the manner in which it impinges on the 1993 Act.

The new clause is to be inserted at the end of section 4 of the 1993 Act. It says:

"This Chapter does not apply to premises falling within section 3(1)"

of that Act. In other words, the whole Act applies to the Bill for the purposes set out in the new clause. It is not necessarily a loop line; it is more a case of taking us through a tunnel into another Act. That is the point of the new clause. The Minister has made no attempt to explain the situation. She is looking for the first time at the 1993 Act. That is important, because without doing that it is not possible for the House or the people who need to refer to the legislation subsequently to understand the relevance.

The provisions of section 4 are amended by proposed new subsection (5). It is a substantive provision that relates to premises including so-called railway track, and states:

"This Chapter does not apply to premises falling within section 3(1)",

which are

"any premises . . . if they consist of a self-contained building or part of a building and the freehold of the whole of the building or of that part of the building is owned by the same person . . . they contain two or more flats held by qualifying tenants; and . . . the total number of flats held by such tenants is not less than two-thirds of the total number of flats contained in the premises."

The chapter does not apply to premises

"if the freehold includes track of an operational railway",

which gives rise to the difficulties of the definition.

Section 4 of the 1993 Act says that the chapter does not apply to the premises that I have just outlined if

"any part or parts . . . is or are neither . . . occupied or intended to be occupied, for residential purposes".

I would have thought a railway track would not be regarded as something that was occupied or intended to be occupied for residential purposes unless it was part of the railway development schemes, which give rise to complicated questions about pre-emption and surplus land if they apply under the Railway Clauses Consolidation Act 1845. Section 4 goes on to say that the chapter does not apply to premises if they are

"comprised in any common parts of the premises".

Furthermore, it states that it does not apply to premises if

"the internal floor area of that part or those parts (taken together) exceeds 10 per cent. of the internal floor area of the premises (taken as a whole)."

We have had almost no explanation of the interaction between the different pieces of legislation. In the last Session, however, before programme motions came into effect, we had a fuller explanation.

The Minister referred to different premises that could be covered by new clause 13. Section 4 goes on to say:

"Where in the case of any such premises"—

those excluded from the right—

"any part of the premises (such as, for example, a garage, parking space or storage area) is used, or intended for use, in conjunction with a particular dwelling contained in the premises (and accordingly is not comprised in any common parts of the premises), it shall be taken to be occupied, or intended to be occupied, for residential purposes."

It would be one thing if we were merely talking about an estate management scheme, but we are not: the provision relates to the railway track business—not to mention

[Mr. Cash]

Railtrack business, which I shall not go into. The problem is that it is difficult both for those who are involved in estate management schemes and for tenants to interpret the legislation.

New clause 13 will not give enough assistance to remove the doubts that have been raised. There is much more to this than meets the eye, and there are serious difficulties to resolve. Although it has taken time to explain, the problem has to be properly considered and I look forward to hearing the Minister's explanation of what the new clause means in the context of the 1993 Act, the 1845 Act and all the other matters to which I have referred.

Mr. Wiggin: The new clause is bizarre. It has arrived at a late stage in our proceedings and relates to part I of the 1993 Act which is entitled "Collective Enfranchisement in Case of Tenants of Flats". I cannot understand why anyone would think that people who live above an underground railway line or the tube might think that that is relevant to them. Section 4 is entitled "Premises excluded from right" and does not apply to premises falling within section 3(1). I am aware that the Minister does not have a copy, so I shall briefly go through it.

Subsections (1)(a) and (b), (2), (3) and (4) of section 4 refer to "premises" and nothing else. To me, and perhaps to other lay people, the word "premises" implies something in which people could live, and could not refer to a railway line. That is why I find the new clause bizarre. I am afraid that I cannot dissect it in detail and with the same skill as my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash), but I feel that it is wholly inappropriate in respect of leasehold and commonhold reform.

8.30 pm

Why would the Government suddenly want to introduce a provision relating to railways in the middle of a Bill that relates to people's homes? It is extremely odd. Without wishing to fuel conspiracy theories, I could suggest that this might be another instance of the Government burying a strange amendment for use on another day. I do not see why the new clause is crucial to the Bill. The idea that tourist railways, the underground or indeed any sort of railway would be property that a commonholder would want to own is bizarre. The fact that the railways are currently in receivership makes it even less likely that anybody who wants to be included in a commonhold arrangement would consider suggesting that the underground line over which they live might be part of their property. I find that proposition extraordinarily naive.

I hope that the Minister will give us some assurances that the new clause has snuck on to the amendment paper by accident. I hope also that she will seek to withdraw new clause 13—an unlucky number on no small scale in this instance—as it is so out of character with the rest of the Bill. It strikes me as extraordinary that we are expected to believe that people who want to enfranchise will also hope to claim a small part of the Circle line. It must be an accident or even a mistake, so I look forward to hearing that the Minister will seek to withdraw the new clause as it is wholly inappropriate, especially in light of the 1993 Act.

One can see that garages, parking spaces, storage areas and so on are proper premises. It would be possible to convert a garage or parking space—presumably a covered one—into a home of some sort, but the idea that people would live on any part of the Circle line in a tunnel strikes me as out of order and bizarre. *[Interruption.]* The Minister appears to be saying that there are people who live in the underground.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman does not take too much account of sedentary comments, of which the occupant of the Chair does not approve. While I am on my feet, I also remind him that he is now in danger of repeating himself more than once.

Mr. Wiggin: I am grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall leave my comments at that.

Ms Keeble: I am told that of 244 minutes of debate this evening, the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) has occupied 132. He probably spent about a quarter or a third of that time on new clause 13, in a contribution that was probably the least constructive that he has made, and certainly of the debate.

The new clause is intended to deal with very practical issues around access to railway tracks when major works are needed. As the hon. Gentleman said, the identification of ownership is a major issue in that regard. At the start of his contribution, he spoke about his experience of how difficult it can be if it is not possible to determine where ownership rests.

The hon. Gentleman spoke at length about estate management schemes, but I advise him that the new clause does not deal with such schemes; the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) had it right—it is about enfranchisement. I also remind him that there is a need for major infrastructure works on the railways and the underground. The purpose of the new clause, as I thought I had made clear previously, is to ensure that we deal with issues of land ownership in relation to the work that is needed. It has also been made clear to us that the Railways Act 1993 did not make adequate provision for cases in which flats had been built over railway track—a point that deals with the questions about properties located on top of the Circle line. The new clause refers to blocks of flats that are built on top of a bridge or tunnel under which a railway runs.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about the definition of track. The description set out in the new clause is clear. The definition is based on that which is contained in existing railway legislation. He said that the provisions were very complex and again referred to his experience in the 1960s. Of course, legislation has been amended and introduced since then. Clearly, it would be unhelpful if the definition in the new clause was different from that used in other railway legislation.

Mr. Cash: If the definition of track has been lifted from current legislation, why does not the provision say so? It could merely say that "track" means whatever is stated in existing legislation. That is the normal way of dealing with such matters. I do not have the legislation immediately to hand, but I would not be surprised if there were differences between the existing definition and that which is used in the new clause. If there is no such difference, why should it be set out again?

Ms Keeble: The hon. Gentleman asked a question and he has got the answer—it seems merely that he does not like it. There is a lot of clarity in the definition and I am told that it is based on the definitions in existing railway legislation. That seems the best possible approach.

The hon. Gentleman asked about differences in numberings. I understand that the use of Roman numerals is no longer practised. He will notice that the passage that he claims to be different from the 1993 Act is not part of the substance of the new clause. We are not inserting that into legislation; it is a parenthesis and is purely descriptive. The passage in inverted commas—the new clause itself—is perfectly accurate and there is absolutely nothing wrong with it.

I have said openly that the new clause was tabled at a late stage in response to questions about potential problems relating to access to track and other requirements for carrying out work on railway lines. Given the current importance of infrastructure work on both overground and underground railways, we must ensure that we do not in any way complicate or frustrate that through any lack of clarity as regards land ownership. That is the purpose of the new clause. It is extremely helpful and constructive, and I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 14

EXTENSION OF RIGHT TO CHALLENGE LANDLORD'S CHOICE OF INSURER

'(1) Paragraph 8 of the Schedule to the 1985 Act (right to challenge landlord's nomination of insurer) is amended as follows.

(2) In sub-paragraphs (1) and (2), after "nominated" insert "or approved".

(3) In sub-paragraph (4), after "nominate" (in both places) insert "or approve".'.—*[Ms Keeble.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Ms Keeble: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 52 to 55.

Ms Keeble: New clause 14 and the amendments are purely technical. The new clause is important in that it builds on amendments that were tabled in Committee by ensuring that their intent is properly carried through. I hope that it will assist certain groups of people.

As hon. Members may recall from previous debates, some leases provide for insurance to be taken out with a nominated insurer. Some landlords have abused that right by insisting that their leaseholders take out insurance with a company that charges inflated premiums so that they can secure a large commission. Several hon. Members referred to the disgraceful scams that have taken place and the hardship that has been caused to many people.

Existing leasehold law gives leaseholders the right to challenge their landlord's choice of nominated insurer. Clause 161 further provides that where the terms of a lease on a house require the leaseholder to use a nominated insurer, it will be sufficient for them to take out insurance with any insurer authorised to carry on business in the UK, subject to certain conditions being met. However, some leases provide that insurance must be taken out with an insurer who is approved by the landlord. We are concerned that it could be argued that that is not quite the same as a requirement to take out insurance with an insurer who is nominated by the landlord. Although we do not think that such an argument would be likely to succeed, for the avoidance of doubt we thought it important to amend the relevant provisions to make it absolutely clear that they also apply to approved insurers. I am sure that that will be especially welcome to my hon. Friends the Members for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) and for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Crausby), who led the charge on the matter in Committee and beforehand.

Amendment No. 55 ensures that the new clause tabled in Committee on nominated insurers—now clause 161—applies to Crown land.

I commend the new clause and the amendments to the House.

Mr. Cash: The Minister is completely right to say that the new clause is an important provision. We had a useful debate in Committee about the implications of the matter. Several issues are raised by the manner in which certain landlords put tenants at a disadvantage by requiring that they accept their insurance company, with which they, the landlords, may themselves be involved. The Minister rightly described that as a scam. It raises questions of conflict of interest and of uberrimae fidei, which lie at the heart of insurance contracts. It also raises questions about the extent to which there is a free market and whether a monopoly may arise, albeit in relatively constrained circumstances. Some of the very large estates represent a vehicle for acquiring vast amounts of commission, which can be generated on the back of a simple requirement to nominate an insurer.

On the face of it, the new clause makes an extremely simple amendment to paragraph 8 of the schedule to the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985, which deals with the right to challenge the landlord's nomination of insurer. Nevertheless, it is, by any reasonable standards, a considerable step forward that will come as a considerable relief to many people who have been taken for a ride in the past. The sums involved may be important as well, but the downstream consequence of being landed with a bucket-shop insurer—or even a big insurer—simply because the landlord has the power to insist on it has always struck me as an extraordinary state of affairs. It is almost nothing to do with the landlord, in the sense that what is done in the flat in question relates to compliance with covenants of repair, and so on. It could be argued that, if the tenant or leaseholder did not properly insure, other people in the premises could be at risk.

8.45 pm

Mr. Wiggin: I am curious as to what would happen if a tenant claimed to have insurance—or perhaps ran his own insurance business—but it turned out to be inadequate. What sort of protection would the freeholder have from a rogue tenant who claimed to have insurance but in fact could not insure himself?

Mr. Cash: The short answer to that is that there are some very complex laws on assets under various Acts

[Mr. Cash]

relating to insurance companies. These laws require that any insurer must have a certain degree of viability. It is certainly true that a number of other insurers, who could fall into the category of being involved in scams, would not have that degree of proper insurance. I seem to remember an enormous insurance scandal about 25 years ago.

Ms Keeble: Which one?

Mr. Cash: The Minister asks which one. I do not think that it matters unduly, but the man's name began with "S".

Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): It was Savundra; I think the company involved was Fire, Auto and Marine.

Mr. Cash: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Greg Knight: Was he a Labour supporter?

Mr. Cash: I have no idea. What I do know is that the principles of asset backing matter a great deal to an insurance policy when the crunch comes and something goes wrong, whatever kind of insurance we are dealing with. In relation to property insurance of this kind, it is essential for the tenant to have a proper degree of interest in who the insurer is, because he will be affected if the assets are not there to back the insurance policy. He and the other tenants and leaseholders will all be affected.

The matter should not, therefore, be left entirely to the landlord. That is why I agree that the inclusion of the words "or approved" means that there would be no way in which a tenant, under paragraph 8 of the schedule to the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985—which covers the right to challenge—could leave a leaseholder swinging in the air, because he would now be able to give names to the insurer. It would not simply be a question of nomination, which I regard as offensively monopolistic and extremely dangerous from the point of view of the people living in the premises.

There has been quite enough trouble, one way or another, in the insurance industry over the last few years, and it is the easiest thing in the world for a large estate with many leaseholders and tenants to prescribe its own insurer, and not only collect the commission but give no verifiable evidence of the assets that back that insurance company. That does not apply in all cases, but in a number of cases the provision will be extremely important. For all those reasons, I regard the new clause as good and sensible.

The Minister referred to clause 161, which prescribes that

> "where a long lease of a house requires the tenant to insure the house with an insurer nominated by the landlord . . .
>
> The tenant is not required to effect the insurance with a nominated insurer if—
>
> (a) the house is insured under a policy of insurance issued by an authorised insurer";

furthermore,

> "(b) the policy covers the interests of both the landlord and the tenant",

and

> "(c) the policy covers all the risks which the lease requires to be covered by the insurance provided by a nominated insurer";

furthermore,

> "(d) the amount of cover is not less than that which the requires to be provided by such insurance, and
>
> (e) the tenant satisfies subsection (3)."

The provision is extremely useful and will be of great benefit to tenants. We support the Government's proposals.

Mr. David Crausby (Bolton, North-East): I shall be brief. I welcome clause 161, for all the reasons that the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) set out. It is disgraceful that members of the British public should be forced by anybody to take out insurance with the landlord's insurer. The amendments strengthen the clause and give people the power to decide which insurer to have.

The clause is a fine example of how Parliament should work. In the original proposals that went through the other place and came to this place, there was no recognition of the point. Because hon. Members in all parts of the House argued their case, the Government listened, rightly, and are acting in the interests of the British people.

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): I shall make a brief and inexpert contribution. I cannot rival the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) in his eye for detail or his rhetorical skills.

There will be genuine rejoicing in my constituency at the inclusion of the clause, as it puts to bed an issue that has dogged Southport for many years. I am grateful to the Government for being responsive, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) for drawing the matter to the Government's attention.

Southport was developed in the Victorian era and land was originally in the hands of feudal families. They sold off the land on 999-year leases, which is a peculiarity of the north. In the discussion of the Bill, there has been something of a London focus, and that practice is a northern peculiarity. For many years, those families collected a ground rent and expected an income for about a thousand years.

Attached to the lease were various exotic conditions. When I first owned my house, I understood that the Weld Blundell estate had the right to appear if ever, during the course of gardening, I struck oil or found coal or gold. The estate had additional income, quite apart from ground rent. Further income was derived by charging for alterations and extensions. A fee would be charged for an alteration as simple as putting in a new window.

As a result, the value of the ground rent in Southport fell. The cost of administration outweighed the income received by the original ground landlords. The ground rents were sold off to City firms, which had no connection whatever with the locality. The problem surfaced in Southport in the 1980s, when the then Member of Parliament, Sir Ian Percival, the Solicitor-General, got involved. There were threats from various companies that if insurance companies were not changed, dispossession would be a distinct possibility.

Southport people are thoughtful and intelligent, which is one reason why they habitually elect Liberal Democrats. They reacted positively. They got together and there were huge meetings attended by hundreds of people. Pressure was brought to bear, and as a result some of the companies that tried to profiteer backed off. Few, if any, cases went to court, and there was something of a stand-off. However, the problem was not resolved. Many people took the opportunity to buy their freehold.

Latterly and very recently the problem has resurfaced. Residents, many of whom are elderly and still have houses under leasehold conditions, are being asked to switch insurance companies—not to fly-by-night companies, but major insurance companies that are associated with this technique. AXA is the insurance company that people in the northern part of Southport have been asked to change to, and it is a shame that AXA is associated with such a process. It is not motivating it: a Welsh finance company is doing that.

The letters and communications, which I have seen, have an undertone of threat. Letters sound legally assured, and people are genuinely frightened that they may lose their property. The people who are frightened are none the less well insured. They may not have an opportunity to look round the insurance market to find out what would be best for them.

Until this law is enacted, the process that is happening now could be repeated in three, six or nine years' time. It is an abuse: it has nothing to do with securing people proper insurance, but everything to do with making a fast buck.

It is a shame AXA is involved. No company should be party to an arrangement that involves frightening elderly people. It has nothing to do with the legitimate interests of ground landlords or real insurance: it is simply profiteering. Although this legislation may be dull—it is certainly a dull evening for many of us—there will be genuine rejoicing in Southport that it is going through because it will benefit many ordinary people.

Peter Bottomley: I support the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash). I note what was said about long leases in Southport. I have a family interest in a long lease on the Isle of Wight, which is about as far south as one can get. I should declare an interest in a flat in Worthing, so I would potentially be affected, although not directly.

The leaseholders in my constituency and elsewhere want service, assurance and a reasonable way of being protected against sharks. The suggestions that my hon. Friend made in welcoming this new clause would help to protect people against sharks, and ensure that there is a common interest in insurance being carried through properly. In my block of flats in Worthing, all bar one of the six tenants have changed during the five years that I have been the Member of Parliament. It is important that managing agents and freeholders as well as the changing leaseholders have some continuity of protection. When damage occurs, insurance matters. I welcome the Government's rational approach to this issue.

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): I welcome the new clauses on insurance and the one that was passed in Committee. In all our deliberations on the Bill, we have shown that too many sharp practices are associated with leasehold tenure, whether it is the insurance scams that were detailed on Second Reading and in Committee or forfeiture and ground rent grazing. This new clause is welcome, as it closes down the possibility of freeholders abusing leasehold home owners. The Government have done well to introduce the new clause. It is right that leaseholders should have freedom of choice and be able to choose the insurer that best suits them and gives them best value for money. I welcome this further tightening of the law to deal with insurance scams.

9 pm

Ms Keeble: I welcome the support for new clause 14 from my hon. Friends the Members for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Crausby) and for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac), and from the hon. Members for Southport (Dr. Pugh) and for Worthing, West (Peter Bottomley). Members have raised the issue repeatedly, and I hope that these measures will go further to ensure that people are not ripped off.

The hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) mentioned the possibility of tenants' failing to insure properly. Under clause 161, landlords can be satisfied that properties are insured. He also asked about insolvent or dubious insurers. Insurance must be with authorised insurers, supervised by the Financial Services Authority. I wrote to him just after the Committee stage, and he should have that on file.

The new clause extends what we have already done. It reflects concern expressed by Members on both sides of the House about the skill of a small percentage of freeholders in finding ways of making legal loopholes work to their financial advantage. I hope that many leaseholders will benefit from this further safeguard.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 15

CONSULTATION ABOUT SERVICE CHARGES

'For section 20 of the 1985 Act (limitation of service charges: estimates and consultation) substitute—

"20 Limitation of service charges: consultation requirements

(1) Where this section applies to any qualifying works or qualifying long term agreement, the relevant contributions of tenants are limited in accordance with subsection (6) or (7) (or both) unless the consultation requirements have been either—

(a) complied with in relation to the works or agreement, or

(b) dispensed with in relation to the works or agreement by (or on appeal from) a leasehold valuation tribunal.

(2) In this section "relevant contribution", in relation to a tenant and any works or agreement, is the amount which he may be required under the terms of his lease to contribute (by the payment of service charges) to relevant costs incurred on carrying out the works or under the agreement.

(3) This section applies to qualifying works if relevant costs incurred on carrying out the works exceed an appropriate amount.

(4) The Secretary of State may by regulations provide that this section applies to a qualifying long term agreement—

(a) if relevant costs incurred under the agreement exceed an appropriate amount, or

(b) if relevant costs incurred under the agreement during a period prescribed by the regulations exceed an appropriate amount.

(5) An appropriate amount is an amount set by regulations made by the Secretary of State; and the regulations may make provision for either or both of the following to be an appropriate amount—

(a) an amount prescribed by, or determined in accordance with, the regulations, and

(b) an amount which results in the relevant contribution of any one or more tenants being an amount prescribed by, or determined in accordance with, the regulations.

(6) Where an appropriate amount is set by virtue of paragraph (a) of subsection (5), the amount of the relevant costs incurred on carrying out the works or under the agreement which may be taken into account in determining the relevant contributions of tenants is limited to the appropriate amount.

(7) Where an appropriate amount is set by virtue of paragraph (b) of that subsection, the amount of the relevant contribution of the tenant, or each of the tenants, whose relevant contribution would otherwise exceed the amount prescribed by, or determined in accordance with, the regulations is limited to the amount so prescribed or determined.

20ZA Consultation requirements: supplementary

(1) Where an application is made to a leasehold valuation tribunal for a determination to dispense with all or any of the consultation requirements in relation to any qualifying works or qualifying long term agreement, the tribunal may make the determination if satisfied that it is reasonable to dispense with the requirements.

(2) In section 20 and this section—

"qualifying works" means works on a building or any other premises, and

"qualifying long term agreement" means (subject to subsection (3)) an agreement entered into, by or on behalf of the landlord or a superior landlord, for a term of more than twelve months.

(3) The Secretary of State may by regulations provide that an agreement is not a qualifying long term agreement—

(a) if it is an agreement of a description prescribed by the regulations, or

(b) in any circumstances so prescribed.

(4) In section 20 and this section "the consultation requirements" means requirements prescribed by regulations made by the Secretary of State.

(5) Regulations under subsection (4) may in particular include provision requiring the landlord—

(a) to provide details of proposed works or agreements to tenants or the recognised tenants' association representing them,

(b) to obtain estimates for proposed works or agreements,

(c) to invite tenants or the recognised tenants' association to propose the names of persons from whom the landlord should try to obtain other estimates,

(d) to have regard to observations made by tenants or the recognised tenants' association in relation to proposed works or agreements and estimates, and

(e) to give reasons in prescribed circumstances for carrying out works or entering into agreements.

(6) Regulations under section 20 or this section—

(a) may make provision generally or only in relation to specific cases, and

(b) may make different provision for different purposes.

(7) Regulations under section 20 or this section shall be made by statutory instrument which shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.".'.—*[Ms Keeble.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Ms Keeble: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): With this it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 60 and 48.

Ms Keeble: I will speak at some length about these complex proposals because that may help Members, although I know that time is marching on and that others want to speak.

Mr. Don Foster: About marriage values.

Ms Keeble: Indeed. Although I have been as brief as possible so far—to the dissatisfaction of the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash)—these proposals require some explanation.

New clause 15 would replace clause 150, and is intended to provide greater flexibility in the drafting of new regulations setting out the consultation requirements that will replace those contained in section 20 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985. It reflects views expressed in response to an informal discussion paper on how the new consultation arrangements might work, and views expressed in a recent meeting of a public sector leaseholders' working party.

The revised measure incorporates three minor but important changes. It will provide the flexibility for exclusion of long-term contracts from the consultation requirements when the value of a contract is below a de minimis figure. Clause 150 as now drafted requires landlords to consult leaseholders before entering into any contract of more than 12 months—regardless of value—when costs will be passed on to leaseholders through service charges. While long-term contracts are cheaper for the leaseholder, we would not want added consultation costs to be passed on when that was not strictly necessary.

Concern has been expressed that the measure could mean landlords' having to consult leaseholders about a large number of contracts involving minimal costs to leaseholders. For example, when a large corporate landlord is entitled to recover a share of general administration costs from leaseholders, consultation may be required on contracts for the provision of office services and stationery. The cost of consulting leaseholders could exceed the costs that they would be asked to meet. That makes no sense.

The new clause will enable us to exclude contracts whose value is below a prescribed amount from the consultation requirements. When we consult formally on draft regulations, we will seek views on what the amount should be and how it should be calculated.

Clause 150 currently provides that, if the consultation requirements on long-term contracts are not met or dispensed with by a leasehold valuation tribunal, no costs under that contract may be recovered through service charges. We envisage occasions when a landlord will not consult because the estimated costs are less than the prescribed amount, as we have discussed. However, if the cost subsequently increases above the prescribed amount, perhaps through genuinely unforeseen external factors, it would be unfair to put at risk the whole of the costs incurred. Subsections (6) and (7) therefore provide that only the excess above the prescribed amount would be irrecoverable. That is in line with the existing approach for consulting on specific works under section 20 of the 1985 Act.

On dispensations, as drafted, clause 150 provides that a leasehold valuation tribunal may grant dispensation from all or any of the consultation requirements in a particular case. The intention is to ensure that landlords are not penalised for technical infringements that do not disadvantage leaseholders, or in circumstances in which it is not practicable to consult fully or at all—for example, where work has to be carried out in an emergency. It is arguable that, as drafted, clause 150 allows such dispensation to be sought only after the event. The new clause therefore makes it clear that a landlord may apply to a leasehold valuation tribunal for dispensation of the requirement to consult before the works are carried out.

Amendment No. 60 is consequential to new clause 15 and deletes the existing clause 150.

Amendment No. 48 would create a new power to exempt managers, by regulation, from the requirement to use separate accounts for separate groups of service charge payers. Again, it may be helpful if I briefly explain the rationale behind the Bill's existing provisions and our reasons for the changes. Under existing law, managers are allowed to hold service charges from unrelated blocks of flats in the same account, which can make it easy for the unscrupulous to misappropriate funds. For example, if a group of leaseholders who had a sinking fund of £20,000 asked to see proof that their money was being kept safely, they might be shown details of a bank account holding £50,000, which supposedly included £20,000 from their block. They might assume that all was well, but they would have no way of knowing whether the account should in fact hold a much larger sum.

We know of a case in which leaseholders' funds went astray and, because they were held in the same account as funds from other leasehold blocks, it was extremely difficult for them to establish precisely what had happened to their money. It is reasonable to assume that that is only one of many cases. Using a single account for unrelated funds also makes the job of certifying accountants much harder. If they are asked to produce a certificate relating to just one block, they, too, will be unable easily to establish whether the right sum is being held at the bank.

Many managers already use separate bank accounts as a matter of good practice, and the time has come when all should do so. However, we have received representations from some managers who claim that operating separate accounts would be unduly expensive. Such costs would, in turn, be passed on to leaseholders. We remain sceptical about such claims. Managers who already operate separate accounts say that the additional costs of doing so are relatively small. Certain banks have already designed packages to minimise the inconvenience involved, and to avoid the need to keep separate cheque books for separate accounts, for example. They also apply interest based on the total sum held at the bank, rather than on individual accounts.

None the less, we are anxious to ensure that the costs of operating separate accounts do not outweigh the benefits. After all, those costs would inevitably be passed on to leaseholders in the form of higher service charges. We have therefore decided that it is sensible to include in the Bill a power to exempt managers from the requirement to use separate bank accounts under certain circumstances. We do not intend to use that power unless we are presented with reliable and persuasive evidence that the cost of using separate accounts would outweigh the benefits in certain cases. Moreover, if we were to use that power, any exemption should be subject to the agreement of the majority of service charge payers concerned. The new power will also allow us to impose alternative requirements on managers to minimise any risk to leaseholders. We consider that to be a sensible precaution that would allow us to respond to any changes in the services provided by financial institutions, or in their charges, that might increase the costs of maintaining separate accounts to the point at which it became unduly expensive and the undue expenses were passed on to the leaseholders.

Mr. Cash: We discussed this issue at some length in Committee and I am glad that the Minister has taken the opportunity to describe the arrangements in new clause 15. It is always refreshing to note occasions on which consideration in Committee has produced improvements in legislation—and that is especially so in relation to this Bill, following the extended discussions that took place when it was first introduced and then on its reintroduction.

The Minister said that the new clause will replace the old clause 150 and section 20 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985. As new clause 15 states, when the new section applies

> "to any qualifying works or qualifying long term agreement, the relevant contributions of tenants are limited in accordance with subsection (6) or (7) (or both) unless the consultation requirements have been either . . . complied with in relation to the works or agreement, or . . . dispensed with in relation to the works or agreement by (or on appeal from) a leasehold valuation tribunal."

The new clause then defines a "relevant contribution". The Minister made the point that she wants to be sure that we do not end up with the costs outweighing the benefits, and that is an important point. However, that leads us to a feature of recent Government legislation. I was asked to comment on the Education Bill and I said that it was regulation, regulation and regulation rather than education, education and education. The position with this Bill is similar.

We all understand that an important Bill cannot cover every issue, but—as I said in Committee—it is a matter of increasing concern that a tidal wave of regulation is affecting the people of this country. The public are confused, because even if they can understand the opaque and difficult provisions of a Bill—we have already discussed several examples tonight and I have tried to point out how difficult it is for people to understand, or even have ready access to, the provisions that will affect them—it is even more difficult to understand those areas that are shoved off to be the subject of regulations.

We do not even know what the regulations will contain. In Committee, I made that point about the drafting and preparation of the standard form of community statement and the commonhold association. I do not want to go back over old ground, but it took more than a nutcracker to get the details out of the Government. I am glad that I succeeded.

9.15 pm

Mr. Mark Field: I understand my hon. Friend's concern about an overwhelming tide of regulation. Equally, I think all of us would accept that leaseholders must be protected. Some of the Government's suggestions are entirely sensible. However, does my hon. Friend have some thoughts on the de minimis provisions, on which the Minister was unfortunately unwilling to go into any detail, and the amounts of money below which such regulations would not come into play?

Mr. Cash: I should have thought that it was sensible to prescribe arrangements to ensure that people were excluded from the operation of the regulations except in circumstances where it was obvious that there was no alternative. Just as we cannot apply sunset clauses to everything, we cannot apply de minimis regulations to everything. What we can do is set a threshold and say, "The regulation will not apply in these cases but it will apply in others." As it happens, thresholds have already been set in a number of provisions in the Bill. They may have been applied in this case.

I have a general concern. New section 20ZA(5) states that the regulations will

"in particular include"—

it does not say exclusively include—

"provision requiring the landlord—

(a) to provide details of proposed works or agreements to tenants or the recognised tenants' association".

I do not know whether you, Madam Deputy Speaker, live in a block of flats like the block I live in. I dare say that most hon. Members do, certainly in London. I am happy to declare an interest and a concern, as I have done several times during our proceedings. There is the idea that, after we leave the precincts of the palace of Westminster, we will go to a late-night meeting with a tenants' management association and sit there between 10 pm and 1 am listening to harmonious, or very unhappy, discussions.

I have on occasion unwisely taken part in some of those activities. I am a little apprehensive, because there is always—I say it with great respect—the A1 barrack-room lawyer, who is determined to continue analysing the management association, the articles of association and the memorandum in every detail. *[Interruption.]* I take good note of the gesture the Minister has just made to me, which I perfectly understand. I assure her that those people do what they do in the great cause of ensuring that people understand the documents properly. All I can say is that there will be many occasions when the regulations will be buried from view. They will probably be in some obscure corner of a solicitor's office and cause a great deal of difficulty.

Mr. Greg Knight: My hon. Friend should know that there is a lot of concern among Conservative Members about the scope of the regulations to which the Minister has referred. Has the Minister given him any undertaking as to whether she will consult with him and other political parties in the House before the regulations are formulated? If that assurance has not been given, has an assurance been given that the House itself will have the opportunity to debate the regulations? I share the concern that he expressed a few moments ago on this matter.

Mr. Cash: I am glad that my right hon. Friend has raised that point. Vicariously, I pass it on to the Minister from the Dispatch Box. In a nutshell, will the hon. Lady ensure that we are consulted on the regulations? The question of their being subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House is a perennial problem. There is the question whether they will ever be properly examined, even by the House itself. That is another problem, so the Government should please consult. I also ask for a clear leaflet on the whole content of this Bill to be produced for those affected by it, particularly with regard to the provisions under discussion. Then people outside the House will be able to understand what is going on, with reference being made to the regulations if necessary. Please let us have regulations in plain English. If the Minister for Europe—this is the first time that I have referred to this today—can reduce to 300 words all the treaties from the treaty of Rome to the dreadful treaty of Maastricht, right the way through to the treaty of Nice, I hope that the Minister can give a clear explanation of the provisions under discussion.

Peter Bottomley: May I add two points to my hon. Friend's contribution? If the Minister cannot answer my questions this evening, I should be happy to receive a letter subsequently.

First, constituents have told me that, sometimes, in leasehold agreements, if someone who is not a leaseholder but a potential purchaser asks the freeholder for an answer to a legal point, the freeholder is free to consult his own lawyers and the existing leaseholders have to pay the legal costs. I find that surprising. That may be understandable in the lease, but it is not understandable to the leaseholders. The Minister may want to consult her officials on whether, here or in another place, that point can be covered by this new clause or by another.

Shona McIsaac: Many Members raised this issue in Committee—the leaseholder always seems to be paying the freeholder's costs in relation to many different things. Concerns were voiced in Committee, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that.

Peter Bottomley: I am happy to do so. The point is whether anything can be done about it. To raise the issue in Committee—and to have nothing done about it—is an advance, but I want a more practical advance.

My second point may fall within the new clause or outside it. Sometimes, managing agents and freeholders are highly reluctant to spend a small amount of money that can make a major difference to the costs to leaseholders. I shall give a brief example from the commercial field. When I was a junior Minister in the Department of Employment in the 1980s, I discovered that spending £250 on a water meter in the Department of Employment's office in Tothill street would save £100,000 a year—£100 for each employee. I then had that change made throughout the Department of Employment estate. In Worthing, which has the highest proportion of retired people in the country and a reasonable proportion of leaseholders, nearly all pensioner flats pay more for water in terms of council tax values than they would if they were on meters. Installing meters in blocks of flats is complicated—many managing agents and landlords do not want the bother—but the leaseholder would be the gainer.

Therefore, I hope that under this new clause, or under an amended version of it, or under an amended Bill, not only water companies but managing agents and freeholders will be subject to incentives or requirements to consult leaseholders, who will thus be told when it is likely that there will be an advantage. By installing a water meter—which is free from many water companies, or £50 from others—people may find that they can save £50 or £100 a year, which is a very high rate of return. However, leaseholders cannot always fix that by themselves.

Ms Keeble: I shall try to deal with the issues raised and, in particular, with the points made by the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash), who referred to regulations and gave the example of the de minimis level in the contract. Of all the provisions in the Bill, the one before us should be set by regulation because of the need for consultation and because we are talking about small sums of money. What is a small sum one year might appear to be completely trifling 10, 50 or 100 years later. Arrangements for such sums should be made by regulation.

The hon. Gentleman referred to "regulation, regulation, regulation", but it is often far preferable to use regulations for certain types of arrangements. If they are enshrined in the Bill, changes can be made only by primary legislation and the hon. Gentleman knows how rarely the occasion to do that comes along. We want an efficient means of making provision for the proper management of leasehold properties.

Questions were also raised about the application of the de minimis level and about the levels we had in mind. Subsections (4) and (5) of the revised section 20 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 are intended to provide the maximum flexibility in determining the prescribed amount and they will enable the amount to be based on the total cost of the contract, the total costs in any period or the costs recoverable from any service charge payer either over the length of the contract or in any other period. We wish to consult before we commit ourselves to any particular option, but it is our intention to exclude contracts only when the costs of consultation would be disproportionate to the costs of the contract. However, it is difficult to envisage what that might involve.

The hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) asked about the sums that might be involved and, to give him some idea, it might be that we exclude contracts where the annual costs paid by any leaseholder exceed £20 to £25. That might sound a small sum, but I am sure that the hon. Gentleman realises that, when there are many people in a block of flats, that might involve a substantial contract. It is important that there is proper consultation so that we get the amount right. We must strike a careful balance between costs and the requirement to consult.

The hon. Member for Stone asked many questions about the proposed new section 20ZA of the 1985 Act. The proposed new subsection (5) states:

> "Regulations under subsection (4) may in particular include provision requiring the landlord",

and paragraphs (a) to (e) list the matters, such as providing details of proposed work, to which the regulations might apply. The hon. Gentleman found the provisions to be very detailed and I do not think that he understood why people might be intensely interested in the issue. However, it is perfectly possible for people to talk at great length about who will do the work to their properties and how much it will cost. The fact that he finds that odd might reflect the way in which we choose to spend our evenings and not reflect the way in which people who are passionately interested in their homes choose to spend theirs.

The hon. Gentleman also asked for assurances about consultation on the regulations. I hope that I have already made clear our commitment to consult on the de minimis level, which is probably one of the most important provisions before us. He asked whether Members would have a right to discuss the regulations and, as he knows, if they are discussed under the affirmative resolution procedure, they will be debated in Standing Committee. That debate might be wide ranging and extensive. If the regulations are considered under the negative resolution procedure, the Opposition will have the opportunity to pray against them and then discuss them. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Stone now gestures at me.

Peter Bottomley: My hon. Friend is smiling.

Ms Keeble: Good. I had not noticed that, but never mind.

As the hon. Member for Stone well knows, the Conservatives frequently pray against negative resolutions and we have extensive debates on the regulations concerned. He will get plenty of opportunity to debate regulations.

9.30 pm

Mr. Greg Knight: Will the Minister tell the House tonight which of those procedures the Government will be prepared to use? It is obviously better from our point of view if she gives an undertaking tonight that the affirmative procedure will be used.

Ms Keeble: There is provision for a number of different regulations—some affirmative, some negative. I think that I am right in saying that the de minimus ones are negative. It will be possible to pray against them, but there will be consultation beforehand.

Peter Bottomley: Those who listen to our debates may not know this, but am I right in saying that if the Government are defeated on a negative resolution, the measure is still carried into effect?

Ms Keeble: The hon. Gentleman is right. However, there will be consultation and it will be in the interests of us all to make sure that we get regulations that work.

The hon. Member for Stone asked about plain English, and he is correct. My officials and I are very concerned about that, since the many changes proposed by the Bill will profoundly affect a lot of people and their homes. We are doing a lot to ensure that there is good information in plain English so that people know their rights.

The hon. Member for Worthing, West (Mr. Peter Bottomley) asked about a number of points, most of which did not apply to the new clause or the amendments but which were very interesting none the less. On the question of the legal costs for purchasers being passed on, if charges are levied under the terms of the lease, the provisions of schedule 11 regarding administration charges will apply; for example, they must be reasonable and there is a right to challenge them at the leasehold

[Ms Keeble]

valuation tribunal. It is always the case that if rights are given to people, they have to exercise them. However, the rights are there and the point has been considered.

I will write to the hon. Member for Worthing, West about water meters. One point that he might not have picked up on, if he has not been closely involved in the Bill, is that the Bill opens up to leaseholders a right to manage. That is very important—particularly for pensioners—because it means that they do not have to go to the trouble to enfranchise, but can acquire the right to manage in leasehold blocks of flats.

Peter Bottomley: In my constituency, the average age in a block of flats may be about 80, and most people do not want to take on the responsibilities of management.

Ms Keeble: I take that point, but in terms of people's ability to deal with issues that otherwise they could deal wit[illegible]ly through enfranchisement, they will now have this o[illegible]r route open to them.

That deals with all the points. The new clause and the amendments provide further improvements to the Bill and make it possible to look in more detail at some of the more detailed provisions. They ensure that we get the right balance between consultation and cost, for example, and that we help to improve the Bill for leaseholders.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 1

LANDLORD'S SHARE OF MARRIAGE VALUE

'Paragraphs 4, 4A and 4B of Schedule 13 to the 1993 Act (landlord's share of marriage value) are hereby repealed.'.—*[Mr. Sanders.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Sanders: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Government amendment No. 43.

Amendment No. 8, in clause 134, page 65, line 20, leave out clause 134.

Amendment No. 9, in clause 135, page 65, line 24, leave out clause 135.

Amendment No. 1, in clause 144, page 69, line 33, leave out clauses 144, 145 and 146.

Mr. Sanders: First, I declare an interest as a freeholder of a flat occupied by a leaseholder who pays a ground rent.

Under the Leasehold Reform Act 1967, marriage value was not deemed to be part of the valuation of the freehold interest; the leaseholder had only to pay the capitalised value of the ground rent, plus the reversion of the site value. In the pamphlet "An End to Feudalism", prepared by the Minister for Local Government and the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) before the 1997 election, a call is made to return to

> "the fundamentally sound logic of the 1967 Act, which does not include marriage value in the valuation process. Its subsequent appearance has tilted the balance significantly in favour of the landowner and there is a strong case for it to be deleted".

A freeholder can sell a property to a leaseholder for full market value, as there is no difference between the price of a 99-year lease and the price of a freehold purchase. Hon. Members have only to look in an estate agent's window anywhere in central London to see that that is the case. However, after a certain length of time, the leasehold property reverts back to the freeholder, who can sell it again for its full market value. During that entire period, the property's upkeep has been paid by the leaseholder, who must then pay marriage value on top of everything. That fee is exacted to compensate the landlord for the depreciation in the asset's value over the period that it has been in the leaseholder's possession. By paying for maintenance and upkeep for so many years, the leaseholder has already shouldered the financial burden of the property's depreciation. Marriage value is therefore a bounty on top, and it requires that the leaseholder pay again.

The Government have said that most compulsory purchase schemes are based on full open market valuation, and they do not want to depart from that principle. However, they have made a mistake regarding what constitutes the open market value of a property. The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors defines that value as:

> "An opinion of the best price at which the sale of an interest in property would have been completed unconditionally for cash consideration on the date of valuation, assuming . . . that no account is taken of any additional bid by a prospective purchaser with a special interest."

The leaseholder obviously has a special interest, as moving from their long-time home would pose much stress and inconvenience. If the Government believe, as they say they do, that the basis for property valuation in collective enfranchisement cases should be the full open market value, the RICS code of practice makes it clear that they should reject the inclusion of marriage value, which arises out of the special purchaser status of the parties involved.

The reality for many people is that they have no choice between freehold and leasehold properties. Due to the circumstances in which they find themselves, they may have no choice but to opt for leasehold, even though it may not be in their best interests. The complicated and murky practice of marriage value is widely misunderstood, and there must be a clearer and easier way to compensate landlords on the transfer of property from leasehold to commonhold.

Let us compare purchasing council housing with buying leasehold properties. For example, leaseholders have paid for mortgages and years of upkeep and improvements to their homes, yet they must still pay a premium to transfer their properties to freehold, but council housing tenants have had the upkeep on their homes paid for by the council—albeit with contributions through rent—yet they can buy their properties at a significant discount.

Leaseholders often feel that they are maintaining someone else's property, yet they are bled once again if they try to improve their position by enfranchising and converting their property to freehold.

Often leaseholders do not even realise that they are being taken advantage of because the calculations involved in these negotiations are complex and specialised. Going to a leasehold valuation tribunal is intimidating and costly, so many people fall prey to unscrupulous landlords without having any idea of their rights.

It is important to remember that leaseholders paid for their property when they originally bought the lease. Why should they have to pay extra to keep what should already be theirs? Additionally, the leaseholder may have paid just as much as neighbouring freeholders for the right to live in their property. Why should they have to pay again when their neighbours do not have to?

The main problem with marriage value is that it takes unfair advantage of the fact that leaseholders have a vested interest in keeping the property in which they live and so are willing to pay whatever it takes to gain freehold rights to their property. In that relationship, freeholders have the power and can force leaseholders to pay exorbitant prices to hold on to the property in which they live. That is not a realistic market situation; it is unfair to the leaseholder, who should not be charged more than an outside investor would be asked to pay for the property.

We have been having this debate in the Chamber for more than 100 years. Its time has come—we should rid ourselves of marriage value.

Ms Keeble: I will be brief because I understand that a number of other hon. Members want to speak on this issue. I shall begin by speaking to Government amendment No. 43, which also relates to marriage value.

The Bill generally provides for marriage value to be disregarded in cases where the unexpired term of a lease exceeds 80 years. Our policy aim is to prevent potentially expensive debate over sums of money which would, in any event, be very small. However, in the case of collective enfranchisement, the Bill provides that marriage value should be disregarded only if the unexpired terms of all leases of flats held by participating members of the right-to-enfranchise company exceed 80 years.

On reflection, we do not consider that that approach meets our policy objectives. It has the potential for abuse. If a landlord owned just one flat in a block directly, there would be nothing to prevent him from granting a new, relatively short lease for that flat to an associated company which could then exercise its right to participate in a collective enfranchisement bid.

Mr. Mark Field: That argument was made earlier in relation to unanimity and 100 per cent. consent. It is now being used to justify the provisions on marriage value.

Ms Keeble: The argument refers to the amendment to which I am speaking; it is not about marriage value.

The position that I have just described would enable marriage value to be claimed on the whole block, even though all the other leases may exceed the 80-year threshold. We decided, therefore, to provide that marriage value should be disregarded on any individual lease with more than 80 years left until its expiry. This is consistent with the approach taken for the individual rights of lease renewal and house enfranchisement, and would be a better way to meet our policy objectives.

More generally, marriage value is clearly one of the most controversial aspects of the Bill. It has been widely discussed and, as I mentioned in Committee, is a major issue for leasehold reform campaign groups. These groups have long campaigned for marriage value to be excluded from the purchase price altogether, and we have considered their representations carefully. However, we concluded that it would be wrong to remove marriage value from the determination of the price. Although some may not like it, we must recognise the property rights of both the freeholder and the leaseholder. That said, there are defects in the provisions that need to be corrected.

The right to enfranchise is a right of compulsory purchase, as is the right to a longer lease on a flat. To exercise it, leaseholders do not have to demonstrate that the freeholder is at fault in any way. It is only fair, therefore, that the landlord should be paid the same price that he would have received from voluntarily selling the freehold—or a longer lease—to the leaseholder or leaseholders.

9.45 pm

When leaseholders buy their freehold or renew their lease, they obtain a benefit that no other purchaser would receive. When leaseholders of flats enfranchise, they can gain new 999-year leases without having to pay a penny for them. Similarly, a leaseholder who buys the freehold of a house is no longer subject at all to a lease. The value of that extra benefit is the marriage value. If existing leases still have, say, 80 or more years to run, new longer leases will be worth little more than existing ones, so any marriage value will be insignificant. If the unexpired term is relatively short, however—say 50 years—the difference will be substantial.

It follows that in a sale between willing parties where the unexpired term of the leases was not very long, the leaseholders would be prepared to pay additional money for the extra benefit but would certainly not offer the whole amount of the marriage value. They would be well aware that they represented the freeholder's only chance of obtaining a higher price than he would gain from an ordinary purchaser.

In practice, a sale would be agreed only if the parties agreed to split the difference: if the parties were equally willing and eager, the split would be 50:50. The freeholder would finish up with a higher price than he would have received from another purchaser, but I emphasise that the leaseholders would still finish up with an asset that was worth more than they had paid for it.

People often ask how marriage value can be said to apply to the right to buy a longer lease. After all, there is no joining, or marriage, of the two interests. The answer is that the term does not have quite that meaning in the lease renewal context. Indeed, marriage value is something of a misnomer. Lease renewal marriage value is quite different in concept from the same term in enfranchisement. As defined in the Act, in broad summary, it is the difference between the aggregate values of the landlord's and tenant's interests as they are before the new lease is granted and as they will be after it is granted.

The notion that, in one way or another, extra value is created by the transaction is common to both cases. For lease extension, as for enfranchisement, any amount of marriage value will be extremely small if the unexpired

[Ms Keeble]

term of the existing lease is still long. As with the right to enfranchise, the split of marriage value has been much argued about in individual cases, but in most cases the LVT has decided that it should be shared equally between the parties.

Our intentions are the same for both lease renewals and enfranchisement cases. The leaseholder should be required to pay no more and no less for the compulsory acquisition of a new lease than he or she would pay in a similar transaction between the same parties if they were equally willing. That is the principle behind marriage value, and the Government believe it to be sound. That is why we cannot support new clause 1, but have offered an amendment that will improve on the current position.

Mr. Mark Field: I broadly support new clause 1 and have received constituency representations to that effect. The Government's main argument in justifying retention of marriage value seems to be that abolition would be confiscatory. Almost all popular legislation since 1967—and perhaps even before then—is confiscatory in the sense that it compulsorily intervenes in what would otherwise be a free market for what the Parliament of the day considers to be the broader social interest.

It has been argued that the open market value of the freehold interest is greater to the leaseholder than to anyone else and that the cost to the leaseholder should reflect that. Hon. Members on both sides have expressed concern about the logic of that argument.

The view has also been taken that the leaseholder would gain an unjust windfall at the freeholder's expense. That concern could be overcome by a covenanting provision similar to that introduced under the right-to-buy legislation of the 1980s so that there should be further compensation if someone who bought a lease made a sale within a specified period.

We must ensure that, as far as we can, we expedite the succession of leasehold tenure. We must clarify and simplify those procedures. I hope that is the long-term aim of the Bill. However, the retention of the half share of marriage value remains a controversial and uncertain element in the cost equation. That will continue to be a significant barrier to the proposed progress of enfranchisement.

The abolition—or at least the watering down—of marriage value would thus contribute substantially to the achievement of the aims of the measure. It would be widely welcomed not only by the groups which have been campaigning on the subject but by a great number of lawyers and other professionals who have to deal with the practicalities.

Shona McIsaac: I have to announce an interest on behalf of people living in the 21,000 leasehold houses in my constituency and in the neighbouring town of Grimsby.

Those people should not be affected by marriage value—the landlord's bounty. However, as I explained to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary during Committee, because of the complexity of the rules and guidelines on marriage value people are ripped off on many occasions. People are charged far more than they legally should be because marriage value is used to get even more money from enfranchising leaseholders to whom it should not apply.

I point out to Liberal Democrat Members—as I did in Committee—that marriage value will not be scrapped at this stage. I have concerns about it. In Committee, I went through the mathematics of a hypothetical case to show that the landlord realises that value on day one. As the property can revert to him after 99—or 999—years the landlord obtains even more than the market value.

During Committee, my hon. Friend the Minister gave me some assurances that marriage value would apply as little as possible. One of the measures that I asked her to consider was creating a level playing field for flats and houses. Marriage value does not apply to flats where the freeholder voluntarily sells on the leases. The tenants have the right of first refusal and marriage value does not come into play.

That right does not exist for people who live in freehold houses—about half the leasehold houses in the country. About 1 million houses are affected. Landlords can dispose of those freeholds without informing any of the residents. That has happened in whole streets in my constituency. If we were to give the right of first refusal to people living in such houses marriage value would not apply.

My hon. Friend assured me that she would consider that proposal. She also assured me that, due to the complexity of the law and the lack of understanding of the mathematics involved, she would devise a formula—probably through a statutory instrument—to which freeholders would have to adhere and which would show what people were paying for.

Mr. Field: Is not one of the concerns that any mathematical formula would have to be far more complicated, because it would have to be regionalised for different parts of the United Kingdom, or even different parts of London? That confusion is one of the reasons why many people feel that we should abolish the whole concept of marriage value.

Shona McIsaac: If we had some simplicity and clarity, people would not have such concerns. Because of the complexities, people are being grossly overcharged—ripped off. There should be an obligation on the freeholder to inform the leaseholder how the price was arrived at. At present, figures are plucked out of the air. In my constituency, the fee for enfranchising exactly the same type of property can range from £2,000 to £20,000. That unacceptably high level of charge can happen because of the complexities in the structure of marriage value.

I hope that the Minister can assure my constituents and the House that she will do all that she can to ensure that marriage value is applied less to leasehold properties.

Mr. David Lepper (Brighton, Pavilion): I welcome Government amendment No. 43, which provides the necessary clarification. It is a step in the right direction. Regrettably, however, it is not a big enough step. I am one of the vice-chairs of the all-party group on commonhold and leasehold reform, and I remind the Minister that in the consultation on the original Bill we expressed the hope that the Government would take the opportunity to abolish marriage value entirely.

The hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) has made an important point about how the leaseholder contributes to the value of the property over and over again, yet marriage value gives a bounty to the freeholder. I see no justification for marriage value in the definition of open market value set out by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. The Government have missed an opportunity. I will support Government amendment No. 43, but I cannot support the Government in opposing the new clause.

Mr. Sanders: Let me re-emphasise the point that the leaseholder has paid for the property once, when taking up the lease, and again on enfranchisement. There can be no justification for an extra sum, even if it were to be split 50:50, as the Minister suggests.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 48, Noes 294.

Division No. 190] **[9.58 pm**

AYES

Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Baker, Norman
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Burstow, Paul
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cotter, Brian
Dodds, Nigel
Doughty, Sue
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flook, Adrian
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Gidley, Sandra
Hancock, Mike
Heath, David
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Moore, Michael
Öpik, Lembit
Pugh, Dr John
Rendel, David
Rosindell, Andrew
Sanders, Adrian
Sedgemore, Brian
Selous, Andrew
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tyler, Paul
Webb, Steve
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Younger–Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Tom Brake and
Bob Russell.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burde[illegible] Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca–Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan

Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Anne McGuire and
Mr. Tony McNulty.

Question accordingly negatived.

It being after Ten o'clock, further consideration stood adjourned.

Bill, as amended in the Committee, to be further considered tomorrow.

CONSOLIDATED FUND (NO. 2) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Question, That the Bill be now read a Second time, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 56 (Consolidated Fund Bills), and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith, and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

SOCIAL SECURITY

That the draft Tax Credits Up-rating Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 14th February, be approved.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

COMPANIES

That the Companies (Fees) (Amendment) Regulations 2002 (S.I., 2002, No. 317), dated 13th February 2002, a copy of which was laid before this House on 14th February, be approved.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

Question agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT (EASTER)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 25 (Periodic adjournments),

That this House, at its rising on Tuesday 26th March, do adjourn till Tuesday 9th April 2002.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Ordered,

That the Fur Farming (Compensation Scheme) (England) Order 2002 (S.I. 2002, No. 221), dated 5th February 2002, a copy of which was laid before this House on 7th February, be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

PETITION

Mobile Phone Mast, Kensworth

10.13 pm

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): I rise to present the petition of 370 residents of the village of Kensworth in Bedfordshire, a number of whom believe that they have experienced health problems since the siting of a mobile telephone mast in the village.

The petitioners declare:

That they object to the siting of a mobile telephone mast at Common road, Kensworth; and that they oppose any proposals to site such masts within residential areas in the village.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to take such measures as are within his power to have the mobile telephone mast removed and to prevent the siting of any such mast within residential areas of Kensworth.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Cemeteries

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

10.15 pm

Norman Baker (Lewes): I am very pleased to have this opportunity to raise an issue of considerable importance to my constituents. I have learned over the last couple of weeks, if I did not know it before, that national issues are not always the ones that exercise local opinion. The question of cemeteries is undoubtedly the most important issue for my constituents at the moment, as my local papers—the *Seaford Gazette*, the *Sussex Express* and *The Leader*—can demonstrate, as they feature this issue on their front pages regularly.

The reason for this is that safety tests have been carried out by one of the two district councils in my constituency, Lewes district council. Those tests, notably in graveyards in Seaford and Lewes, have led to huge numbers of headstones—more than 500, in fact—being knocked over by the council, which has caused considerable distress and anguish to relatives of the deceased, who have described the actions as desecration and vandalism. It is clear that, for many, this action has brought back the pain of bereavement, and my sympathy goes to all who have seen the headstones of their loved ones toppled.

The situation has been made worse by the fact that inadequate warning was given by the council. Small notices were posted on site only about two weeks before the tests were carried out, although many people visit the cemeteries where their loved ones are buried only once a year, perhaps on the anniversary of the death of the person they cared for. Many people, even now, may still not know that the next time they visit the cemetery in Seaford or Lewes, they will find that their loved one's headstone has been knocked flat. I am sorry to say that no effort was made by the council to contact the surviving relatives before the action was taken. I am pleased that the council has at last apologised for the distress that has been caused, and that members of the council are now involved. A group has been set up under Councillor Eddie Collict, a diligent and competent councillor, to investigate the circumstances that led to these events. That action is belated, but very welcome.

A number of issues have arisen as a consequence of this episode, and I want to address them tonight with the Minister. I hope that she will not mind if I ask some very technical questions, because they are the questions that my constituents are asking me. I entirely understand if she cannot answer them all tonight, but perhaps she will be so good as to write to me afterwards if that is the case.

The council was concerned that the headstones were potentially unsafe. I ask the Minister to confirm that this council—every council—has a duty of care and is obliged to ensure that headstones are not unsafe, and that it was therefore acting within its rights in carrying out these tests. The point was made in a report by the then Select Committee on the Environment, Transport and the Regions that there have been three fatal accidents involving children and falling memorials in recent years, so it is understandable that the council should want to carry out the tests.

What guidance has been issued to local authorities in respect of testing, in terms of whether they should test and of the method of testing to be employed? Lewes district council tells me that there is no UK standard for such testing, although I understand that a draft standard—British standard 8514—is in development. The council understands that this will not be a push test—that is, one in which pressure is applied directly to a gravestone—but one involving a complicated test rig, which will measure construction standards. The council is concerned that such a test could not easily be used in situ, where there are physical constraints such as memorials placed in close proximity to one another.

I would be grateful if the Minister clarified whether there is to be a British standard safety test, or whether there is already one of which I am unaware. Is there one coming? When will it be adopted? Will it be a push test or a rig test? If it is to be a rig test, what is her response to the council's objections to such a test? I apologise for the fact that these questions are rather technical, but they are the questions that are exercising many of the constituents who have written to me.

The council says that it applied the only existing European standard that it could find: the German standard, technically called UVV 4.7, which applies a 50 kg push test to headstones. Does the Minister know whether that is the only standard in the European Union? Do the Government consider it appropriate? Pending the adoption of a UK standard, are councils advised by the Government to follow the German standard, or is there no advice as to which standard they should apply? The council says that the German standard has been approved by the Association of Burial Authorities.

The method of testing was the subject of considerable controversy at a public meeting that I attended in my constituency some two weeks ago. The testing involves the use of a device called a topple tester, which applies a force of 50 kg to a headstone at the height of 1 m. Clearly, if the headstone fails, it falls over; if it does not, it is deemed safe.

Do the Government have a view on whether that is the appropriate method to test headstones? I understand that Health and Safety Executive guidance states that it is not suitable for war memorials, crosses or angled headstones, and that it is suitable for use only with memorials that are more than 1 m high and in tablet form. Is that correct? If so, has the guidance been properly applied by the district council, so far as the Minister can tell? More to the point, how is a council expected to test other memorials for safety, if they do not fit that description?

I understand that the National Association of Memorial Masons recommended, as recently as 11 February, a test called a hand technique test, followed by a final assessment with a topple tester set at 35 kg—in other words, considerably less pressure than the 50 kg implicit in the German model.

I hope that I have demonstrated to the Minister that there is considerable uncertainty in the minds of my constituents and the council, and in my mind, about what exactly the guidance is, in terms of what test is applied, what implements are used, what pressure should be applied and where. That may seem rather detailed and inconsequential, but the consequence is that about 500 headstones have been toppled, with the resultant grief experienced by those who have gone to visit the graves in cemeteries in Seaford and Lewes.

I have seen—I am grateful to staff of the House of Commons Library for their help—Health and Safety Executive local authority circular 23/18, issued in

[Norman Baker]

August 2001 and entitled "Management of Unstable Memorials". It states that under the Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977, councils can take immediate action to make safe dangerous materials, but cannot do so for memorials presenting "no immediate risk" without posting clear notice and seeking the permission of owners. Can the Minister say whether that is correct?

Is it also correct that the council needs the permission of the bishop of the relevant diocese for work in consecrated areas? That clearly was not sought in the case in question. Is it possible that in Seaford cemetery, where 431 headstones were knocked down by the council, all 431 were at immediate risk? What is the legal position if stones were laid down that were not at immediate risk? Is the council responsible for that, and has it a duty to respond sympathetically and actively to people who say that they want the headstones put back as they were, before the council's action?

There seems to be wide variation in practice across the country. I have done a little research, and it seems that some councils are knocking down huge numbers of headstones. I referred to Lewes district council in my constituency, and 431 stones knocked down in Seaford alone. The report of the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee, to which the Minister will doubtless refer in her reply, mentions Bristol. The report states at paragraph 107:

> "Last year eight hundred gravestones were identified as being unsafe in Bristol City Council owned cemeteries and had to be laid down. In the current year"—

that presumably refers to last year—

> "a further two or three hundred stones will be laid down for health and safety reasons."

More than 1,000 headstones were laid down in Bristol, whereas in Eastbourne, which is close to my constituency, tests were carried out and only three headstones were laid down. There seems to be a huge variation in performance across council areas, which suggests a need for clearer Government guidance or regulation in this area.

I ask myself why so many headstones fail in Lewes. Perhaps Lewes is being assiduous and applying regulations carefully. The Health and Safety Executive, in the circular to which I referred, says that many authorities are not dealing with dangerous memorials, which presents a different problem. Presumably, some graveyards are not being looked into by councils, which is another problem—it is not the one in Lewes, but may be of interest to the Minister.

I can come up with three reasons why so many headstones fail. First, unnecessarily high standards are being applied, such as the pressure applied in the topple test. Secondly, the tests were improperly carried out in this instance. Thirdly, there is possibly a problem with the method of erecting headstones, and I ask the Minister to address that in her reply. In Seaford, 22 per cent. of new headstones tested by the council failed and have been laid flat, whereas only 6 per cent. of the older headstones in the cemetery failed. It seems that new headstones are less secure than old headstones, which is perhaps a perverse conclusion because one would have thought that older headstones were more liable to fail. The HSE has also referred to the fact that newer headstones are less able to withstand pressure.

What guidance and standards have been applied to the erection of headstones? How deep must they go, and what anchorage is required? Is there any Government guidance that specifies how a headstone should be erected? If not, I suggest that there should be some. In Germany, a third of the headstones must be under ground. That was traditionally the practice in this country until the 1950s. Since then, there have been more lawn memorials with no foundations, so inevitably many of the headstones that are tested fall over.

If the test is correct and headstones fall over, should legislation set a new depth? They must be inherently unsafe if the test is correct. If not, why are councils being encouraged to test them and knock them over?

According to the Association of Burial Authorities, most accidents occur when people kneel down to plant flowers and use the headstone to pull themselves up again, whereupon it collapses on them. That requires pressure of 3.5 kg, which is a tenth of the German standard and much less than that applied by Lewes district council and other authorities.

Will the Government set standards for the erection of memorials to ensure that they are safe? If they are subject to safety testing, they should stay in the ground. It is absurd that a memorial erected less than two years ago can fail a safety test. Why should people who have had a headstone erected so recently see it knocked over and be told by the council that it is their responsibility to put it back up? Someone must be at fault: either the council for the way in which it carried out the test, or the Government for the regulations, or the stonemason for the way in which it was erected. The person who bought the headstone cannot be at fault.

What is the position regarding historically valuable headstones, which may even be listed buildings? How does a duty of care dovetail with that? Are there grants to protect and reinstate such stones?

I would welcome some guidance on the question of costs, because frankly I do not know where to go on this matter. There are hundreds of fallen headstones in my constituency, and the council's view is that people are responsible for re-erecting them because they were unsafe. The view of my constituents is overwhelmingly that the council has a duty to bring them back to the way they were, because its tests were responsible for knocking them down. Is there some Government guidance on that? Does the council have a duty or a power to bring those headstones back to the condition they were in before it undertook its tests? This is the key question for my constituents.

That leads me to my two objectives. The first is to return cemeteries in my constituency to their former condition as soon as possible, so that people can see the graveyards as they were—respectable places where they can pay tribute to their loved ones—rather than as the scenes of violence that they are now. The second is to ensure that the necessary regulations, legislation and guidance exist nationally, so that this does not happen again in Lewes, Seaford or anywhere else.

10.30 pm

Mr. Mike O'Brien (North Warwickshire): I thank the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) for allowing me to speak, and congratulate him not only on securing a debate on an important issue but on the strength with which he put his constituents' case.

In my part of north Warwickshire there is similar concern about headstones and the disturbing of graves, although the circumstances are slightly different. The church in the village of No Man's Heath is redundant, but the cemetery has been used in recent years—indeed, in recent months. The Church of England is proposing to sell the church, which may go to a commercial buyer and may be used for a number of different purposes; but it will keep the cemetery.

However, a number of gravestones and indeed graves abut the church. Apparently the Church of England is not prepared to give any reassurance that the graves will not be disturbed. It is possible that some gravestones will be removed, and that the contents of graves will be disinterred. That is causing great distress to relatives, some of whom may have buried their loved ones very recently.

Could the Home Office re-examine cemetery law to establish whether relatives' concerns about people buried in cemeteries where the abutting church has become redundant can be given priority over the need to make a commercial sale for the Church of England's benefit? Obviously the Church of England must deal with its redundant churches properly and sensibly, but, as the hon. Gentleman said, we should also be aware of the feelings of those whose relatives are buried in the cemeteries.

10.32 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Beverley Hughes): I too congratulate the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker). The subject he has raised is important and emotive for families who may think that their feelings and needs have been ignored.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) drew attention to circumstances that differ slightly from the general circumstances described by the hon. Gentleman. The current law states that any buried remains to be removed must be removed in accordance with Home Office directions. That will not be allowed unless the Home Office is satisfied that any remains will not be disturbed by building work. If he gives me the details in writing I will pursue the matter, but we have instituted a process of re-examining the law and the advice and guidance in relation to cemeteries and burial, and I shall ensure that the issues raised by both Members are taken into account.

Although the Home Office is responsible for burial law and the law regulating cemeteries, it is not responsible for every statutory provision that may have a bearing on cemeteries. Cemetery authorities must comply with a wide range of other laws regulating their activities, including those relating to planning, environmental protection and health and safety.

The existing legislative framework of burial laws is designed primarily to ensure that certain minimum standards are observed. For example, there are powers to inspect burial grounds and to require health and safety measures to be undertaken. Individual burial authorities are given considerable freedom as to how they manage their cemeteries on a day-to-day basis. Among other things, that means that it is a matter for each authority to determine how to discharge their various responsibilities.

I agree with the hon. Member for Lewes that current legislation is in need of reform. It is uneven and inconsistent, and it does not give the Government the powers that they need to address some of the problems. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Environment Committee, which came to much the same conclusion on completion of its inquiry into cemeteries last year.

In the Government's response to the Committee's report, we announced how we would take forward the various issues identified. First, we undertook to set up an advisory body, which would include the Health and Safety Executive, as well as representatives of the industry and others. It will consider the issue of testing that the hon. Gentleman raised. Secondly, we would undertake research into cemetery management, training and maintenance standards. Thirdly, we undertook to conduct a survey of all burial grounds; and, fourthly, to carry out public consultation on the issue of law reform.

The advisory body has been set up. The researchers' report will be received shortly and we have now begun planning for the burial ground survey and for the consultation exercise. We aim to make substantive progress during the course of this year.

Burial authorities must also have regard to their wider responsibilities. As the hon. Gentleman said, cemeteries can present a real safety hazard. Open graves can be dangerous. Many older cemeteries contain tombstones and memorials that have become unstable. As he also pointed out, newly erected tombstones can also—astonishingly—be unsafe. That has resulted in a small number of injuries and even deaths. Health and safety practice must be at the forefront of any cemetery manager's mind. I know that the hon. Gentleman will not disagree.

Burial authorities must take action if there is an immediate risk of a headstone falling, but it would be equally wrong to lay down all or most of the headstones in a cemetery simply as a precautionary measure. The hon. Gentleman may be interested to learn that in one recent case the local government ombudsman found a local council guilty of maladministration because adequate prior notice of their intentions was not given to the families concerned.

Burial authorities must seek to get the balance right. Public safety is paramount, but the rights of memorial owners, who want to visit cemeteries to remember their relatives, cannot be ignored. I well understand the concern that the public will have if memorials appear to have been laid down as a precautionary measure or without due consideration of the other issues.

The legislation that governs local authority cemeteries sets out detailed procedures to be observed before memorials can be levelled in normal circumstances. Those procedures include requiring notice of the authority's intention to be placed in the cemetery, in local newspapers and, where appropriate, sent to those who have exercised a right to place a tombstone or memorial on the grave. The hon. Gentleman asked whether bishops should also be notified. I do not know the answer to that question immediately, but I shall obtain it for him. I also understand the feelings of his constituents who, given the situation in Lewes, want to know who is responsible for replacing the tombstones. Again, that is not a Home Office matter but I will try to ensure that another Department provides the hon. Gentleman with the answer.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned the deaths of three children. Partly as a consequence, research was carried out on behalf of the Confederation of Burial Authorities and, in the light of the findings, guidance on memorial

[Beverley Hughes]

management was published in 2000 by the Institute of Burial and Cremation Administration, which is the relevant professional body. That guidance recommends regular inspections of headstones and practical measures to make dangerous memorials safe. Laying down memorials is not the only option. Memorials may also be supported, cordoned off or repaired.

Lewes council, like any council, has a duty to ensure that tombstones and memorials are safe. There is no dispute about that. Last May, the council approved a code of practice and programme of testing memorials. In doing so, it drew upon guidance recently issued by the industry. Notices of its intentions were posted in the cemeteries shortly beforehand.

That exercise revealed that a proportion of the headstones were unsafe and presented an immediate danger. The council decided to lay them down and to contact the owners as soon as possible. Clearly, memorial owners and the general public seem not to have been prepared for that action. I am sure that there are lessons to be learned by the council and indeed by other burial authorities about providing more effective advance publicity. I understand that the council has asked the relevant sub-committee to look again at its code of practice and is considering the practicalities of notifying individual memorial owners in future.

As the hon. Gentleman said, it is important that the inspection of memorial safety be undertaken in a competent and technically proficient manner. The institute's guidance recommends seeking advice from structural engineers or other appropriate sources. Although testing equipment is available, the Health and Safety Executive has advised, as the hon. Gentleman said, that that may not be suitable for all types of memorial. The National Association of Memorial Masons has produced its own advice and guidance, which it keeps under review.

There is also the issue of who should undertake any survey of safety. Some will consider that memorial masons may not be sufficiently independent, but that must be a matter of judgment for the burial authority. It certainly seems sensible for the testing to be undertaken by an appropriately trained person. Training on removal and replacement of memorials is already provided by the institute.

Nevertheless, the way in which the various representative and technical organisations have responded in addressing the problems has been positive. In addition to guidance to their members, a cemetery safety awareness campaign was initiated to bring home to the public, particularly children, the dangers that are posed by memorial headstones.

This is quite a difficult thing to say but we have to remember that, although we are talking about families who are grieving for someone whom they have lost, they have an important share of the responsibility for ensuring that the memorials are put up safely in the first place and indeed that they are maintained. I recognise that for older memorials the loss of contact with the owners is a real difficulty for the burial authorities.

The hon. Gentleman asked quite a large number of technical questions. Although I could theoretically answer him because I have all the detail here in terms of weight, measures and distances, I do not think it appropriate to plough through that. However, I assure him that I will write to him on all those technical questions.

Norman Baker: The Minister is giving a helpful reply for my constituents. Before time runs out, can she say how she can reconcile the fact that in Seaford, 421 stones have been felled, compared with just three in Eastbourne where similar tests were carried out? Why do the new gravestones seem to be failing and the old ones not?

Beverley Hughes: I cannot answer the hon. Gentleman as to why there is that disparity, but the fact that there is that variation suggests—I think that this is the real point of his question—that there is at the very least a lack of consistency in how burial authorities and local authorities are undertaking these responsibilities. That itself points to the need perhaps for more effective guidance. I will feed that and indeed all the issues that he has raised into the work that the advisory group is doing for us.

Memorialisation of the dead is an important aspect of our society. It demonstrates respect for the people we have lost and provides comfort for the bereaved. We must not allow poor workmanship or poor site management to undermine the historic, cultural and emotional value of our local cemeteries. From what the hon. Member for Lewes and my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire said, I accept that more work is needed to bring appropriate expertise to bear and to promote common standards. I certainly assure the hon. Gentleman that I shall take up all the matters raised and feed them into the process that we have initiated.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fifteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 12 March 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

MERSEY TUNNELS BILL *(BY ORDER)*

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Tuesday 19 March.

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Squid

1. **Mr. Richard Bacon** (South Norfolk): What discussions he has had with the Falkland Islands Government concerning a multilateral treaty for illex fishery on the high seas. [39564]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Denis MacShane): We discussed a possible multilateral high seas agreement at the November South Atlantic fisheries commission meeting in Argentina, in which the Falkland Islands Government's director of fisheries played a key role as a member of the UK delegation.

Mr. Bacon: It gives me great pleasure to ask the Minister a question about squid, but before I do so, I should declare that I returned recently from the Falkland Islands, which I visited at the invitation of the Falkland Islands Government. I have registered this in the normal way and been assured by the Registrar of Members' Interests that my question is not in breach of the advocacy rule.

Is the Minister aware that satellite photographs show fishing boats on the high seas emitting more light than the city of Buenos Aires because there are so many of them? Will he ensure, in the spirit of what the Secretary of State for Defence said about the Falkland Islands yesterday, that there is wider co-operation between Argentina and the Falkland Islands, especially in view of the fact that the European Union negotiations have not proceeded well in the last three years? Will he also ensure that this subject is high on the agenda at the meeting of the South Atlantic fisheries commission next week, and that it stays on the agenda because it is in the interest of both countries and will do more to promote the economic development of the Falkland Islands than any other issue, according to legislative councillors I have met there?

Mr. MacShane: I thank the hon. Gentleman and his two colleagues, my hon. Friends the Members for North Durham (Mr. Jones) and for Motherwell and Wishaw (Mr. Roy), who went to the Falkland Islands recently and expressed the continuing care of the House, the Government and the British people for the safe prosperity and future of the islands. My answer to the hon. Gentleman is simply yes, this is an important issue and it will be discussed next week.

Zimbabwe

2. **Richard Ottaway** (Croydon, South): If he will make a statement on the conduct of the Zimbabwean elections. [39565]

9. **Barbara Follett** (Stevenage): What recent discussions he has had with the countries of southern Africa about securing a solution to the crisis in Zimbabwe. [39572]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): Counting in the election is under way today. As the House is well aware, there has been every sign of ZANU-PF-backed violence and intimidation, right up to the close of polling, as well as many reports of irregularities, including a shortage of polling booths in urban areas, and harassment of opposition election agents in rural areas. We will make a final judgment when the outcome of the election is declared and the international observers have reported. I will, of course, keep the House informed. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made clear in his statement last Wednesday, Zimbabwe dominated discussions at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Australia.

Richard Ottaway: Murder, violence, intimidation, gerrymandering, corruption, arson—these are the lengths to which Mr. Mugabe has gone to thwart the democratic process in Zimbabwe. Leaving aside the impotence of the Commonwealth, does the Foreign Secretary agree that Mr. Mugabe has no legitimate right to be head of state in Zimbabwe, and will he confirm that this Government will not recognise him as such?

Mr. Straw: The descriptions that the hon. Gentleman has uttered are entirely accurate. This is a terrible period not only for Zimbabwe but for those who hold dear the cause of democracy in Africa and elsewhere. I am not making predictions about the formal outcome of the election, but I promise that I will keep the House informed and, if I can, I will make a statement to the House about the decisions that we shall make. The only reason why that might not immediately be possible would be if such decisions were made at a weekend.

On the issue of recognition, it is states that are recognised, not Governments—a view also taken by the previous, Conservative, Administration. Of course, if it becomes clear, in the event of President Mugabe's being declared the winner, that he has stolen the election—the evidence is already pretty strong—that will have enormous implications for the nature of our relationship with Zimbabwe.

Barbara Follett: Will my right hon. Friend do all that he can to ensure the early release of the general secretary of the Movement for Democratic Change, Welshman Ncube, who was arrested yesterday? His arrest typifies the appallingly undemocratic way in which the elections are being conducted.

Mr. Straw: The answer to my hon. Friend is yes. I have been in touch with Brian Donnelly, the British high commissioner in Zimbabwe, about this matter as well as many others. The fact that President Mugabe and ZANU-PF have resorted to methods of violence, intimidation, murder and bringing charges, which many say are trumped up, against members of the MDC, including Welshman Ncube and Morgan Tsvangirai, illustrates President Mugabe's lack of confidence in his ability to win a free and fair election.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): May I, from this side of the House, warmly congratulate the Foreign Secretary on the reply that he gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway)? Whatever the outcome of the election, I remain optimistic that the presidential candidate from the Movement for Democratic Change can and should be elected. Is it not devastating that the objectives and criteria of the Harare declaration of 1991 have been busted open and flagrantly abused by the current president of that country? We want a change, so that the wonderful people of Zimbabwe can share in the genuine growth and prosperity that they warmly deserve.

Mr. Straw: I agree with the hon. Gentleman, and I am grateful to him for his remarks. I hope that the issue of democracy in Zimbabwe will not be not subject to partisan exchanges across the Floor. Everyone should be united on the need for democracy and for all sides in this country to support the forces of democracy. As for the future, my long experience of elections is that they are often difficult to predict, even more so when there has been such intimidation and so many irregularities. The immediate future for the people of Zimbabwe may be dark, but I have faith that they will be able to come through that, and that in the end democracy and right will triumph.

Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the stand that he took on suspension at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting. Can he confirm that steps will be taken by the institution of the Commonwealth following the election result? Does not the Commonwealth have to grapple with the issue of suspension in the long term? In the future, other countries will deserve to be suspended, just as Zimbabwe deserves to be suspended now.

Mr. Straw: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made it clear last Wednesday that we regretted the decision—or lack of decision—of the Commonwealth Heads of Government in Australia last week not to move immediately to suspend the Mugabe Government from the Commonwealth, just as I greatly regretted the failure of the Commonwealth Ministers action group to do so when it met on 31 January.

At Coolum, it was agreed that a troika of the three Heads of Government should be established to determine whether Zimbabwe should be suspended following the outcome of the election and the report of the Commonwealth observers. What decisions they make remains to be seen, but what has become clear over the past year is that the existing arrangements for what amounts to disciplinary action by the Commonwealth need to be changed to take account of regimes, like the Mugabe regime, that may have been democratically elected but have rapidly resorted to undemocratic practices. I am pleased to say that at least one good thing happened at Coolum, which was that the decision was taken to ensure that there is such a disciplinary process in future.

Mr. Boris Johnson (Henley): At the last Labour party conference, the Prime Minister said that there would be no tolerance of the activities of Mr. Mugabe's henchmen. I do not want to anticipate the statement that the Foreign Secretary proposes to make in the next few days, but can he tell the House exactly how that policy of no tolerance is to be put into effect?

Mr. Straw: I can tell the House what has already happened. On 18 February, I managed to secure the unanimous agreement of all 15 member states of the European Union for sanctions that are targeted at individuals in ZANU-PF, including a ban on military sales, and not at the people of Zimbabwe. As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, the United States has taken similar measures, although they are not quite as comprehensive. If the worst happens in Zimbabwe and the election is stolen by President Mugabe, we will be in close touch with our European Union, Commonwealth and American allies about what further action can be taken.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): My hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack)—[Hon. Members: "Macclesfield."] I am sorry. How could I confuse my two hon. Friends? I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) for rightly reminding us of the 1991 Commonwealth declaration, which ironically was signed in Harare. A quotation from that declaration was included in the booklet produced by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office yesterday to celebrate Commonwealth day. It is worth recalling the words:

> "We believe . . . in the individual's inalienable right to participate by means of free and democratic processes in the society in which he or she lives."

Does the Foreign Secretary agree that the Harare declaration rings tragically hollow in Zimbabwe today? Has not the Mugabe regime ridden roughshod over the principles of democracy, making a total mockery of that declaration? Has not the barbarous and brutal conduct of the election—both before and during it—been outrageous, and on any fair test unacceptable? Why will the Foreign

Secretary not make it clear today that if Mugabe is proclaimed the winner, he will reject the result and act accordingly?

Mr. Straw: Is Zimbabwe—is the regime of President Mugabe—in breach of the Harare declaration? Yes, manifestly so: there is not the slightest doubt about that. At least I got the Commonwealth to recognise that in the Commonwealth ministerial action group, both before Christmas and on 31 January. It is not just me saying this; there is now the clearest possible recognition of the breach.

As for what action we should take, I think it wise to await the outcome of the election. Counting is taking place this afternoon. I promise to keep the House informed and, if I am physically able, to make a statement to the House immediately. Let us make decisions when we know the full facts.

Mr. Ancram: The right hon. Gentleman obviously has more faith in the Mugabe-endorsed election observers than I have.

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the Commonwealth disgraced itself at last week's Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting? Does he agree that if Mugabe claimed victory and the Commonwealth failed to disown the result and suspend Zimbabwe, it would be a travesty of everything that the Commonwealth stands for? It would be a failure not so much of the Commonwealth as of its collective leadership.

After so much dithering, which has led to so much suffering for the people of Zimbabwe, will the right hon. Gentleman now grasp the nettle and give the lead that is necessary for the building of an international coalition to restore genuine democracy in that sad country?

Mr. Straw: The gentlest thing I can say to the right hon. Gentleman about his suggestion that I have faith in Commonwealth observers is that it is an error rather like confusing South Staffordshire with Macclesfield. In fact I did not mention observers, or whether I have any faith in them. Whether the House has faith in them will depend on the quality of their report, in the light of palpable evidence—seen and read by all of us—of the irregularities that have been going on under the nose of the international community, as well as their own noses.

There are three principal sets of international observers in Zimbabwe, from the Commonwealth, the Southern African Development Community and South Africa itself. What reports they produce remain to be seen, but of course those reports will be scrutinised very carefully, and the credibility of those organisations and individuals will be as much at stake as the issue of the integrity of the election.

Iraq

3. **Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome): If he will make a statement on Government policy on Iraq. [39566]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): The Iraqi regime represents a severe threat to international and regional security as a result of its continued development of weapons of mass destruction. It has an appalling human rights record using torture and mass execution of political detainees.

Iraq continues to defy the United Nations. Of 27 separate obligations imposed on it by the UN Security Council, Iraq is in clear breach of at least 23. Her Majesty's Government are playing a leading role in establishing a new control regime which better targets the importing of military-related goods to Iraq, while allowing normal civilian goods to be imported without restriction.

The international community's most pressing demand is for Iraq to let the weapons inspectors back and, this time, to allow them to do their job without obstruction.

Mr. Heath: Does the Foreign Secretary agree, in the absence of compelling evidence of complicity, and given the certainty of the disintegration of the international coalition, and given the expectation of mobilisation by Iran and Kurdish separatists, that massive military confrontation with Iraq is certainly not inevitable and would indeed be foolhardy? If so, will he tell us what alternatives he proposes to ensure Saddam Hussein's compliance with UN resolutions?

Mr. Straw: As far as compliance with the United Nations resolutions is concerned, we in the United Kingdom Government are doing a huge amount of work, in which I have been involved from the day I assumed this office, to secure a more targeted regime of controls of exports to Iraq. We now have the agreement of the Russian Federation for the principle of what is called a goods review list; I hope very much that, when resolution 1382 comes up for renewal, it will be put fully into effect.

As for compelling evidence, I simply say to the hon. Gentleman that there is a huge amount of published compelling evidence about the complicity of Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi regime in the production of weapons of mass destruction. When they were in Iraq, the United Nations weapons inspectors discovered chemical and biological weapons and missile parts buried in the desert, and concealed in caves and railway tunnels. They also discovered large quantities of chemical warfare agents, including Sarin, Tabun, mustard and nerve gases. Iraq was also producing biological warfare agents such as anthrax, botulinum toxin, gas gangrene and aflatoxin. The weapons inspectors were unable to account for 4,000 tonnes of so-called precursor chemicals used in the production of weapons, 610 tonnes of precursor chemicals used in the production of nerve gas and 31,000 chemical weapons munitions.

In these circumstances, in our judgment it is more important than ever that inspectors from the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission and the International Atomic Energy Agency be given access to all relevant sites, to be allowed to inspect freely wherever they want to, at whatever time they wish to. That is the action which Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi regime must take to come back into the international community, for what lies at the heart of this issue is the rule of international law.

There have been nine United Nations Security Council resolutions, none of which Saddam Hussein has complied with in full, and 27 separate obligations upon Saddam Hussein of which he is in blatant breach of at least 23, notwithstanding the overwhelming and compelling evidence of his involvement in developing and producing weapons of mass destruction.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): As my right hon. Friend has said, the Iraqi regime is guilty of the most awful human rights abuses. He also said that international law was important.

I chair an organisation called Indict. It is funded by the United States Congress, and its main aim is to collect evidence against the Iraqi regime on charges of human rights abuses. Two years ago I took a file to the Attorney-General containing evidence, which can be tried in British courts under universal jurisdiction and the Taking of Hostages Act 1982, of human rights abuses perpetrated by the Iraqi regime.

Why, two years later, when a leading Queen's counsel says that we have enough evidence to bring this case to a British court, has the Attorney-General kicked it into the long grass by sending it to Scotland Yard? Why is a case not being brought? Surely that is a better option for dealing with the Iraqi regime than some of the options that are at present being considered.

Mr. Straw: I pay tribute to the work that my hon. Friend has done over many years in standing up for the cause of human rights and against the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq. My hon. Friend will appreciate that the main point that she raises is a matter for the Attorney-General, but given the seriousness of the matters that my hon. Friend has raised with me, I will readily take them up with the Attorney-General and have a meeting with her.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Does the right hon. Gentleman understand that many of us are very concerned about the talk of pre-emptive military action against Iraq? Many of us do not believe that it is as yet established that there is a sufficient requirement for that. Would the right hon. Gentleman ensure, first, that before he has further substantial discussions with the United States Government he holds a full debate in the House, so that the views of hon. Members can be identified? Secondly, will he ensure that if we are to have military action at any stage, that will be made the subject of a substantive vote on which the House can express its opinion?

Mr. Straw: I would welcome a debate on the matter. As the right hon. and learned Gentleman will understand from his experience as a Minister, this is a matter for the usual channels to sort out.

As for further debates, the right hon. and learned Gentleman is aware of the conventions of this House about the basis on which military action is decided. There is an argument for those conventions to be changed, but those are the conventions. But of course, as far as this and preceding Governments have been concerned, whenever military action has been determined, the House has had a crucial role to play. In respect of matters following 11 September, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister ensured that Parliament was recalled from recess not once but twice, and there were five separate debates—all in Government time—on Afghanistan between September and December.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that if military action were to be taken against the Iraqi dictatorship, many of us who fully supported the campaign in Afghanistan would have to be satisfied, first, that it is absolutely essential, secondly, that it is according to international law—I cannot emphasise that enough—and, thirdly, that the Iraqi dictator has not allowed the weapons inspectors back in? A great deal depends on the line that he takes over allowing back in those inspectors, who can check and verify weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. Straw: I entirely applaud my hon. Friend for being concerned about military action, because we all should be. It cannot be ruled out in this situation, but no one who is serious should contemplate the prospect of military action unless, as he said, there is the clearest possible evidence of the necessity for it and, alongside that, unless there is a clear need for military action to be taken when other practical measures have failed. I do not believe that anyone looking at this matter inside and outside Government is taking any different approach from that.

Certainly, we want the weapons inspectors to go back, but that has to be on the basis that they are admitted in circumstances in which they can properly do their job and are not subject to the kind of restrictions that Saddam Hussein imposed upon them in the period up to 1998.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): The Foreign Secretary was right to remind us of those UN resolutions of which Saddam Hussein and Iraq are in breach. Does he understand, as Mr. Cheney will find as he tours Arab capitals, that there is a strong sense among Arab Governments that we are inconsistent in our determination to apply some UN resolutions, but not all, and that there are other countries in the region that could well be taken to task for their failure to implement UN resolutions, not least 242 and 338? Does he agree that military action and the abandonment of the strategy of containment and deterrence can be contemplated only after all other reasonable alternatives have been explored, and with a proper understanding of the possible political and military consequences, including the break-up of the coalition against terrorism and, equally, the break-up of Iraq? As the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) drew to our attention, should not any British participation in military action be dependent upon an affirmative vote in the House of Commons; not just for the Members of the House of Commons, but so that the people of the United Kingdom can be satisfied that these issues have been properly explored?

Mr. Straw: I dealt with the right hon. and learned Gentleman's last point in answer to the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford, etc. *[Interruption.]* It is his penalty for having such a long constituency name. I strongly accept that we do not take military action without clear and compelling evidence—I have read out some of that—and take it only where it is clear that it is, as it were, the last resort. So far as the view of the Arab community is concerned, it is profoundly concerned about the middle east and it wants to see 242 and 338 implemented; so do the rest of us. However, there may at least be a process to achieve that.

At the same time, many Arab leaders whom I have met express, privately if not publicly, the gravest possible concern about the threat that the Iraqi regime has posed and continues to pose to the stability of the region, as well as about the appalling record of that regime—unparalleled in its depravity—against the Iraqi people themselves.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): I appreciate that—so far—the response to 11 September has been calm and measured, as the Prime Minister said, but does my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary understand the concern caused by those members of the Bush Administration who seem gung-ho about starting wars with various unconnected countries, and who even contemplate nuclear first strikes against countries that do not possess nuclear weapons, as well as against those that do?

Mr. Straw: If I accepted the assumption behind my hon. Friend's question, I would share his concern, but I have not met members of the Bush Administration who are gung-ho. *[Interruption.]* The ones whom I have met are careful and cautious. Of course, I understand the anxieties, which are expressed on both sides of the House. However, if we judge people by their actions and decisions—rather than by the noises off of their most extravagant supporters—the fact is that every decision that President Bush has taken in the international field since assuming his very high office has been careful, cautious, proportionate and within international law, and has enjoyed the support of the international community. I have no reason to believe that future decisions that he takes will be any different.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): The Foreign Secretary has already clearly shown that Saddam Hussein possesses a vast arsenal of weapons of mass destruction, and that he continues to develop such weapons. Does the Foreign Secretary agree that Saddam has shown that he is prepared to use them aggressively, not least against his own people; that he regards the United Nations and its resolutions and inspectors with contempt; and that, unchecked, he poses a growing threat to the union and beyond? Is it not an overriding responsibility and objective to stop Saddam, and to decommission his weapons of mass destruction before he uses them—or gives or sells them to others to use? Will the Foreign Secretary confirm that he shares that serious objective with our American allies, and that nothing—nothing—must be ruled out as a means of achieving it?

Mr. Straw: I have already put on the record a synopsis of some of the compelling evidence against Saddam Hussein, the danger that he poses and his continual flouting of the obligations of the international community and the Security Council of the United Nations. We should not rule out possible actions if Saddam Hussein does not comply with international law, but we have to be very careful in this situation. We must be cautious and proportionate, and ensure that the decisions that we take have the support of the international community and are consistent with international law. As I said a moment ago, nothing in my discussions with members of the Bush Administration suggested that they have in mind anything other than proceeding in that way.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): What is the Foreign Secretary's response to the King of Jordan, one of this country's best friends in the middle east, who says that a military attack on Iraq would be a catastrophe?

Mr. Straw: We understand the vulnerability of Iraq—[Hon. Members: "Jordan."] Sorry—we understand the vulnerability of Jordan. I think that it receives all its oil from Iraq, so it is in a very difficult position. At the same time, I greatly applaud the stand taken by the King of Jordan and his Government. If military action is in contemplation—it is not directly in contemplation at the moment—there will be the fullest possible consultation with all Arab states, and particularly with allies such as Jordan, before any decisions are taken. However, my discussions with the Government of Jordan demonstrated that every single member—from the highest level downwards—is profoundly concerned about the threat that the Saddam Hussein regime poses to their people and to the stability of the region.

War on Terrorism

4. **Mr. George Osborne** (Tatton): If it is his policy to support action against countries other than Afghanistan in the campaign against terrorism. [39567]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): The coalition did not take action against Afghanistan as a country, but against al-Qaeda and the Taliban regime that harboured and supported it. We support appropriate action against terrorism; indeed, it is our duty to do so under United Nations Security Council resolution 1373, which was passed on 28 September 2001.

Mr. Osborne: Who really speaks for the Government on the issue of broadening the campaign against terrorism? Is it the Secretary of State for International Development, who thinks that further military action is not sensible; is it the former Foreign Secretary, who leaks Cabinet discussions to advance his case; is it the current Foreign Secretary, who thinks that the American Administration are electioneering; or is it the Prime Minister, who conducts his own presidential foreign policy without telling anyone about it and does not come to the House to explain it?

Mr. Bradshaw: That question was not worthy of the hon. Gentleman. [Hon. Members: "It was."] Okay, it was. He quoted most of my colleagues inaccurately, but the Government are clear on the issue. As I said in my original answer, our policy is based on the unanimous United Nations resolution that was passed post-11 September.

Mrs. Lorna Fitzsimons (Rochdale): Does my hon. Friend accept that one of the lessons that most of my constituents and others who view the actions after 11 September have learned is that we ignore people such as Saddam Hussein and the Taliban at our cost? Does he agree that in deciding how to proceed—as we must—he has the support of the majority of the public? Will he ensure that we put as much effort into maintaining broad support, especially in the Muslim world and the Muslim diaspora? We have enjoyed support so far from the majority of British Muslims, who understand that they are just as much at risk from terrorism and acts of gross human rights abuses by Saddam Hussein as we are.

Mr. Bradshaw: I agree with my hon. Friend that it is important that we take people with us in the campaign, which should not be seen in a narrow military dimension. It involves international development, good governance and political and economic reform. Many people have missed the fact that phase two has already begun in many ways. In co-operation with several Governments, including the Philippines, Yemen and Nepal, the international community is assisting Governments who wish to deal with the terrorist threat but do not always have the means themselves to do so.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Does the Minister accept that in any action against Iraq it will be essential to carry with him not only his hon. Friends and Opposition Members, but the wider Muslim community and the country as a whole? That will mean building up trust in the Prime Minister. When will the Prime Minister come to the House—[Hon. Members: "Tomorrow."] When will the Prime Minister—[Hon. Members: "Tomorrow."] When will the Prime Minister make a statement on his proposals for Iraq, instead of just leaking stories to the Australian press?

Mr. Bradshaw: Members have given the hon. Gentleman the answer to his question about when the Prime Minister will next come to the House. The hon. Gentleman is wrong to assume that action against Saddam Hussein would be unpopular in the Arab and Muslim world. As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has already pointed out, little love is lost between Saddam Hussein and his neighbours. We will of course work to take people with us and maximise consensus.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): My hon. Friend will recall the widespread admiration for the Prime Minister following the events of 11 September, especially in putting together the broad-based alliance. Is he aware that if we follow the United States into action against Iraq, we run the risk of wrecking that alliance, further destabilising the middle east—which is already on the threshold of war—and causing widespread unease on the Government Benches?

Mr. Bradshaw: I do not think that it is correct to talk about Britain following the United States. Britain will make a decision based on our national interest. As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I have already pointed out, little love is lost between Saddam Hussein's regime and his Arab neighbours, but we will of course take into account views in the Arab world, as we did after 11 September, and do our utmost to build the maximum consensus.

Middle East

5. **Norman Baker** (Lewes): If he will make a statement on the prospect for peaceful resolution of the conflict in the middle east. [39568]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): The Government are profoundly concerned at the continuing violence in the middle east. We fully understand the intense political pressures on the Israeli Government to respond to repeated suicide bombings. Our condemnation of terrorism in all its forms is unequivocal. We look to the Palestinian Authority for 100 per cent. effort to deal with terrorism, but actions aimed at inflicting maximum pain on Palestinian civilians can never be an effective basis on which to build peace.

It is precisely because of the gravity of the situation that the parties concerned and the international community should do all they can to restart the peace process. Over the past three days, I have spoken to the Israeli Foreign Minister, the Palestinian Authority's foreign affairs representative, the US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, and to EU Foreign Ministers. We welcome the return of US envoy General Zinni later this week, the Saudi Arabian initiative and US Vice-President Cheney's visit. Both the Israelis and the Palestinians must grasp the opportunity that those provide to de-escalate the violence and restart dialogue.

Norman Baker: When the Prime Minister met Vice-President Cheney yesterday, did he stress that it is important for the middle east that UN resolutions in respect of Israel and Palestine are enforced as well as those in respect of Iraq, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) noted? Is not the way forward to establish a genuinely independent Palestinian state, as well as to make sure that Israel's right to exist within its own borders, free from attack, is recognised by all? Did the Prime Minister also tell Vice-President Cheney that any attack on Iraq would be likely to set the peace process back, rather than advance it?

Mr. Straw: The point about the United Nations Security Council resolutions was not raised with Vice-President Cheney for one reason only: the United States is completely committed to the implementation of key resolutions 242 and 338, which it supported in the Security Council. The US has helped to provide a route map to securing the resolutions' implementation through the Tenet and Mitchell plans.

In addition, we all share the aspiration and the hope that a secure state of Israel can exist within recognised borders alongside a viable state of Palestine. We have long made that clear, and I am glad to say that President Bush made it clear in almost those exact terms when he addressed the UN General Assembly on 10 November.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): Does my right hon. Friend agree with the comments of Jonathan Freedland in *The Guardian* last week, when he said that every last one of the 200-plus Israeli reservists who refused to go to the West Bank and Gaza were heroes? Last week, premier Sharon told the Knesset that the aim was

> "to increase the number of losses on the other side. Only after they have been battered will we be able to conduct talks."

Is it not time that the Government used their influence with the United States to say that, if the US is serious about tackling terror, the least that it should do is cut off the supply of arms to Israel, which is attacking Palestinian civilians daily?

Mr. Straw: With apologies to Mr. Friedland, I must tell my hon. Friend that I did not see that article in *The Guardian* last week, so I shall not comment on it. As far as the area's future is concerned, the situation there is extremely grave. Of course, there are people who, like my hon. Friend, speak strongly and powerfully for the Palestinians, and there are people who speak with equal passion on the other side, for the Israeli community. I hope that there are people in all parties in this House who speak for all sides.

The situation is profoundly grave. Yes, I grieve for all the innocent Palestinians who have lost their lives in recent weeks, and I grieve also for all the Israelis who have lost their lives. But I have to say that the terror that is now felt in Israel as a result of the increasing and escalating use of suicide bombers is palpable. *[Interruption.]* The terror carried out by the IRA in this country was bad enough, as many people—myself included—experienced, but I ask the House to understand and appreciate what it would have been like if it had included the terror of suicide bombs.

As I made clear in my statement, in these circumstances we must work to ensure cautious and statesmanlike responses from both sides. However, we must also have some appreciation of the pressures exerted on the politics of Israel, as well as on the Palestinian Authority. We must also try to look to the future in the midst of this grave darkness. That is why the United Kingdom Government have been working as hard as we can, and why we welcome General Zinni's travels to the region at the end of the week, the visit of Vice-President Cheney and, in particular, the initiative of Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): I preface my question by declaring an interest as a member of the Business Advisory Council of the United Nations. The Foreign Secretary has reminded us this afternoon of the grave developments in Iraq, but those were known to most of us before the shocking events of 11 September. In recent days, our Prime Minister and the President of the United States have clearly indicated their likely intention to lead our two countries into war against Iraq. Before the Prime Minister seeks the support of this House of Commons for such action, will the Foreign Secretary urge him to publish a document explaining in precise detail, for the benefit of those of us who do not have access to secret intelligence reports, the threats to Britain and the United States that would justify an attack on Iraq at this stage? Will the Foreign Secretary also tell us under what chapter or clause of the United Nations charter we would seek to proceed in declaring war?

Mr. Straw: The issue of the chapter on military action does not arise because no decision has been made about military action. I have said already that we accept our obligations in international law, but the issue of Iraq is about international law and the failure of the Saddam Hussein regime to meet the very clearest requirements of international law on him.

The hon. Gentleman makes a point about 11 September, and I would make exactly the same point. We were aware of much of the evidence against Saddam Hussein before 11 September. What 11 September did—for the whole international community, I hope—was make us more alive to threats from failing states, terrorism and rogue states such as Iraq than ever before. Surely the lesson of 11 September, and of the decay of Afghanistan which allowed terrorism to breed before 11 September, is that where we have evidence—as we had about Afghanistan before 11 September—we need to act on it before the international community and the peace of the world is put at risk to the degree that it was on 11 September and could be again.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Taking into account the act of outright aggression carried out in Ramallah today by Israeli forces under a Defence Minister who, to his shame, is the leader of the Israeli Labour party, the fact that tanks supplied by Britain may well have been used in that attack, and the fact that in the year of Sharon's premiership four times as many Israelis have been killed by terrorist acts as in the preceding year and four times as many still Palestinians have been killed—innocent Palestinians as well as innocent Jews, as my right hon. Friend says—is not the time approaching when economic sanctions and an arms ban may have to be considered by the United Kingdom and Europe on both sides in this hellish confrontation?

Mr. Straw: I accept my right hon. Friend's profound concern and applaud the way in which he has put his point. However, I believe that, although the situation is very grave, the best prospect of a peace, which can only come through negotiation, is by accepting the principles of Crown Prince Abdullah's initiative and by the work of General Zinni and others in ensuring that there is a pathway back through Tenet and Mitchell to direct negotiations. What is so frustrating is that virtually everybody is agreed, inside the Israeli Government as well as the Palestinian Authority, that there have to be negotiations, and they are pretty well agreed about the basis for those negotiations. We all have to get those negotiations going. If I felt that my right hon. Friend's proposals would assist in those negotiations, I might support them, but I have yet to be persuaded.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Following a recent visit to the middle east with the shadow Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), I tabled a question asking what was being done to help to allow Yasser Arafat attend the Arab summit in Beirut at the end of this month. I thank the Foreign Secretary for the fullness of his reply, and for agreeing that Yasser Arafat should attend. As violence in the middle east gets worse and worse day to day, any new idea is of the utmost importance. As the Foreign Secretary said, the proposals made by Crown Prince Abdullah deserve to be treated seriously and must be encouraged. Having an empty chair in Beirut instead of Yasser Arafat will only make things worse. What progress has been made in seeking a common position with the Americans that Yasser Arafat should be allowed free passage from the Palestinian Authority to Beirut and back again?

Mr. Straw: A good deal of discussion has taken place with the Americans to ensure that. I am glad to note that the Israeli Government have now agreed at least to release President Arafat from what effectively amounts to house arrest. We shall continue to put pressure on the Israeli Government to ensure that he can travel to Beirut and back again in safety. That is essential, and we are discussing it with the United States Government and others.

Afghanistan

6. **Mr. Chris Mullin** (Sunderland, South): What discussions he has had about extending the mandate of the international peacekeeping force beyond Kabul; and if he will make a statement. [39569]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): We have discussed the expansion of the international security assistance force with a number of our colleagues, including Hamid Karzai, chairman of the Afghan Interim Administration. The expansion of ISAF beyond Kabul is not a matter for the UK alone, but for the whole international community. The UN Security Council resolution 1386 limits ISAF to Kabul and the surrounding area.

Mr. Mullin: May I put it to my hon. Friend that the problems in Afghanistan are by no means over, and that a little help will be required from the Americans among others to stabilise the situation there before we turn another country inside out?

Mr. Bradshaw: I agree with my hon. Friend that an enormous job of work remains to be done in Afghanistan. The Americans are contributing a great deal in terms of special forces on the ground and financial support. However, I agree that the international community and the United Kingdom should not repeat the mistake that we made 10 years ago. We shall not abandon Afghanistan until we have ensured its secure and prosperous future.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): What steps are the Government taking, whether by the use of peacekeeping forces or otherwise, to make sure that the farmers of Afghanistan do not take advantage of their new-found peace simply to return to the massive production of heroin, as they have done in the past, and to export it through Europe and thereby ruin the lives of young people in the countries that liberated them in the first place?

Mr. Bradshaw: ISAF is not strictly responsible for the areas of Afghanistan to which the hon. Gentleman refers. Its remit is restricted to Kabul and its surroundings, so its ability to act in that regard is limited. However, the interim authority has put on record its determination to stamp out opium production. The signs are encouraging—the prediction is that this year's crop will be about a third of what it was under the Taliban.

We are working hard with the Afghan Interim Administration and the rest of the international community, with all the extra funding promised at the Tokyo conference. Part of that money will be used for crop substitution and other schemes to help wean Afghan farmers off opium production, which is basically the result of Afghanistan being a failed state. The most important thing is to get Afghanistan back on its feet.

North Korea

7. **Mr. John Grogan** (Selby): What recent contact he has had with the Government of North Korea to discuss bilateral relations. [39570]

11. **Mr. John Smith** (Vale of Glamorgan): What recent discussions he has had with North Korea on international security. [39574]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Denis MacShane): The North Korean Vice-Foreign Minister, Choe Su Hon, visited London in December. He met my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, and I held detailed talks with him. I told Mr. Choe that North Korea should end its missile exports and comply fully with its nuclear commitments under the agreed framework, tackle its poor human rights record, and hold talks with the South Koreans and the United States.

Mr. Grogan: During those discussions, was the question of the "sunshine" policy of engagement with the North of President of South Korea, Kim Dae-Jung, raised? In my hon. Friend's judgment, did President Bush's "axis of evil" speech help or hinder the development of that policy?

Mr. MacShane: The Government strongly support President Kim Dae-Jung's "sunshine" engagement policy. In all my talks in South Korea, I have expressed that support and I urge whoever succeeds him this year as president to continue that policy.

When President Bush interpreted the "axis of evil" speech when he visited the region, he made it quite clear that there was no question of any military attack on North Korea. He repeated what Secretary of State, Colin Powell, has said, that the United States is ready for talks

"any time and any place"

with Pyongyang. I again urge the North Koreans to take up that offer.

Mr. Smith: Does my hon. Friend think that the American Administration's nuclear posture review that advocates targeting North Korea and other non-nuclear countries will improve international security? What is more, does he think that it will help or hinder the international community's attempts to deter North Korea from developing intercontinental ballistic missiles that can deliver a nuclear payload?

Mr. MacShane: Surely the important point is that the policy review, as reported in the press, reiterated the United States' commitment to a "no first use" policy. It also indicated that America was seeking to reduce the number of its nuclear missiles from 6,000 to 2,000. The message that my hon. Friend and other Members surely should convey is that we want North Korea to engage with, to talk to and to open up to the rest of the world.

That is the view of South Korea, Japan and China, and, I believe, of the United States—and certainly of Her Majesty's Government.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Is North Korea not already developing ballistic missiles and is it not building silos for those ballistic missiles? Is it not the case that, when those silos are completed, there will be no way of disarming North Korea short of a dreadful attack?

Mr. MacShane: As I said in my first answer, I told the Vice-Foreign Minister of North Korea that we wanted North Korea to stop the proliferation and export of the missiles that it is building. It is a serious issue, and the hon. Gentleman is right to say that it must be addressed. That is why we want a policy of getting North Korea to the negotiating table—whether with the United States, South Korea or anyone else.

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): The Under-Secretary will recall the declaration of March 2000 that called for Government-to-Government dialogue and inter-Korean economic co-operation on the Korean peninsula. Given that President Kim's attempts to engage with the North have been limited in success and given North Korea's substantial military capability, including, we believe, the possession of weapons of mass destruction, will the Under-Secretary urgently press for a specific anti-terrorism agreement between the two countries, which has been requested by the South Koreans? That is at least one way of moving towards creating a sense of peace and stability in the region.

Mr. MacShane: That is a very positive suggestion. I certainly urge the North Koreans to enter into talks with the South Koreans to take that kind of confidence-building agreement forward. It would be most welcome in the region as a whole.

EU Enlargement

8. **Linda Perham** (Ilford, North): What discussions he is having with candidate countries to the European Union on their accession. [39571]

The Minister for Europe (Peter Hain): We have regular discussions with all the candidate countries because our Government are champions of EU enlargement.

Linda Perham: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Is he confident that Cyprus will be among the first wave of countries to be admitted to the EU in 2002 whether or not there is a solution to the problem of the division of the island? Will he visit Cyprus to discuss its application?

Peter Hain: I acknowledge my hon. Friend's work in the House for the Friends of Cyprus group. It does excellent work to bring the voice of Cyprus into our deliberations.

I intend to visit Cyprus in the near future, and that is crucial because we are seen as champions of EU enlargement. Countries such as Cyprus see us as their friends, but they do not see the Conservative Opposition as their friends, because the Tories voted against the Nice treaty, which will allow Cyprus into the EU.

Cyprus has already closed 24 of the 29 chapters that it has opened in the negotiations preceding its accession to the EU. We hope that the process will continue and that, if at all possible, Cyprus will come in as a united island after a bi-communal, bi-zonal peace settlement has been achieved. However, if that is not possible, the Republic of Cyprus and its Government are recognised by the EU as entitled to join if they complete the negotiations.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): Now that the Minister's fanaticism is becoming clearer to everyone, will he at least accept that it would be expensive nonsense and a shambles for the European Union to be extended without a fundamental review of its agricultural policy? Bearing in mind the level of overproduction and the enormous potential for production in eastern Europe, does he agree that we should not accept the complete nonsense that will result unless we get fundamental agricultural reform?

Peter Hain: The hon. Gentleman knows all about fanaticism, if I may say so. To answer his question, the common agricultural policy needs reform; there is no question about that. Indeed, the Government initiated proceedings that resulted in an initial stage of reform in 1999. That is continuing. The CAP cannot continue in its present form. It will collapse as a result of enlargement. That will force reform if no other forces in the European Union do so. The hon. Gentleman should take account of the fact that many of our friends, including the Czech Republic, Hungary and Cyprus, are among the applicant states that want to join the European Union. He should be supporting them, not opposing them like his Front-Bench colleagues.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have given notice of this point of order to you and to the hon. Gentleman concerned.

May I ask you to investigate the conduct of the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price), who has, perhaps inadvertently, misled the House? During last Tuesday's debate I raised with him allegations that the local Plaid Cymru party in my constituency had been receiving donations in exchange for local bus contracts. The hon. Gentleman dismissed the suggestion by saying, at column 157, that all those allegations had been immediately withdrawn. That is not in fact the case, as the hon. Gentleman must have known at the time. Both Councillor Bevan, who originally made the allegations, and the district auditor are now pursuing the matter with some seriousness.

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for the Chair.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. We are daily seeing on our television screens the horrible massacres that are occurring in the middle east. Civilians in the occupied territories are being attacked by tanks and helicopter gunships and bombed by planes. It is not an equal struggle, yet there has been an almost deafening silence from our Government, apart from responses to one or two questions that they had to answer this afternoon.

Yesterday the Prime Minister met Vice-President Cheney, who could and should be doing something to resolve the horrendous massacre that is occurring in the middle east. Nobody condemns suicide bombers more than me, but this is not an equal struggle. These are people with home-made weapons; civilians who are living under occupation and fighting a first-world army. Have the Government said whether we will get a statement on what is happening in the middle east?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for the Chair, but the hon. Lady has put her concerns on the record.

Broadcasting Act 1990 (Amendment)

3.33 pm

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Broadcasting Act 1990 in respect of restrictions on the holding of licences.

The importance and urgency of the need to relax the very restrictive rules that govern media ownership is widely recognised. Throughout the industry, across Parliament and among consumers there is a growing understanding that the changes driven by new technology, which are rapidly eroding old distinctions between television, computers and telephones, and increasing the array of information, services and entertainment available to people at home, at work and on the move, must be reflected in a new and much less onerous regulatory structure.

Historically, the media industry has been subject to more ownership controls than other industries. In the past, those restrictions were justified, by Governments of both parties, in the name of consumer protection because of the very limited choice available to viewers, listeners and readers, but today technology has removed those limits on choice. Millions of households have access to hundreds of television channels, compared with just three 20 years ago.

The Government recognised the need for change in their White Paper "A New Future for Communications", and again in last year's consultation on media ownership rules. In particular, they said that they are ready to remove the statutory obstacle that prevents channel 3—ITV—from being owned by a single company. Ministers have said that but they have not done it, and it does not seem likely that they will do so until the communications Bill goes through Parliament. Given that the publication date of the draft communications Bill keeps being put back, there must now be serious doubt about when all that will happen.

The earliest credible date for the completion of that legislation is the summer of 2003. Events in the industry mean that it is unlikely to wait that long. Even though the recent merger talks between Granada and Carlton broke down, pressures in the industry remain intense and few people believe that the present ownership structures can be sustained. We believe that unnecessary obstacles to change should now be swept aside, so that the industry can decide in what form it wishes to sustain itself. A heathy ITV alternative is needed to compete alongside BBC, Channel 4, Channel 5, Sky and so on.

I am attracted by the concept of a single ITV company, but I recognise that there are other options. Although my Bill would open the way for ITV to be owned by a single company, I must stress that it would not alter the requirements for regional or independent production. Those issues are separate from ownership. Of course, I stress that, although the Bill would remove the legislative obstacle to a single ITV company, any proposal would still have to pass the competition authorities in the usual way, and they, no doubt, would wish to examine the share of television advertising revenue that a merged company could command.

I must also stress that the measures in the Bill are only the first of a series of changes to media and cross-media ownership rules that I shall be recommending. We start from the assumption that, as far as possible, media ownership should be regulated by the same competition laws that apply to other industries. I do not believe that, in general, a special regime is needed any longer.

The competition authorities can have regard to market share issues when considering whether to allow mergers and takeovers. For the most part, that should be quite sufficient, especially as they can consider any market, whether regional or local, as well as national. Of course, I recognise that definitions of market share in the media world are much more complex than those that involve dishwasher powder or hair spray. Following this Bill, I shall introduce further Bills.

Let me to turn to the crucial distinction between regulation of ownership and that of content. Although ownership rules can broadly be left to competition authorities, content is another matter altogether. Although I firmly believe that a lighter touch is needed to deal with the distinction between harm, which needs to be regulated, and offence, which can be regulated by using the off button, I accept entirely that the media industry is unique and that the content of television and radio programmes must continue to be scrutinised. The right way to do that is not through ownership controls, but through licensing procedures, and the authorities must continue to monitor content through their codes and their duty to preserve diversity and choice for consumers. The powers exercised by the Independent Television Commission—for example, in relation to taste and decency or to the time at which channel 3 carries news bulletins—will remain unaltered. In the event of extreme and repeated breaches of any licensing conditions or of the programme code, the ITC would still be able to revoke licences in those extreme circumstances.

The Bill is timely. It removes a barrier that few people believe is still justified, having been rendered unnecessary and out of date by technological progress. It implements a policy to which Ministers say they are committed. Britain has many natural advantages in the media industry—a tradition of high-quality public service broadcasting, a good record of innovation and a large pool of creative and entrepreneurial talent.

I want the emerging global players in an industry that will be important in the 21st century to include businesses in which Britain's influence is prominent. I want to make it easy for British companies to take advantage of the enormous opportunities that exist. Helping them to do so will promote diversity, choice and quality. More freedom for broadcasting companies leads to a better product for consumers. Reaching all those desirable goals should not be obstructed by either ministerial sloth or bureaucratic regulation. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Yeo, Mr. Whittingdale, Mr. Peter Ainsworth, Mr. Greenway, Mr. Hammond, Miss McIntosh and Mr. Laurence Robertson.

BROADCASTING ACT 1990 (AMENDMENT)

Mr. Yeo accordingly presented a Bill to amend the Broadcasting Act 1990 in respect of restrictions on the holding of licences: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 12 April, and to be printed [Bill 110].

Opposition Day

[11TH ALLOTTED DAY]

London and the South-East

Mr. Speaker: We now come to the main business. I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

3.42 pm

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): I beg to move,

> That this House takes pride in London's great heritage and its status as a major international capital city; notes that London remains the heart of global financial markets, a world centre for arts, music and fashion, a leader in higher education, medicine and scientific research, and home to the most diverse tapestry of cosmopolitan culture in Europe; regrets that this status is being increasingly undermined by the steady reduction in the quality of life experienced by people in London and the South East and, in particular, the daily crisis faced by commuters, with delays on the railways increasing and the London Underground facing severe overcrowding with little hope for significant improvement; further notes the rise in violent crime, especially on its streets, and the continuing problems for schools and hospitals struggling to cope with low morale and staff shortages; further notes the environmental scars in many parts of London of abandoned cars, graffiti and rubbish, at a time when Council Taxes are rising even further; and calls upon the Government to address the needs of people in London and the South East and to improve the quality of overstretched public services.

Anyone expecting a yah-boo debate in which Conservative Members try to blame the ills of London on the Labour party or the Liberal Democrats will be disappointed.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Oh! I am very disappointed.

Mr. Pickles: My right hon. Friend is a hard man.

We believe that some consensus needs to exist on London so that everyone—the Government, local authorities, the Mayor and the Assembly—can work together. However, the odd word of criticism of the Government may creep into the debate, but it will be uttered in the spirit of friendship and comradeship.

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West) *rose—*

Mr. Pickles: On that basis, I give way.

Mr. Salter: In the spirit of what is clearly going to be a touchy-feely consensual debate, I give the hon. Gentleman the opportunity to apologise in public to the House and the British people for the decision of the Government whom he supported in 1996 to do away with the police housing allowance, triggering one of the worst recruitment and retention crises in police forces in London and the south-east. Was that wrong? Will the hon. Gentleman apologise?

Mr. Pickles: I am sorry that the consensus has broken down so early. Police officers are to come to the House to lobby tomorrow, when we will see what they think of the hon. Gentleman and the Government he supports.

[Mr. Pickles]

London is traditionally a vibrant and exciting city—a capital of commerce and business, of culture and the arts, and of many different and diverse cultures which have made it an attractive place. However, the question is now being asked, is London a good place to live and to bring up a family? In recent weeks, the capital has had two wake-up calls: we discovered, much to our shock, that a person is five times as likely to be a victim of crime in London as in New York; and the Mercer report on quality of life puts London 11th among all the European Union capitals.

On pollution alone, the Mercer report puts London behind Los Angeles, Istanbul and Lusaka; in the EU, only Athens scores worse then London. More important, on quality of life overall, which takes account of socio-economic factors, crime, transport, the environment and various other measures of whether a city is a pleasant place to live, London has dropped one place since last year and six since 2000. We are now ranked 41st in the world and 11th in the EU behind Vienna, Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Stockholm, Brussels, Luxembourg, Berlin, Paris and Dublin. By measuring factors such as personal safety and comfort, transportation and congestion, the Mercer report has picked up early the deterioration in our nation's capital.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Speaking of deterioration, will the hon. Gentleman confirm that throughout the 18 years of Conservative Government there was mass unemployment in London and massive cuts in the number of hospital beds, and that people fled the city because things were getting so bad? Will he confirm also that under Labour the population of London is increasing as people realise that there are more jobs and greater prosperity in the city?

Mr. Pickles: I do not confirm that. The hon. Gentleman should be careful or I will not follow the instructions he gave me a couple of days ago to lay into the Government on congestion charging and the public-private partnership. He cannot say one thing in private and something quite different on the Floor of the House. I hope that I have betrayed no confidences.

Mike Gapes: The hon. Gentleman has not betrayed a confidence; he has simply got something completely wrong. He knows, because it is on the record, that I oppose the madcap congestion charging scheme introduced by the—independent—Mayor of London, Mr. Livingstone. There might in principle be a scheme that works, but that scheme is not it.

Mr. Pickles: The hon. Gentleman would have done better to remain seated. We have seen the flame flicker and a sinner retract.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for smoking out the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes). Did not the hon. Gentleman vote for the Bill that allows the independent Mayor to levy those charges? Labour Members complain, but they voted for it.

Mr. Pickles: My hon. Friend is right. I had already been so beastly to the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes) that I decided to leave out that point, but my hon. Friend is less compassionate.

Mike Gapes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pickles: No. I suggest that it is in the hon. Gentleman's own interests that he remain seated.

The crime figures tell us that in November last year there were almost 13,000 offences of violence against the person, 5,000 offences of robbery and 14 murders. That is roughly the equivalent of 2.5 offences per 1,000 people. When we compare those figures with those for the same offences in New York over the same period, we find that a Londoner was five times as likely as a New Yorker to become a victim of violent crime. It is a sad day for this country when a member of the Soprano crime family might be reluctant to take tea at the Ritz for fear of being mugged in Piccadilly—*[Interruption.]* I stand corrected; the Sopranos are from New Jersey, but they visit New York. Latest figures show that street crime shot up by 40 per cent. last year and mobile phone theft by 366 per cent. Most shocking of all, the victims and perpetrators of those crimes are likely to be under 18.

Mobile phone thefts are not in themselves the cause of the sudden rise in robberies. We are grateful for Home Office research which shows that if mobile phone thefts were excluded, the upward trend in robberies would barely be blunted—small wonder, when the number of police officers has plummeted by 600 under this Government. As a result of the failure to retain experienced officers, recruitment does not keep pace with losses. The chairman of the Metropolitan Police Federation, Glen Smyth, said:

> "If the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary really want to arrest the rise in crime, they must first arrest the dramatic fall in police numbers."

Mr. Smyth went on to say:

> "You've got to have feet on the beat to put hands on collars."

With fewer police on the street and a reduction in stop and search, it is little surprise that street crime is rising.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): Can the hon. Gentleman explain to the House why Conservative members of the Greater London Authority proposed a cut in the police budget, which Sir John Stevens told the Metropolitan police authority would have meant fewer police officers on the beat on the streets in London?

Mr. Pickles: The hon. Gentleman is quite wrong; Conservative members of the GLA proposed that there should be 1,400 officers, which is 200 more than the Mayor proposed. The hon. Gentleman is confused; Conservative members of the GLA suggested a cut in the number of press officers. I know that for Labour Members press officers and policemen are virtually indistinguishable, but it is clear that had the Conservative budget been accepted and had the Liberal Democrat party not cosied up with Labour, there would now be the prospect of more police officers on the beat, not fewer.

Dr. Stephen Ladyman (South Thanet): As the hon. Gentleman is raising the issue of press officers in the south-east, why did Conservative-controlled Kent county council employ 27 press officers in the year in which it made 27 care managers redundant?

Mr. Pickles: The hon. Gentleman should realise that Kent county council is at the forefront of reducing dependenc[illegible]th the full approval of the Government. He should also realise that it is taking a lead in employing wardens to offer additional help to the police. It has been highly praised and its officers have been invited to No. 10 for discussions, which is more than the hon. Gentleman has been.

Following the reduction in stop and search by the police, it is interesting that Mr. Mike Best, the editor of *The Voice*, recently called for it to be increased. He told the BBC that he was concerned about the number of black youths killed in shootings; he believed that the police had moved away from unprofessional standards and would use the tactic of stop and search more sensibly. He went on to say:

> "Most people would prefer not to be stopped and searched, but increasing crime is warranting that and the majority of people who have nothing to hide won't mind very much."

The Home Secretary's response to that is surprising. In summary, his approach to stop and search is three-pronged; first, officers must provide an on-the-spot record of stop and search which has taken place; secondly, officers will receive a clear explanation, both of the principles of stop and search and the importance of exercising them fairly and effective; thirdly, a supervising officer will monitor ways in which officers stop and search people and look for trends which give cause for concern.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Is my hon. Friend aware that the Home Secretary's proposals on stop and search highlight yet another Government failure—the creation of more bureaucracy and paperwork? One way to get more police on the streets is to reduce the three or four hours that they spend filling in Labour Government paperwork before they can get back out on the streets again.

Mr. Pickles: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend, who may well have been on the police parliamentary trust, as I have. He puts the case robustly. A less robust way would be to say that there are practical difficulties with the proposal. How can I put it nicely? It is not quite like that on the streets.

I have been out on patrol with local officers from my own constabulary and with other police officers. Police are already overburdened with paperwork. They are reluctant to arrest because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) rightly pointed out, that means taking a couple of police officers off the shift for the best part of four or five hours. Most of the forms that they fill in are purely defensive, to ensure that they are not open to charges under the Human Rights Act 1998 or the various procedures laid down by the police authorities.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pickles: I shall make a few more points. I like the hon. Gentleman and I shall come to him in due course.

I was speaking about the practical problems faced by the police. I have seen police officers with a crowd of lads outside a nightclub. It is not like "Heartbeat" or "The Bill". There are not lots of police officers on the street; they do not all go around together. There is usually a single officer, or sometimes two or three. One police officer will be taking down the names of all the people whom the police have stopped to have a word, and the other police officer will be watching the first officer's back and watching the crowd.

Estimates from police officers are that it will take six minutes to record the details. The Home Secretary says that there is no need to worry, as there will be schemes to provide officers with palm-pilots, and through bluetooth technology, all the information will whizz through the ether and go into a big computer somewhere in the police station, where it will be stored. Whether by means of whizzy technology or pen and paper—more often than not, I expect, it will be pen and paper—we will be collecting useless information to be stored for no particular purpose, and putting up the backs of innocent bystanders, who will not want their names recorded. In short, that is no way to tackle crime. We must stop treating the police as the enemy and learn to trust them.

I give way to the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies). Does he no longer wish to intervene? Wake up; you're on.

Geraint Davies: At last. The hon. Gentleman asserted that London's police will not do their duty and will not arrest criminals, for fear of having to fill in a few forms. That is an appalling slur on the police, and I ask the hon. Gentleman to withdraw it now.

Mr. Pickles: The most charitable thing that I can say in response to that intervention is that that is a very nice tie.

Mayor Giuliani's experience of reviving New York is summarised by his concept of mending broken windows. In a speech before the election, the Prime Minister promised to tackle abandoned cars and urban decay, claiming that such issues were

> "at the heart of the Government's rights and responsibilities agenda",

since which time abandoned cars have become endemic.

Abandoned cars are hazardous for children and encourage more vandalism and crime in our neighbourhoods. The European directive signed by Labour will force the cost of car disposal to soar, and the bill will have to be met by car owners and council tax payers. As a result of the EU end of life directive, which comes into force in a few short weeks, the cost of the disposal of cars will soar. The Local Government Association estimates that it will cost £300 to scrap a car, which means that most scrap yards will not accept cars without payment. The LGA waste spokesman, Kay Twitchen, remarked:

> "We simply don't know how many more cars are going to be dumped. It's frightening."

We have already seen the results of much of that careless dumping. According to the London fire brigade, the number of malicious vehicle fires across London has soared by 25 per cent. in the past year—a key indicator of more burnt and abandoned cars on London's streets.

Derek Conway (Old Bexley and Sidcup): My hon. Friend raises an issue that is of great concern, especially

[Derek Conway]

to the outer-London boroughs. In Bexley, one of the difficulties for the local Metropolitan police service and the local authority in responding quickly to the problem of abandoned cars is the bureaucracy involved in dealing with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency in Swansea, which is very slow to respond. Despite the interventions, he has highlighted the fact there is no lack of will power on the part of the police or councils, but an excessive amount of Labour bureaucracy that is holding everybody back.

Mr. Pickles: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, but I must tell him that he ain't seen nothing yet. The nature of the end of life provisions on disposal and the breaking up of cars means that a premium will have to be paid. When those who are not socially responsible or are on low incomes dump their cars, the cost will be picked up by the ratepayer. We will face additional disposal problems and they will become more and more expensive.

Mr. Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford): Does the hon. Gentleman therefore welcome the Government's proposals to allow the DVLA and local authorities to operate jointly, using each other's information? Does he also welcome the reduction of time in respect of seven-day notices—one day is now required—and the shortening of the period for which local authorities must store abandoned cars? Those measures are taking us in the right direction to reduce a problem that he is right to highlight. We have got some solutions.

Mr. Pickles: To be against those things would be like being against motherhood and apple pie. However, the hon. Gentleman took a long time merely to say that the Government are simply allowing local authorities to look at their computers. The great problem is that the DVLA's information is wholly inaccurate. The problem with Labour Members is that their briefings from the Whips make these little points and they think that everything will change—but it will not.

Mr. Edward Davey: On abandoned cars, will the hon. Gentleman clarify two points of information? First, did the Conservative party reply to the Government's consultation on abandoned cars, which was published in October last year? Secondly, what does he think about the provisions in the London Local Authorities Bill on abandoned vehicles: does he support them?

Mr. Pickles: Of course, we welcomed the principles, but as we are discussing the disposal of cars and recycling, perhaps it is appropriate to give notice to the hon. Gentleman that I hope that he will tell us in his speech why falsified recycling figures have been exposed in relation to Sutton borough council. A reported figure of 45 per cent. disguised a true figure of 23.5 per cent. in records going back five years. We want to know why the Liberal Democrats are on the fiddle on waste.

Local communities will also face a menace of fly-tipped fridges. New EU regulations that the Government signed without fully understanding the implications have just come into effect. The requirements will increase the cost of disposal. Not only are there currently no facilities throughout the UK for the disposal of fridges in the required manner, but the Government have imposed extra costs on councils that will run to £100 million a year. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House has become too noisy. The hon. Gentleman should be heard.

Mr. Pickles: I am most grateful for your protection, Mr. Speaker.

According to the Tidy Britain Group, an organisation that is well known and respected throughout the House, on-the-spot litter fines in England and Wales fell from 2,500 in 1990 to only 422 last year. Interestingly, virtually all such fines were imposed by Wandsworth council.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): The hon. Gentleman is debating the quality of life in London and the south-east, but if we are going to have a serious debate, he will need to give the House some indication of what he believes are the components of that quality of life. So far, in his rambling speech, he has said nothing about that at all. For example, does he think that levels of poverty, social deprivation and social exclusion are indicators of the quality of life in London and the south-east? Does he think that the level of public investment in infrastructure and public services is such an indicator? What does he have to say about the contrast between the effect of Labour and Tory years on those indicators of quality of life in London and the south-east?

Mr. Pickles: The hon. Gentleman complains about my rambling, but he has just set a fine example to the House. I may be doing him a great disservice, but I do not think that he was here for the beginning of my speech. I do not think that he heard those fine words about consensus.

Roger Casale *rose—*

Mr. Pickles: No, no. The hon. Gentleman went on for far too long last time. I shall wait for his speech, then I shall intervene on him.

The single greatest cause of the drop in the quality of life of the average Londoner or commuter is transportation. Our rail and underground networks simply cannot cope with demand. They do not have sufficient capacity now; they will not have it in five years' time, and in 10 years, there will have been little change. For most people, the daily trip to the office is cramped, sweaty and nasty. Travellers are packed tight, way over the capacity of the carriages.

I asked a Minister when had been the last time that he had travelled on the underground at peak time. He told me that it had been when he was at school. I dare say that the Minister for Local Government is not a familiar traveller on the tube at peak times.

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Nick Raynsford) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Pickles: Well, I doubt it very much. It is all right for him, in the confines of the ministerial car, but, believe me, being on the Central line at half-past 9 is no laughing matter. Things will not get better for travellers for 10 years or more.

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions may cling to the phoney formula for assessing the success of the railways, but the public know better. Much has been said about Railtrack's planning process, but at least the company was addressing the problems of platform extensions, and the train operating companies were addressing the problems of new rolling stock. Thanks to the Secretary of State's botched placing of Railtrack into administration and the failure to grant franchises of a meaningful length, platform extensions have been postponed and there will be no new trains built after 2004.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): Will my hon. Friend confirm that the reason for the deteriorating state of London's underground is that, since 1997, investment has been significantly less than in the comparable period leading up to that date? Should not the Government get off their ideological high horse on PPP and get on with improving the London underground?

Mr. Pickles: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and what is true of the London underground is also true of the rail system that comes into London. We now know that the much-promised figure of £64 billion over the next 10 years is not accurate. About one third of that sum relates to inflation, about a quarter is double accounting, and a further third is for renewal and maintenance, which leaves just £20 billion for new investment in the railways over 10 years. Even that is an overstatement, because of the extra premium—the Byers premium—that the Government will have to pay because of the botched Railtrack administration. The refusal of pension fund managers to invest in future PPP projects has put many of the infrastructure projects at risk.

We have now had time to assess the PPP for the tube. No one believes that it will work, or that it even has a chance of working, except the Secretary of State. No doubt, the Government machine is looking at ways to sell the PPP to the people of London using snappy, exciting advertising slogans. I am willing to bet that one slogan they will not use is "Stephen says yes, and you can trust Stephen's judgment". That will not be high on the list.

The PPP will not bring substantial improvements in trains, track or signals until well after 2010. There will be only 12 new trains on the whole network by 2009, and most upgrades on lines will be delayed. Planned capacity enhancements will not keep in line with expected growth. London Underground has confirmed that, under the PPP, growth in capacity will be parallel to passenger numbers.

Astonishingly, we are still waiting to hear exactly how much the PPP will cost. In the House, the Secretary of State promised that we would be given figures, but we still have only a vague figure of between 15 and 20 per cent. There is a growing feeling among those concerned with transport that it would be much cheaper for the Secretary of State to put it on his credit card than to go through the whole PPP process.

We now have had the views of the Transport Select Committee in its short but damning report on PPP, which says:

> "The decision of the Secretary of State to proceed with the PPP on the back of such a vapid concluding statement from his independent advisers, Ernst & Young, must be questioned."

It goes on:

> "It is very concerning that after four years, £100 million pounds of costs, this pivotal decision for the future of London is 'subjective'."

It suggests that there is no basis for the Secretary of State's 15-year projections, and says:

> "The decision to approve the PPP without an official review of the suitability of this methodology would demonstrate a lack of fiduciary duty on the part of the Secretary of State and the Treasury."

Finally, it says:

> "It is essential that the Government allows Members a debate and vote in the House of Commons on a substantive motion on the future of the London Underground and the PPP."

Conservative Members wholly endorse that recommendation. If the decision is to be meaningful, London MPs must be able to affect it. We believe that Labour Members should have a free vote on the matter.

Mr. Edward Davey: I agree with much of the hon. Gentleman's analysis of the Government's flawed PPP scheme. Does he share my concern that, according to Bob Kiley and his team, the draft contracts do not give the public sector any termination rights? If the infracos failed to perform, the public sector would not be able to get rid of them. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the whole contractual structure for the PPP could be a millstone around London council tax payers' necks?

Mr. Pickles: The situation is worse than that, so it is no wonder that the Minister for Local Government is looking a bit shifty and upset. If the various infracos do not perform, and fall below par, they will still receive a bonus. This is a terrible deal for London, for the underground, and for the Government. We will be trying to unravel this mess for 30 years. This is an expensive way of funding the underground. It pays not the slightest attention to increasing capacity and improving the service.

Mr. Bill Rammell (Harlow): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would agree with me that, if the Opposition are to be credible, they must outline a coherent alternative to that which the Government are proposing. If it is not to be PPP, what is his alternative? Outright privatisation?

Mr. Pickles: I took the Government at their word. When the Secretary of State said across the Dispatch Box that there was a plan B and that the Government would consider the Mayor's proposals, I believed him. We believe that the options put before the much-derided, independent Mayor of London deserve consideration. We will be looking for quality assurance contracts that can achieve reliability, punctuality and cleanliness, and we want the threat of industrial relations problems removed from the tube. That is what the people of London want.

Geraint Davies: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pickles: No, I am not prepared to give way to the hon. Gentleman, even if he changed his tie.

It is against that background that we must deal with one of the main difficulties, congestion in central London.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): May I return my hon. Friend to the subject of railways? Do not the rail problems extend beyond London to places such as Brentwood and Castle

[Bob Spink]

Point, where there is just as much congestion? Our constituents who travel from those areas have suffered a decline in punctuality and reliability under this Government. Does my hon. Friend not deplore the Government's failure to resolve the problems?

Mr. Pickles: My hon. Friend is right. As he knows, nothing has been done about the various pinch points on the approach to London terminals. Nothing has been done about platform extensions. As for the special-purpose vehicles of which the Government are so proud, no financing has got off the ground for a single one. Apparently station extensions are to be subject to the arrangement for special-purpose vehicles. What Railtrack would do with a couple of buckets of cement the Government are trying to do by putting together a special financing arrangement that will simply mean further delays. Moreover, we are unlikely to see an increase in the number of carriages from 12 to eight on most runs, because of the delay in the granting of the franchise. *[Laughter.]*

Labour Members laugh. They do not have to suffer the consequences. They spend their time in ministerial cars, while ordinary people are trying to get to their jobs in the City, travelling in cramped, overcrowded carriages. They seek the relief that the Government are denying them.

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): When I was at school an increase would be from eight to 12 rather than from 12 to eight. Is this a sign of falling education standards under this Government, or of a lack of numeracy on the hon. Gentleman's part?

Mr. Pickles: The hon. Lady probably thought that that was a good thing to say at the time. Let me explain, however, that trains currently have eight carriages and we want the number to be increased to 12. That cannot happen, because the Government will not grant the franchise. It is a practical problem. There is a difference between a mere debating chamber and a Chamber that is trying to deal with practical problems.

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pickles: No. I want to make some progress.

The real congestion problem in London is not caused by the number of cars on the roads. Surprisingly, research has proved that the number has not risen significantly. Congestion is increasing because of the way in which we deal with road repairs. There is to be a congestion charge, which will apply to various London boroughs. There will be a regressive tax that will hit the public sector, public-sector workers and the low-paid very hard. The tax will not move people out of cars, because public transport has not the capacity to carry them. It will be expensive to administer: in the initial years, 90p in every pound collected will go towards administrative charges. The tax is opposed by business, and it will not cut congestion to any significant extent.

We could take a leaf out of Giuliani's book, and start looking at sensible ways of unblocking roads that are blocked by repairs, improving road signs and school transport, and encouraging car pooling. All that could be achieved, and would reduce congestion more than the charge will.

What is true of transport is true of all our public services. We need to follow New York's example, and recognise that improvements are brought about by practical, street-level solutions.

London deserves better. London's decline is not inevitable. London needs leadership, determination and co-operation. The Conservative party is determined to make London a better and safer place in which to live.

4.19 pm

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I beg to move, To leave out from "Europe" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

'welcomes the Government's commitment to London's continued success, demonstrated by sound economic management, substantially increased employment opportunities, record levels of funding in health, education, crime prevention, transport and other key public services, the promotion of sustainable development, the enhancement of London's environment, cultural diversity and the living standards of its population, as well as the restoration of democratic city-wide government to the capital; and unreservedly condemns the Opposition strategy of talking down London and the South East.'.

I welcome—indeed, relish—the opportunity to debate the state of London and the south-east, to demonstrate the real and positive benefits that five years of Labour Government have brought and to contrast the quality of life in London and south-east today with the state of affairs 10 years ago, when the Conservative party was in full flood.

A decade ago, London and the south-east were trapped in recession—the second that the Tories had managed to inflict on our country—and 400,000 Londoners were out of work as a consequence. Now, thanks to sound economic management under Labour Governments, the picture is transformed. Since 1997, the number of adults in employment in London and the south-east has grown by nearly 500,000, and unemployment has fallen by 41 per cent. in London and by 46 per cent. in the south-east. Long-term unemployment in the south-east has fallen by nearly 75 per cent. since 1997.

It is curious, as one of my hon. Friends rightly pointed out, that we heard nothing about those achievements from the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles), in his remorselessly negative speech. But what else would one expect from the party of unemployment, the party of recession, the party of repossessions?

Dr. Ladyman: My right hon. Friend mentioned two recessions. I believe that, if he counts, he will find that there were actually three during that period.

Not only did we not hear about the economic performance of London and the south-east from the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles), but we did not hear about the south-east. All his remarks were on London. The south-east, and my constituency in Kent, does not exist to him.

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend makes an entirely apt point. I shall not get into a technical debate with him as to whether there were two or three recessions during the period of Conservative Government. All that

Conservative Members know is that their party brought the economy of this country to a standstill on at least two separate occasions and there was a huge and terrible social consequence for the people of this country, the damage caused by which we are still repairing.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): Before we leave unemployment, would the Minister agree that there is no need for complacency? In Uxbridge, in December, unemployment increased by 10.7 per cent. on the previous year, and in January it increased by 15.9 per cent. on the previous year. In December, in my neighbouring constituency of Hayes and Harlington, it increased by a massive 29.5 per cent. There is no need for complacency.

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman will well recognise the circumstances of west London and the area around Heathrow airport in the conditions that have applied since 11 September. I shall refer to that subject later in my speech, but it is certainly not a cause for party political comment. *[Interruption.]* We should all be aware of the circumstances caused by the terrible events of 11 September, the need to restore confidence, and the need to once again rebuild, not least the aviation industry. We are all working on a similar basis to achieve that. But the hon. Gentleman will of course remember—

Mr. Wilshire: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Raynsford: No; I am answering the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall), who will be the first to recognise that the overall framework of the London economy is such at the moment that there are far more opportunities for people to find work than there were when his party were in government.

Mr. Wilshire: It simply is not good enough for the right hon. Gentleman to try to blame all the problems of Heathrow on 11 September. Does he accept that the incompetent delay on the terminal 5 inquiry, which his Government could have sorted out long since, is also playing its part in creating unemployment?

Mr. Raynsford: I was not implying that the problems were solely associated with 11 September, but I was pointing out that that event had very dramatic consequences, and that it was right to take those into account and not to try to make party political points out of them. I might add that the state of the London economy under the present Government compares extraordinarily well with the state of the London economy when the party that the hon. Gentleman supports was in power, and he would probably do as well to remember that.

The hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar made a lot of fuss about transport. Let me first remind him that the use of public transport has increased enormously, with over 0.5 billion more bus passenger km and 1.7 billion more tube passenger km in London than 10 years ago. New investment is already making an impact and will transform transport options and prospects over the next few years in London and the south-east.

Interestingly, the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar chose not to mention the largest civil engineering contract in Europe; the channel tunnel high-speed rail link. My hon. Friends who represent Kent constituencies would not make that mistake, because they know how important that project is, not just in linking Britain with Europe, but to the economy of Kent and the regeneration of east London.

We all know who is to blame for the fact that there is not yet a high-speed rail link from the channel tunnel to London; the Conservative party. Let me remind the Conservatives of the history. It is now eight years since the channel tunnel was completed, yet while the French and Belgian Governments had taken steps to ensure that high-speed links were in place to link their capitals with the tunnel, the British Government—a Conservative Government—chose deliberately not to put any investment into our railways.

The consequence is that passengers travel at 300 km an hour on the European side and 100 km an hour through the tunnel, and then dawdle in a meandering route through Kent; wonderful for enjoying the Kentish countryside, but a disastrous and shameful comment on the short-sightedness of the British Government of the day.

To be fair to the Conservative party, at the very end of its period in power, it realised that this had been a mistake and began plans to establish a high-speed rail link. But the Conservatives botched it in the usual way, so that when we came into office—within literally a matter of a few weeks—we were presented with the clear evidence that their scheme was not viable and was not going to proceed. That was their legacy. Now, five years later, we have stage one of the CTRL scheme very near completion; on course, on budget and on time. What a contrast with the record of the previous Government.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): The Minister is making great play of transit times into London by rail. Can he explain why, since Railtrack was taken into administration, by the Strategic Rail Authority's own figures delays on journeys into London have become much, much worse?

Mr. Raynsford: The consequence of the botched privatisation of British Rail and the mismanagement by Railtrack has caused a serious problem on all parts of the rail network. I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that Hatfield did not occur after we took Railtrack into administration. He would do well to ponder that.

In transport, and so many other areas, we are ensuring that the investment is going in to put right the wrongs that were left by the previous Government.

Mr. Pickles: I am curious about the Minister's reference to Hatfield, and about his shroud-waving. Does he believe that the Deputy Prime Minister was wrong when he said that safety was in no way compromised by privatisation? Is he repudiating what the Deputy Prime Minister said? Perhaps he might take this opportunity of reflecting on his words on Hatfield.

Mr. Raynsford: Clearly, the hon. Gentleman was not listening. I was pointing out that in the aftermath of Hatfield—as he will know very well—the speed of rail services throughout the country, not just into London, was dramatically affected because of the need to take measures to improve safety provision. That is why I said that it would be unwise of the hon. Member for Rayleigh

[Mr. Raynsford]

(Mr. Francois) to focus too much on recent events, rather than on the context of the result of his party's botched privatisation of the railways.

Mr. McLoughlin: We have so far heard the Minister blame 11 Sept for unemployment in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall), and Hatfield for the problems on the railways. Is there anything for which this Government are responsible?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman would do well to bear in mind that, if we are trying to have a serious debate about important issues such as the decline in the number of people travelling by air since 11 September, it is reasonable to mention one of the main causes of that decline. If we are talking about the state of the railways, it is reasonable to refer to the consequence of his party's botched privatisation.

Dr. Ladyman: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way before he moves too far away from the subject of the channel tunnel rail link. Is he aware that the 10-year strategic railway plan for the south-east—he will have read it but the Opposition probably have not, as they do not consider the south-east—establishes in explicit detail that it will be possible to use the channel tunnel rail link for domestic services? For the first time, we in east Kent have a real prospect of a fast train service to London.

Mr. Raynsford: I alluded to that point in my remarks, and I entirely endorse my hon. Friend's view that the link will be a huge asset not just for those travelling from London to the continent, but for people in Kent and east London, who will be able to make use of the greatly improved transport facilities.

Apart from increased investment, a thriving economy and an improving quality of life in London and the south-east, there has been a further striking change in London compared with 10 years ago. That change is in the city's governance. Ten years ago London, alone of all major world cities, had no democratic city-wide authority, following the previous Conservative Government's characteristically arrogant and spiteful decision to abolish the Greater London council. At that time, we said that, on coming to power, we would restore democratic city-wide governance to London, and we have honoured that pledge by creating a Mayor and a separate elected assembly, which together constitute the Greater London Authority.

A further telling comparison can be made between London and the south-east today, and 10 years ago: the number of Tory MPs who represent, and who used to represent, the area. In March 1992, the Conservative party had 48 MPs in London and 61 in the south-east, and felt that it was sitting pretty in the region. Today, after three consecutive electoral setbacks, it has just 13 MPs in London and 53 in the south-east. It was unable to hold on to Harrow, to Croydon, to Hove, to Hastings, to Guildford, to Basildon—*[Interruption.]*—and to many other places that used to be thought of as true blue. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Hon. Members should not shout down the Minister. He must be given a hearing.

Mr. Raynsford: The Conservative party was rightly hammered by the electorate in what it thought of as its own back yard.

The hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar has better reason than most to understand the shift of the past 10 years. Ten years ago, he was about to embark on a new career, exchanging Bradford council for a south-east constituency, deserting the gritty north for the fleshpots of the south-east, and in the process trying to make the first ever transition from bluff Yorkshireman to Essex man. I have to say—with some affection for the hon. Gentleman—that he has not managed that transition entirely convincingly.

London and the south-east are the economic powerhouse of the United Kingdom economy. Together, they account for nearly a third of the UK's total gross domestic product, and they have a massive impact on the economy of the country as a whole. London is the world's largest centre for international trade in equities, with double the turnover of New York. Inner London is now by far the richest region in the European Union. Its gross domestic product per head is 240 per cent. of the European Union average. Its closest rival, Hamburg, stands at just 180 per cent. This Government are determined to reinforce that economic success story.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): Does my right hon. Friend accept that rising standards in our schools are a key contributor to the improvement in London's economy? To cement further his reputation as a shrewd judge of funding applications, will he have a word with his colleagues in the Department for Education and Skills to ensure that they back a private finance initiative bid from the London borough of Harrow to upgrade Rooks Heath high school, which is in my constituency?

Mr. Raynsford: I have great admiration for my hon. Friend's skill in advancing his constituency interests and his prescience in referring to education when he cannot have known that I was about to come precisely to that topic. I will of course pass on his comments to my colleagues in the Department for Education and Skills.

In an age when information, skills and technology are the key to prosperity and growth, education is fundamental. For too long education attainment standards in London and the south-east lagged behind our European competitors, and London lagged behind the rest of the UK. This Government have given top priority to transforming educational achievement. Huge increases in funding, an unswerving commitment to raising standards, and a determination to carry through the reform essential to future success, have already begun to make a difference. Thanks to key innovations such as the numeracy and literacy hours and reduced class sizes, primary schoolchildren's performance in London has now caught up with the rest of the country, and the percentage of 15-year-olds passing five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C has risen from 43 per cent. to 46 per cent. There is still much room for improvement, but the trends are all in the right direction.

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): The Minister is as usual full of promises about education. The Government have promised extra money for teachers but they have not put that money in the hands of local authorities to allow them to pay those teachers. Once again, the Government say one thing and do another.

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Lady makes many claims, but she obviously has not looked at the figures.

The number of teachers in London in 1997 was 56,770, but it is now 58,290. More teachers are teaching children, with better resources and better skills, and getting better results. That is the result of this Government's commitment to improving education.

London's cultural vitality and diversity is one of our capital's greatest assets. In that context, the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar conveniently forgot to mention one very obvious symbol of the difference between Tory and Labour Governments. Our national museums and galleries, so many of which are located in our capital city and which contribute so much to our quality of life, are now open to all, free of charge. That is the result of a Labour Government.

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): The Minister mentioned things that people have forgotten to mention, but does he recognise that one of the greatest determinants undermining the quality of life in London is the dramatically rising crime rate? Does he intend to talk about crime and policing, because those are the issues that matter?

Mr. Raynsford: Of course I will deal with crime and policing later in my speech. The hon. Gentleman will also have the pleasure of hearing from the Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs, who will wind up at the end of the debate. The hon. Gentleman will therefore have a full and detailed explanation of what the Government are doing to improve security and reduce crime.

Apart from free access to museums, we have seen many other changes in the cultural world. The dome was a huge regeneration success in south-east London. The new Tate gallery is one of the world's most successful museums. The London Eye, on the other side of the river, is a great new attraction. London is full of exciting new buildings and developments, all of which have enhanced our capital's diversity, quality and attractiveness to visitors. Those are all achievements of this Government.

We are not just capitalising on the existing strengths of the London economy and its cultural vitality: we are also committed to tackling deprivation. Delivering better services that are more responsive to local people's needs and priorities is key to the regeneration agenda. New local strategic partnerships are bringing together public, voluntary, private and community stakeholders and are already making an important contribution to regeneration in the capital and the south-east. Neighbourhood renewal funding of nearly £200 million over the next three years has been made available to 20 boroughs in London. Under the new deal for communities, more than £500 million is being provided over 10 years to improve the quality of life in 10 of London's most deprived neighbourhoods through community-led regeneration.

We are also driving ahead with the revitalisation of east London and the Thames estuary. To be fair to the Conservative party, it was a Tory Minister, Michael Heseltine, who saw the opportunity for a transformation of the east Thames corridor, as it was then called. Sadly, his efforts on this—as on so many other issues—were not always appreciated by his own party.

However, the Labour party appreciated those efforts. We recognise the huge potential for regeneration and sustainable development in the Thames gateway area. I have already referred to the channel tunnel rail link, which will bring widespread regeneration benefits, particularly around Stratford, where a new international station will be constructed. That and other infrastructure investment will open up large sites along the Thames gateway. Such sites include Barking Reach, with its potential for over 5,000 new homes, and Stratford Railands, where there is potential for investment in a new commercial and residential district for east London.

We heard yesterday new estimates suggesting that the population of London is set to grow by 700,000 by 2016. That raises huge issues about where expansion, for both housing and businesses, can take place. Thanks to this Government's brownfield-first planning policies, and the adoption of sustainable development principles, London already has the highest rate of urban land recycling for housing in England. Our urban White Paper building on Lord Rogers' proposals demonstrated how we could achieve an urban renaissance with good quality new urban developments served by public transport services, using empty or under-used brownfield sites wherever possible.

Mr. Shaw: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of Lord Rogers fundamental recommendations was to reduce the amount of value added tax on empty properties? Many of us campaigned for such a reduction for many years, and last year my right hon. Friend the Chancellor delivered it. Is not that another important strand in creating the right fiscal arrangements for regeneration?

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend makes another very good point about the significant changes that the Government have made to assist the process of regeneration.

The availability of affordable housing is a key component in the development of mixed and balanced communities, and providing affordable homes for key workers is also a particular concern. That is why, over the next two years, the Government are putting in an extra £300 million above current levels into London's social housing. That is why, in the south-east, we are increasing the funds available for housing investment by both local authorities and registered social landlords. In addition, the first round of the starter home initiative gave £66 million to help 2,500 key workers in the south-east buy their own homes.

However, the gap cannot be met simply by increasing public subsidy. We have to recognise that, if we are to tackle affordability problems, the first priority must be substantially to increase the rate of new build. That requires a highly innovative and radical approach—from the Government and the Mayor, from the boroughs and local authorities in the south-east as well as in London, and from developers and landowners.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): Will the Minister say why, in the council areas of Adur and Worthing in my constituency, not a single starter home initiative application has been approved? There is a drastic shortage of nurses and other public service workers in the area. The differential allowances that the Minister is offering mean that policemen from my area commute into London to enrol with the Metropolitan police, thereby exacerbating the problem of staff shortages in Sussex.

Mr. Raynsford: I have not received a letter from the hon. Gentleman so far on those matters but, if he writes

[Mr. Raynsford]

to me, I shall be happy to respond. However, the starter home initiative has been warmly welcomed. In general, the experience is that it has worked best in those areas where the authorities concerned have been well prepared to make use of the opportunities that are being presented.

Effective public transport is a vital element in sustainable development, and the Government fully recognise the importance of improving transport in London. We are committed to tackling the historic underfunding of London transport. We recognise this as one of the major problems—if not the major problem—facing the city. That is why our 10-year plan for transport provides a step-change in funding, with £25 billion of public and private investment scheduled over a 10-year period. All forms of transport will benefit.

For example, we can already see some of the improvements coming through increased investment in the bus network. Interestingly, the bus network was another factor that the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar did not mention. Perhaps he does not know it, but more people in London travel on buses than on the underground. Improving the bus network is just as important as improving other forms of transport. Bus use, I am pleased to say, is up by 6 per cent., to the highest level since 1975. The number of bus services is also up, and more than 1,000 new buses are on the road—cleaner, better and more accessible to elderly and disabled people.

Light rail and tram systems offer scope for real improvements in access, particularly to some of London's more disadvantaged areas. The Croydon Tramlink, which opened in May 2000, is an excellent example of this type of new and integrated transport in action.

Geraint Davies: Is my right hon. Friend aware that in its first year the Croydon Tramlink moved 18 million people? Does he agree that that is a massive contribution to commuting people in the south of London?

Mr. Raynsford: I am delighted to confirm my hon. Friend's positive appraisal of the effect of the Croydon Tramlink. I remember a pleasant occasion on which I joined him and saw the advantages for the New Addington community in his constituency which has benefited hugely from the new transport system.

On the docklands light railway, passenger use has risen dramatically, particularly over the past three years. The growth is expected to continue, resulting in an annual ridership of 60 million passengers in 2004-05 compared with 35 million in 2000, with further growth expected beyond that.

Central to London's transport is the tube, and its modernisation is essential to a prosperous future for the capital. The Government's public-private partnership proposals demonstrate our wholehearted commitment to modernise the Tube infrastructure. If a final decision is taken to proceed with these plans, they will deliver new trains, higher capacity and better stations which will transform travel for Londoners and visitors to the capital. The plans will deliver £16 billion of investment over the next 15 years—that is about £5,000 for every household in London. Nothing on this scale has ever been undertaken before.

Tim Loughton: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Raynsford: I need to make some progress.

Crime blights the lives of far too many people and undermines the confidence of individuals and communities. Crime rates across London and the south-east are falling but street crime in London—mostly mugging—is bucking the trend. That is the sort of violent offence that worries ordinary people most and on which the Government are determined to crack down.

My right hon. Friend the Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs will probably say more in his winding-up speech, but let me make a few key points about what we are doing to tackle crime. The number of police officers was mentioned earlier in the debate. I am pleased to say that at the last count, on 30 September last year, there were 25,374 officers in the Metropolitan police, an increase of 679 over the year and 496 in the six months since March 2001—the largest increase for more than a decade. That is obviously welcome, but increasing the number of police officers alone is not enough. The Government have also allocated almost £50 million to projects over the past three years under the crime reduction programme.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): Will the right hon. Gentleman please tell the House the number of special constables who were available to London in 1996 and the number available to London now?

Mr. Raynsford: As I know from discussions with my local police committee and borough commander, special constables have an important role to play. Either my right hon. Friend or I will be happy to write to the right hon. Lady with a specific answer. As she will appreciate, that is a rather detailed question to put to a Minister who is not a Home Office Minister. I assure the right hon. Lady that she will receive a reply.

We have also set up a new youth and crime unit, based in the Government office for London, supporting work in the 11 London boroughs with the highest youth crime rates. Each borough is drawing up a comprehensive, multi-agency, youth crime reduction strategy. Crime and disorder reduction partnerships have carried out crime audits with local authorities in London and the south-east and are now completing their crime reduction strategies.

Antisocial behaviour is another important aspect of the work of the crime and disorder reduction partnerships. People should be able to live their lives free from intimidation and harassment. That is why we have given the police and local authorities additional powers to tackle antisocial behaviour. By tackling at source antisocial behaviour in young people, we can help stop them falling into a lifetime of criminal activity and instead divert their energies into more constructive work. To help achieve this, in addition to the neighbourhood renewal policies, we have put in place a number of initiatives such as

Connexions, and of course our new deal has helped substantial numbers of young people to find work and lay the foundations for a better future.

Mr. Wilshire: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Raynsford: It is important that all sectors of the community work together to attack crime. To do that effectively, all sectors of society must have confidence in each other. Sadly, that has not always been the case. The Macpherson report and the actions taken subsequently by the Metropolitan police have gone some way to improve relations and mutual confidence between the Metropolitan police and London's ethnic minority communities. A landmark conference on "Black and Minority Ethnic Communities Cracking Crime Together" was held in London last week, and was organised jointly by the Greater London Authority and the Government office for London. That and similar initiatives are all about providing a new impetus for the participation of black and minority ethnic groups in measures to reduce the impact of crime, which is often particularly severe on black and ethnic minority communities.

Graffiti is an important issue and a widespread problem.

Mr. Hammond: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Raynsford: I have given way many times, and I must make progress.

Worry about graffiti is growing and the costs of removing it are high. It is not only the costs of cleaning and repairing damage caused by graffiti that are important; it can spoil enjoyment of public places and add to the sense of fear and insecurity in local communities. It can feed a fear of crime, even though there may be nothing, statistically, to back that fear. If graffiti is left untouched for lengthy periods, it can send out a message that no one cares about the area and that, in itself, can bring problems of decline to rundown local neighbourhoods. Action against graffiti should form part of the local strategies for public reassurance and for tackling antisocial behaviour. We expect crime and disorder reduction partnerships to lead such initiatives locally. I commend the initiative of several London boroughs, particularly Lewisham, which has been extremely successful in engaging local communities in effective action to remove graffiti as soon as it appears.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: I give way to the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton.

Mr. Edward Davey: On graffiti, will the Minister tell the House whether the Government support clause 18 of the London Local Authorities Bill, which would make it an offence to supply, in the course of a business, aerosol paints or indelible marker pens to any person who appears to be under the age of 18?

Mr. Raynsford: Unlike the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar I am very familiar with the London Local Authorities Bill and have had several discussions with the Association of London Government and with officials to explore the way in which we can facilitate the passage of the Bill through the House. Clearly, we are neutrai on such measures, and we want effective powers that enable local authorities to take action against the kind of problems that have been highlighted.

We are also acting to improve and speed up the process of dealing with abandoned vehicles, which is also one of the subjects of the Bill to which the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton just referred. We have had very positive discussions with the Association of London Government about that particular part of the Bill. Our consultation on measures to reduce the notice periods before abandoned vehicles can be cleared off the streets finished on 31 January, and there was widespread support for our proposals. We shall introduce legislation shortly.

The Government also strongly support the capital standards programme, a four-year pan-London street cleaning campaign that was launched earlier this month. That is an excellent example of the Mayor, the ALG and the London boroughs working together to improve the quality of life for people in London.

Finally, in thinking about the future of London or any large city, we need to be aware of the threats as well as the opportunities for improvement. The terrible events of 11 September demonstrated the importance of thorough and comprehensive preparation of preventive measures and contingency plans to cope with any eventuality. Over the past six months, the London resilience sub-committee, which I chair, has been overseeing detailed work to identify the full range of potential vulnerabilities as well as drawing together all the parties who need to be involved, including the emergency services, transport providers, utilities, local authorities and others to address them.

Mr. Hammond: In view of the Minister's obvious concern about the threat from terrorism to London, does he not find it odd that the Metropolitan police is now proposing to sell one of its three helicopters? That will leave only one machine available, at any one time, to cover this very large city.

Mr. Raynsford: The Metropolitan police service has been closely involved with all our discussions about London's preparedness to cope with any eventuality. It has not indicated a particular operational reason to raise the issue of a helicopter with me in that context. This is an operational matter for the Metropolitan police, and a matter for its judgment. I assure the House that the Metropolitan police is fully engaged—and very much in the driving seat—in the arrangements to ensure London's preparedness to cope with any eventuality.

All of us who have the honour to represent this part of the country know full well that London is a great city and that there is much to be proud of in the quality of life that people enjoy in London and the south-east. We know that there is still an enormous amount to do to reinforce London and the south-east's strengths and to overcome their weaknesses, and we are determined to achieve this. Working with the Greater London Authority, local authorities and others, we are tackling the problems

[Mr. Raynsford]

caused by years of chronic underinvestment in our public services. Putting right that underinvestment lies at the heart of ordinary people's concerns.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford) *rose—*

Sandra Gidley *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: We are providing substantial extra funding for health, education, housing, transport, fighting crime and to make sure that our most deprived communities share a better future and have better services. After years of Tory failure, marked by recession, unemployment and underinvestment, in which our public services were run down and devastated, in which our environment was despoiled and in which the people of London and the south-east saw their hopes and aspirations betrayed time and again, we are at last now seeing the real benefits of a Labour Government working with others to secure a bright future and a better quality of life for all in the south-east and London.

4.56 pm

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): I wish to congratulate the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) in two respects. First, I congratulate him and his colleagues on calling this debate. It is important that we focus on the quality of life in London and the south-east because it affects our constituents in the varied ways that he and the Minister have mentioned. I was surprised, however, that neither of them concentrated on issues involving the south-east and linked them to London. The Minister touched on that, but he did not make it the main focus of his speech. I shall try to correct that omission in my remarks.

We support the Opposition's motion even though it is very mild. It contains serious omissions—I shall come to them—but it would have been churlish to amend it. I reassure the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar that the Liberal Democrats will support the motion in the Lobby tonight.

Bob Spink: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davey: In a moment.

It is important that we send the united message that Labour is letting down London and the south-east. We heard that story in the remarks of the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar. The streets of London are filthy, public services in London and the south-east are breaking down and crime on the streets is rising. Those fair and valid criticisms can be targeted at the Labour Government, and the House must send the message to the people of London and the south-east that those are our complaints and that we will campaign hard until the problems are put right.

Mr. Rammell *rose—*

Bob Spink *rose—*

Mr. Davey: I give way to the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink).

Bob Spink: The hon. Gentleman has referred to omissions, but did he note that we did not hear a single word from the Minister about pensions and the special plight of the elderly in London? I hope that, like us, the hon. Gentleman will consider that issue.

Mr. Davey: I agree with the hon. Gentleman, but he should be careful on that point. I cannot remember the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar mentioning pensioners, either.

Some of us are not surprised that Labour has let London down. The Cabinet is made up of people who are anti-London. Time and again, by their policies, the Government have undermined the share of funding available to London. I do not know why the Cabinet is so anti-London but, as London is the most dynamic, diverse and successful city not just in this country but probably in the world, it is madness that the Government are not backing London and the south-east.

I also want to congratulate the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar on his bare-faced cheek. There was not a single apology for the part that the Conservatives have played in the problems facing London and the south-east. What about the rail fragmentation, which is one reason why our railways and transport system are in such a mess? What about the cuts in the national health service and in police numbers that occurred under the Conservatives? What about the underfunding of councils from which so many councils in London and the south-east have suffered? Moreover, the hon. Gentleman provided no alternative. There is a serious case for reallocating the number of Opposition days to give more to the Liberal Democrats. If the Conservative Opposition cannot propose a decent alternative, leave it to the Liberal Democrats, because we will certainly provide one.

As I have said, there were major omissions not only in the hon. Gentleman's speech, but in the motion. For example, it does not mention housing. As all Members from London and south-east constituencies know, housing is utterly central to the quality of life. The lack of affordable housing is undermining our public services. If we cannot give nurses, police officers, teachers and many other public sector workers who are serving our people decent housing, how can we improve their quality of life? That is an appalling omission.

A second major omission is poverty. Although London may be one of the richest cities in the world—the Minister said that inner London, as a sub-region, is one of the richest, if not the richest region in the European Union—some parts are among the poorest in the European Union. Many of our fellow citizens suffer from grinding poverty and huge levels of inequality, and it is outrageous that Conservative Members did not mention that in the debate or in their motion.

Mr. Randall *rose—*

Mr. Davey: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, because he, at least, talks about poverty in a caring way.

Mr. Randall: If the Conservative motion has all those glaring omissions, why did not the Liberal Democrats propose their own amendment? Were they too busy toadying to the Government, as usual?

Mr. Davey: I am not disappointed in the hon. Gentleman, because normally he is not only a good attender and a thinking Conservative Member, but someone who listens to other Members' speeches. I said at the beginning of my speech that I wanted a united message to go out from the House about the Government's failure. Labour has been letting the country down.

Bob Spink: The hon. Gentleman is making a good point. The Minister compared today's economy with that of 10 years ago. The hon. Gentleman may recall that about 10 years ago, 38 per cent. of pensioners were on means-tested benefits—yet, according to the Library, under this Government the figure will rise to about 57 per cent. by next year. That is poverty under a Labour Government.

Mr. Davey: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the number of pensioners on means-tested benefits in London and the south-east is increasing. However, I have not heard Conservative spokesmen on pensions say that they mean in any way to change the situation. The hon. Gentleman is right to make the criticism, but unfortunately it could be pushed back on to his colleagues.

I want to mention three key issues, none of which were touched on by the Minister or the Conservative Front-Bench spokesman, but all of which are fundamental to a debate on the quality of life in London and the south-east. First there is population growth, secondly, funding for public services and, thirdly, the environmental concerns and constraints that determine whether we can deliver proper quality of life for our citizens.

On population, yesterday the Mayor of London's office published a document called "Planning for London's Growth". It is a serious document, which I recommend to right hon. and hon. Members. It suggests that population growth in London will be faster than was previously forecast. One estimate is that in 15 years' time there will be 700,000 more people living in Greater London, which is equivalent to adding a city the size of Leeds. That is a shocking forecast that we must discuss. In the past two years alone, 190,000 people have moved to or been born in London. Since 1989, the population of London has grown by about 600,000—the population of Sheffield.

That is a huge growth in population. It is impossible to debate the quality of life in London and to devise policies to improve it without focusing on that underlying factor. If the population of London is growing by so much, many policies will have to be rethought. To put the growth record in context, in 1945 there were about 8 million people in London. That fell dramatically in the post-war years, so that by 1983 there were about 6.8 million. If those forecasts from the Mayor's office prove right, the population of London will be 8.1 million in 2016. That huge increase presents us with some serious challenges.

Hon. Members may wonder where that increase will come from—50 per cent. will be indigenous to Greater London; 25 per cent. will come from British nationals repatriating to Greater London; and the other 25 per cent. will be made up of other European Union citizens moving to the area on work permits and asylum seekers.

Those are the dynamics of London's demography, but the situation is, if anything, slightly worse in the south-east, where the population growth is probably even greater. Using the Government office for the south-east's definition of the region, its population was 8.75 million last year and is forecast to be 9.4 million by 2016—again, an increase of nearly 700,000. Those huge movements of people affect everything that we are talking about today.

I am concerned about some of the ideas coming from the Mayor's office and the Greater London Authority because we have to decide whether to adopt the strategy of predict and provide or that of alert and avoid. Should we say, "These are the forecasts; we can't do anything about it, so we'll try to increase the infrastructure hugely and manage things by building over all the open spaces in London and the south-east"? Or should we say, "Hold on—yes, we want growth; it's natural and we can't stop all of it"? However, should we also adopt offsetting, dispersal policies, such as those used after the second world war?

The Mayor has set his sights against dispersal policies and opposes them. He is saying that the huge increase in population—it is of historic proportions—should be dealt with in the confines of Greater London because he is a committed defender of the green belt. Therefore, land in Greater London has somehow to accommodate that huge population growth, but I do not think that that is possible because it would seriously undermine the quality of life for our citizens in Greater London.

We will not be able to stop that population growth—we have not even managed to deal with the growth that has taken place in recent years—but we have to try to manage it and invest in London to try to maintain the quality of life. We have to combine that with dispersal policies, central to which are policies to decentralise political, financial and economic power throughout the regions and nations of our country.

If dispersal and decentralisation policies are taken seriously, as the Government have begun to do with Wales and Scotland, the economic fortunes of the regions can be transformed. Surely it is no mistake that Cardiff and Edinburgh are two boom cities in the regions. They have a focus for government, which then attracts business and the financial sector. So decentralising political and economic power can ensure that we have balanced growth, and I suggest that it will help London and the quality of life of Londoners. Londoners need to work with other regions and nations in the United Kingdom. All that makes perfect sense.

My second point concerns the underlying trends that affect the quality of life in London. I wish to talk for a few moments about public funding. All hon. Members know the history of public finance cuts, whether under the Conservative party or in the first three years of the current Labour Government, and we know the effect of those cuts on our health services, police forces and councils. The question is whether those cuts have been any worse in London and whether the problems in London and the south-east are any worse than those in other parts of the country.

I suggest that the particular problems in London and the south-east need a public finance response. Of course, they primarily involve land and house costs. The huge increase in housing costs has had an effect on vacancy rates and recruitment and retention problems, primarily in our public services. It is no coincidence that the vacancy rate for teachers in London is two and a half times the national average. It would be even greater were it not for the fact that many young teachers come to London, usually from Commonwealth countries, to teach for two

[Mr. Davey]

years before continuing their travels around the world. The needs of our children, who are the future of London, are not being met because of those vacancy rates.

Although the Minister talked about increasing police numbers, he failed to say that the Met is losing 40 experienced officers every month to other forces, which is destabilising it. No wonder street crime has increased. Even if the number of officers increases, the new policemen and policewomen are rookies, straight out of police training college. We are losing the experienced officers who know how to organise and how to catch criminals. Unless the Government deal with retention, they will not tackle street crime. It is crucial that we deal with the problem of retention.

Let us consider just one profession in the health service—nursing. The vacancy rate for nurses in London is 6.5 per cent. compared with a national average of 3.4 per cent. We cannot pretend that we are running sustainable public services with problems of that nature. Some 151 Filipino nurses work in my local hospital in Kingston. They are excellent nurses who have been recruited as part of a good programme that checks their language and nursing skills. However, they are on short-term contracts and can return to Manila and elsewhere in the Philippines after two years. That is not a way to plan and run a service or to ensure that the London health service has a base knowledge. If the Government do not wake up to those problems in public services in London and the south-east, our services will continue to decline.

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): My hon. Friend is right to raise that concern about nurses and the need to recruit internationally to plug the gaps in the national health service. Given that London accounts for well over half the spend on agency nurses in this country, does he agree that we are wasting money on paying for agency staff because it would be better spent paying better wages so that we retain nurses permanently on the payroll?

Mr. Davey: My hon. Friend is right. That is why Liberal Democrats in this and the last Parliament have argued for a proper measure of the difference between living costs in London and other regions. That would allow us to work out what the extra allowances should be, to tackle the problems of low pay in London, to have a permanent solution for the problems and to stop chucking money away on agency nurses and teachers.

Mr. Shaw: Does the hon. Gentleman include the south-east in that? Increased pay in London has a ripple effect on the whole region, as my hon. Friends know only too well.

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman is right. I suggested that there should be an index of the cost of living in London and other regions so that we get a handle on the differences between areas. I know that there are hot spots in other regions. Cities that are undergoing huge economic development also have increasing house prices and problems with recruiting staff—

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Like Bath.

Mr. Davey: Yes, and many other successful cities, too. However, although there are hot spots, I do not think that other regions have a hot spot that covers the whole region homogenously. There is a particular problem in the south-east to which the Government have not faced up. They need to re-examine regional government and regional pay bargaining. Unless we decentralise pay bargaining in the public sector and allow regions to negotiate in light of the real costs in their regions, we will never sort out the problem.

As evidence, I cite a recent report by NERA Economic Consulting, which bears close scrutiny. It tries to get the best measure for the real costs of employing people in the public sector in different regions. To do that, it rightly uses private sector wages as a proxy for the state of regional labour markets. NERA's analysis shows that wages in outer London should be 20 per cent. higher than the average for the rest of the country, whereas the Government use a figure of 15 per cent. The figures for inner London are 40 per cent. and 30 per cent. respectively. Those are large differences that have major public finance implications. The Government have to take a closer look.

When considering mechanisms that they might use, whether regional pay or allowances, the Government must take that type of analysis into account. If they do not, Londoners' long-term quality of life will again be undermined because we will not have public servants in the numbers that we need, and we will not benefit in terms of the quality of service they provide.

Incidentally, I was surprised that the Conservative spokesman did not mention the NERA report. Councils throughout London and the south-east are relying on that sort of analysis to ensure that in future they get a better grant funding deal from the Government. The fact that the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar failed to mention it will be noticed by those councils, which will ask why the Conservatives are not speaking up for them. Yet again, the Conservatives have let down the councils in the regions and it has been left to the Liberal Democrats to argue for fair funding.

The third major factor is environmental constraints in London and the south-east—basic constraints such as land for housing, business, and green open spaces, and air and water quality. The Minister mentioned a few of those factors, and under the Greater London Authority Act 1999 the Mayor has to devise strategies for them. However, I suggest that there are other factors responsibility for which has not been given to the Mayor and of which the Minister and his colleagues should take cognisance.

First, there is the danger of flooding. I am told by people who know about these things that the need to plan for a second Thames barrier is not far off. If that is not done, the threat to London will be significant. Secondly, although the Mayor has policies on waste he does not appear to have got them right yet, and progress on recycling in this country is poor. In connection with that—even though he answered none of my questions—let me respond to a point made by the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar, who is no longer in his place, about Sutton council's recycling figures.

There was a problem with the figures on recycling for Sutton council. On the insistence of councillors, an inquiry was held which found that a council officer had made an error; that was investigated and the figures have now been corrected. Even according to the correct figures, Sutton has an amazing record on recycling, so it was rather unwise of the hon. Gentleman to pick on Sutton council, which is an environmental beacon council. In May last year, it won the EMAS—eco-management and audit scheme—award, the first London borough to gain the award, and one of the first recipients in Europe.

The GLA has powers in environmental matters, but two years on—early days yet, I admit—the Minister must be rather disappointed by the effect that the GLA has had. The GLA model is flawed: the authority has proved to be not powerful enough. I bet that during the Committee stage of the 1999 Act the Minister did not expect that the public-private partnership for London Underground would not have been signed by spring 2002. Night after night, he and his colleagues assured the members of the Standing Committee that PPP was the way forward and that it would bring investment quickly, but three years later not a dime has been invested in London as a result of it. It has been a total failure.

Let me give two other examples of the way in which when we discuss quality of life in London and the south-east we need to take a broader view than has hitherto been taken in this debate.

Mr. Don Foster: My hon. Friend was commenting on the GLA model and structure. I hope he agrees that it is very much to be hoped that when they eventually get around to publishing their White Paper on regional government, the Government will reveal a model for regional government that is very different from the one used for the GLA.

Mr. Davey: I agree with my hon. Friend, and commend to the Minister his ably written paper on regional government; it provoked a lively and well-informed debate at our recent Manchester conference.

One of the examples that I wish to discuss is the terminal 5 decision, about which many of my hon. Friends are concerned. Considering the environmental pressures on the capital, the Government's decision is surely flawed, as it will massively increase those pressures. Will the Minister tell the House whether or not he and his colleagues will give the go-ahead for a third runway at Heathrow? We are waiting to hear the result. The announcement by the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on terminal 5 was instructive because he failed to rule out the prospect of a third runway at Heathrow. If the Government go ahead and permit all that development to be concentrated in a small sub-region of London, they will create even greater imbalance in our regional and national economies. They do not understand the constraints that the environment places on an economy and a region.

I wish to raise briefly a number of issues; my hon. Friends will go into greater detail if they catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker. Front-Bench spokesmen have mentioned them already, so it is right for me to deal with them briefly. First, I am concerned that the Government have not worked effectively enough with the Metropolitan police authority and the Mayor to try to tackle the rise in street crime. Although there has been an increase in police numbers, it has been insufficient. The extra costs on the MPA following 11 September have not been fully funded. The Government have not provided as much support for local authorities on lighting and CCTV as they could have, and need to do far more.

Jane Griffiths (Reading, East): The hon. Gentleman referred to CCTV—almost its first mention in our debate—and called for more support for local authorities to introduce it, which is fine and good. He lauded the record of Liberal Democrat-controlled authorities, but is he aware of, and will he join me in deploring, Liberal Democrat-controlled Wokingham district council, which forgot to bid for CCTV money last year?

Mr. Davey: May I correct the hon. Lady? If she bothers to look at the detail of what happened in Wokingham, she will find that, when Liberal Democrats took over after the resignation of the Tory chair of the environment committee, they found that the Conservatives had failed to put in an application. The hon. Lady is right to draw attention to the matter, but she should have aimed her remarks at Conservative Members. Liberal Democrats in Wokingham have been picking up the pieces of the failed Conservative administration and will no doubt be returned in large numbers in due course.

My second example is the appalling state of our transport system. To hear the Minister talk, it was if nothing had happened to worry commuters in the past few months or the past year. He hardly touched on the problems. Listening to him, it was as though nothing was wrong; everything was rosy and successful. He did not once mention the strikes, the lack of investment or all the delays. He should apologise for that record, not try to put a spin on it.

Mr. Raynsford *rose—*

Mr. Davey: Are we going to get some more spin?

Mr. Raynsford: When the hon. Gentleman looks at the record tomorrow, he will see that throughout my speech the main theme was underinvestment. I hope that he will not make completely unfounded allegations that I did not raise the issue.

Mr. Davey: I shall certainly look closely at the record, but I do not think that the Minister said that his Government had under-invested in the transport system. We believe that they have. If the Minister had given the figures, they would have shown that his Government have, on average, spent less in the past five years than was spent in the last five years of the Conservative Administration.

My final point on quality of life concerns the NHS and the social care sector. My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) has done a fantastic job in highlighting many problems, not just in London and the south-east, but across the country. In London, I am sure he agrees, we have particular problems, primarily because of staff shortages, wages and property prices; many care home owners have sold their property to developers for residential use. That has meant a massive reduction in the number of care home places in London and the south-east, which has had a knock-on effect on the NHS. To date, the Government have done almost nothing about it. It is Liberal Democrats who have raised the issue on our Opposition days, and we will continue to harry the Government until they start to tackle the problem. Until they do so, we will never be able to get the NHS right in London and the south-east.

If my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) catches your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, I know that he intends to speak about

[Mr. Davey]

the problems of abandoned cars, graffiti and the failure to keep the streets of London clean. As he has said on previous occasions—and I agree with him—those are fundamental to improving the quality of life of our citizens in this great capital and the great region of the south-east.

If we are to have a serious debate about the quality of life in London and the south-east, and if we are to get away from banging statistics across the Dispatch Box, as the two previous speakers did, we must discuss the underlying issues so that we can produce long-term analysis and strategic planning. We must adopt policies to ensure that we take power out of Whitehall and distribute it across the country, to give our regions strong government and to give London stronger government, thereby enabling our local communities and our regions to build a better quality of life for all our citizens.

5.26 pm

Mr. Bill Rammell (Harlow): I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate. I was fascinated by the fact that the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) opened the debate by seeking consensus but subsequently reverted to the Tory knee-jerk response.

We need consensus on the key issues that determine the quality of life in London and the south-east. For my constituents in Harlow, and, I believe, elsewhere throughout London and the south-east, such issues are whether people have a job, whether they have enough income to keep them out of poverty, whether they have a roof over their head, whether they feel confident sending their children to the local school and whether they feel that their local hospital is improving.

I am not one of those party politicians who says that everything is perfect under my Government and everything was disastrous under the last lot, but if we examine the evidence on those key criteria, it is clear that things are significantly better, or at least moving in the right direction, compared to the situation four and a half or five years ago. I shall highlight some of the aspects where I believe that to be the case.

My right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government spoke about unemployment and what has happened over the past four and a half years. My constituents still remember Norman Lamont singing in the bath and speaking about unemployment being a price worth paying, and the economic philosophy whereby if a measure was not hurting, it was not working. We saw the results of that. In my constituency in 1983, under the last Conservative Government, unemployment rose to 4,700. In 1993, it got as high as 5,200. In all those 18 years, unemployment was never lower than 1,500, yet in September last year, it was as low as 978, and it is only marginally above that figure now. For the thousands of my constituents who had their lives blighted by unemployment, that was a huge improvement in the quality of their life.

To get to first base in terms of a decent standard and quality of life, people need a roof over their head. Thousands of my constituents experienced negative equity or housing repossessions in the late 1980s and early 1990s because of the Conservative mismanagement of the economy. They will be incredulous or angry beyond words to hear the Conservatives now speaking about quality of life.

We need to remind ourselves how serious and pernicious the situation was. At one stage in the early 1990s, 1.8 million households in Britain were experiencing negative equity, and 1 million of those were in London, the south-east and the eastern region. That had a devastating effect on people's quality of life, their confidence, their security and their ability to plan their lives.

A decent quality of life also means having a local state school to which people feel confident about sending their children. On that criterion, parents are in a much better position—even if it is not perfect—than they were four and a half years ago. Despite what the Conservative party says, with some support from the Liberal Democrats, school funding has increased considerably since the Conservative years, especially on school building: building, repairs, maintenance and renovation have tripled. Every time I visit a school in my constituency, I am told about a new science block, classroom or playground—the reality of that increased investment.

Mrs. Laing: I appreciate what the hon. Gentleman says, but is it not even more important that there are enough teachers to do the job that must be done in the schools to which he refers? Schools in his constituency and mine do not have enough teachers, and the main reason for the shortage is that the Government have not funded them.

Mr. Rammell: The hon. Lady makes a reasonable point in an absurd way. There are pressures on recruitment in my constituency and hers and elsewhere in the south-east, but they must be put into context: we have more teachers in schools today than at any time since 1984. One of the reasons for the excess of demand over supply is that the Government are putting more money into revenue budgets for schools, which means that they can employ more teachers. The issue is difficult and we need to think it through carefully and face up to it. It must be recognised that the Conservative party's simplistic claims that the pressure on demand is due to the policies of this Government do not bear any scrutiny.

It is not only on the funding front that improvements are being made in our schools. The focused strategy of target setting and monitoring, as well as the literacy and numeracy strategy, have ensured an attainment increase of almost 50 per cent. among 11-year-olds in four and a half years. Parents in my constituency and elsewhere in the south-east value that significant advance very much indeed. Furthermore, at long last the national health service is increasing its capacity to deliver health improvements, in contrast with the reductions in capacity that occurred under the Conservatives.

Mr. Burns: Does the hon. Gentleman remember attending the 1999 Labour party conference, at which the Prime Minister promised the country that under Labour everybody would have access to an NHS dentist within two years? Will he please explain the written answer given by Health Ministers last week, showing that 49 per cent. of children in London were registered with an NHS dentist in March 1997, while the latest figure for this year is 37 per cent?

Mr. Rammell: As I said, I do not claim that everything is perfect in terms of taking forward the improvements that we need in our key public services. When I talk to my constituents, I see that they have frustrations and concerns about the pace of change and the improvements that the Government are taking forward, but they know in their bones that the investment is now being made and the change is being delivered in a way that was not even considered during the 18 years that the Conservative party was in power.

Let me focus on the health service from a constituency perspective. In Harlow, £1 million has recently been allocated for the modernisation of our maternity unit, which is the same today as when my 12-year-old son was born in it. That shows the scale of the lack of investment in the past, whereas £1 million has now been allocated. We also have a new GP walk-in centre, providing access to a GP or a nursing service when the patient wants it—a development that is hugely popular with my constituents. Whatever the Conservative party says about funding, the North Essex health authority has had a 10.5 per cent. increase this year—a substantial increase in anybody's book. We need that funding to be sustained, as is now happening under this Government.

We need a debate on the national health service that is based on facts, not spin. I say that to all politicians in all parties. One of the key claims that the Government have rightly made concerns the need to increase nursing numbers and the reality of making that happen. Since 1997—I have obtained these figures not from the Government, but from the Library—the total number of nursing, midwifery and health-visiting staff has increased by some 28,000. That is a point that we need to force home.

I was watching the television at the weekend, and saw an advert for *The Mail on Sunday*, advertising one of its weekly stories on the alleged crisis in the national health service. I do not know whether hon. Members saw it, but at the end of the advert there was a picture of a hospital bed with a graph at the end of it entitled "Nursing numbers", with a bar chart showing the figure going down. That is a complete and utter lie. It is Conservative party spin. The Labour Government have been accused of spinning on these issues, but our opponents must recognise that they need to get their facts right. Not for nothing did Michael Foot refer, justifiably, to the *Daily Mail* as "the Forgers' Gazette".

Another aspect of the quality of life of people in London and the south-east is their ability to have access to art and culture. There was an attitude under the Conservative Government that interest in art and culture stopped at a certain point going down the socio-economic scale. This Government have rightly taken a different view. They have invested significantly in that area and brought about policy changes that benefit our constituents in London and the south-east, particularly the introduction of free access to museums to which my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government referred. That has been a huge and popular success. Attendances at our national museums since the policy was fully implemented at the beginning of December are up, on average, by about 100 per cent. It is children, the elderly and poor families, in particular, who benefit from that enrichment of their lives.

We are on the point of introducing another significant change that will benefit the arts and culture in London and the south-east, namely the substantial and unprecedented increase in funding for regional theatre starting on 1 April this year. The increase for theatres in the eastern region, through East England Arts, is £1.3 million over two years. That is a 110 per cent. increase in funding, and there is a similar picture in London, which will get a 92 per cent. increase. That demonstrates an unprecedented degree of funding, opening up our arts, culture and theatres and enriching the quality of life for people in London and the south-east, and throughout the country.

On many of the issues affecting the quality of life, most reasonable people would conclude that the Government are facing up to the concerns and making substantial progress, although there is always much more to be done. In that regard, I find it puzzling that the Liberal Democrats will be supporting the Conservatives on this issue in the Lobby tonight. I think that that decision has little to do with political principle and a great deal more to do with the tactical repositioning that appears to be under way by the Liberal Democrats at the moment, in which a crude and cynical calculation is being made about which seats are on their hit list and which menu of political policies they therefore need to put to the electorate. I would welcome an intervention from the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) on this. I tried to intervene on him earlier, but he would not let me.

I have charted some of the improvements that have taken place, but I do not claim that everything is perfect. Clearly, as time goes on, there will be new times and new challenges. The Governments who endure and retain popular support have to face up to those new challenges. I want briefly to sketch out some of the challenges that we are facing in London and the south-east. First, the need for a better rail and tube service is paramount, as has been loudly trumpeted on the Opposition Benches. I also know this from my constituents, particularly those who commute into London.

When I discuss these matters with my constituents, as I do regularly, they are unconvinced by the Conservative bluster on the issue. They know that the situation we are in is a result of decades of under-investment in the railways and the tube service. They certainly have long memories: they remember that it was a Conservative Government under Margaret Thatcher who came up with the policy of completely removing public subsidy from Network SouthEast and British Rail, as they then were.

My constituents also remember that it was the Conservative party that drove through the flawed and ideologically driven privatisation of British Rail that got us into this situation. However, they remain to be convinced—they want to be convinced—that the Government have the plans and the strategy to repair our rail and tube networks. People feel instinctively that we have taken the right decision on Railtrack. If there is a criticism, it is that the decision was not taken sooner. People desperately want the not-for-profit company to be up and running and improving our rail infrastructure as quickly as possible. They also want the PPP to be up and running, and to see the reality of the increased investment.

The second major challenge that we must face up to is the need to improve the quality and volume of homes to rent in London and the south-east. No area of public spending under the Conservative Government was cut as much as that on council housing. They had a right-to-buy

[Mr. Rammell]

policy, and nothing else. This Government have made a good start with a 50 per cent. increase in housing investment.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): The hon. Gentleman could have made that point 10 minutes ago. He has had nothing to say, and should sit down.

Mr. Rammell: If the hon. Gentleman cares to intervene on this issue, I will be happy to take his intervention. The issue of homes to rent is important to constituents in Harlow and elsewhere in the south-east, and they want to hear it articulated in the House of Commons.

That point needs to be made in a constituency context. In my constituency, the local authority has a waiting list of more than 3,000 people, some of whom have waited five or 10 years for a decent home to rent. We must face up to that problem. There is a huge north-south divide: this is a much bigger problem in London and the south-east than it is elsewhere in the country.

Mr. Edward Davey: Does the hon. Gentleman regret the fact that the Government put a cap on council tax benefit and housing benefit? As a result, many people who require affordable housing in London and the south-east do not have the rent subsidy to enable them to get that housing.

Mr. Rammell: The Government are reforming the system, and intend to reform it further. All of us in the Chamber need to face up to the problem of an acute lack of rented housing. Linked with that is the difficulty in recruiting key public sector professionals in London and the south-east. I share the view of the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey). However, the solutions that he proposes, which merely tinker with the cost of living allowance and the London allowance, lack credibility. If the salaries of teachers or nurses in London and parts of the south-east were doubled overnight, they would still not be able to afford the cost of homes in those areas. We need a far more radical strategy to deal with that problem.

The final quality of life issue that I want to highlight is community safety. One of the dispiriting aspects of the debate is that we all bandy about the figures on crime levels, instead of reaching cross-party consensus on the fact that crime was falling under the last years of the Conservative Government, and has continued to fall under this Government. However, the real concern of my constituents is not about the absolute level of crime but about what I would describe as low-level, neighbourhood nuisance, aggravation and vandalism, which blight the lives of so many people. In my community and elsewhere, people too often feel that the police and the local authority do not give those problems a high enough priority. The Home Office needs to move forward on that issue, and I know that it is doing that.

Much has been done, but we need to face up to other problems. Those watching the debate and the public at large will form a judgment on whether the Government are moving forward credibly—I think that they would say that they are—and whether the Conservative party has a credible alternative. From what we have heard in the debate, I think that a credible alternative is singularly lacking. We have not heard one substantive proposal. The only alternative on offer for the underground is privatisation. The Tory party is stuck in the days when the answer to every question was to cut taxes and public spending, and to move towards 35 per cent. of gross domestic product. That provides none of the answers to the problems that we face.

5.44 pm

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): The first duty of any Government, no matter which party, is to protect their citizens from harm. The Government are signally failing to do that in London and the south-east. As we sit here in relative comfort, bandying statistics, the lives of hundreds of thousands of people, especially but not exclusively on the big inner-city council estates, are being made a daily hell by thuggery, intimidation, violence, vandalism, drugs, threatening behaviour and neighbourhood disputes. That is going on in a concentrated fashion on big estates, and in a less concentrated but still distressing fashion in rural areas. It seems to me that every agency shrugs, and no one gets to grips with the problem.

Statistics bandied across the House are not the answer to any of these problems. We must ask ourselves how we tackle such crime. Much of that crime—not all of it—is carried out by young people, some of whom are below the age at which the courts have sufficient remedies to deal with them. Why is that coming about? Part of the problem stems from family breakdown. Many of the youngsters who get into that way of life have not had a father or have had a succession of men called "uncle" passing through their household. They have precious little parental supervision, and from the moment they are old enough to go to school unaccompanied they start to play truant, missing vital education. They fall between all the agencies, none of which take absolute responsibility. They learn to idle before they are even at secondary school, and some bunk off secondary school altogether.

When I have visited the education department of Her Majesty's prisons, I have seen fully fledged adults doing the modern equivalent of "the cat sat on the mat". I ask them, "What happened at school?" and I wish I had the smallest coin from the poorest realm for everyone who said, "Didn't go to school, Miss". That is a crying indictment—I am not saying that it is specifically and exclusively an indictment of the Government—of our failure to get to grips with that problem.

Truancy enforcement should be a major priority and concern for any Government if we are to get on top of this problem. If kids want any dealings with the labour market, and are not so rooted in crime that they do not prefer that way of making money, they will have difficulty if they have no skills and are illiterate or innumerate. The labour market increasingly wants the skilled and semi-skilled, and has fewer and fewer jobs for the unskilled. Idling, truancy and an inability to present for jobs when the time comes add up to crime and trouble. Those youngsters find ways of filling their time that make them menaces, nuisances and sometimes serious threats to the law-abiding in their area.

We must get on top of that problem. We must ensure that, when those young people are apprehended and brought before the justice system, adequate remedies are available to deal with them that will get them away from the environment that is causing them a problem and in which they are causing a problem, and that will give them secure training that is specifically directed at the needs of the child. They must have a shared interest in the outcome, which can be built into the system through incentives. We must make some attempt to put those youngsters back into a better way of living. If we do not do that, the quality of life for the people who have to live in their neighbourhoods will continue to deteriorate.

People who live on those big, inner-city council estates have an ambition to lead a normal and decent life. But they cannot escape from what are sometimes very troublesome and threatening neighbourhoods, because they have not the necessary resources. They have a fraction of the resources possessed by those of us who stand here pontificating today. They are trapped. I am not talking just about the archetypal old lady who is afraid to go out after 6 pm. In the run-up to the last election, I travelled up and down the country meeting people living on estates, not only in London, who simply could not live in that environment any longer.

In Hartlepool I met not the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), but a young man who had bought a modest little house on the edge of a council estate. It was all he could afford, although he had aspirations. He had experienced so much antisocial behaviour—there had been graffiti, vandalism and attacks on his property, just because he owned it and was trying to make a better life for himself—that on the morning I met him he had put the keys of his house through the door of the building society, although he knew that that would prejudice his chances of ever owning a house again. He could no longer live in that house, and he could not sell it for exactly the same reasons.

Two hours after I left, there was a shooting on another estate. I do not think it was a case of cause and effect. I spoke to a large number of people—and I mean a large number—who told me that each time they tried to create a pleasant little front garden it immediately became a target for every vandal in the neighbourhood, not because they had made enemies of the neighbours but simply because it was a nice little front garden.

What are the Government doing about that sort of thing? One answer, although it is not the only answer, is highly visible policing. The Minister spoke of strategies to deal with graffiti. I am all for that, but the best strategy is to have a few policemen about when it is happening. Many people living on estates, including rural estates, complain that they never see a policeman in the neighbourhood. Worse still, when they summon the police they do not arrive.

That is not because the police are not interested. It is not because they do not care tuppence. It is because the police are so overstretched that they must prioritise constantly. Nevertheless, people's confidence in the rule of law is lessened, and as a result their whole quality of life is diminished. The main thing that citizens need to feel—something we all used to take for granted; many of us still do, but too many cannot now—is that they are safe in their own neighbourhoods. They need to feel that they can venture abroad from their own houses, and live in harmony with their neighbours. That basic quality of life should not be beyond realisation, but for far too many people it is.

I think that John Stevens is one of the best things to happen to London. We should listen to him when he says that no end of police effort will work unless it is backed up by the courts and, moreover, is sustainable because there are enough police to sustain it. I am not going to oppose the proposals for community support officers in a knee-jerk fashion, but they are not and never will be a substitute for proper policemen with proper powers, properly trained, properly funded and available in sufficient numbers to make neighbourhoods safe, reliable and pleasant again.

So far I have concentrated on inner-city estates. As some Members will know, that is partly because in a previous incarnation as shadow Home Secretary I took a particular interest in the Arden estate in Hackney. Although it is by no means the worst example, it has enormous problems. Time and again, what I heard from those living there was, "No one cares, no one is here, no one is doing anything. We have been asking for closed-circuit television for goodness knows how many years, and we still do not have it. We have been asking for extra coppers for years, and we still do not have them." It was a crime that no one listened. If we are serious about improving quality of life, that is the issue with which we must deal.

Let me say something about rural areas, and about my constituency. I hear increasingly about problems there. There are farmers living in remote farmhouses who say that people brazenly steal farm vehicles, knowing that even if the farmer can see them and is telephoning the police, it will be a nice long time before the police arrive—unless they are exceptionally unlucky and there happens to be a police car in the neighbourhood. Then there are villagers who say that, particularly in the evenings, people do not feel comfortable moving around the village after dark. What sort of indictment is that? The English village used to be a haven of safety; now too many have become seas of vandalism and antisocial behaviour.

I do not entirely buy the Government's line that antisocial behaviour orders are a rip-roaring success. How many were imposed in the first three years of their existence? The Government have finally, grudgingly conceded that they got it all wrong and must handle it differently in the hope that it will work in future, but only last week—not in my constituency, but nearby in Kent—three 13-year-olds who had defied an ASBO were due to appear in court. They face a period in detention if they are found guilty, but the fact that they defied the order raises serious questions about how effective such orders are in cases of that kind. Again, policemen are needed to ensure that people do not break ASBOs.

Mr. Shaw: The right hon. Lady may be referring to the Malling area in my constituency.

Miss Widdecombe: Gillingham.

Mr. Shaw: In the Malling area, young men the same age have been the subject of ASBOs, have offended against them and have been taken to court. It is the first time that that has happened in the community involved. If a custodial sentence is imposed, a message will go out

[Mr. Shaw]

to other young people. In some circumstances, is it not necessary to demonstrate the effect that this can have on individuals?

Miss Widdecombe: If the hon. Gentleman had listened to my earlier comments, he would have noted my specific observation that young people should be taken out of the environment where they are causing a problem and a problem is being caused to them, and should be put into secure training. I devoted a substantial section of my speech to that. Intervention would happen earlier than it does in the case of ASBOs: until an ASBO has been seriously breached, nothing is done.

My point is that the tendency to breach ASBOs would probably be reduced by more visible policing. I am trying to present common-sense solutions to problems that are not easy to deal with, and have multiple roots. I said specifically, not just today but—to make a party political point—well before the last election, when it was a crucial plank of my policy, that youngsters should be taken into secure training if they were causing a neighbourhood menace.

Mr. Mark Oaten (Winchester): I thank the right hon. Lady for that point. She is making a strong case for more police and greater police visibility, but is it not the case that studies by the Audit Commission and others show that that only provides a comfort factor, and that having police walking the beat and police in cars is not as effective in tackling crime as she may be suggesting?

Miss Widdecombe: I think that the hon. Gentleman is wrong and the reason for that stems from what I saw in New York, where, as he knows, there has been not only a zero tolerance policy but a huge hike in the number of police and a huge concentration on visible policing. Visible policing has lots of positive benefits, one of which, as the hon. Gentleman identified, is that it reduces the fear of crime. The second is that it enables police to interact with the community.

I cannot imagine anyone flagging down a police car to say, "Excuse me, officer; I am not certain, but I think that I may have seen something odd two nights ago." However, if there is a man walking the beat at a fairly slow pace, looking interested and, in particular, looking around, that sort of interaction takes place. Just as CCTV is a deterrent to opportunistic crime but not as much to planned and organised crime, a visible policeman is a deterrent to opportunistic crime.

Therefore I do not believe for a moment that visible policing is simply a comfort factor. If one chooses to make comparisons between a police car responding immediately to a call some way off and a policeman who may or may not see something of interest as he wanders along a street, one can reach the conclusion that the hon. Gentleman has drawn, but if one takes a broader view, one reaches a different conclusion.

Mr. Edward Davey: I think that the right hon. Lady will appreciate my argument when I have made it. When Mayor Giuliani was asked, when he was in London recently, what was the key aspect of his fight against crime, he said that it was not just the number of police but the way in which they interacted with intelligence gathering and a database. What mattered was the way in which those police were deployed. What is needed is intelligent policing—more police, but more intelligently deployed.

Miss Widdecombe: That is undeniably the case. Mayor Giuliani had another 11,000 policemen and I am not suggesting that they were all walking up and down streets; they were doing all sorts of things, but they were also walking up and down those streets. In New York, one need not look far to see the visible presence of a policeman. In London, one can sometimes walk quite a long way before seeing one, and in a rural area, or in some villages in my constituency, one will never see a policeman.

I am not saying for a moment that there is a simplistic relationship between the number of police officers and crime. Rather, I am saying that although the number of police may not be a sufficient condition of fighting crime, they are certainly a necessary condition of it, and that if there are not enough policemen, the fight against crime is doomed to failure. That, sadly, is what is happening at the moment.

In addition to policemen there are of course the special constables. When I asked a question about the number of special constables, it apparently constituted such a detailed request that the Minister brushed it away. It is not a detailed question. Special constables are the reserve that the police fall back on. The police are facing an ever-increasing amount of bureaucracy—much, but not all, imposed by the Labour Government—with fewer active numbers and less of a reserve to fall back on. That is obviously totally counter-productive if we want to control crime.

Another aspect of quality of life has nothing to do with crime but causes me considerable irritation and probably causes a great many people to raise their eyebrows and wonder why it only appears to happen in London and not in other capital cities. I am referring to the sheer quantity of litter that blows and flows around London. There are the awful, rotting black bags that sit on pavements and street corners, and which one has to wend one's way round when going out in London in the evening. Why is it that we appear, uniquely, to be unable to control litter and rubbish in London when other capital cities have done it extremely effectively? It impacts on the quality of life and lets the capital down, especially in the eyes of visitors, who are used to completely different standards.

I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate. I hope that the Minister will take seriously the points that I have raised and that he will not interpret them as being made in a purely party political spirit. I hope that he will acknowledge that statistics are not the answer; real policemen on real beats, doing real jobs, are.

6.5 pm

Mr. David Lepper (Brighton, Pavilion): Thank you for calling me, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am glad that the emphasis of the discussion has shifted away slightly from London. I feared, soon after the debate started, that we would discuss nothing but London and ignore the rest of the south-east of England. Most of my remarks will be about the experience of my constituency, on the south coast.

Quality of life means different things to different people. To some of my constituents, the fact that a Labour Government are likely to approve a national park for the south downs will be a big boost to their appreciation of the area in which they live and their feelings of well-being. To others, the fact that our Dome concert hall has just reopened after a major refurbishment, financed partly by the local council, partly by national Government funding, partly by English Heritage and partly by the lottery, and the fact that that will lead eventually to refurbishment and an entirely new library and museum in the centre of our city, will be key factors in judging the quality of their life.

For others, quality of life will be headlines such as the following, which appeared in the Brighton daily newspaper, the *Argus*, on 8 March 2002: "Big fall in crime". The article read:

> "City crime has dropped to its lowest point since 1999 . . . Totals"

for burglaries and car crime

> "late last year were more than 2,000 per month compared to more than 3,000 in 1999. The biggest fall has been in car crime, down to 300 a month compared with 700"—

still too many, but a major drop. That was partly the result of special funding directed by the Home Office to the Brighton and the—still existing but soon to be former—Hove and Shoreham divisions to enable them to concentrate on tackling car crime.

However, to many of my constituents, the prime criterion that they would use is whether they have a job. My hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell) spoke about changes that had happened nationally and in his constituency over the past four and a half years. Throughout the Brighton and Hove city area, in January 1997, there were 14,415 people out of work. That figure has now been reduced to 5,531. In my constituency, the January 1997 figure was 5,721 and now the figure is 1,845—a drop of 66.8 per cent.

I would argue that that drop is mainly attributable to skilful management of the economy by the Labour Government and to other policies, which have been opposed by the Opposition—policies such as the new deal for the unemployed. The new deal first helped young people—young people exactly like those that the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) talked about. It has helped young people exactly like those whom I saw in the late 1980s and early 1990s as a teacher in a secondary school on a council estate in Brighton, who were leaving school at age 16 without hope of employment. The new deal has given them a new kind of hope, but not only hope: it has given them jobs.

The new deal has provided support, encouragement and training for many people who had been considered unemployable by the previous Government because of a disability, or because they were lone parents. They were encouraged to be benefit-dependent, whereas our policies have encouraged them to find the potential within themselves and to use it very positively.

Mrs. Laing: I cannot sit here and listen to the hon. Gentleman saying something about the last Government that is not true. Exactly the reverse is true. No Conservative Government ever encouraged any sector of society to be benefit-dependent.

Mr. Lepper: The hon. Lady is welcome to her opinion. I have listened to a number of untruths from Opposition Members about the policies of this Government, and I stand by my statement. Whereas the previous Government encouraged benefit dependency, with incapacity benefit being the prime example, this Government have encouraged people through training and the sheer shift of emphasis within the Employment Service. The Government have provided opportunities through their management of the economy, and the creation of jobs that that has helped to engender, for people to move off benefit and into work.

Miss Widdecombe: If the hon. Gentleman's Government are so keen on reducing benefit dependency, why was it that when we introduced the jobseeker's allowance, which required people to look for work, it was opposed by the then Opposition? Why was it that when we made amendments to incapacity benefit—precisely because it was so abused and used for dependency—were they opposed by the then Opposition? Why did they oppose all those measures when in opposition if they are genuinely opposed to benefit dependency?

Mr. Lepper: That was a long intervention from the right hon. Lady. I stand by my statement. We have attempted to shift away from benefit dependency, not just through the new deal. My constituency and the rest of the Brighton and Hove city council area has benefited from being an employment zone. We also have the working links organisation, which has taken a more flexible approach to training and getting people into jobs.

Assisted area status has been given to parts of the Kemptown constituency and my own, as well as parts of the wider Newhaven to Shoreham area. That is also helping to bring jobs to my part of the south coast. I well recall the days before I was a Member of Parliament when, as a Brighton councillor, I came up to London with a delegation from the Brighton borough council, as it then was, and from East Sussex county council, with which we were then linked, to make a plea to the then DTI Minister—who was at the time the Conservative Member for Hove—for Government support for assisted area status.

We could see the effect that the two recessions—we will not quibble about whether it was two or three—were having on our area. We had seen the way in which they had decimated a once-thriving manufacturing base on the outskirts of Brighton and Hove and the way in which we lost about 6,000 jobs throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s.

We made a plea for Conservative Government support for assisted area status and despite the fact that his own constituency would have benefited, the then Minister did not feel able to persuade the Conservative Government to back our bid for that status. It has taken a Labour Government to support that bid and we are now beginning to see some of the fruits of it.

The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey), who is no longer with us, talked about the need for strategies and for analysis leading to strategies. In terms of the south-east, I draw his attention and that of other hon. Members to the document "A Better Quality of Life in the South-east", produced by the south-east regional assembly, the Government office for the south-east, the South East England development agency, the Environment Agency and the national health service.

[Mr. Lepper]

The document was published in June last year and carries out exactly the kind of analysis for which the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton was pleading, and develops a strategy for improving the quality of life. The authors of the document—not the Labour Government—say that the single most significant tool in terms of addressing the objective of tackling deprivation and its associated targets is the national strategy for neighbourhood renewal. That is a strategy of this Government, and I am pleased that part of my constituency, the Hollingdean area, will benefit from being part of the strategy, which concentrates on the poorest constituents and brings in funding from the mainstream budgets of public agencies. Perhaps most importantly, it involves the local community in planning the way in which that funding will be used.

Underlying some of the comments of the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald—I may be misinterpreting her—was a view that somehow communities were waiting for things to be done to them by outside agencies. I agree that the quality and level of policing is important, but what has been overlooked for too many years—another hallmark of this Government is that we are shifting the emphasis—is the involvement of local people at community level in deciding how additional funding should be used.

Miss Widdecombe: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lepper: I will give way for the last time to the right hon. Lady.

Miss Widdecombe: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman and I will not trespass on his patience again after this. Does he accept that what he has just said was the exact basis of our single regeneration budget, an extremely successful initiative that the Government have carried on? Does he accept that neighbourhood involvement was the very essence of that?

Mr. Lepper: The single regeneration budget was a late addition to Conservative policies, but I agree that my constituency has benefited in part from it. However, it did not look at the neighbourhood areas in the way that neighbourhood renewal does.

I welcome the fact that we will benefit in parts of my constituency from being part of neighbourhood renewal. That same area of Hollingdean now has sure start funding, which will vastly improve the quality of life of the many families with young children under school age who are living in council estates or areas of private housing that currently have little in the way of community facilities that are sometimes taken for granted elsewhere. These are the kinds of streams of funding that are making a real difference to the lives of people in my community.

I could mention also the increasing health authority allocations over the last five years, and the additional £800,000 given to our local hospital to modernise the maternity unit, much as happened in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow. I could mention also the opening of an NHS dental centre, providing dental treatment for many of those people who, because of changes made by the previous Government in the early 1990s that helped to cut the numbers of dentists in the NHS, have not been able to sign up with an NHS dentist.

Mr. Burns: I will paraphrase the question that I put to the hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell). Was the hon. Gentleman at the Labour party conference in October 1999? Did he hear the Prime Minister say that, within two years, everybody in the country would have access to an NHS dentist? Is he aware that, according to Government figures from the Department of Health, the number of people who have access to an NHS dentist amounts to just under 60 per cent? It is over two years since that promise. Could the hon. Gentleman explain why it has not been kept?

Mr. Lepper: The NHS dental centre in my constituency, opened in the autumn of last year, is one of a number of such centres opened across the country since the Prime Minister made that speech at the Labour party conference to which the hon. Gentleman has twice drawn the attention of the House.

While on the subject of health, I could mention the £675,000 of the local capital modernisation fund, provided to our local NHS trust for equipment and small building works. Perhaps most importantly, we have been given the go-ahead for a new children's unit on the site of the Royal Sussex county hospital to replace the 120-year-old Royal Alexandra children's hospital. That hospital was much loved by local families over the years, but as everyone recognises—particularly the medical staff and nurses who work there—the 120-year-old building has long since outlived its capacity for refurbishment and modernisation. I am pleased to say that the Government have brought forward the intended date of completion of the newly transferred children's unit from 2010 to 2007.

Mr. Oaten: The hon. Gentleman mentioned several Government-funded capital projects, but does he acknowledge that, although the Government may have made some progress, a fundamental problem exists in the south-east in terms of the revenue required to bring certain projects on stream? In the south-east, there is a real difficulty in getting year-by-year allocations to back up capital projects.

Mr. Lepper: In my experience, the problem that the hon. Gentleman describes does not apply to the projects that I listed.

I shall finish my remarks on health by drawing attention to the new medical school—one of three in the country—that will open in Brighton this year. This joint project—involving the Government, the University of Sussex, the University of Brighton, and the Royal Sussex County hospital—will create one of the schools that will help to train doctors. Our national health service is still in drastic need of more doctors, and more nurses, because during the 1990s recruitment and training programmes for doctors and nurses were repeatedly cut back. I am pleased that my constituency will have one of the new medical schools.

The right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald—in mentioning her, I risk her intervening again—rightly drew attention to the problems that can be generated by disaffected young people. As I said, I taught for many years at a secondary school that served a council estate on the edge of Brighton, and I witnessed such problems again and again. That is why I welcome—as will she—schemes such as the positive futures initiative, which is funded by the Home Office. My area has been designated one of the 33 new areas that will form part of the positive futures network.

This issue brings me back to the importance of involving local people in improving the quality of life. The scheme will provide funding for a local partnership—involving the local council, Brighton and Hove Albion football club, South East Dance, Brighton youth centre and Adventure Unlimited—that will work with precisely those young people, aged 10 to 16, who are in danger of falling into the trap of disaffection that the right hon. Lady described.

I have sought to outline certain ways in which several Government policies are directly addressing improving the quality of life for many of my constituents. However, I want to make a plea to the Government that echoes the comments of some other Members. As I said, having a job is probably the most basic measure of one's quality of life, but having somewhere to live goes hand in hand with that. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will know from my correspondence and comments in the House that the problem of obtaining affordable housing is becoming increasingly acute, not just in my constituency but along the entire south coast. Indeed, I suspect that the same is true in London.

I welcome the fact that my area is part of the key workers scheme, which involves the Moat housing association, and that East Sussex, Brighton and Hove health authority now has an additional allowance for nurses and other health service staff. It was excluded from that scheme on its introduction—until health service representatives, my hon. Friends and I undertook a great deal of lobbying. I also welcome the fact that my local council can now specify a proportion of affordable housing in new planning developments, and the many measures in the housing Green Paper and the urban White Paper—such as changes in VAT—that should help to free up empty property. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow and others have referred to such measures. My own council has an empty property strategy, through which it tries to bring back into use some of the many—far too many—empty properties above shops and offices that could be used as flats.

Measures are in place to make housing more accessible to the people who need it, but I renew my plea to the Government to look again at the housing benefit system. In my constituency, the housing benefit that is available to under-25-year-olds in no way compares to even the lowest rents that are being asked for the smallest privately rented properties. I do not want housing benefit to cover the whole of a person's rent, because that would invite landlords to increase rents. However, existing structures, the way in which the local reference rent is set and certain housing benefit restrictions are not helping many of my constituents, particularly the young. As I said, I ask the Government to look again at that issue.

I finish with a slight warning. I hope that the remarks of the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) are not widely reported outside the House. I say that not because of any personal animosity—I do not know him well enough to have strong feelings about him one way or the other. However, last week I chaired a meeting of the all-party tourism group, at which the British Tourist Authority referred to the serious decline in tourism in this country, caused in part by foot and mouth disease and the aftermath of 11 September. Many people are working hard to counter that decline. Negative descriptions of London such as the one that dominated the hon. Gentleman's earlier remarks will do nothing to help bring people back to our capital city, and to south coast resorts that MPs such as I represent.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I should tell the House that, so far, Back-Bench speeches are averaging 20 minutes. That will prove the road to disappointment for many hon. Members, unless we can improve on that.

6.29 pm

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): I shall endeavour to keep my comments to a minimum, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper), but I am afraid that I intend to return to the subject of London. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) on making an extremely thoughtful speech on a subject that she obviously cares about greatly, and on which she has a great deal of knowledge. Certain Members would be wise not to paint her as a caricature; they should listen to what she has to say on this important subject.

I welcome the fact that this debate is being held on the Floor of the House, although we have had some interesting debates on London in Westminster Hall. I notice that some of the regular London debaters from Westminster Hall are not in their places today. That is possibly because hon. Members feel a little less constrained in what they say in Westminster Hall. For example, Labour Members have made some very intelligent criticisms of the Government. If the Minister has not yet read the speech made a few weeks ago by the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) on housing in London, I recommend him to do so. It was a model speech about the problems London faces.

London is a great place to live if one is a have—usually the owner of a property—as opposed to a have-not. Middlesex is even better and in Uxbridge we benefit from a position that is close to the centre, being a good location for business and transport, as well as having easy access so that people can enjoy the countryside.

London has much wildlife, and not only on the outskirts. I can recommend the Barnes wetland centre, which is not many miles from here. This season, three bitterns have wintered there. Before a Liberal Democrat jumps up to point out that the centre is in one of their constituencies, I should point out that the only feature they have in common with the birds is an ability to sit on fences.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): Another thing that we have in common is that we have paddled through some very rough water.

Mr. Randall: I shall endeavour to observe the strictures of my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood

[Mr. Randall]

and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) about not being partisan. I just fell victim again to the temptation to be partisan about the Liberal Democrats—it is like retaliation on the football field, in that one feels like doing it even though one knows one should not and might get a red card for it.

One of the problems with politicians is that we are always taking credit for things that our party has achieved. We also like to ignore those things that we did not get right or left undone. That is true of all parties. However, it is only fair to Londoners to say that London owes its position as a great city today more to the endeavours of Londoners—be they native Londoners, people who have come from elsewhere in the country or people from outside the country—than to any political party.

London has some great universities and in Uxbridge we have Brunel university. Some of the problems we have mentioned with the cost of living—property prices, affordable housing and rents—impinge on students. If we want to encourage people to come to London to study, we must recognise that students face those problems, too.

If everything is so wonderful, hon. Members might wonder what I have to complain about, but as well as some of the greatest advantages, London has some of the worst pockets of deprivation in the country. Hon. Members have mentioned the problem of affordable housing. Well, we want more houses, but we do not want to build on our open spaces. We must consider ways around that problem, including high-density housing, although we must be careful that we do not recreate the problem estates with the high-rise flats that were a big mistake. As we all now know, having a nice environment in which to live and work has a knock-on effect on how people behave.

The hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell) mentioned *The Mail on Sunday* and its report on hospitals. I am not a regular reader of that newspaper, but I was told today by the *Uxbridge Gazette* that Hillingdon hospital got one star—the lowest rating. It does not merit such a low grade. Members of Parliament often receive the bad news on hospitals in complaints from constituents, but when we visit the hospitals we often see the reverse because things are laid on especially for us. I know from my family's experiences, and those of neighbours and fellow residents, that the hospital is not always so bad, but matters are not improving. Much of the problem is caused by staffing difficulties.

I am sorry to see that the Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs, the right hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham), has left the Chamber briefly—even though he has left an admirable replacement—only because in a previous incarnation he dealt with health matters. I want to remind the House of the terrible decision to move Harefield hospital into central London. That sums up some of the problems we face. We are trying to stop people driving into London, but that hospital was moved from the outskirts to the centre. It is better to live on the outskirts of London, and I would have thought that convalescing in Paddington basin is a lot more difficult than in rural Middlesex.

Antisocial behaviour and the general lack of visible policing is a subject on which I hear more complaints than any other at the moment. The problem is real. We have four police stations in Hillingdon borough and none of them has a front counter that is open 24 hours a day. That worries people. Statistics show that not many people attend the front counter of police stations, but the lack of them is a psychological blow and people find it difficult to accept that the police station is open.

The antisocial behaviour that other hon. Members have mentioned seems to be on the increase, although I congratulate the Hillingdon division, which is trying to muster as many men, women and vehicles as it can to go out on Friday and Saturday evenings to tour round looking for, in particular, youth crime. I went out with them recently, and West Drayton and Hayes on a Friday evening were everything that I dreamed they might be.

The quality of life for the people who have, whom I mentioned earlier, can be very good. London can be a super place to live, but that quality can be fragile. Certainly for those who have not, London can be an unpleasant place to live. It has some of the worst accommodation and can be a very lonely place. We do no service to our constituents, or to Londoners generally, if we ignore those problems. I mentioned the problem of unemployment in an intervention during the Minister's speech and I accept his point that it is not the Government's fault. Although levels are relatively low at the moment, compared with other parts of the country, things could get worse quickly. More job cuts are on the horizon.

We know about the problems of public service workers and the lack of affordable housing, but workers in the private sector—for example, in retail—also suffer. We cannot get enough bus drivers or postmen, and that affects the quality of life.

I was disappointed by the Government's amendment, although I know that it is their job to respond to our motion. It is unfair to say that the Opposition are talking London down. We are not. We are trying to raise awareness, because the danger that might result from talking our capital city down could also arise if people who do not want to acknowledge that a problem exists continue to look through rose-tinted spectacles. There has been a hint of that among Labour Members this afternoon. Without awareness, we will never be able to address the problems that affect us all.

6.40 pm

Joan Ryan (Enfield, North): I, too, shall concentrate more on London than on the south-east in general. I shall speak mainly about my constituency of Enfield, North, and about the borough of Enfield.

I was surprised to hear the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) speak about abandoned cars. That is clearly a huge issue, as abandoned cars blight localities. I very much welcome the White Paper on abandoned vehicles, and it was interesting that the hon. Gentleman did not answer a specific question about whether the Opposition had responded to it. We must conclude that the answer is no, although we stand to be informed on the matter.

However, I was surprised by the hon. Gentleman's remarks most of all because some months ago I raised the matter of abandoned cars at Prime Minister's Question Time. Opposition Members fell about laughing that afternoon, and I was greeted with a huge amount of derision. It was quite intimidating, but I continued with my question because the issue is so important. I am sure that Opposition Members intended to be intimidating, but their reaction showed merely that they have—and have had for many years—a complete lack of regard for what I call the nitty-gritty issues to do with quality of life.

I shall return to the bigger policy areas, such as unemployment and housing, but the real, nitty-gritty issues to do with quality of life are those that face people when they open their front doors. If people do not feel empowered to do anything about those issues, it is highly unlikely that they will engage in the bigger policy areas.

Tim Loughton: I agree that the nitty-gritty issues are important to ordinary people in their own environment. Those issues include abandoned cars, fly tipping and the location of mobile phone masts. In their general election manifesto, the Conservative Opposition had detailed policies on all those matters, whereas the Government did not touch on them at all. It is not that we had no view on those matters: rather, we had a very detailed view on each of them.

Joan Ryan: I said that I would return to the issue of crime, but the hon. Gentleman's intervention is a crime against reality. I do not agree with him at all. It is true that abandoned cars, litter, fly tipping, dog fouling, vandalism, graffiti, the antisocial behaviour of travellers and so on are very serious issues in local communities. However, my experience of the general election was that there were really two elections going on. On television, in the media and even locally, the Conservatives seemed to want to talk only about two issues—the euro and asylum seekers. In contrast, the Government—and, to be fair to them, the Liberal Democrats—talked about other matters as well, most notably public services.

Local people made it clear to anyone who knocked on their doors that they wanted to talk about the issues that I listed earlier and about public services. I know that many other hon. Members had the same experience. People understood that those were the issues that affected their quality of life. They are concerned about what goes on in their street, their stairwell, their car park and their park. They are also worried about whether they have jobs, decent housing, and good health services and schools.

However, the Conservatives did not want to discuss those issues in the election. Their manifesto may have tried to pay lip service to those issues, but lip service was all that it achieved.

Tim Loughton: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Joan Ryan: No, as I want to complete this point. This debate is striking for the absence of an awareness of reality among Opposition Members, and for the fact that they take no responsibility for their inaction when in government. The previous Conservative Government could have had an effect on these matters, but they chose to do nothing. Opposition Members want to jump on a bandwagon by tabling this motion for debate today, but where are they? They take no responsibility for the many problems that exist.

This Labour Government are tackling those problems. They are making some progress, but the problems are deep-seated and have existed through many years of complete disregard and lack of investment by the previous Conservative Government. They will not be solved in a five-year period. The Conservatives had 18 to 19 years in government last time, and they were in government for many more years of the previous century. They created the problems and ignored local people. For so long, they showed neither care nor consideration for local communities, yet they want the problems to be resolved in five years.

I want the Government to continue to act. I want more action, and I want it faster. I want resource levels to be maintained and then increased. I do not accept that all the problems arose in the past five years, nor that this Government have done nothing to tackle them. The problems did not arise in the past five years, and the Government have acted to resolve them.

Another matter that has not been mentioned forms part of the ethos of some political parties, but not of the Conservative Opposition.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Joan Ryan: No, I will not.

I wish to speak about consultation, the involvement of local people, and partnership. I was a local councillor from 1990 to 1998, with a Conservative Government in power for most of that time. In effect, "consultation" came to be a dirty word when it came to involving people in local authority and other issues, especially health. I remember all the meetings that were held about establishing an internal market for health. It appeared that local people were being consulted, but no one believed it. On the contrary, local people were being told what was going to happen, and that they could like it or lump it.

That really damaged the involvement of local communities in local and national politics.

Mrs. Laing: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Joan Ryan: I will when I have finished this point. We have paid a heavy price for that. I have heard nothing this afternoon to demonstrate that the Opposition have changed their approach. We have heard nothing about the many local community and voluntary groups which have to engage with local authorities and Government to make progress on these issues. In my constituency, we see such consultation in local strategic partnerships, the involvement of people on governing bodies, neighbourhood watch schemes and in voluntary groups. The Conservative party should take responsibility for the damage that it did to that process.

Mrs. Laing: I am listening carefully to what the hon. Lady is saying about consultation and involvement. Was it not a Conservative Government who were responsible for large numbers of school governors? Was it not a Conservative Government who introduced community health councils to involve the community in the health service? Did not the Labour Government try to get rid of community health councils and ignore the consultation process?

Joan Ryan: The hon. Lady will know that even the national body for community health councils agrees that reform is needed. There is no point Conservative

[Joan Ryan]

Members wrapping themselves in a veneer of respectability; because if we scratch the surface we see that nothing is there.

I fully accept people's right to be travellers and to pursue that lifestyle if they so wish. Problems arise because on many occasions—I am sure that many right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House have experienced this—when travellers leave land that is inappropriate for human habitation and has no facilities, they leave behind a dreadful mess. Once they are there, it is very unpleasant for the residents of that area; the travellers are often on their only piece of open space. When they go they leave a mess, and local authorities or the private sector business which owns the car park or land in question is left with the bill for cleaning up after what is essentially antisocial behaviour. Will the Government look more closely at what we can do to assist local authorities and local people in dealing with the issue?

Tim Loughton: I agree with the hon. Lady, but will she acknowledge that in 1998, the then Home Secretary—now the Foreign Secretary—by way of regulation enabled travellers of whatever description to encamp on derelict land in the ownership of local authorities, resulting in a 16-month encampment in my constituency? The change in the regulations for which her party was responsible led to an extraordinary increase in the problems of travellers in Sussex and the rest of the country.

Joan Ryan: That is not the case—there was no change in regulation. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman goes back to the Library for some more detail.

Consultation partnerships are important because they empower people. The hon. Gentleman mentioned fly tipping, which in many ways has the same outcome for local residents as visiting travellers. Will the Government consider what measures can be taken to combat this problem? I fear that it is on the increase; it is a scourge and a blight, and local authorities need support in dealing with it. It is a big issue for legitimate local businesses that manage their waste properly. They fear for the future of their business because of the state of the area in which they operate when fly tipping takes place.

My local authority has put in place many initiatives that have made a big difference to local people's quality of life. Enfield council, in partnership with local residents, the police and business, has won almost £2.1 million in Government backing to help tackle crime and the fear of crime. Despite all that has been said, the British crime survey shows that there has been a 7 per cent. drop in crime. There is an issue surrounding street crime and mobile phone crime, which the Government have acknowledged as much as the Conservative party, but there has been a drop in crime overall. It is important to make that point.

Enfield is one of the safest London boroughs. However, we can never afford to be complacent, nor would we want to be. It does not help to scaremonger. People can walk around the streets of Enfield 99 per cent. of the time and be perfectly safe, but the fear of crime is much greater than the likelihood of it happening. Although I support visible policing and believe that there should be more of it, it is also about intelligent policing. That is vital.

Enfield has benefited from an increase of almost 15 per cent. in police numbers from this April, which is very welcome. The £2.1 million from the Government for our CCTV monitoring station will make a tremendous difference in catching criminals and acting as a deterrent. I pay tribute to my local authority in being successful in its bid and to the Government for making the money available so that my local authority could bid for it.

Ponders End and Edmonton have received more than £4 million this year for our neighbourhood renewal programme. That, too, is making a tremendous difference. The way that money will be spent is in direct response to residents' involvement and wishes. It will be aimed at improving quality of life.

On employment, my constituency lost 9,000 manufacturing jobs between 1992 and 1997. That is a huge number. I acknowledge that there are difficulties in the manufacturing sector, but that is not to say that manufacturing cannot succeed, because it can and does. The difference that the Government have made to Enfield is that we now have the lowest unemployment rate for 25 years, and youth unemployment is down by some 83 per cent. That is something to celebrate.

There is a scheme in Enfield that combines housing and jobs. It is a partnership that deals with the catch-22 situation for young people who lack relevant experience and qualifications and are unable to secure that vital first job. The partnership is between Enfield council, the Young Builders Trust and the Lee housing association. Young people build their own homes; they learn construction skills while they do so and, at the end of the process, they have the opportunity to take up a tenancy. They also have the skills to acquire a job. That is an innovative scheme; people could learn a lot from it and I recommend it to my right hon. Friend the Minister. He is nodding—he is clearly aware of such schemes. That came about following a successful bid to the Housing Corporation. More of these schemes are needed.

In conclusion, it is good that we have debates about these issues with regard to London and the south-east. Although issues such as litter, dog fouling, and the state of stairwells and pavements have been treated with derision by Opposition Members in the past, they are very important to our constituents. It is a shame that the Conservatives are Johnny-come-latelys on these issues, but it is no surprise. It is easy for them to pick up these issues now that they are in opposition—they did not bother to do anything about them when they had many years of opportunity to do so—because they do not have to take responsibility for anything whatever.

7 pm

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): I want to pick up the theme of quality of life and the environment. I shall restrict my comments to the counties around London. In the context of the south-east regional planning committee—this may surprise you, Mr. Deputy Speaker—Essex, Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire are considered to be part of the south-east rather than the eastern region. For the purposes of my speech, that is exceptionally convenient and useful.

Everyone seeks to have the best quality of life that they can enjoy, particularly with regard to their housing. Over the last few years, the way in which Serplan, the Crow report and the Government have sought to establish figures to dictate to the home counties and beyond the number of houses that they must build over the next decade and up to 2021 has been nothing more than a shambles. No reasonable person would deny the responsibility of local communities, through local authorities and, up to a point, through central Government, to consider demographic changes. As a result of those changes, there is a need to provide extra housing for young people and others, because more and more people in society are living in single-parent households or on their own. However, because the process is statistically flawed, I question the way in which central Government seek to dictate to local authorities what they are expected to do with regard to house building.

After a series of false starts—and of taking two steps forward, and one step back—the regional planning guidance of December 2001 stated, in effect, that until 2006, 39,000 houses a year must be built, and, thereafter, 43,000 houses a year. If my mathematics are correct, the counties concerned must therefore build a total of just under 880,000 houses over a relatively short period of time. I question whether the way in which those figures have been arrived at, and the basis for the calculations, is correct. The sad fact of life is that if the figures are wrong, and the houses have been built, it will be too late to get that land back.

The Government have continued the policy of my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) when he was Secretary of State for the Environment in insisting on 60 per cent. brownfield build. I applaud that. However, there is a problem in certain areas, which I am sure that the Minister, with his experience, will accept. Some areas do not have 60 per cent. brownfield sites on which to build. My local authority in Chelmsford is one such authority. The Deputy Prime Minister, in a previous incarnation, said that that figure should be flexible, so that it could be traded around the country. Therefore, theoretically, if an area had 80 per cent. brownfield sites, it would be able to build more, whereas an area that had a figure of less than 60 per cent. would be able to build less. I do not disagree with that at all. It is a sensible approach. In reality, however, it seems that nothing is being done to bring that policy, and the mechanisms for it to work, into force. Therefore, a rigid target of 60 per cent. must still be met, even though some areas do not have 60 per cent. brownfield sites to meet it.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): On my hon. Friend's point about the target, is it not extraordinary that that target has been fixed so early in the cycle, before information is available from the national census? The results of that census, which clearly identify housing formation and housing need, will not be available until next year.

Mr. Burns: My hon. Friend makes a telling point. It is characteristic of the cock-eyed way in which the system has operated in the past five years that something as crucial as the census report will not be included in the basis for the figures.

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Burns: I shall make some progress.

Another problem is that in almost all of these areas—there have been examples in West Sussex, around Stevenage in Hertfordshire and in Hampshire—the local population are being ignored. If the Government paid more than lip service to their rhetoric, that local population should be empowered. However, the building programme is being forced on them with the full arm and might of the law. No account is being taken of local views. Even more disturbingly, if the Government's White Paper proposals for reform of the planning laws go ahead in their current form, the viewpoint and wishes of local communities will be reduced even more by the diktat of this Government and their control freakery.

As I said, that has caused considerable problems in West Sussex, around Stevenage in Hertfordshire and in Hampshire. It has also caused problems further afield, but I shall not test your patience on that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as that is beyond the Serplan area. However, that policy is causing particular problems in my county of Essex, where we are expected to build 112,000 houses by 2011. In my local authority area, we must build just under 12,000 houses, but we do not have 60 per cent. brownfield land for that. Therefore, there will be more and more encroachment on the greenfield sites that everyone wants to maintain as far as realistically possible. That is a worrying problem, and my local authority is having to deal with it.

Mr. Cameron: Will my hon. Friend remind us who controls Chelmsford borough council and what their view is on this matter?

Mr. Burns: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend, as he raises a highly relevant point. Although—for reasons that will become apparent shortly—my local authority is a hung council, it is controlled by the Liberal Democrats. The performance of Liberal Democrats in Chelmsford over the past three or four years has been extraordinary. If one were sad enough to read Liberal Democrat press releases and the ghastly dishonest issues of *Focus* that Liberal Democrats spew around our constituencies in the run-up to elections, one would conclude that they believe that the green belt is crucially important and should be sacrosanct, and that greenfield sites should be protected where possible.

The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) had the audacity at the beginning of his speech to say something that Labour and Conservative Members have heard frequently over many years. He said that the Liberal Democrats are not like the other parties and that they do not like nasty bickering. They want to consider the truth and come up with a sensible argument. However, as we all know, the one party that descends first and quickest into the gutter is the Liberal Democrats. We know that they have the audacity—I suppose one has to say also the skill—to go down a row of 30 houses where 30 different opinions are held and give 30 different answers to satisfy all 30 households. We have faced that problem in buckets in Chelmsford.

Liberal Democrats claim to represent the party that believes in the green belt, to be the party of the environment and to be the greens of this Parliament. However, they wanted to put housing on green belt land in the small village of Margaretting in my constituency. Naturally, the proposal caused uproar, but they saw no contradiction between their views on the green belt and

[Mr. Burns]

plonking 1,500 houses in a village with a population of just more than 1,000 that is totally surrounded by green belt land.

The Liberal Democrats' chairman of planning made the mistake of turning up to a public meeting. The meeting had to be abandoned after 15 minutes. I am told that he was last seen being separated from a member of the public by another member of the public as he got involved in a heated discussion. At that point, even the Liberal Democrats had the common sense to back off.

The Liberal Democrats then had to look round the rest of the borough to find somewhere for the housing, and what happened was breathtaking. Unfortunately for them, as I heard on the grapevine, their councillor for the seat of Boreham in Chelmsford was dissatisfied with the Liberal council, so he decided—inconveniently for the Liberal Democrats—to resign his seat and force a by-election. In July 2000, we had an interesting by-election campaign in which the Conservative candidate was, ironically, the only one who lived in the village.

The Liberal Democrats brought in a high flier who had been defeated in the previous borough elections in the town of Chelmsford and they fought the campaign by pledging that there would be no house building on greenfield land around Boreham. They were so insistent on protecting the environment and the quality of life of the people of Boreham that even the Liberal Democrat leader of the council turned up. There was a photo opportunity that appeared in *Focus* and they claimed that they would protect Boreham. They said, "Vote Liberal Democrat, return this councillor and Boreham will be saved from the house building that all the people of the village loathe."

Amazingly, there was a 30 per cent. swing from the Liberal Democrat to the Conservative candidate, who also fought the election by opposing the house building. However, within six months of polling, the Liberal Democrats produced their master plan of where the houses would be built in the Chelmsford local authority area. [HON. MEMBERS: "Boreham."] My hon. Friends and the Minister know the Liberals only too well. Surprise, surprise: 2,000 houses are being inflicted on the village of Boreham despite all the Liberal Democrats' promises—at least, that is where they hope they will be built. A process must be gone through and the people of Boreham have united and set up a committee to fight the proposal. They look forward to the public inquiry that will take place next year.

I have a final remark on the Boreham story. Despite what the hon. Member for Enfield, North (Joan Ryan) might have thought about her general election campaign, it was a pleasure to canvass as a Conservative candidate in Boreham in June last year.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): Would the hon. Gentleman like to remind the House what percentage of building took place on greenfield sites under the last Conservative Government?

Tim Loughton: None in Boreham.

Mr. Burns: My hon. Friend upstages me. He is absolutely right. For one fleeting moment, I thought that the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) was going to apologise for the performance of Liberal Democrat councillors in Chelmsford, but then I thought, "Don't be silly, Simon. He's a Liberal Democrat." As my hon. Friend rightly said, there was no building on greenfield sites in Boreham before the Liberal Democrat council took the decision that they are hoping to get through.

This is a serious matter. It is wrong that the south-east and the counties covered by Serplan are having such a large amount of house building on greenfield land forced on them. That land will never be recovered once it has been built upon. Given the analysis that is the basis for determining the number of houses that must be built, I fear that by 2021—and, I suspect, long before that—we will have already destroyed the environment before the flaws in the figures become apparent.

Tim Loughton: My hon. Friend mentioned West Sussex. In my constituency, the inspector's report replying to the Worthing local plan has identified areas of greenfield land that touch areas of outstanding natural beauty on the Sussex downs. Local people and the local council want them to be kept as greenfield land, but the downs are now being identified as potential house building sites because of what the Government have done and what the Deputy Prime Minister instructed local councils to do. He told them to build on greenfield sites in places such as Worthing if the brownfield sites are not available. That is increasingly likely to happen.

Mr. Burns: I appreciate the fact that my hon. Friend has raised that important point. It is time that the Government were prepared to think again and to listen to the people in places such as West Sussex, Boreham in Chelmsford and Hertfordshire. Why do the Government not reconsider and trust the people and introduce a system that is bottom up rather than top down? Why are the Government not prepared to let local communities, who are far more familiar with the requirements of their area, determine future house building and the needs of the local environment? Instead, the Government are forcing the policy on those communities as a diktat from the centre. I fear from the way in which the Minister shakes his head that my suggestion will not be accepted but, sadly, I am used to that.

This is a Government of control freaks who do not simply control their press officers and news management. They want to control every nook and cranny of our lives. Their policy is deeply unpopular and the statistics show that it is unnecessary. Long after the Minister has had responsibility for local government or housing, he might in the small hours of the night, as he reflects on his career, come to regret the decisions that he took, particularly when he was the Minister for Housing and Planning in the previous Parliament.

7.19 pm

Mr. Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns). His speech was very well delivered but, at one point, I wondered whether he was describing the life and times of the Chelmsford Liberal Democrat party. He seemed to know such a lot of detail about it that I thought that we were about to hear when its latest whist drive or jumble sale would be held. However, I have sympathy for some of the points that he made.

I want to talk about the county of Kent and my constituency in particular. People's quality of life turns principally on their work, income, holidays and family, and there has been enormous progress on many of those fronts during the past few years. Many of my constituents never got paid holiday under the previous Conservative Government; now they do, because we signed up to the social chapter. Many of them earned as little as £1 an hour; no longer, because we now have a statutory minimum wage. Maternity leave has been increased. A whole raft of measures have not been mentioned during the debate, but they are important to people's lives.

The hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) mentioned pensioners. When I knocked on doors during the election, some of those people told me, "I'm getting £200 now" or "I'm getting a free TV licence now." As my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Pond) knows, a combination of the Government's policy on cut-price fares and a local Labour initiative led to a flat-rate bus fare of 20p in the Medway towns. Those are quality of life issues. As my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, North (Joan Ryan) said, they are the nitty-gritty details that affect people's day-to-day lives. People worry about whether they can afford a holiday or need to find the money for their television licence. They do not if they are over 75, because it is provided by the Labour Government.

Mr. Fallon: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the principal elements of the quality of life for his and my constituents in Kent is being able to travel to one's place of work? Does he think that commuting to London has improved under the Labour Government?

Mr. Shaw: Fifty per cent. of people who live in the Medway towns travel outside them to work. The hon. Gentleman is right that there have not been vast improvements in commuter trains, although when I travelled up from Chatham today I was in one of the new air-conditioned Networkers with other passengers from the Medway towns. More of those trains are on order from Connex. Difficulties have arisen because Railtrack and Connex have failed to provide sufficient power for all those trains. I admit that I often still have to use slam-door trains, but there is a programme to phase them out and to introduce more trains like the one that I travelled on this afternoon.

Mrs. Laing: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that investment in new rolling stock, and Connex's very existence, would not have come about had it not been for the Conservative Government's privatisation of British Rail?

Mr. Shaw: "All hail privatisation"—that is the mantra of Conservative Members. If they persist with it, they will continue to do as well as they have done in the past few years.

The problem with privatisation is that it was focused on the short term. On the Connex South Central line, the franchise ran for only seven or eight years. Who on earth wants to invest in a franchise of that length? No wonder the company lost that franchise. In future there must be longer franchises of 25 or 30 years, with proper penalties if quality is not delivered and the requisite improvements are not made. There is no point in saying that everything is marvellous after privatisation, because that is clearly not so. Even if there is no consensus on that in the House, there certainly is in the rest of the country. Once longer franchises are introduced, investment will start to come in. The present arrangements are unsatisfactory.

I want to talk about the effect of education on the quality of life. The right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) made a passionate speech about certain communities that we all have in our constituencies and how to tackle some of the deeply entrenched problems. I did not hear all of her speech, but she painted with a broad brush in mapping out the issues. The Government are introducing tangible initiatives and policies to deal with specific problems.

One of those is the sure start programme, which in my constituency provides funding of about £2 million, concentrating on the most deprived areas. It benefits around 1,300 children under the age of three, and works with their parents to tackle deprivation cycles. By creating artificial situations, it is possible to improve the relationship between parents and young children at an early age. That improves the children's emotional development, which means that they are more likely to do well in pre-school. In 2000 there were about 200 pre-school places for three-year-olds in the Medway towns; we now have more than 2,000. That is the direct result of Government money and the development of local infrastructure. If youngsters have good pre-school education they do better when they move on to primary school, and if they get a good grounding in primary school—the numeracy hour, the literacy hour and reduced class sizes have assisted in that—they will do better in secondary school. If they do better in secondary school, we will start to move away from the disfranchisement and disenchantment that they often feel.

Sandra Gidley: I am a great supporter of the sure start scheme. Hoping that I would be able to speak in the debate, I accessed the sure start website. Is the hon. Gentleman proud of the fact that the Government have few schemes in the south-east, but a huge number in the north and north-west? We are discussing problems in the south-east; sure start is an example of an area in which the south-east is deficient in services and funding.

Mr. Shaw: I do not have a map in front of me showing the various deprived areas. If the hon. Lady wants a sure start programme in her area, I am sure that she will articulate that on behalf of her constituents. The programme targets the most needy areas that cover 30 per cent. of the country. Sometimes we are winners in the south-east; sometimes we are not. That is the purpose of a national Government. We cannot have every single programme in every single constituency. I do not know the hon. Lady's constituency well, but I am sure that it has particularly needy areas.

The foundations have been laid at primary school level and we are moving on to the 14 to 19-year-old agenda. For far too long, there has been a fixation with academia whereby every youngster has to get academic qualifications. It is not surprising that if the national curriculum is purely academic, many youngsters do not fit into that. If they are already feeling disaffected and have no connection with the curriculum, it is not surprising that they fall into truancy and bad behaviour. It is incumbent on us, as policy setters, to provide a

[Mr. Shaw]

curriculum that does more to meet youngsters' needs and aspirations. The curriculum should fit them; they should not have to fit into the curriculum. That is an important part of tackling current problems, as opposed to finding long-term solutions.

Investment is being put into our schools. During the general election, parents told me that they approved of what they had seen in schools—the installation of computer suites, the reductions in class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds, and the capital developments. However, there is much more to do.

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): Does the hon. Gentleman share the disappointment of many parents, which was articulated by Mike Tomlinson, the chief inspector of schools, that after five years the Labour Government have failed to narrow the gap between the best-performing and worst-performing schools?

Mr. Shaw: The Ofsted report shows that all schools are improving. The gap is not widening, but there are disaffected groups in our secondary schools, so we must consider what to do about that. Do we just blame the Labour Government?

Mr. Hoban: Yes.

Mr. Shaw: That is it then; the hon. Gentleman simply blames the Labour Government, but we should start to talk about policies to find a different curriculum to meet the needs, especially those of young men, in the schools in our constituencies. I would have hoped that, instead of just blaming the Government, the hon. Gentleman had something a little more constructive to contribute on an important issue that affects many young people and parents in his constituency.

We must also recognise that we need to deal with literacy issues. The Government's programme of providing more basic adult literacy and numeracy skills is absolutely crucial. As Opposition Members have said, finding or holding down jobs is enormously difficult when people do not have basic skills. It is not just a case of finding jobs; people often have hurdles to overcome to secure those jobs. If there is a downturn in an area, the people without basic numeracy and literacy skills will be the first go. The Government's target of training 750,000 people is very ambitious; nevertheless it is right and proper.

I want to talk about a couple of infrastructure issues in the south-east before I conclude my speech, as I know that other hon. Members want to speak. We live in a crowded country. Indeed, the south-east is one of the most heavily populated and crowded areas in the United Kingdom. As hon. Members on both sides of the House have said, there are always competing demands in providing affordable housing for the indigenous population, teachers, social workers, nurses and all sorts of other key public sector workers, but finding the solutions to those demands is enormously problematic.

Those competing demands require us to consider the availability of brownfield sites. Until the Labour Government were elected, we did not know the full extent of our brownfield land. We fully understood where housing could be built, other than on greenfield sites, only when the Government undertook a proper audit. The 60:40 split will present different pressures to different areas. Some areas will be able to deliver without a great deal of problems. There are many brownfield sites throughout the Thames gateway area in north Kent, and they have been earmarked for large-scale development.

In every inner-city constituency, there are many rundown properties, and it is right to reduce VAT on renovating properties. With the competing demands of protecting the countryside and providing enough housing for people, it is perverse that VAT for new build on greenfield sites, which builders find cheapest, convenient and most attractive, is zero rated, yet 5 per cent. VAT is still charged on renovating properties, which is expensive on contaminated land and logistically difficult in inner cities. At some point in the future, that scale must be tipped the other way. Logic demands that we make more use of what we have already, so there has to be a fiscal incentive to renovate rather to build new.

I have spoken mainly about Kent—the county that I have lived in all my life. In the constituency where I was born, the primary and secondary schools and the very poor areas, which I know very well, have made important advances in the past few years, under the Labour Government. We have run the economy well. My constituency has the third youngest population in the south-east, but let me tell the House about one of the key things that people told me during the election campaign. Some 80 per cent. of my constituents have mortgages, and they all vividly remember the affect of 15 per cent. interest rates and the recession. They lost their jobs; then they lost their houses; and then they found out that their houses were worth less than they paid for them, and they told me that they put the blame at the foot of the Conservative party.

7.35 pm

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): I am pleased to support the opening speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles), whose constituency neighbours mine. The Minister besmirched his name, so let me begin by answering that. I have checked in the intervening hours between the Minister's insults to my hon. Friend and now, and I can assure the House that there are no fleshpots in Brentwood and Ongar—at least, not yet—so whatever the reason for my hon. Friend's move from his previous abode to the south-east, it was not in search of fleshpots.

It is good to have this debate. The Government often initiate debates about Scotland, Wales and different industries in various parts of the country, yet we rarely have an opportunity to speak about London and the south-east. We have the opportunity to raise such issues on the Floor of the House today only because we have used our Opposition time, and I greatly welcome the opportunity.

The hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper) said that the motion is negative, but it is very positive. We all know that there great advantages to living in and around London, but there are also some problems, which is what the motion highlights. I have lived in other parts of the country and I know the different lifestyles of people in other areas, so I can compare where I live now with other parts of the country.

Hon. Members will not be surprised if I assure them that the towns and villages around Epping Forest are certainly the best places to live in the United Kingdom today. However, I object to the assumption, often made by Labour and Liberal Democrats and members of other parties, that there is only affluence in London and the south-east. There is no doubt that that part of the country has many advantages, but I have been astounded at the complacency of Ministers and many Labour Members who have spoken this evening about planning, housing, transport, crime, health and education. The people who live in my constituency have considerable problems with those issues.

When considering what I would say this evening, I did not look up any statistics—I did not have to. I have merely reflected on the lifestyles and the daily lives of the people who live in Epping Forest, and I know what those problems are. I shall begin with planning. We are fortunate that the forest in and around Epping is protected land, but it is protected by ancient laws whereby it is owned by the City of London corporation and protected by laws made 150 years ago. It is not protected by modern planning laws, so we have to fight right, left and centre to keep the green belt and to preserve the rural areas on the edge of London.

Nowadays, we have to fight the Government's ridiculous ideas on housing to try to preserve the little bit of rural land that still exists. Queen Victoria gave Epping Forest to her people for the enjoyment of the people of London, so that they could get out of London and the areas with no green belt and no trees and go to a place where children could play, which would be pleasant to live in and visit and where people and wildlife could breathe and prosper. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) so eloquently put it, the Government are trying to dump thousands of houses on the green belt without considering what effect that will have on the areas immediately around London.

Mike Gapes: Is the hon. Lady saying that the Government propose to build on Epping Forest? Can she clarify that? I grew up in Essex and know Epping Forest well. The argument about marginal changes on the edge of the green belt is one thing, but there is no suggestion that Epping Forest is to be built on.

Mrs. Laing: Certainly not, and I apologise if I have not made myself clear. The forest is protected because of ancient laws made more than 150 years ago, but the rest of the area is not because of the Government's negligent attitude towards planning, as witnessed in the desire of the Deputy Prime Minister and other Ministers to dump houses regardless of the opinions of local people.

The cost of private sector housing in London and the south-east is another problem. I agree with much that the hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell) said about the need to build more social housing, council housing and starter homes. However, stamp duty and house prices also need to be addressed. They are not popular issues. Indeed, when I raised them in my maiden speech nearly five years ago, Labour Members laughed at me. I said that the cost of an average three-bedroomed house in my constituency went beyond the stamp duty threshold and that that affected middle-income, middle-class families who wanted to buy a house that was big enough for them to live in without any grandeur.

In the five years since then, house prices in my part of the world have more or less doubled, so the point that I made then is relevant now. The cost of buying property in and around London makes it impossible for people on average incomes to get on the housing ladder. That is not fair. Of course, the Government cannot control everything that has caused the rise in house prices. However, there are some things on which they can take immediate action and make a huge difference to purchasers, especially first-time buyers. Stamp duty is one such thing. I appreciate that the Minister cannot speak on behalf of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, but it would be good to know that Ministers are aware of the problem.

The massive rise in house prices makes it difficult for first-time buyers to get mortgages. Many mortgage companies believe that today's inflated house prices do not reflect the actual value of houses. The housing market in and around London is becoming distorted and is not working as it should. Some of that is down to the Government's negligence, and they should do something about it.

In addition, if a house is the main asset that is passed on from one generation of a family to another and its value is above the stamp duty threshold, the duty is payable on the whole of the asset. Stamp duty has become nothing more than an extra inheritance tax for many ordinary families in and around London. The Government could solve that problem with the stroke of a pen.

Transport was well covered by my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar. I will not reiterate his points except to say that the tube is important for my constituents. They have waited five years for the Government to do something about it, but they have taken no action. They have done nothing to improve the journey to work that thousands of people from my part of the world have to make every morning.

On crime, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) made an excellent speech and I would not dream of gilding the lily. I agree with every word that she said, as would all right-thinking normal people in Britain. It is time that the Government woke up and listened to her.

I am especially worried about education and the disgraceful way in which the Government have handled teachers. Teachers need to be told that they are respected professionals and that their work is valued. Parents in my constituency and Conservative Members value it, but the Government do not. They have handled teachers so badly that they are going on strike the day after tomorrow. That poses huge problems for children, who will miss a day's schooling, and for mothers who depend on their children attending school so that they can go to work. On Thursday, those mothers will discover that there is no school for their children to attend, and that missed schooling will make a difference. It will cause enormous disruption to families. The problem is not funny. It is not just about dogma or about pay and conditions; it is about how badly the Government handle people who are doing professional jobs.

[Mrs. Laing]

Teacher shortages pose a particular problem in my area. Epping Forest is not part of London; it is part of Essex. Teachers, police officers, doctors, nurses, hospital workers, local government officers and those on an average salary in my constituency do not get a London allowance—

Mike Gapes *rose—*

Mrs. Laing: For the sake of time, I am afraid that I cannot give way. I must finish so that other hon. Members can speak.

People who work in my constituency do not get a London allowance, but they have to pay London house prices, London transport prices and all the other high costs of living that are borne by people in and around London. That has caused particular problems with teacher shortages and with recruitment and retention in other public sector jobs. We are reaching crisis point. It is not surprising that people travel the extra couple of miles down the road to work if they can earn an extra £5,000 for doing so.

I do not think that the Government are even aware of the problem. They like to draw lines around areas so that they can point to London and the prosperous home counties, but they forget that there is a bit in between. It is not just the green belt that we have to protect; the communities in the towns and villages around Epping Forest need to be protected as well. It is important that the Government recognise the particular problems that we face because we have to cope with London's economic conditions even though we are not part of it.

The Government can deal with those problems. That is the theme of the debate. Problems are inevitable in some aspects of everyday life, and successive Governments have tried to tackle them with varying degrees of success. However, in some areas, a simple stroke of the pen would change Government policy and make a difference. My hon. Friends have mentioned many such areas this evening, and I have drawn attention to further examples. I sincerely hope that the Minister and his colleagues will listen to what we have said when using Opposition time to highlight the problems of London and the south-east.

7.50 pm

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing). I lived in Debden in her constituency from the age of one, having spent my first year in Woodford Bridge—I believe it, too, falls within her constituency—where my grandmother lived all her life. I attended Buckhurst Hill county high school—also in her constituency—which is now the Guru Gobind Singh Khalsa college. Our constituencies are in close proximity to each other.

I remember the hon. Lady's predecessor, the would-be Mayor of London, Steven Norris, campaigning vigorously with local Epping Forest Conservatives against the boundary change proposal made before the 1992 to 1994 boundary changes to the London boroughs. They campaigned to keep 10,000 people in the Epping Forest constituency out of London—there were placards on Fencepiece road on the border between Redbridge and Epping Forest saying, "Keep us out of London! We don't want to be moved into London!" Perhaps some of those people who do not get London allowances now—the ones on whose behalf the hon. Lady complains—would have acted differently had they known that one of the consequences of staying in "leafy Essex", as the campaign put it, would be that they would lose out financially. The campaign was a nonsense. Not least among its effects was that pensioners lost out on concessionary bus fares. Another effect was that the London borough of Redbridge went from three parliamentary constituencies down to two, and the former Conservative Chief Whip had to decamp from Wanstead and Woodford to become a Hampshire Member of Parliament—but that is another story, and not one for this debate.

The terms of the motion, which refers to

"Council Taxes . . . rising even further",

are interesting. I do not know whether when drafting the motion the parliamentary Conservative party consulted the Conservative group on Redbridge council, which, with its Liberal Democrat allies, increased council tax in Redbridge from 2.3 per cent. to 6.2 per cent. at last week's budget meeting. We in Redbridge have a hung council, and the Labour group's proposals were defeated. A second meeting was necessary—the first having ended in disarray at 2 o'clock in the morning—to get the budget through. That was the result of the Conservatives and the Liberals, as they have on so many borough issues over the past few months, working in league against the Labour council, which has no overall majority, although that might change in May.

In this debate on London and the south-east, I shall focus on Redbridge. Often there is a polarisation of views, with an image produced of the south-east that has in the middle the great wen—the urban centre, London. In fact, many outer-London boroughs, including mine, have areas with inner-city problems as well as areas that are among the most affluent in the country. Woodford Green, which the hon. Member for Epping Forest will know well, is an example of such an area. Analyses to determine the location of areas of deprivation generally take a borough approach, so Redbridge loses out.

The Conservative Government kept Redbridge out of the LIZ—London implementation zone—for the health service: we got nothing directly from that. We received money only as a side-product of the joint Redbridge and Waltham Forest health authority, even though at the time our mental health services were deplorable. We got some help, but only incidentally, on the back of Waltham Forest. We have not had a successful single regeneration budget bid, but again we got some money because of the joint health authority links.

We are not in the Thames gateway, although our local borough authority is part of the Thames gateway group of authorities, so we get none of that funding. Redbridge is not in the Lea valley. Unlike our neighbouring borough, Newham, we are not able to siphon millions of pounds of European money each year, so regeneration in Stratford, which I welcome, cannot be matched by regeneration in Ilford town centre, which around the railway station has problems that need serious attention.

I therefore welcome the fact that in the sure start scheme at least, the Government have recognised our problems. Loxford ward in my constituency is receiving sure start money. My hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Mr. Shaw) mentioned that, so I will not repeat it, save to say that it is an extremely important initiative. Furthermore, when we compare the data on central Government support for Redbridge borough under the annual local authority settlements we find that, overall, the revenue spending allowed to Redbridge has increased from £207.5 million in 1997 to £273.5 million in the current financial year ending next month. That is an excellent improvement brought about by a Labour Government.

It is interesting to note that the annual central Government grant to Redbridge was cut by the Tories from £160 million in 1992 to £142 million in 1997, whereas Labour has not only restored the grant, but increased it so that we now get £181 million—an extra £37 million on the amount left us by the Conservatives. When Conservative Redbridge councillors and their little Liberal Democrat echoes complain about lack of funding forcing them to push up local council taxes, they should remember that the Labour Government have given more money than the Liberal Democrats ever asked for, and certainly more than would have been given by the Conservatives, whose record is one of cuts to the provision available to the people of my borough. In some years, Redbridge was actually capped during the extremely difficult period in which we faced changing social needs, greater demands, and additional burdens imposed by the Conservative Government.

Those restrictions are gone and my borough is receiving more central Government funding to meet the needs of its people. Of course, it is not enough—it is never enough. We can always say we do not have enough to do everything, but I am pleased by the Government's actions. I praise my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for his work to give greater emphasis to local government and his support for local government since taking up his current post. The media would do well to comment on that, rather than on tittle-tattle and personalities and all the garbage that we have seen in the *Daily Mail* and other publications in recent weeks.

Redbridge has also benefited from increases in capital expenditure. The Labour Government have increased education capital spending from £9.3 million in 1997 to £27.5 million in the current financial year. The new private finance initiative-built Oaks Park secondary school is open, with pupils, even though it was delayed a year because the Tory-Liberal coalition on the council objected to the terms of the contract, so the kids started in portakabins—another victory resulting from the Liberal Democrats' ability to swing decisions in a hung council.

Redbridge has benefited from the valuable support that the current Secretary of State for Education and Skills gave when she was a Minister of State at that Department to the Ilford Ursuline high school. That school, a Catholic girls' high school, chose to leave the independent sector and come under the local authority as a voluntary aided faith school, whose admissions criteria state its desire to be a school that reflects the community. The school's policy is that 23 of the 90 children admitted every year are non-Catholics. If I had been able to speak in the debate on faith schools a few weeks ago I would have pointed out that the school, which has a Catholic ethos, provides facilities for Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, Jewish and Christian young ladies.

I have to declare an interest, as I have three daughters in different schools in the London borough of Redbridge. All of them are doing well; Redbridge's education results are the best in London and the third best in the country because of the excellent work of local teachers, support staff and people in the local authority who care about those matters. The Labour council assumed minority control in 1994, after the one-party East German-style regime that we had for 30 years. When it did so, there were virtually no nursery places in Redbridge; for the first three years, it made enormous efforts to put its own resources into nursery provision. With the support of the Labour Government, we have been able to accelerate that programme and now have nursery units and nursery classes in all the borough's primary schools; Redbridge now supports a much larger proportion of its young people in nursery education, whereas it had a deplorable record under the Tory council for many years.

The Tory philosophy in Redbridge was low spending, low provision and keeping the council tax down; that is how the Tories ran the borough, with serious consequences. The demography has changed—the population has become younger in the south of the borough, whereas there is an ageing population in other areas—but we have not had support from social services and have not had resources generally to deal with those problems. Historically low levels of spending have had a knock-on consequence over the years. We hope that that is now beginning to be put right; the Government are putting more resources into Redbridge and recognise its social needs. I hope that the 2001 census will provide further ammunition for arguments about rapid social and demographic change, particularly in Ilford.

I want to make two or three further points. As has been mentioned, there is a serious problem with housing in London. Redbridge has a high level of owner-occupation; in fact, my constituency has 78 per cent. owner-occupation. We have almost no social housing. Local government boundary changes made in 1994 meant that much social housing—council housing on the Becontree and Padnall estates—was taken out of the borough and put under the control of Barking and Dagenham. The Tory philosophy in Redbridge was to sell council housing, even before that became the general ethos; Tory councils were doing so in Redbridge in the 1960s. The Tories did not build any council houses for years, and refused to have social housing of any form. Only in the 1990s did they accept the advent of housing associations.

We therefore have a serious lack of housing, and many of the new developments have been in private housing. Land has been sold, so few sites are available for new social housing; on top of that, there is serious demand for such housing. When I first became an MP, people from inner-London boroughs such as Westminster, Hackney and Tower Hamlets who had been placed in private rented accommodation in Redbridge came to me with their problems. I now have constituents who are homeless through no fault of their own—the landlord sells the property or there is some other change—and are placed in bed-and-breakfast accommodation in Westcliff-on-Sea and Southend-on-Sea; I even had one case in Great Yarmouth. As a result of those changes, there is disruption to people's education, as well as social, environmental and economic consequences. There should be greater priority for social housing in London and help should be provided, not just in areas with big brownfield sites, but in areas such as mine, where local authorities want to buy up private rented accommodation and bring it into the public or socially owned sector, where housing associations operate

[Mike Gapes]

renovation schemes—a foyer is opening in my constituency to advertise such a scheme—and where there are attempts to introduce affordable housing for key workers.

The problem is difficult because, as has been revealed this week, there has been a significant increase in the number of people moving to London from other parts of the country. As usual, I see that there are no members of the Scottish National party in the Chamber. Interestingly, a report published the other day said that people are fleeing Scotland—I do not know whether just from SNP constituencies—to live in London.

Mrs. Laing: Perfectly reasonably.

Mike Gapes: At least I agree with the hon. Lady about that.

There is immigration to London from the rest of the United Kingdom. The European market entails a lot of mobility; many British people go to work in European capital cities, and many Europeans come to work in London. There is migration from Commonwealth countries and historically large numbers of asylum seekers and refugees have come to the capital city. If that is added to housing shortages, we can see that difficult issues have to be addressed. As a result of the policy of the Conservative party over the years not to provide social housing, rents in the private sector are astronomic. People with average incomes, even with London allowances, cannot afford to buy homes in London. If they are outside the social housing sector, they face weekly private rents of £150, £160, £180 and £200 for half-decent accommodation. They have the uncertainty of six-month or one-year leases; within a few months, they may have to disrupt their children's lives and risk homelessness and bed-and-breakfast accommodation until they find somewhere else. The issue must be pushed up the agenda; there are no easy answers, but we must tackle the problem soon.

I want to make some remarks about Ilford station. A few weeks ago, the chair of the Metropolitan police authority, my long-standing friend Lord Harris, came to our borough to talk with the police commander and the local safer communities partnership. We have a crime hot spot in the centre of Ilford. Redbridge is generally a low-crime borough, despite the unfortunate headlines and a few horrible events, including the murder of a young Pakistani law student, Sajjid Chisti, by a gang last May. Generally, however, Redbridge is not an area with high crime. The railway station is owned by Railtrack and operated by Great Eastern Railway; it is badly designed and a magnet for undesirable people, who hang around, begging for travelcards and money. The place is not very nice because of its design.

I urge Railtrack, which owns the station, and Great Eastern Railway, which operates it, to do some serious work to improve Ilford station and make its environment better. We can design out crime to some extent and introduce modern approaches to staffing; there are issues, to which I shall not refer in detail, concerning the station staff and the way in which they dealt with an incident that led to that murder last year. We must take account of those problems in future.

Finally, I raise the problems of other stations. I asked the Library to produce a note for me on the secure stations scheme, which was introduced by British Transport police and Crime Concern in April 1998. I am extremely disappointed that although Liverpool street station is one of the stations that meets the criteria, none of the stations from Liverpool street down to Southend through Ilford, Seven Kings, Goodmayes, Chadwell Heath, Romford—I shall not name all the stations along the line, as some are outside my constituency—through Shenfield to Southend is in the scheme. I want to know why not.

We need to raise standards of security and people's confidence when they travel on our public transport—on the underground, on the overground railway and on buses. I intervened on the speech of the Opposition spokesman and commented on congestion charging. My views are on the record at my website, www.mikegapes.org.uk, and they can also be read in the *Official Report* of the debates in Westminster Hall, where I spoke in January. The Mayor's scheme is the wrong scheme in the wrong place at the wrong time, and it will have serious detrimental consequences for people who live in outer London.

I congratulate the Opposition on their choice of subject for today's debate. It gives me the opportunity to point out the damaging behaviour of the Conservatives and Liberals in Redbridge council, and the opportunity to praise the Government's record in giving greater support to my borough over the past five years.

8.11 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): I begin by apologising for missing some of the opening speech from the Conservative Front-Bench spokesman. Perhaps surprisingly, I am in total agreement with the Conservative motion, but I must comment briefly on what it does not recognise: the fact that the Conservatives share some responsibility for the poor quality of life that we experience in London and the south-east.

Private affluence and public squalor were not invented back in 1997. The problems are deep-seated. I have lived in London for more than 20 years, and it is clear that under-investment in our transport and other infrastructure and a lack of vision for London have existed for many decades. I understand that the failures of Conservative policy were not recognised in the opening speech, but there will be an opportunity, perhaps in the summing up, for those failures to be recognised, and I understand that at least one Conservative Back Bencher acknowledged in his comments the responsibility that Conservatives share for the present poor quality of life in our capital city.

The person who drafted the Labour amendment obviously has a sense of humour. The Government's amendment welcomes

"the restoration of democratic city-wide government to the capital",

but which capital are we talking about—not London, surely? The Government are not willing to give the capital's directly elected authority and Mayor the power they need to fulfil Londoners' wishes. The Government have not restored democratic citywide government to the capital. In some ways, they have created something that resembles a South African homeland, hemmed in legislatively and unable to make the decisions that really matter—on PPP, for example.

Clearly, the state of the tube is fundamental to the quality of life of the 800,000 people who commute into London, so why do the Government persist in imposing on London a plan for the part-privatisation of the underground, which nobody believes will improve the quality of life of Londoners? London's elected representatives will be stuck with trying to manage the scheme as best they can for 30 years, even though the current Mayor was elected specifically in opposition to the plan. Londoners are still wondering why they bothered to vote.

The statutory consultation period for the part-privatisation has been a farce. Last November, during the Transport Committee's hearings into the matter, the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions promised that there would be a full consultation with all interested parties before any final decision was made, so that he could form what he described as

> "a decision informed by the views of a whole variety of other people and not just by myself."

The consultation that emerged has been a travesty of that promise. The only consultation that has taken place has been the one that the Government are legally bound to undertake with the Mayor and Transport for London, and as much as possible has been done to hamper that consultation. The bare minimum of time was allowed for Transport for London to examine contracts which, we were told, are unique and among the longest and most complex of their type in the world. Even worse, vital documents were withheld from TFL for a considerable period, and only the threat of legal action brought them to light. Perhaps the Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs can explain how such activity helps devolved government work properly, and in what respect it will improve the quality of life of Londoners.

The consultation might be more meaningful if the Government followed the Labour-dominated Transport Committee's recent recommendation, which stated:

> "It is essential that the Government allow Members a debate and vote in the House of Commons on a substantive motion on the future of London Underground and the PPP."

I hope that the Minister will undertake to speak to his colleagues in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to ensure that such a debate takes place on a free vote, so that Members of all parties can express their views as part of the consultation on the Government's plans for the London underground.

If we are to address one of the key concerns of Londoners in relation to the tube, and one which has a major impact on their quality of life, another question that the Minister will have to answer is exactly what new tube capacity will be created in the first seven and a half years of the PPP contracts. It is the new trains that will make the difference. The £16 billion figure that is repeated ad nauseam sounds impressive, but if one analyses what it will mean in respect of overcrowding, for instance, it does not look impressive at all.

Another aspect of transport that has a significant impact on people's quality of life is train services. Will the Minister comment on the concerns expressed in the *Evening Standard* today about the possibility of a huge rise in fares, and how that will impact on people's quality of life? There is a clear link between the level of service that people receive and how much they have to pay for it—that influences their perception of their quality of life. If there is a significant increase in fares at the end of the seven-year period during which fare increases were limited to the level of inflation or less, we want to hear from the Government how they think commuters will respond—commuters who live in London and those who travel into London.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): As a Member of Parliament for a Yorkshire constituency, I am listening carefully to what the hon. Gentleman says. It seems to be one long whinge about unfair treatment of London and the south-east. Many of my constituents, and many people living in the three northern regions, look at the 70 per cent. of resources in the strategic rail plan that will be spent in London and the south-east and compare it with the tiny amount that is to be spent in the three northern regions. The debate is not particularly edifying for most people living in other parts of the country who look at the affluence and splendour of public and private investment in London and the south-east.

Tom Brake: Perhaps I should not have given way to the hon. Gentleman, who has only just appeared in the Chamber. The important point about the tube—it is not a whinge—is that although his Government have apparently devolved power to London, they have devolved none whatever on one of the most critical issues that it faces and are unwilling to give up the reins on the future of the tube.

More general environmental issues, other than the travel experience, are also important for quality of life. Several hon. Members referred to abandoned cars, litter and so on. I remind the Minister of the recent debate on graffiti and the cost to the boroughs of cleaning it up: they have to pay about £3.5 million across London, and transport providers face a similar cost. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) challenged the Minister for Local Government about his view on the London Local Authorities Bill. Indeed, I challenged him a couple of weeks ago during the debate about graffiti. He may have had time to reflect further on the matter, on which he said he was neutral.

Perhaps the Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs will tell us whether he personally—he need not necessarily express a Government point of view—thinks that there are good grounds for stopping the sale of graffiti products to under-18s whom the retailer suspects will use them to deface each and every flat surface in the vicinity. I hope he will respond, as he should not underestimate the importance of the issue, which is very significant in terms of quality of life. Indeed, the crime and disorder audit produced by my local authority refers to graffiti as a key issue raised during a two-month period last year. Police visibility was the first concern, but the second major issue was graffiti and vandalism, so it is clear that people want the problem to be dealt with.

I would have liked to deal with many other issues, but I will listen to what the previous occupant of the Chair said about keeping my speech short. I wish that other hon. Members had done so. I should like briefly to draw attention to a police issue and mention concerns about a potential shortage of detectives in the Met. Detectives work unpaid overtime, but sergeants coming up through the ranks do not want to take on such a work load and can see their colleagues working seven days a week. A problem may be building up, as there will be a significant impact on quality of life if those ranks are not being filled.

Hon. Members also mentioned the need for affordable housing. The Government's key worker schemes are welcome, but they do not scratch the surface of the

[Tom Brake]

demand that is out there. My local authority has very few housing places; there is perhaps one place for the police and 10 for teachers, but we need fifties or hundreds of them. The Government clearly need to consider the matter, as lack of housing affects quality of life severely.

On airports, my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton tried to clarify the position in respect of London's third runway at Heathrow. If the development proceeds, it may have a significant impact on the quality of life not only of the people who live around the airport, but of everyone who lives in London.

This debate has highlighted many of the concerns of Londoners and others in the south-east, including crime, fear of crime, streets that are dirtier than those in Lusaka, according to a report published yesterday, and high pollution and congestion. It has also highlighted the advantages of living within easy reach of our capital city. Quality of life in London and the south-east will improve only once transport, affordable housing and health care provision show signs of improvement. The Government's actions have so far made little or no difference, and the quality of life monitor continues to flat-line.

8.25 pm

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): I hoped that the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) would develop his theme about public squalor and private affluence as it existed before 1997. Listening to some of the speeches made from the Opposition Benches, one would think that Britain before 1997 resembled Roy Plomley's desert island—Sue Lawley's version might be a bit too modern. Under the Tories, this was not an island with a few seagulls and records, the Bible and complete works of Shakespeare; it was one where people's personal security was threatened by rising crime and their financial security was affected by job insecurity and negative equity. It was indeed an island of private affluence and public squalor.

Many of the social attitude surveys carried out towards the mid-1990s showed that the degree of acceptance of inequality that people were prepared to give in the 1980s had evaporated and that there was a genuine aversion to the inequality that had been created. That aversion was greatest among the highest socio-economic groups, because their quality of life was also being diminished by the sort of society that had been created in London and the south-east, as well as throughout the rest of the country. It was not only the poorest who were affected. In London and the south-east, however, the pressures were even sharper, because the inequality was greatest there. The prosperity, where it existed, was at its greatest, but the squalor, poverty and deprivation were very often at their sharpest.

I wonder whether anyone remembers the words of a former Minister for Housing and Planning about the homeless; I think that the hon. Member in question entered the Chamber at one stage during the debate. I refer to the predecessor of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government who complained at having to step over the homeless on his way to the opera. Even his quality of life was diminished by the inequality that had been created, but what about the quality of life for the homeless themselves, the 4 million children living in poverty and the pensioners who were fearful of using heating during the winter months in case they could not afford to pay the bills?

In the past few years many of my constituents have at long last started to see the improvements in quality of life for which they have waited too long. Most important is growing prosperity, underpinned by careful economic management that has delivered the lowest mortgage rates for a generation, low and sustainable inflation and rising employment. That has ensured that we have real security in relation to our homes, living standards and jobs, and there has also been major inward and public investment in our public services. The overall result is a 10 per cent. growth in employment in Gravesham. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Dr. Stoate) would wish me to point out—he cannot do so himself, for reasons that the House will understand—his constituency, which is next door to Gravesham, has seen a 19 per cent. increase in employment under the current Government.

In sectors such as construction, employment has increased by 56 per cent., and it has increased by 25 per cent. in transport and by 45 per cent. in other services. Again, the overall result is a halving of unemployment and a decline in youth unemployment of almost three quarters. Quality of life for those people has been immeasurably improved by what has happened to the economy locally and nationally—an improvement that is underpinned by increasing security.

Getting a job was not always a route towards a better quality of life. We all remember the old Conservative mantra of "low pay or no pay". That was the only choice on offer: people either had a job that was pitifully badly paid, or they were threatened with having no job at all. We have broken through that to ensure that millions of our fellow citizens can have a job with dignity, a decent wage—through the minimum wage—and a decent level of income to meet the cost of their children, through the working families tax credit, which is soon to be replaced by a system of new tax credits that will make a real difference to their living standards and quality of life.

Many hon. Members have referred at some length to crime, which is the main determinant of a poor quality of life for many of our constituents. I will not go into great detail about my constituency, because we had a full debate on this issue on Friday, to which I was able to contribute, although others were not. I was able to point out in that debate the achievements that we have made in reducing the level of crime and social disorder in Gravesham through investment in the police and in resources such as closed circuit television.

I will, however, give one example of a particular estate in my constituency, Lorton Close, which has a high proportion of pensioners and people with disabilities. Real fear existed there when I was first elected to represent Gravesham in 1997—not of their new Member of Parliament, I hasten to add, but of crime and social disorder. I am pleased to say that, in that small area of my constituency, there has been a 75 per cent. reduction in crime over only five years. For the first time, many of the residents feel that they have real quality of life, and the ability to go out, even after dark, without fear of being subjected to crime and disorder.

We are not complacent, however, and we know that a major factor in reducing the quality of people's lives is the fear of crime, if not crime itself. That fear is enhanced because we still have a major problem with youth disorder, vandalism and intimidation in the streets. That problem may not be serious enough—certainly in the case of some decisions by the courts that I have regretted—for the people involved to be brought to justice. Nevertheless, it creates a climate of fear.

Dr. Tonge: I ask this question in all sincerity. The hon. Gentleman said that there had been a 75 per cent. reduction in crime in a particular area of his constituency. For the benefit of all our constituents, can he tell us exactly how that has been achieved?

Mr. Pond: I certainly can. Part of the measures involved the police working in partnership with the local authority and the residents. One of the important lessons that we have to learn from the achievements so far is that, unless we get that sort of partnership involving the residents themselves, the extra investment in policing and CCTV will not achieve the significant reductions in crime that we want to see. It is that lesson about partnership that is so important. It has certainly worked in Lorton Close, and elsewhere in my constituency.

I welcome the announcement in the past few days that there is to be greater emphasis on victims and witnesses throughout the criminal justice system and policing generally. That, too, will be important in ensuring that the downward trend in crime can continue. As my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, North (Joan Ryan) made clear, however, it is the nitty-gritty issues that are so important to all our constituents in determining their quality of life. Abandoned cars, graffiti, vandalism, litter and dog-fouling are not issues that detain the House for many parliamentary hours, but they are the issues that are important to all our constituents.

We have sought to tackle those issues and, through investment in public services—particularly in education and the health service—we are beginning to see an improvement in the life chances of my constituents and the population as a whole. That means that, in the longer term, they will have the opportunity for a better quality of life. Other hon. Members have referred to the fact that, only five years ago, half of our 11-year-olds had not reached basic standards of literacy and numeracy. That meant not only that they were being disadvantaged at that point, but that their quality of life and standard of living were likely to be diminished and damaged throughout their working lives as a result. We cannot be complacent; one fifth of our 11-year-olds are still not reaching those basic standards, and we need further reform and investment in education to ensure that we give those young people the chance that they deserve.

We are moving in the right direction, but that will require further investment in schools, the national health service, transport and roads. An issue that is prominent in my constituency at the moment is the need for a relief road in Denton. Such a road would dramatically improve the quality of life for people living on the estate there. It would also provide the possibility of creating or maintaining 600 jobs and allow the regeneration of a very deprived area.

Our aim, as a Government, is to build prosperity while maintaining and improving the environment and the quality of life. In Gravesham, and elsewhere in the south-east, we enjoy a balance of countryside and urban areas. They are interdependent, and it is critical for the quality of life of all my constituents that we ensure that the rural areas meet the objectives published in the rural White Paper of having a living, working, vibrant countryside. We must also ensure, through the urban regeneration that we have been pursuing, that the town centre is an attractive place to live, by building on the history and heritage of which we are so proud. We must, of course, do that in such a way that we enhance the quality of life well into the future, and we are trying to ensure that we maintain that balance.

Bearing in mind that a number of Members still want to contribute to the debate, I shall briefly conclude by referring to the comments of the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe). She referred to an estate in Hackney that she had visited in the run-up to the election.

Miss Widdecombe: Several times.

Mr. Pond: Several times, I am sure. She reported that the residents of that estate were concerned that nothing was being done for them to improve their circumstances. Other hon. Members have pointed out to her that the most important factor in the quality of people's lives is the power that they feel that they have over their lives. The concept of people in such a community having something done to them is one of the reasons why they felt so powerless in the past. It is not what we do to residents in such circumstances, but what we can do with them. Giving them the power to improve the quality of their lives is the key to regeneration and to improving their living standards.

Miss Widdecombe: The hon. Gentleman has completely distorted what I said. For a start, I did not say "done to them": I said "done for them". The way to achieve any advance is to work with those people. One half of the partnership is the Government, and that is what they were complaining about. They have set up a residents association and undertaken initiatives, but they cannot conceivably provide themselves with CCTV or a policeman. They were complaining that they could not get those things. The hon. Gentleman should stop distorting what I said, stop belittling the people on that estate in Hackney, and start telling the facts instead of making it all up.

Mr. Pond: I thank the right hon. Lady for allowing me to intervene on her intervention. I think that she understands the point fully, which is clearly why I rattled her cage. Those people want the Government, the local authority and the voluntary sector to work in partnership with them to achieve these things. They want to be active citizens. They do not want to be the dependent recipients of welfare or patronage from this or any other Government. It is by ensuring that they are given responsibility for their own lives that they will feel that their quality of life has been enhanced.

I shall conclude on that point. There has been much discussion about the impact of the policies of previous Conservative Governments measured against the impact of the policies that the present Government have implemented. The big difference is not between the impact of those different policies, but between the present Government who are determined to improve the quality

[Mr. Pond]

of life for the majority of our citizens and previous Conservative Governments who I do not believe had that as one of their priorities.

8.41 pm

Bob Spink (Castle Point): In the south-east, taxes have risen and regulation and bureaucracy have grown like Topsy, yet our public services are failing. Clearly, the quality of life of people in the south-east is worse under the Labour Government. The statistics show that, and even Ministers, including the Prime Minister, are beginning to admit it when pressed at the Dispatch Box.

Rail capacity is too low. Reliability, punctuality, costs and services have all fallen since Labour took power. Roads are even more congested now than they were in 1997. Health care is worse, waiting lists are up, a visit to the accident and emergency department is a lottery, bed blocking is up because the Government are trying to destroy the residential care sector, and last week we heard that the wait for cancer treatment is now longer than it was three years ago. That is outrageous, and should not be tolerated by the people of this country.

In education, class sizes are up in secondary schools. Every secondary school in Essex has an extra child in every class. Average class sizes in Essex have increased from 16.8 to 17.7. The Prime Minister certainly did not promise the people of Essex that when he went to the polls. Teachers are overburdened with bureaucracy: more and more form filling, and less and less teaching. It is no wonder that so many of them are leaving the profession and retention is so difficult. The Government have followed their political correctness handbook and have tried to destroy discipline in schools, which has put more pressure on teachers and forced them to leave the profession.

However, I do not want to rant about the Government's performance generally. I want to focus on the quality of life of pensioners and people in the south-east who are over 50 years old. There are many such people, and they are listening carefully to this debate. They have been hit worse by Labour policies than any other group in the country.

Miss Widdecombe: Is not it especially nauseating—I cannot think of a better word for it than that—that Labour Members, particularly the Parliamentary Private Secretaries, apparently find the plight of pensioners funny?

Bob Spink: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that intervention. Labour Members do not realise that it was the pensioners who made this country what it is. They gave thi[illegible]untry its wealth.

Mr. Clive Soley (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Bob Spink: No, I will not give way. As a result of the Labour Government's policies, pensioners do not enjoy a fair share of the wealth of this nation. Pensioners' share of the wealth of this country has fallen since Mr. Blair took office in 1997.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Member should use the correct parliamentary language.

Bob Spink: I apologise. I should have said the Prime Minister.

Mr. Soley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Bob Spink: No, I will not give way.

The insulting 75p that the Prime Minister gave pensioners a few years ago has been just one of the factors, but the biggest factor to hit people over 50, and everyone in society, was the £5 billion Labour stealth tax on pension funds. The Government's removal of the 20 per cent. credit on dividends was probably the nastiest and most damaging of all Labour's stealth taxes. It is a key cause of the worsening quality of life for elderly people, and it is entirely of the Government's making.

That measure has fuelled pensioner poverty, which has increased under a callous Labour Government. In 1979, after a Labour Administration, 57 per cent. of pensioners were being means-tested. By 1995 that was down to 38 per cent., thanks to sound management by Mrs. Thatcher. According to the House of Commons Library, the figure will have returned to 57 per cent. by 2003. Pensioners need protection from this Government, and we Conservatives will provide it.

Mr. Edward Davey: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Bob Spink: No. Many Members wish to speak, and many others have spoken for 20 minutes. We need short, sharp speeches in this place.

Pensioners in particular suffer as a result of council-tax rises while local services are cut, especially in Labour-controlled authorities such as the one in Castle Point. Many Castle Point pensioners will not even receive a pension increase sufficient to cover the rise in their council tax this year. The council-tax rise in Castle Point will amount to an incompetent four times inflation. That is Labour councils for you.

Mr. Davey: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the hon. Gentleman to talk about pensions when the motion tabled by his Front-Bench colleagues does not even mention their plight?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: This is a wide-ranging debate. The hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) is certainly in order.

Bob Spink: If the hon. Gentleman does not think that having for the first time in their lives to pay more than £1,000 for living in an average band D house will affect the quality of life of the many pensioners whose council tax will rise to that amount, he is living in cloud cuckoo land along with his Liberal Democrat colleagues.

The council tax rise is yet another dishonest Labour stealth tax, as a result of which councils such as Basildon will be returned to sound Conservative control very soon.

It would help pensioners and people over 50 in the south-east if the Government accepted the proposals of my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), whose private Member's Bill would give pensioners more freedom and choice—words that Labour does not understand—to invest their pension funds as they wish, once they have bought, at 65, an annuity sufficient to prevent them from qualifying for state benefits. The Government's nanny-state approach, which forces pensioners to use their pension funds inappropriately at the age of 75, is dramatically lowering their quality of life.

Pensioners also get a rough deal from the Government when it comes to crime, disorder and street nuisance, all of which have escalated under Labour. The solution is obvious: we need more policemen on the streets—higher visibility policing. That means cutting the bureaucracy with which Labour keeps burdening the police. Labour cut the number of officers in Essex, as has been confirmed by the chief constable and even, recently, the Prime Minister.

We must create an environment in the south-east in which bad behaviour, nuisance and crime are not tolerated at any level. That will improve the quality of life for young and older people alike. It will provide safer communities for all, as Mayor Giuliani has shown in New York, where the streets are much safer than they are now in London.

Another problem that is depressing the quality of life for pensioners is the unrestrained influx of asylum seekers. Yesterday, we learned that the number of asylum seekers trying to get into the south-east from France has tripled in the past year, and French police expect the number to grow even faster during the current year. That damages everyone's quality of life, but especially that of genuine asylum seekers, whom we should be caring for better. It is a direct result of yet another Government refusal to listen.

Time is short, so I shall mention just a few more of the many problems that we face in the south-east as a result of Government policies. One problem is the overdevelopment of our communities that Labour has forced on Castle Point borough council, forcing it, through Serplan, to build an extra 2,400 houses—houses that we need in Castle Point like we need a hole in the head. These will increase congestion and decrease the quality of life for all my constituents, and they will punish the Government for that.

The Government's failure to provide money for infrastructure, such as Canvey Island's third road, is yet another problem. It is high time that the Government started to improve infrastructure and the public services, not just for the community's sake but for the sake of the excellent and dedicated doctors, nurses, teachers, police officers and ambulance drivers. All those superb people who work in our public services deserve better than they are getting from this Labour Government.

8.51 pm

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent): Thank you for calling me, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Much of tonight's debate has centred on London and its suburban boroughs. However, a large part of the south-east, outside that area, is essentially rural in character.

Geraint Davies: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I simply ask, having been in the debate for over three hours, why I was not called after the previous Opposition speaker?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman cannot ask that sort of question. This is a matter for the Chair.

Hugh Robertson: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As I was saying, a large part of the south-east, outside London and its suburban boroughs, is essentially rural in character. My constituency of Faversham and Mid-Kent is such an area. It is a largely rural constituency, taking in much of the northern downs and the eastern end of the Weald. It clips the eastern suburbs of Maidstone and has in it the market town of Faversham, but it otherwise contains 39 parish councils, spread across the heart of rural Kent. Therefore, for many of my constituents, the quality-of-life issues mean something very different from those in constituencies elsewhere in Kent, and indeed the south-east of England.

However, quality of life is based on two common principles: the quality of the environment and the availability of services. I shall take the quality of the environment first. That, in my case, is entirely defined by the countryside. Kent is, after all, the garden of England, yet it is threatened as never before. Having grown up in the area, that threat is something that I saw as a young child and now see at first hand as the constituency MP.

The countryside is under threat from Government housebuilding targets—plans to which my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) has alluded. We are simply trying to push too many people into too small an area. That leads directly to capacity problems. Already, villagers in parishes such as Leeds and Langley are holding demonstrations against heavy vehicle traffic. Villagers in Bearsted complain to me about mobile telephone masts, the plans for whose installation were the direct result of demand caused by an increase in population. They have worries about health and safety. Local residents do not want to see those mobile telephone masts near schools, medical facilities or residential areas.

There are traffic worries brought on by an increase in the number of vehicles. Eight parish councils in my constituency are currently campaigning for interactive speed signs, and a number of others feel that the existing roads are now inadequate to deal with the current volume of traffic.

There are too few police. They are never seen in rural areas. Kent county council is doing something to make up the shortfall with its rural community wardens, but they can be no substitute for real policemen.

The railways are in crisis. There are three train lines to London from my constituency—from Faversham, Maidstone East and Headcorn. All are subject to regular delays and I receive endless complaining letters about them.

There are also problems caused by our close proximity to the channel. Cheap beer importers and bootleggers sell their alcohol to underage children. We have problems

[Hugh Robertson]

with illegal immigrants. Hollingbourne parish council has written to me this week about lorry drivers who regularly drop off illegal immigrants in a lay-by near the M20. They then wander through the village, frightening old people late at night, and jump a train to London.

Finally, there is the state of the rural economy. In my capacity as secretary of the parliamentary fruit group, I will touch on this briefly. The fruit industry defines our part of Kent. The fruit farming industry is wholly unsubsidised, and is good for the environment and the landscape. It produces high-quality food that is good for people, yet it is being suffocated with endless regulations, such as the environmental impact assessment, the EU marketing standards, the seasonal regulations for labour and part-time workers and the recent banning of Thinsec. To put it simply, if we allow our fruit industry to wither, the landscape of Kent and the quality of life for its residents will be destroyed for ever.

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye): The hon. Gentleman included in his list of problems part-time workers. Is he opposed to equal rights for part-time workers and, for that matter, to the minimum wage?

Hugh Robertson: I am not in the slightest opposed to rights for part-time workers. I am opposed to the mass of regulation that makes it impossible for fruit farmers to employ them in the first place.

The second area of concern is the availability of services. I will only say a little on this, as I know that many other hon. Members wish to speak tonight. However, one issue dominates for my constituents; the plans to downgrade the Kent and Canterbury hospital. The hospital is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier), but it supports the whole of the population in the northern part of my seat. My seat has a number of elderly people and a number of people who live in deprived areas; the seasonal fruit pickers who come to settle in our part of Kent. They are all heavy users of the NHS.

There are three critical facts that affect those people. The first is the transport links from Faversham and the North Downs to the replacement hospital at Ashford, once Canterbury is downgraded, which are poor. If one has to travel by public transport, they are atrocious or non-existent. As I have said, there are large numbers of elderly and disadvantaged people who have always been heavy users of the health service and the public transport system, and they will be effectively disfranchised by the proposal.

Secondly, there is the fate of the cottage hospitals; Faversham cottage hospital in my constituency is a good example. It should have been built up before the plans to downgrade the Kent and Canterbury were put in place. There are no plans to do that and it is not part of the resulting private finance initiative.

Thirdly, there is the question of cancer care, which is of critical importance for all elderly people. The model proposed is something called an ambulatory model, in which 20 per cent. of patients—all the in-patients—are transferred to Maidstone. The model has been rejected by every single cancer consultant across Kent and by the Royal College of Radiologists. It does not exist or work anywhere in the UK and is simply dangerous.

The problems in Faversham and Mid-Kent are different from those of London and the south-east. However, they are similar in that they revolve around two key facts; the quality of the environment and the availability of services. My constituents are particularly concerned about the plans to downgrade Kent and Canterbury hospital and the implications for cancer care across Kent. I urge the Government to act on this and the other problems that I have mentioned in the rural economy before it is too late.

8.58 pm

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): I am glad that my tie has caught your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I want to speak briefly about Croydon and, more generally, about the problems and opportunities that face our great capital. The one key feature that has affected the opportunities and the problems is the miraculous change of fortune in the economy, which has seen an extra 250,000 people getting jobs in London. However, those extra people are putting pressure on the transport system, and the popularity and economic success of London is putting pressure on house prices, which, in turn, have brought their own pressures to bear.

The investment has delivered results, including higher standards in our schools and smaller classes, particularly in our primary schools, where nearly every class has fewer than 30 pupils. There has been targeted investment in such things as education action zones. In New Addington in my area—where standards were not being delivered and levels of poverty and unemployment were high—we have seen a miraculous renaissance.

I realise that the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) is a bit of a social anthropologist, having been to Hackney once or twice. She knows a bit about these things, but the people who live and breathe in those areas can see the changes brought about by economic opportunities, transport links and investment in imaginative education systems. These systems give new self-esteem to children who, in many instances, come from backgrounds where they are told that they cannot succeed.

I am concerned about the issue of affordable housing. It is central to the debate, and as former leader of the largest council in London and former chair of the London boroughs housing committee, it is worth my commenting on it. The Government face strategic issues such as how to balance investment in quantity with investment in quality. We have chosen to raise standards through a 10-year plan, and I certainly favour a switch to quality at the margin, where demand in London and the south-east is particularly high.

There has also been investment in key workers. We all know the problems associated with recruiting more nurses and teachers, although we have been successful in that regard. I ask the Government to reconsider an audit of all public land in London—particularly that owned by the Ministry of Defence, the police and rail services—to establish whether it is being properly used. Indeed, in the private sector we should consider compulsory purchase orders, so that land that is not properly used—I refer not to traditional brownfield sites, but to land that is not being invested in optimally—can be released and a balance can be struck in terms of affordable housing. In that regard, planning is key. The Mayor is pressing ahead with plans to establish a 40 per cent. level of affordable housing in various areas. It is important that the Government and the Mayor support boroughs in their negotiations with private sector developers who want to minimise their investment in affordable housing.

Although people migrate to London, some migrate from London because the urban townscape does not meet their concerns about the environment, educational opportunities and personal safety and security. Meeting such concerns is key to ensuring that people remain in an urban environment in which they want to live, and where the quality of life is good. I shall return to those issues in a moment.

On the delivery of health in our capital, it is worth noting that enormous extra sums are being invested. In Croydon, we are investing an extra £18 million a year, and since 1997 waiting lists for treatment have reduced by a third. Waiting lists for appointments with consultants have reduced by two thirds, and the length of wait has been halved in the past six months. Such reductions have been achieved partly through investment and partly through person power. An extra 250 nurses in Croydon's Mayday hospital are doing a tremendous job in delivering an additional 2 million operations every year. Although the media may choose to highlight inevitable individual problems, and although people have a perception that the health service is in crisis, in practice consistent improvements are being made in London and locally. Problems exist, but we are finding solutions to them.

People moan about transport, just as they moan about the weather, and difficulties do exist. However, in Croydon a new tram link, involving 28 km of light rail, is transporting 18 million people a year. Bus use in London has risen by 6 per cent., and underground use has risen by 25 per cent. It is true that we need more investment, but such plans are in place. The Opposition say that £20 billion is not enough, but how much more would they spend and from where would they get it? How does that extra expenditure stack up with their commitment to cut tax? The figures do not add up—they are just hot air. The reality is that more people are using public transport systems. We are getting there, but the big problem—it is also an opportunity—is that the enormous number of people now in work is increasing transport demand. However, investment will settle the problem down in the medium term.

Crime is obviously on people's minds. Overall crime has declined by 12 per cent., but street robberies—particularly in relation to mobile phones—are escalating. The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, Sir John Stevens, made several assertions on crime recently. In short, he said that more people should be denied bail, more people should be locked up and that there should be more witness protection.

Mr. Cameron: Can the hon. Gentleman explain how the Government will address those shortcomings in the criminal justice system, given that they have thrown out their proposed criminal justice legislation for this Session?

Geraint Davies: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman asked that question, because it has used up some more time. I am about to come to that point.

On the issues that Sir John Stevens has placed at the top of his agenda, his assertion that more people should be given bail is a strange one. It implies that we should reform the Bail Act 1976 and compulsorily deny bail to people. At the moment, hon. Members will know that bail is granted at the discretion of judges and magistrates. It can be, and is, denied if there is a threat of reoffending or witness intimidation. It is not the role of politicians to stick their noses into that subject. Those people who should go to jail should go to jail, and there should be enough space in our prisons to deal with them.

At the same time, we should not forget that we have 70,000 people in our prisons and that no country in Europe jails the same proportion of its population, other than Portugal. We must ask why so many people are in jail. Should some of them not be in jail, such as people who commit housing benefit fraud—for argument's sake—and who do not pose a threat of violence on the streets? They are simply being dislocated from the employment market. Perhaps instead we should consider the root cause of serial offending and tackle that.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): I happen to have Sir John's speech in front of me and what he said was:

> "It is not uncommon in London to have muggers released on bail eight or nine times before they face trial for their first attack."

Is the hon. Gentleman claiming that Sir John was telling an untruth?

Geraint Davies: Not for a moment, but the issue is what we should do about the problem. Should Sir John look over the shoulder of every judge and magistrate and insist that they lock everybody up? If mistakes are being made by judges and magistrates, we need to confront that, but it is not for politicians to prescribe that no one should be granted bail. *[Interruption.]* I am sure that there are many anecdotal examples, but we should not interfere with the granting of bail. We should provide enough room in jails and analyse why people are there.

The figures show that 75 per cent. of people in British prisons have previously been permanently excluded from school. Those people who are troublemakers in the classroom are thrown out, perhaps to keep standards up or to prevent the disruption of classes—a good reason—and end up on the street after five hours of education. What do they do? Is it a surprise that a proportion of them shoplift or steal mobile phones? When they try to return to school, having found it difficult to have their behaviour controlled, they cannot catch up and are excluded again. Ultimately, they end up in jail. They serve a year or two and, within two years of their release, 76 per cent. of males reoffend and are sent back to jail. The overall average is 58 per cent. Those people enter the university of crime—our prison system—learn some new tricks and find it even more difficult to break out of that vicious circle.

Such people need proper, intensive, full-time education in small classes. They need to be forced to learn to read and write. It costs £34,000 a year to keep someone in jail. Would not that money be better spent giving them a proper education, which would keep them off the streets and prevent them from ending up as serial offenders?

Other problems have to do with ethnic composition. For reasons that include social exclusion, there is a greater probability, other things being equal, that people from ethnic minorities—and especially young Afro-Caribbean men—will be excluded from school. That ethnic

[Geraint Davies]

composition is reflected in the numbers of people in prison, and it is echoed in the difficulties that people face in society when they come out of prison. The problem involves the denial of a person's opportunities and human rights, and it will only grow bigger for everyone unless we confront its causes.

The Government have decided to invest in pupil referral units from September. Instead of being permanently excluded from school, pupils will go to the referral units and receive intensive education. I should prefer the units to be called something else, as at present they sound a bit like borstals. They should represent an alternative schooling system, with intensive education.

As a member of the Public Accounts Committee, I have taken part in interviews with the head of our prison service, Mr. Narey. What he has to say is of special interest to people involved in the debate about crime in London.

People reoffend for three reasons. The first is that they do not have a home to go to on release. Forty per cent. of people leaving prison are homeless, so it is no surprise that they go back to offending. Secondly, their social networks have been disrupted. Some 25,000 inmates are placed in prisons situated more than 50 miles from their homes, while another 10,000 are in prisons more than 100 miles away. It is therefore no surprise that their links with spouses and families are broken. The absence of that communication also leads to serial offending.

The third reason for reoffending is that people leaving prison cannot find employment. Why can they not get work? In part it is because they have been in prison, but the main reason is that they are not educated. Ten per cent. of the total number of people targeted by the Government's numeracy and literacy strategies are prison inmates. They have no opportunities, and I hope and expect that the Government will turn the problem around at its cause.

Finally, I repeat that prisons contain a number of people who would not be dangerous to others on the street.

I turn briefly to the problem of graffiti, which is of great concern to people, in Croydon and elsewhere.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I am sure that his thoughts on graffiti will be as profound as his thoughts on everything else, but does he recall the conversation that we had only last week, when he was unfortunate enough to be the only hon. Member to be squeezed out of a debate? Will he bear in mind the remarks made on that occasion as he frames and times the rest of his contribution, given that many Opposition Members would like to contribute to the debate?

Geraint Davies: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who refers to the debate on the police last Friday, in which many hon. Members wanted to speak. I sat for three and a half or four hours, but remained the only hon. Member not called to speak. The hon. Gentleman said at the time, helpfully, that I should not worry, as I could always give the speech on another occasion. This is that other occasion, and I thank the hon. Gentleman very much for his help.

The problem of graffiti is difficult. In Croydon, we are making some headway through the use of closed circuit television. A strategy of "bang 'em down and lock 'em up" is not always appropriate. By ensuring that the youth service and the police service work hand in hand, we can take a CCTV video of a youth spraying graffiti to his parents. We can then say, "Here's Johnny, doing this. Unless you get him to clean that off, with the council, we'll take him to court." We do not want to force people into the judicial system and the university of crime. We want them to face up to the consequences of their mischief and clean up the graffiti. That is happening, and it is working.

Drug use is a massive cause of crime and a massive problem in prison. Croydon is running a treatment and testing pilot scheme. Instead of going to jail, people given treatment and testing orders have training and education for five days a week and are tested for drugs. If they are not clean, they go to prison. Most of these people have been in prison and know how awful it is. The scheme is keeping people out of prison and helping them to stop their habit. In prison they would continue taking drugs because it is easy to get them. The scheme is working very well.

I understand that in Birmingham, intensive supervision and surveillance programmes that are an alternative to prison are working remarkably well. They give people back their self-esteem by investing in education, giving them work habits and getting them back into normal life. We should be considering that sort of programme.

Mr. Cameron: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman has just referred to Birmingham. Is that not outside the ambit of the debate?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is a matter of debate, not a matter for the Chair.

Geraint Davies: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My point is that London can learn things from Birmingham and Birmingham can learn things from London. We must be open-minded.

The final area that Sir John Stevens considered was witness protection. That is a key issue. If witnesses are too scared to go to the trial because they will be intimidated or beaten up, we must deal with that. Section 68 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 provides protection for children under 17, people with mental illness and rape victims. They can give evidence behind screens, there can be video links, evidence can be given in private and witnesses can be interviewed by intermediaries. Will the Government consider extending those provisions to violent offences and wherever it is believed that there is the prospect of significant witness intimidation? This is a serious issue and we know, empirically, that there is a problem. We have the means at our disposal and we should move forward. I am interested in what my right hon. Friend the Minister has to say about that.

Sir John suggested that witnesses and others using the criminal justice system were badly treated. Again, he has a point. People turn up at court as witnesses and defendants to find on the day of the trial that the case has been adjourned or dismissed. These are not lawyers; they go in fear to the court, after building up their courage, only to be told to come back next week. That is appalling.

Witnesses must be kept informed of the progress of the case. They need to know about the people who have committed the crime—where they live, for instance, otherwise witnesses can be intimidated. We need a system under which witnesses are welcomed, and that is being introduced in Croydon.

I am aware of the time, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] I have promised to keep my comments to a bare minimum of absolute quality. In short, school standards in London are up, waiting lists are down, jobs are up and take-home pay is up by 10 per cent. We have more police and the number is increasing faster than ever. We are on the up—things are getting better. There are challenges in transport and elsewhere, and more investment is being made. However, the people of London know that things will get better under Labour and that they would be a darn sight worse under the other lot.

9.19 pm

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): I saw the sands of time slipping by during the brief speech—some 20 minutes—of the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies). I shall keep my remarks brief because other Opposition Members wish to speak. I want to raise an issue of fundamental concern to my constituents in relation to the quality of life in my part of south-east Hampshire—housing development.

In the past 20 years, the amount of housing in Fareham has increased dramatically. Twenty years ago, the part of the constituency in which I live was comprised purely of strawberry fields. Now the only indication that strawberry fields were there is a road called Strawberry Fields. The growth in housing has put immense pressure on Fareham's infrastructure. There is chaos at junctions 9 and 11 of the M27 and development in the Gosport peninsula has caused traffic problems in Gosport and Fareham, and has exacerbated problems at junction 11. The infrastructure needed to support the housing development projected by the Government and imposed on the borough to date is simply not following that housing development.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hoban: I will not. It is 9.21 pm, and other hon. Members are waiting to speak.

Infrastructure is required to support the housing development that is in progress and is projected, but the Government are not delivering it. A light rail system is planned for the area between Fareham and Portsmouth, but it will not address traffic issues in the west of the constituency, where many people live.

The other problem is the pressure on schools. Brookfield school, a very good comprehensive in my constituency, has reached its capacity of 1,750 pupils. Pupils who live close to the school have to be bussed across junction 9 of the M27, along the main route from the west of the constituency into Fareham, to another school. Valuable educational resources are therefore being absorbed by school transport costs. Traffic problems in the area are being exacerbated by the number of children who have to be bussed from their homes to the school, simply because the secondary school infrastructure is not in place to cope with the expansion of the population in the west of the constituency.

The problem with the way in which the Government fund the increase in school places to reflect housing development is that it is piecemeal. Sufficient resources are provided to deal with the financing of primary schools but not to deal with the financing of new secondary schools. The west of the borough is in need of those resources.

My argument is that control of housing development should rest with the local council. For far too long, there has been interference from central Government—of both persuasions—in housing development. The Government have increased by 25 per cent. the number of houses that should be built in two developments on sites in my constituency. That puts more and more pressure on the infrastructure. Control of how many houses should be built and where they should be built should be given back to local councils. It is disappointing that the Green Paper on planning advocated more centralised control of the planning system, removing from local councils and local people the power to decide what housing development is best for their area. People in Fareham want a system that achieves a better balance between the infrastructure that is available and the housing that is imposed on the borough by Government plans. That would be an important move forward. The way to improve the quality of life in the south-east is to restrict housing development and to allow the infrastructure to support the existing housing.

9.24 pm

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): I am delighted to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban). I wish that I could say that I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies)—who is no longer in his place—but I do not want to mislead the House.

I welcome this debate on the quality of life in the south-east. I want to mention two key problems in my constituency, Witney, in Oxfordshire, which falls within the south-east region. First, I want to refer to the state of the public services, and particularly the problem of recruitment and retention of staff, which is the biggest difficulty that we face. Secondly, I want to refer to the issue of housing, which my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham just mentioned. There is a conflict between the need to protect the countryside and the need to build affordable housing at the same time.

Mr. Love: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cameron: I will not give way, because we have very little time left.

I shall briefly argue that, in many ways, the answer to both problems is a form of devolution, but not the devolution that the Government are talking about. The regional development agencies and the regional assemblies are a waste of money. They are talking shops, and they do not solve problems but add to bureaucracy. The real answer is proper devolution of power and authority in the public services so that teachers, doctors in hospitals and police forces have greater power and responsibility.

The Thames valley has the third lowest number of constables per 100,000 of population in the whole country. We keep trying to recruit more policemen under

[Mr. Cameron]

the crime fighting fund and all the other initiatives, but we have fewer policemen now than we had a year ago. They are travelling to low-cost areas, such as Cornwall, north Wales and Northumberland, or to the Metropolitan police where they can earn another £6,000 and the Met can pay the cost of their travel. We face a real problem in that regard, and I can say the same about nurses and social services. The answer is devolution and the end to national pay scales. We must give devolution and devolved power to the public services.

The same points apply to housing. As my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham said, we all want greater provision of social housing. My local authority, West Oxfordshire district council, is spending £20 million on social housing, but why cannot it be given the responsibility for deciding on housing needs in the area? We had Serplan and the Crow report; then we had the Prescott scheme and now we shall have the Raynsford scheme under which 39,000 houses a year are to be built. My hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) spoke movingly about this issue. Why do we need centralised targets? Why do we not give power to local authorities? That would be proper devolution, and not the false devolution of regional development, regional assemblies and the vast cost that they involve.

When Conservative Members draw up policies, we should concentrate on considering how we can improve the quality of life for people in the south-east by devolving power. The quality of life is all right for the better-off in the south-east, because they can buy their way out of lousy public services and they can afford the house prices. However, the less well-off in our constituencies suffer because we have not devolved power in the way that I have suggested. That is what we should do.

9.27 pm

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): I shall be extremely brief.

My main concern is house prices in my outer-London constituency, which are high because of its proximity to central London.

Mr. Love: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Angela Watkinson: No, I will not, but it is always a pleasure to meet one of nature's gentlemen.

Since mortgage interest tax relief was abolished, stamp duty has gone up by an average of £650 on a band D house and the council tax is rocketing in Upminster. Those factors combine to squeeze out Upminster families. The people who have lived in Upminster all their lives now have to leave the area, because they cannot afford to stay. The same applies to teachers. When a teaching post is advertised in Upminster, the only people who apply or who can afford to take the post are teachers from another school in Upminster. Therefore, there is no net gain to the teaching body in the constituency.

We face a parallel problem with hospital staff. We expect a new hospital to be finished in 2005 and a housing development will be built on the site of the existing hospital, which will be demolished. I hope that that housing development will contain affordable housing for hospital staff so that, at least, the new hospital can run at full complement. The existing two hospitals have nothing like a full complement of staff.

Another problem that we face is commuter parking. Residents in my constituency have commuters parking outside their houses from dawn till dusk five days a week, often blocking their drives. The iniquitous congestion charging scheme will exacerbate the problem, because people who have hitherto driven into London will look for a convenient place to stop along the line. Upminster is a sitting target for those who wish to avoid the £5 a day charge. It is yet another tax on the motorist from the anti-car Government; it will do nothing to tackle pollution or congestion in London.

My final comments are about the proposal in the Police Reform Bill to employ community support officers at two thirds of the salary of a real police officer. The Bill does not make it clear whether that proposal will be imposed or whether chief constables will have the choice of employing four real police officers instead of six community support officers.

9.30 pm

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): Unfortunately some of the earlier speeches were lengthy and somewhat costive, so I shall be brief.

I want to highlight policing problems in Hampshire. I realise that, compared with London, we are lucky in Hampshire—the crime rate is relatively low. I am especially aware of that fact as my daughter is currently a student at King's college. However, according to the 2001 crime survey, 4 per cent. of adults in the south-east were victims of violence in 1999-2000, which is higher than the national average.

The problem for my constituents is that—as has been mentioned—there has been an increase in petty crime, youth nuisance and rural crime. Vandalism and youth nuisance may not sound like huge problems but they can have a severe impact on the quality of life of home owners and affect people's feelings about their environment.

The problems have been exacerbated by the establishment of a call centre. Unusually, I agreed with the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) when she talked about prioritisation. People are encouraged to call the police; the calls are prioritised and the police arrive two hours later when the problem has been cleared up. Residents therefore believe that there is no point in calling the police because they turn up too late to do anything about the problem. The reduction in reported crime is thus partly due to public disenchantment—they think that the police will not be there when they are needed—although the police work hard and do the best they can.

Last year, the chief constable of Hampshire, Paul Kernaghan, wrote to me and other Hampshire Members about recruitment problems. Although he supports the concept of a national salary for policing, he feels that

"an allowance is required to reflect local economic and recruiting circumstances."

Historically, police officers received a rent allowance based on the cost of accommodation in their force areas. That varied throughout the United Kingdom and broadly reflected the economic circumstances of the officers. The allowance was abolished in 1994, so officers carrying out the same work can receive very different rates of pay. The impact of that is illustrated by the fact that 48 Hampshire officers have opted out of the police pension scheme.

In 2000-01, Hampshire constabulary received funding for 3,573 officers, including 82 additional officers through the Home Office crime fighting fund. However, during that period, the chief constable noted that

> "we have found it impossible to recruit the additional 82 officers and have had no choice but to request deferral of 62 of these additional officers to the next financial year . . . I acknowledge the national recruiting initiative, but frankly do not see it producing sufficient numbers of quality recruits, given our current terms and conditions."

The Government should take note of the chief constable's remarks.

In the current year, the target was 330 recruits but after extensive national and local advertising only 210 officers were recruited.

Next week, the Association of Chief Police Officers is due to present a paper to the Police Negotiating Board suggesting that the national regional allowance should be examined. Statistics are not yet available, but the aim of Hampshire police is to secure an allowance of between the £1,000 that they receive at present and the £6,000 plus received by the Metropolitan police. There are six police forces in the south-east: three of them receive an extra allowance of £2,000, while the other three receive only £1,000. The £1,000 received by Hampshire officers offers no realistic help towards the comparatively expensive cost of living in the area.

I shall draw my remarks to a close, so that other hon. Members can join in the debate. Will the Minister undertake to provide fair police salaries for Hampshire? After all, that is in the best interests of the Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs, because he also represents a Hampshire constituency.

9.35 pm

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): When my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) opened the debate, he referred to the need for a constructive approach and not yah-boo opposition, and the speeches of Conservative Members have largely fulfilled his expectations.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) spoke with passion, as she always does, about crime and its roots from her knowledge of much research in Hackney and elsewhere. She spoke about the weaknesses in the proposals for community support officers and about rural crime and the need for visible policing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) spoke about the importance of the countryside and wildlife, even in London. My hon. Friends the Members for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), for Witney (Mr. Cameron) and for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) spoke about the Serplan proposals and the fact that the Government had overruled Serplan and local opinion.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford also managed momentarily to unite the Government and the Opposition in mutual opposition and hatred of Liberal Democrats' duplicity in the way that they seek to build on the green belt while proclaiming their support for the environment. Things are exactly the same in Cambridgeshire, where the Liberal Democrat-controlled city council is trying to build on the green belt in my constituency.

My hon. Friends the Members for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing) and for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) spoke about house prices and the impact of the rise in stamp duty and the fact that the average first-time buyer now pays £685 more than previously. They could have added that the council tax for an average band D property has trebled under this Government, and that excludes any increase that may occur in the next couple of weeks. A point that could have been made about housing involves the alleged changes by the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Love: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Paice: No, of course I will not.

The Inland Revenue is putting obstacles in the way of private landlords by classifying maintenance as improvements.

My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) spoke cleverly and wisely about pensioners. He reminded us of what the Government have done in relation to £5 billion in tax and red tape. He could have gone on to talk about the collapse of final salary schemes and the Government's refusal to shift the rules on annuities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent (Hugh Robertson) spoke about housing numbers and said that his constituency was the front line for illegal immigrants.

In riposte, the Minister in opening for the Government kept on about money, and that is what we have heard from many hon. Members. One might have thought that, after five years, the Government would realise that people judge output, not input. People want services, not a series of figures to which they cannot easily relate. A plethora of initiatives and funds in many penny packets may be good for soundbites, but a huge, unconstructive effort is involved in claiming those moneys and in designing bids. The Government will be judged on the results.

Peculiarly, the Minister chose a 10-year time span in his reply. He talked about all the improvements that have taken place over 10 years. I do not know why he chose 10 years—presumably in doing so, he was attributing many of the improvements to John Major and his term in office. Failing that, he could have chosen a five-year period, but of course that may have produced a different picture.

Let us ignore this Government's first two or three years and consider the past 12 months or so. Whatever hon. Members may think about the changes that took place pre-1997, let us consider what has happened now that they have been in office for three or four years. As my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar said transport, is getting worse. Train delays have soared since Railtrack was taken into administrative receivership. They have increased by 46.9 per cent. on the Connex South Eastern Kent link, 77 per cent. on South West Trains suburban and 95.6 per cent. on First Great Eastern.

On development, the Government proclaim that they are in favour of local decision making, but ride roughshod over local people's proposals in Serplan for housing in the south-east, as many of my hon. Friends explained.

[Mr. Paice]

Abandoned vehicles were also mentioned, and there has been a 25 per cent. increase in malicious vehicle fires in the past 12 months.

The Minister referred to museums. We did not hear, however, about the impact of the Government's policies on the London art market. That £8 billion European market—30 per cent. of which used to belong to the United Kingdom and London in particular—has been devastated by the Government's activities and has greatly reduced in size.

Many hon. Members on both sides of the House spoke about crime. My right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald posed the Minister a question, to which he did not know the answer. I can tell him that the number of specials in the Metropolitan police service is 753, the lowest on record. Although I am the first to recognise that the number of police officers has risen in the past few months, the fact remains that in the last full year for which the figures are available—up to March 2001—the number was at its lowest for 10 years in England and Wales, including in the Met.

The picture is the same in the south-east in general. Violent crime in the past two years has followed the trend set in London. It is up in Kent and Sussex. Indeed, in the Thames Valley area, it is up by 38.2 per cent. In London, street crime rose by 39 per cent. in the last nine months of last year.

As my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) has made clear in the House, we support the Government's proposals for stop and search because it is important for policing. Perhaps the Minister, who is responsible for that, can tell us when he responds about the technology that the Home Secretary thinks police officers will use when they stop someone and request all the information that they have to obtain. Is the technology available? How much will it cost? Who will pay for it? We understand that it is not available, so all the Home Secretary's talk about police officers filling in their palm-pilot in the street might prove to be fatuous.

Several hon. Members referred to criminal justice and what happens to people once they are arrested. As my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron) said, the Government have dropped their proposals for criminal justice legislation in this Session. I am sure that the Minister will repeat what he said on Friday and stress that that is due to pressure of work in the Home Office. *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friends suggest even more nefarious reasons for it. I suspect that it is also to do with a turf war between the Home Office and the Lord Chancellor's Department. If that is the case, we side with the Home Office. We want criminal justice legislation changed. I repeat our offer to help the Government get the non-controversial part of the relevant Bill, which is the bulk of it, through the House.

We read in today's *Evening Standard* that a senior aide of the Prime Minister has said:

"He"—

the Prime Minister—

"will show there is still life in the project after five years."

The project—whatever that may be—has not yet delivered on its promises. I question whether there are any principles behind it. The Government rubbish the private sector when it is involved with Railtrack, yet they seek to embrace it when they want it to be involved in the public-private partnership. The Government say that they will reduce police red tape and bureaucracy, yet they throw more at them in their proposals for stop and search. There will almost certainly be fewer stops as a result. The Government talk about regional decision making, but ride roughshod over Serplan when it makes decisions for its region.

The Government promised to be whiter than white, purer than pure, but they retain the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers) in charge of our transport. I suggest that the reason they are in such difficulty in so many areas is that they have no principles—indeed, that is the gripe of many Labour Back Benchers who have retained their own. The Government have done some things right—of course they have—but in so many areas there remains so much to do. Health, transport, violent crime—all are getting worse. If the Government really want a reputation for honesty, they should start by admitting the truth of the situation as it really is. Until they do, they stand to be criticised. I commend the motion to the House.

9.45 pm

The Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs (Mr. John Denham): When the Conservative party lost the last two general elections, some were unkind enough to suggest that it was out of touch. This afternoon, the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) tried to put that right by speaking movingly about travelling to work on the tube during the rush hour. What a shame he thinks that rush hour is half-past 9 in the morning. No doubt the Conservatives are still working on the latest issue of "Intouch". My hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell) got the Government's position just right. Our argument tonight is not that there are no problems, no issues, no challenges in the south-east of England, but that since 1997 we have made real progress in the areas that matter.

As one would expect, the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) was one of the few Conservatives to display any sense of the broad sweep of issues. She made some excellent points about prison education which I acknowledge, but she will acknowledge that we are trebling the number of people who will get level 2 qualifications in the prison system to 36,000 in the coming year. Furthermore, 10 per cent. of all the qualifications gained in the first six months of the Government's campaign on basic skills were achieved by people within the prison system. There is progress to be made, but we are moving in the direction that the right hon. Lady wants.

The theme of housing, affordable housing and housing for key workers ran through the debate, but the confusion among Opposition Members was amazing. The hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) wanted more affordable housing, and the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing) wanted tax changes that would fuel house price inflation but vigorously condemned anyone who would build a new house in which someone might live. Opposition to building new houses was voiced by the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), who criticised the Liberal Democrats, and by the hon. Members for Castle Point (Bob Spink), for Fareham

(Mr. Hoban) and for Witney (Mr. Cameron). All opposed there being any houses in the south-east of England for key workers to live in. That confusion—

Mrs. Laing: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Denham: That confusion—[HON. MEMBERS: "Give way!"] I will give way as many times as the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) did.

To press on, my hon. Friends understand how the different issues link together. My hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Mr. Shaw) understands the need for development in the north Kent gateway area, where there are brownfield sites that can be developed, and the way in which that links to the Government's success in developing the channel tunnel rail link—a project that completely failed under the Conservatives.

My hon. Friends the Members for Harlow and for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes) talked about the importance of investing in social housing: they will welcome the extra £300 million that we are putting into that. They, too, emphasised the importance of development on brownfield sites. None the less, I acknowledge the comments made about the continuing need to encourage investment in older properties. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government has been listening to those comments.

My hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, North (Joan Ryan) also spoke of housing, but she made the crucial link to the development of employment skills among young people. That underlines the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper), who spoke of the Government's success in getting people back into work, tackling social exclusion and ending the dependency culture that formed so large a part of our inheritance in 1997.

The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) began promisingly by attacking the Conservatives' failure to say anything about poverty or housing, but, like most Liberal Democrats, he failed to live up to his early promise and said that his party would vote with the Conservatives tonight. He talked about the important issue of wastage in the Metropolitan police. The indications that I have for the current financial year show that the level of wastage appears to be the same for the Metropolitan police as it is for the rest of the police service in England and Wales; it is less than 5 per cent, as it has been for the past few years.

Mr. Cameron *rose—*

Mr. Boris Johnson (Henley) *rose—*

Mr. Denham: The hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire did not give way to Members wishing to intervene. I should like to give Members who have been present throughout our debate and made speeches the courtesy of reply, rather than respond to Members who have not been here all evening.

Dr. Julian Lewis: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it in order for a Minister who has discourteously refused to reduce his reply to the time to which the Opposition spokesman reduced his speech to refuse to give way to people whom he has named in his summation?

Mr. Speaker: That is entirely up to the Minister.

Mr. Denham: I take the length of the point of order by the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) as a sign that he is uncomfortable about my being allowed to speak further in this debate.

I was moving on to the speech of the hon. Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent (Hugh Robertson), who told the House that his parish council objected vigorously to lorry drivers dropping illegal immigrants off in a lay-by in his constituency. The Conservative party, however, has vigorously opposed us taking any action at all against lorry drivers who bring illegal immigrants into the country and let them out in lay-bys in Kent. Again, there is utter confusion among Opposition Members.

I do not know if my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies) is a supporter of proportional representation, but—I hope he does not mind my saying this—I congratulate him on delivering what could be described as a single transferable speech. Although he could not make it on Friday, none the less, he made some good points about the criminal justice system.

Mr. Boris Johnson *rose—*

Mr. Denham: Well, the hon. Gentleman has been here for a long time.

Mr. Johnson: I am grateful to the Minister for interrupting his hymn of praise to the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies). Will he break off from his glutinous complacency about everything that Labour has done and explain to the House why, if things are so much better, violent crime has gone up in the Thames Valley area by 38 per cent? I have yet to hear him address that point and should be grateful if he would do so now.

Mr. Denham: If the hon. Gentleman had not intervened, I would have moved on to issues involving crime, and shall do so shortly.

Our debate has been about one of the world's greatest cities in one of Europe's most prosperous regions. It is a part of Britain in which millions of people enjoy more successful and more prosperous lives than they or their families have ever enjoyed before. Of course, the capital and the region face real challenges, some of which stem from the very success, prosperity and attractiveness that make many people want to visit, live and work here.

There is a saying, "Out of sight, out of mind." The Opposition are out of power and largely out of sight. Thankfully, however, they are not forgotten. People know that since 1997, the number of people in work in the region has gone up by 500,000 and that unemployment is down by more than 40 per cent. in London and the south-east. People know—many remember only too well—that a year of mortgage rates of more than 10 per cent. plunged them into negative equity, and that that cost nearly 30,000 families in London and the south-east their home in 1991.

[Mr. Denham]

Yes, it can be hard today for first-time buyers to enter the housing market, which is why over the next three years 4,600 key-worker households in London, and 2,500 in the south-east, will be helped through the starter homes initiative in London.

Mrs. Laing *rose—*

Mr. Denham: That is why the NHS housing co-ordinator will identify another 2,000 accommodation places for NHS staff and why his work is also being extended to police officers.

Mrs. Laing *rose—*

Mr. Denham: That is why nurses and police officers in London and the south-east have received regional pay allowances. We should not forget that for millions of home owners in London and the south-east, mortgage rates are at their lowest since the 1960s.

It is true that crime in London and the south-east—

Mrs. Laing *rose—*

Hon. Members: Give way!

Mr. Denham: No, I am responding to the intervention from the hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson) about crime in London and the south-east. Crime in London and the south-east is down overall. Let us not forget that under the last Conservative Government, police numbers began falling in London in 1991, in Surrey in 1992 and in Thames Valley in 1994. It is our crime fighting fund that has put things right and brought 3,240 more police recruits into London and the south-east than would otherwise be recruited.

Mrs. Laing *rose—*

Mr. Denham: We have reversed that long-term decline and we are on the way to record police numbers. It is because we will have record police numbers in this country, and because numbers are increasing in London and the south-east, that we will be able to tackle the crimes that cause concern—street robbery, hard drugs and antisocial and yobbish behaviour. That action is already under way. Operation Safer Streets in London is hitting the rise in street crime and we will support the Metropolitan police service in its work. The new moves on antisocial behaviour orders will help to tackle loutish and yobbish behaviour, graffiti and other issues that were raised during the debate.

In the wider sense, in cleaning up the environment and removing abandoned cars, local councils will be able to move much more swiftly than they can at present, because the delays have been taken out of the system. The improvements will become apparent not just in crime reduction, housing and prosperity. Our children—the children of the families of London and the south-east—are doing better in our schools than ever before. Literacy and numeracy results of primary schools in London have risen—for literacy, from 64 per cent. to 74 per cent. last year, and in the south-east from 67 per cent. to 76 per cent., and there were similar improvements in numeracy results.

Mrs. Laing *rose—*

Mr. Denham: More children are getting five high grades at GCSE than ever before. Over the past three years the number of children attaining key stage 2 in English has risen by 6 per cent.; in maths the figure is 3 per cent.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is this gross example of misogyny to be allowed to continue?

Mr. Denham: The hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing) seems to have lost interest.

In transport—

Mrs. Laing: I thank the Minister for giving way after my sixth time of trying. Does he not appreciate that there are enormous teacher shortages in London and the south-east because he is taking no action whatever to put that right? He is doing nothing about house prices. He is doing nothing about finding accommodation for public servants. He is talking statistics, and he is ignoring the most important one of all. Where does he propose that teachers should live?

Mr. Denham: Having heard the hon. Lady's contribution, the one place where we can be certain that teachers will not live is in Epping Forest, as she condemned any plans to build any housing anywhere near her constituency. More importantly, there are 3,430 more teachers in London and the south-east than there were in 1997. So much for the idea that we have not taken action.

A world city—

David Maclean (Penrith and The Border) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 178, Noes 315.

Division No. 191] **[10.1 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James

Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Hayes, John
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and
Dr. Julian Lewis.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baird, Vera
Barron, Kevin
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*

Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Julie
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Neill, Martin

Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan

Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Winnick, David

Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tony McNulty and Angela Smith.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 306, Noes 180.

Division No. 192] **[10.14 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Barron, Kevin
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann

Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil

Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain

MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Julie
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian

Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Trickett, Jon

Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Angela Smith and
Mr. Tony McNulty.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
(Rushcliffe)
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen

Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Hayes, John
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*

Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and
Dr. Julian Lewis.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes pride in London's great heritage and its status as a major international capital city; notes that London remains the heart of global financial markets, a world centre for arts, music and fashion, a leader in higher education, medicine and scientific research, and home to the most diverse tapestry of cosmopolitan culture in Europe; welcomes the Government's commitment to London's continued success, demonstrated by sound economic management, substantially increased employment opportunities, record levels of funding in health, education, crime prevention, transport and other key public services, the promotion of sustainable development, the enhancement of London's environment, cultural diversity and the living standards of its population, as well as the restoration of democratic city-wide government to the capital; and unreservedly condemns the Opposition strategy of talking down London and the South East.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

That the draft Audit Commission (Borrowing Limit) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 14th February, be approved.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

NORTHERN IRELAND

That the draft Criminal Injuries Compensation (Northern Ireland) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 25th February, be approved.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

Question agreed to.

DEREGULATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 18(1)(a) (Consideration of draft deregulation orders),

EDUCATION

That the draft Regulatory Reform (Voluntary Aided Schools Liabilities and Funding) (England) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 25th February, be approved.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Free Prescriptions

10.28 pm

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking): I am honoured to present a petition initiated and organised by my Woking constituent, Mrs. Eriksson-Hills, of Goldsworth Park, Woking, to whom many congratulations are due. This petition has been signed by more than 3,000 people and, in the petition, they request a change to legislation to allow free prescriptions for all transplant patients to fall into line with other patients who receive free prescriptions.

The petition concludes:

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Secretary of State for Health to review as a matter of urgency the ailments to which the concession on prescription charges applies and to extend the scope of this concession to include the category of transplant patients.

To lie upon the Table.

E-Democracy

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

10.29 pm

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): I would like to use this debate as an opportunity for the Minister to update the House on where the UK Government—and its wholly-owned subsidiary, the UK Parliament—are on the exciting but dangerous road of e-democracy. Access is the key to e-participation. Just as the majority of people in the world have never made a telephone call, so the majority of my constituents have never sent an e-mail. They are in the poorest third of our community in the UK, with only one in nine households having access to a personal computer. However, one of the answers to that, and to participation in democracy, is not ownership of a PC but access to one. Involvement through a group is just as valid. Indeed, arguably, in the practice of democracy, it is more effective than one of the atomised.

The Government have produced many initiatives in this area, including the wiring up of schools, the development of UK online and the setting of targets for online Government services. However, I hope that the Minister will tonight report to the House on the latest progress of the e-democracy Cabinet Committee. I hope that that Committee is not limiting itself to the nerdy issues, but will take head on the key problems of access, especially pricing and restrictive practices. It is no good wishing the ends and then dodging the means. The Committee must take a view and act on some serious issues.

BT and the cable companies should make all local calls free to give a massive boost to internet usage. Some 90 per cent. of the cost of a local call is either in billing or in metering. Broadband technology, which allows extremely fast internet connectivity, is becoming increasingly affordable but has to be more so. Even those who want broadband in most rural areas cannot get access to it. If the Government are serious about access, they must ask Oftel to examine and, if necessary, restrict BT's sale of lower grade ISDN lines, so as to boost broadband.

The Office of Fair Trading should investigate the BT monopoly of leased lines, especially outside the major cities, so that we can open up those systems. The Government must be far more creative in providing computer access for poorer families. The computers within reach scheme was confined to a few small local pilots, because of underfunding. If Microsoft Windows changes versions again, it may be highly profitable for the company, but it will mean the replacement of perfectly adequate computers by faster ones and the further purchase of expensive software—and that often excludes poorer people.

The piece of kit that most people are familiar with and find easy to access is the television. I hope that the Minister can tell us if interactive digital television will provide access for those parts of British society that are currently on the outside but who need public e-services the most.

The e-democracy Cabinet Committee was charged with producing a consultative paper last summer and I hope that it tackles the supply and access issues that I have mentioned. I hope that the Minister will give us a date for the publication of that long-anticipated consultative paper. The opportunities are immense. New technology offers exciting prospects in many areas. For example, we need to create a joined-up e-democracy, involving central, regional and local governments and to ensure that online voting, when it happens, is not only secure and trusted but adds educative value to the voting experience. Crude e-plebiscites are not the way forward. We also need to create quality content for digital television, including citizens channels and links between constituents and their representatives. Leading on from that will be the provision of e-service delivery, in which public services of value to my constituents—including education, training, child care and job placements—get to those who need them.

Given the shortness of the debate tonight, I shall concentrate on only one area—the impact of e-democracy on parliamentary democracy. As much is expected of the new digital technologies as was expected of television in the 1930s, and rightly so. The e-revolution, if it is to mean anything, must deliver for our democracy. It must produce ambitions that match the reach of that technology. It must be bold enough to strike at the heart of political cynicism. It must create something that revives our tired, downtrodden Parliament and makes us, once again, the forum of our nation. It must make quake the rotten duopoly of the media and an over-centralised Executive.

That is a tall order, but there is a way to deliver all the above. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has pushed forward the concept of pre-legislative scrutiny, in which the principles and practicalities of a Bill can be examined for, say, eight weeks by a group of Members of Parliament taking evidence openly and without votes. It is a brilliant innovation, worthy of my right hon. Friend, which will transform Members of this House from rubber stamps to something almost akin to real legislators.

However, we can take the proposal one step further, and invite the public—our electors—to the party. If the proceedings of those Committees are webcast, with the schedules known well in advance, any group or individual with a PC will be able not only to see live TV coverage, but to respond to the evidence or the debate by e-mailing the address running across the bottom of the screen as the sitting is televised. That could be done immediately, or after reflection and consideration.

Such thoughts and insights would be e-mailed back to the Committee and go to a mediator. His or her task would be to filter out the e-garbage familiar to all hon. Members, and distil the essence of the responses, the bright ideas and the experiences of those responding. The mediator would then report to the Committee, which would consider the responses and, where convinced by them, incorporate them in its report, and then perhaps in legislation. As knocking on doors and passing resolutions fade into political history, democrats can use the new technology to realise a dream—that electors can help make better laws.

I led for Labour on the Bill establishing the Child Support Agency. All parties agreed on the principles of that Bill, but the absence of an effective parliamentary or public process put into law an insensitive, unamended, Whitehall Bill. It caused suffering and suicide, as many hon. Members know. Online pre-legislative scrutiny would have prevented much, if not all, of that anguish. It would have meant that we listened to the right people before deciding the contents of the Bill.

[Mr. Graham Allen]

Such scrutiny must be undertaken seriously. Respondents must be acknowledged, given feedback and referred to relevant parts of the final report. Some respondents should even be personally acknowledged and publicly recognised for especially useful or insightful contributions. The result will be better service delivery, more value for money, healthy participation in our democracy, and better law.

However, if the process is not undertaken properly, or if the House merely goes through the motions, it will add to, rather than diminish, cynicism about our politics. Members of Parliament may be content to be rubber stamps, but the public will walk away from such a charade, and from us. It is possible, too, that they will walk away from our democracy.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will say that we should seize the moment. If we can overcome the electorate's fear and take people with us, we will be on the edge of a new era of genuine participation in our democracy. Using new technology in the way that I have described would strengthen our democracy and be a bold and creative step. The UK Parliament could be the first parliamentary institution in the world to meet that challenge. I hope that my hon. Friend will tell me when we can make a start.

10.39 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Stephen Twigg): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on securing this important Adjournment debate which, as he said, gives me an opportunity to set out the progress being made by the new e-democracy Cabinet Committee. I am pleased to take up his challenge that our Committee should avoid being nerdy on these issues. Anyone who knows my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, who chairs the Committee, or myself will realise that neither of us is in any danger of being a computer nerd or, I hope, nerdy in other respects.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the intense interest and great commitment and enthusiasm that he has shown in electronic democracy and, more broadly, in taking up issues relating to the renewal of our democracy. It is a timely debate, because the new Cabinet Committee on e-democracy met yesterday for only the second time. We are working towards publishing the consultation document to which my hon. Friend referred. I am afraid that I have to disappoint him as I am not in a position to take up his challenge to give the date of the report's publication. However, I can say with some confidence that my hon. Friend should not have to wait too long, and neither should others in the House. This consultation is an important opportunity for us to take the debate out into the wider public arena.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right to seek to place this subject in the broader political context. In many debates in this House, reference is rightly made to the low turnout in recent elections. Most notably, the turnout at last June's general election fell to 59 per cent.—the lowest since universal suffrage was introduced in this country. Especially disturbing was the fact that turnout fell most dramatically and to an all-time low among young people who were entitled to turn out and vote for the first time in their life. Surveys suggest that among 18 to 24-year-olds, the numbers voting were probably fewer than two in five. The problem is not confined to this House or this country, but is being witnessed across the democratic world, with significant declines in turnout in general and among young people in particular.

Against that background, my hon. Friend is right to say that when we look at e-democracy, we are looking at how to renew interest in our politics and in this place so that Parliament can once again be seen to be at the centre of these debates in our country. How best can we harness advances in technology to strengthen democracy?

We are all aware of the technological background—the context, technologically—with the growth of the internet and mobile phone use. About two households in five have the internet at home, widening the possibilities of public access to information. The average adult will spend something like eight years of their life watching television. I understand that more telephone votes were cast in the recent final of "Pop Idol" than were cast in total for the Conservative party at the 2001 election. To be fair to the Conservative party, I suspect that people voting Conservative last year voted only once, whereas those voting for Will or Gareth had the opportunity to vote many more times, and I know that many did.

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): Fortunately.

Mr. Twigg: I assume that my hon. Friend means that it was fortunate that people could not vote more than once for the Conservative party, or indeed for other parties.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Unfortunately.

Mr. Twigg: My hon. Friend rightly prefaced his remarks by highlighting the threat posed by the digital divide. I have already said that two households in five are signed up to the internet. My hon. Friend pointed out that access to personal computers at home in his constituency is barely more than 10 per cent. In my constituency, which is very different, the figure would be well above 50 per cent. It is of great importance that we do all that we can, in Government and in Parliament, to hit the target that has been set by the Government and extend access to the internet to all households by 2005. That will not be easy; it is not simply about access but about ensuring that people have the skills and confidence to use the internet. The Government, partly through the Office of the e-envoy, are tackling that as a matter of priority.

E-democracy is often seen simply as internet voting, giving people the chance to cast their votes over the internet, over the telephone or by text message. Clearly, that is part of the process, but it goes much wider than that. As my hon. Friend suggested, the key issue in e-democracy is participation and involvement by using the new technologies as a way to enhance opportunities for citizens to participate in the democratic process.

That can be achieved in three ways. First, new technologies can facilitate participation by making it easier for citizens who otherwise are not involved to access information, follow the political process, scrutinise Government and other public bodies and, of course, to vote in elections. Secondly, we can use the new technologies to broaden participation by opening up new channels of communication so that involvement in democratic activity can be increased especially, as my hon. Friend suggested, among those previously excluded. Thirdly, we can harness technology to deepen participation and to strengthen some of the connections between citizens and levels of representative institutions.

We can cite many examples of that, and I shall refer to just one or two. Parliament has its own website, and webcasting is being trialled in the House of Commons and the House of Lords and a specific experiment will run until the end of the year. The Scottish Parliament provides live audio-visual coverage of all its proceedings in its Chamber and main Committee Rooms.

In terms of broadening participation, the Hansard Society has an e-democracy programme that involves several successful and excellent projects. I refer, for example, to one that has been mentioned many times in debates and questions in this Chamber. The online consultation that the society conducted in partnership with the all-party group on domestic violence considered the thorny question of domestic violence. About 1,000 messages of evidence were received from women, many, if not most, of whom would not have come forward otherwise and certainly would not have been prepared to face the great personal risk of coming to Parliament to give evidence in public.

Another recent Hansard Society consultation before the last election with the then Select Committee on Social Security considered the issue of people receiving the working families tax credit. It gave those receiving the credit an opportunity to give online evidence direct to the Committee. About 75 per cent. of those giving evidence said that they had never previously been involved in any form of consultation exercise.

Mr. Allen: I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting the invaluable work of the Hansard Society and of Dr. Stephen Coleman and his team. They have pioneered many of the techniques that we are debating and have drawn the wider public's attention to the fact that, as my hon. Friend pointed out, webcasting is already taking place in the House. The only thing that is missing is the return path. People can see Committees or the Chambers in this House or the other place in action, but they do not have the return path to e-mail their views back. I am talking about a very simple add-on to the webcasting of pre-legislative scrutiny.

Mr. Twigg: I thank my hon. Friend for that point, to which I shall return in a moment.

Another aspect of the issue is seeking to deepen participation. For example, my constituency is in the London borough of Enfield, which is represented by three Members of Parliament. The local branch of the United Nations Association has recently launched an interactive website in which it conducts what it describes as "MP Watch". It sounds rather ominous, but the three of us have signed up to it and, every fortnight, we receive a question from the group to which we reply. A discussion group and forum then follow from that. The project is in its early days, but it is a positive and innovative example of a local voluntary organisation harnessing the technologies to seek to deepen participation and the connection between political representatives—in this case Members of Parliament—and local people with a particular interest in a policy matter.

The Government are keen for such initiatives to be taken up throughout the country so that we can learn from best practice, and strengthen involvement in democratic activity. My hon. Friend referred to UK online, which includes the CitizenSpace area where people can already take part directly in Government consultations and discussion forums. We want to consider how to take that forward—partly through our consultation document—to make CitizenSpace a showcase of e-democracy.

The substantial part of my hon. Friend's speech addressed the question of how, as part of the modernisation of this place and the wider reform of Parliament, we could harness new technologies to increase citizen involvement and our responsiveness to citizens. In his proposals to the Modernisation Committee in December, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House put great emphasis on strengthening pre-legislative scrutiny. Technology can play an important part in achieving that.

I welcome the suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North that we harness new technology to enhance pre-legislative scrutiny and, as he said, to realise a dream that electors themselves can help to make better laws. I shall pass on his specific proposal to my right hon. Friend and to the Modernisation Committee.

I am well aware that the Committee is determined that the debate on modernisation should not simply be for those of us in this place—the Westminster village—but must be taken outside. The best test of a more effective Parliament is whether we are held in higher esteem and have greater credibility with the public.

Mr. Wyatt: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for allowing me to intervene, as I had not asked Mr. Speaker for permission.

The advertising industry bases its assessment of television watching on 1,000 telephone interviews. That is a very concentrated process for providing ratings. Is it possible to feed such a system into the e-democracy debate? We could invite an outside agency to telephone 1,000 people to test a debate or an issue. It has been statistically proven that that is the best method. The current system is often only one-way.

Mr. Twigg: That is a welcome idea and I shall be happy to pass it on for the consideration of the Modernisation Committee.

Similar ideas have been brought to my attention during the debate. For example, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations suggested that we might set up a citizens panel to which we could refer major questions in Parliament. Departments could also refer to that panel and the consultations could be conducted partially or fully via new forms of technology.

Several Select Committees are considering ways in which they can use new technology to reach out to smaller voluntary organisations that might not be able to give evidence in person, but could provide it through the web or e-mail. Greater access for the public could be a great gain. However, I fully agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North that we must do that

[Mr. Twigg]

properly or we shall increase the cynicism that we want to dispel. If we ask people to respond through new technology but fail to acknowledge those responses or take them into account, it would be preferable not to ask for those views in the first place. We must ensure that systems are in place to deal properly and fully with the concerns that people raise—whether in this place or with the Government.

The Select Committee on Procedure is currently holding an inquiry into parliamentary questions which will report later this year. I understand that there is overwhelming support among Members for e-tabling of parliamentary questions.

Let me move on briefly to e-voting by the electorate. There is great potential for us to use new technology to make the voting process in elections more convenient to the elector, more accessible to all sections of the electorate—particularly those who are less likely to vote, such as young people—and more efficient, thus possibly leading to greater turnout at elections. There are obvious areas of caution such as security issues involving the internet, let alone telephone voting and, of course, the digital divide issues, to which my hon. Friend referred. That is why the Government are moving forward with caution on such matters.

Last month, the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions announced 30 pilot schemes for this May's local elections. Those schemes range from all-postal-vote elections in certain authorities; some trial use of mobile phone text messaging and local digital television for voting; trials of internet voting from home, local libraries and council information kiosks; early and extended voting; and electronic counting. The Electoral Commission is giving financial support and advice to the pilot authorities.

The aim of those pilot schemes in new forms of voting is to help to develop secure online voting, so that we can open the possibility that e-voting will play a role in a future general election after 2006—roughly translated, that means not at the next general election. Nevertheless, that is something to which we can all aspire.

In consulting on the various issues of e-democracy, it is very important, as my hon. Friend implied at the beginning, that we reach out beyond the usual suspects, whether computer experts—my hon. Friend had another word for them—or constitutional reformers, who may take a certain view on the wider context of such issues. We want the consultation to reach the wider public. That is why we want to ensure that we get the consultation document absolutely right when we launch it.

Finally, I pay tribute to all those who worked hard on such issues inside and outside the Government, the e-envoy and his team, various hon. Members on both sides of the House and, in particular, the Information Committee. I see in his place its former Chairman, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan), who has been a trail-blazer on many of these issues. I also pay tribute to many people in the wider civil society—notably, as my hon. Friend said, the Hansard Society, which has done so much take this issue forward.

We have the potential, as a country, to be at the cutting edge on this issue and, as a Parliament, to be ahead of many other Parliaments in other advanced democratic countries. The consultation document, which will be issued shortly, will enable the public to have their input into that debate, and I am pleased that my hon. Friend has given me the chance to update the House on how our discussions are going.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at three minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 13 March 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON DEVELOPMENT AGENCY BILL *(BY ORDER)*

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on 20 March.

Oral Answers to Questions

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State was asked—

Special Advisers

1. **Bob Spink** (Castle Point): What the Government's policy is on compensating special advisers who are required to resign. [40116]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mrs. Barbara Roche): The circumstances in which compensation may be paid to special advisers who resign from the civil service are set out in the "Model Contract for Special Advisers".

Bob Spink: The Prime Minister has the final say in appointing special advisers. Will the Minister tell us exactly what role the Prime Minister plays in dismissing advisers, and will she say what amount of compensation Jo Moore was paid?

Mrs. Roche: The hon. Gentleman's question was about special advisers who resign from the civil service. Their conditions are laid down in section 13 of the "Model Contract for Special Advisers". It will be for Jo Moore and the Department to work out the exact terms.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): Will my hon. Friend agree to have a look at the evidence given to the Select Committee on Public Administration last week by Sir Richard Mottram about the whole matter of special advisers and how they could be required to resign? Does my hon. Friend agree that it is sometimes not clear whether the Secretary of State or the permanent secretary is responsible for requiring a special adviser to resign? For future reference by Governments of all complexions, would it not be better to clear that up now?

Mrs. Roche: We have an obligation to consult on a civil service Act, and of course we shall listen to what people have to say during that consultation. The House should bear in mind, however, the fact that the "Model Contract for Special Advisers" was published for the first time by this Government, and that they also published the code of conduct. That will interest Conservative Members, one in eight of whom I understand to be former special advisers.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Whose job is it to ensure that special advisers cannot break their code of conduct, and therefore their contracts, with impunity? What action was taken when Ministers confirmed to the House that Jo Moore had instructed a civil servant to brief the press against Bob Kiley, contrary to paragraph 6 of the code? Was that a breach of contract? If not, why not? Would severance pay be payable if it was?

Mrs. Roche: The terms and conditions in the model contract go into an individual's terms and conditions of employment. That is the rule in employment law.

As far as I am aware, no official complaint has been made. If a complaint were made, it would be investigated.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Will the Minister confirm for the record that it was the Prime Minister who personally decided to retain Jo Moore in office last autumn? If he did, will the Minister confirm that he, not the taxpayer, will be paying any lump sum that is paid to Jo Moore?

Mrs. Roche: I refer the hon. Gentleman to what the Prime Minister said on 17 October during Prime Minister's Question Time:

> "First, I do not defend in any shape or form what Jo Moore said, which was horrible, wrong and stupid. I do, however, defend the decision that to sack someone and end their career was too heavy a penalty. That was the decision taken. I supported it and regard the matter as closed."—[*Official Report*, 17 October 2001; Vol. 372, c. 1165.]

That is the way in which to deal with these affairs.

Civil Service Bill

2. **Mr. Gordon Prentice** (Pendle): If he will publish a civil service Bill in draft. [40117]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State (Mr. John Prescott): The Government are committed to the introduction of civil service legislation, and I anticipate working closely with the Select Committee on Public Administration in developing a consensus through all stages of reform. As I said when I appeared before the Committee on 18 October last year, this does not rule out any form of pre-legislative scrutiny.

Mr. Prentice: That is a good answer, but it does not tell me anything that I did not already know. Is there any problem with introducing a civil service Bill, given that all the parties are signed up to it? I am mystified over why there should be so much navel-gazing in regard to an issue on which there is consensus in the House.

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: As the hon. Gentleman will recall, he asked the same question on an earlier occasion. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hon. Friend!"] Well, I will leave that to the judgment of the House.

I was trying to make it clear to the House that my hon. Friend—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"]—had asked a question and adjusted it in the process. He asked about pre-legislative scrutiny, which I think is a very good idea.

People want to have a debate about this issue. We have made it clear that we intend to make a radical change: to put provisions into law and a legislative framework, which the Opposition have called for in their recent report. We think that that is right and we will publish at the right time. The Cabinet Secretary will make a statement about the matter shortly. I believe that he is appearing before my hon. Friend's Committee tomorrow.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Does the Deputy Prime Minister agree that a civil service Bill should include statutory provision for the ministerial code? Yesterday a judge in the Doncaster case said in passing sentence on two Labour councillors found guilty of corruption—I hope that the Deputy Prime Minister agrees with this—

> "Corruption by those elected by the public strikes at the root of democracy".

Does he agree that following the Mittal affair, the Hinduja affair, the Ecclestone affair and the Vaz affair, the last person who should be judge and jury on the conduct of Ministers is the Prime Minister?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: We could expect a rant from the hon. Gentleman, but a Conservative councillor was before the court at the same time. Let me make it clear that the House condemns corruption wherever it takes place; I assume that that view is held on both sides of the Chamber. All parties have had problems, but the hon. Gentleman seeks only to exploit the situation, and throws doubt on the credibility of many councillors, Tory, Labour and Liberal Democrat, who do an excellent job. We do not intend to put the ministerial code into a legislative framework.

Mr. Speaker: Question 3. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State (Mr. John Prescott): I was just thinking about Lady Porter.

PIU Reports

3. **Mr. David Chaytor** (Bury, North): If he will list the performance and innovation unit reports for which his Department is the lead department. [40118]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The Cabinet Office is the lead Department for four completed PIU reports, which focused on a cross-cutting approach to government, regional and local government, electronic delivery of Government services, and leadership in the public sector.

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office is also the sponsor Minister for two current PIU projects, on risk and uncertainty; and ethnic minorities and the labour market.

Mr. Chaytor: The content of all PIU reports is a matter for the sponsoring Minister, so in respect of the process governing the report on the energy review, will my right hon. Friend speak to the Minister for Industry and Energy and ensure that there is the fullest possible debate about that review over the next few months, given the deteriorating international situation, particularly in the middle east?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The report was commissioned by the Prime Minister, as my hon. Friend is aware. It was conducted by the PIU under the sponsorship of the Energy Minister. In those circumstances, it has produced the report, and statements have been made. The report is now publicly available for consultation and discussion. After the consultation, and despite the controversial issues associated with our commitments on climate change and nuclear energy, we will produce our White Paper at the end of this year. We will include our conclusions in it, as Governments normally do.

Ombudsman Review

4. **Tony Wright** (Cannock Chase): When he expects to introduce legislation to implement the conclusions of the ombudsman review. [40120]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Christopher Leslie): The Government have made clear their commitment to replace the existing arrangements with a more unified ombudsman body. We intend to publish more details shortly. Any legislation required to implement new arrangements will be made when parliamentary time allows.

Tony Wright: My hon. Friend will know that it was a Labour Government in the 1960s who introduced the ombudsman system to protect the citizen against acts of maladministration by state officials, a move that was opposed by the Conservative party. We have had a review that has been around for a long time saying that the ombudsman system needs to be updated to meet the needs of citizens now. As we were the party that introduced that system, can he guarantee that we will be the party that urgently brings in the product of the review?

Mr. Leslie: I can certainly guarantee that the Government remain firmly committed to a unified ombudsman system. There is much that we can do in advance of any legislation. For example, the new parliamentary ombudsman, when appointed, will continue to undertake the health service ombudsman role as well. We can use this opportunity to resolve any jurisdictional issues, and we can look at co-locating the local government ombudsman with the parliamentary and health service ombudsmen, so that we have a more seamless, single-door approach for the public.

Civil Servants (Employment Tribunals)

5. **Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): If he will make a statement on the circumstances in which junior civil servants are entitled to have their cases submitted to employment tribunals in cases of alleged misconduct. [40121]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Christopher Leslie): Civil servants have the same rights of access to employment tribunals as other employees.

Mr. Dalyell: In the light of Lord Butler's remarks in the other place, to which my hon. Friend the Minister's attention has been drawn, do we have the assurance that the junior civil servants in the Moore-Sixsmith case will be treated according to fair process?

Mr. Leslie: The former Cabinet Secretary, Lord Butler of Brockwell, said that the relationship between special advisers and civil servants was generally very productive. As well as the general right to access industrial tribunals, civil servants also have extensive internal appeal opportunities, to the civil service appeal board and to the civil service commissioners. My hon. Friend will accept that it would not be appropriate for me to detail the particulars of any individual case on the Floor of the House of Commons.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Is it not rather worrying that so many civil servants have had to look to appeal procedures as a result of their run-ins with one Cabinet Minister? The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions lost a press officer when he was at the former Department for Education and Employment, and since then he has lost a head of press, a deputy head of press and junior press officer. He has even, belatedly and reluctantly, lost a special adviser. Should not the right hon. Gentleman take out some sort of block booking with the appeals service?

Mr. Leslie: That was very droll. We have been around the block on this matter with the hon. Gentleman far too many times. I do not know whether he is getting bored with asking the same question, but I am certainly getting bored with answering it. The permanent secretary has issued his statement and dealt with all these matters. It is time that the hon. Gentleman put them into perspective.

Ministerial Code of Conduct

6. **Mr. Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight): If he will revise the ministerial code of conduct. [40122]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mrs. Barbara Roche): A revised ministerial code was published in July 2001. Since then, in response to a recommendation from the Public Administration Select Committee, the Government have agreed to amend paragraph 27 of the code.

Mr. Turner: I thank the Minister for that answer. Is she aware that the Deputy Prime Minister has just said that the ministerial code will not be contained in the future civil service Act? Is it right that the Prime Minister should be judge, jury and—occasionally—executioner with regard to breaches of the civil service code when he has not justified the trust that people placed in him in connection with the cases of the hon. Members for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson) and the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions? When the Prime Minister needs our trust, would it not be appropriate that he earns it?

Mrs. Roche: That was the most astonishing outburst. In response to the report by the Public Administration Committee, the Government have revised the civil service code. That code was left unaltered by the previous Conservative Administration whom, if the hon. Gentleman had been in the House at the time, I am sure that he would have supported. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has published the ministerial code and altered it in the way recommended by the Select Committee. I am sure that that action has the overwhelming endorsement of the House.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): Despite the attitude of the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner), does my hon. Friend the Minister think that it would be useful to have a meeting with Opposition Front-Bench Members on this issue? At such a meeting, would she consider raising with them the report from the Public Administration Committee published in February last year? It touched on this matter, and included the concern that the Opposition could not give a categoric assurance that Short money was being used exclusively for parliamentary purposes. Is there any information from the Opposition on that matter?

Mrs. Roche: Of course, I should be delighted to meet the Opposition at any time. My door is always open to any hon. Member. If the Opposition want to raise the matter with me, I should be delighted to discuss it with them.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): Does the Minister agree that it is essential that the ministerial code be amended to ensure that Ministers at all times comply with the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards and the Committee on Standards and Privileges and not avoid their recommendations, as the Deputy Prime Minister did?

Mrs. Roche: That is not the case. Let me deal with this once again, as Conservative Members peddle this line at every opportunity. The Committee on Standards and Privileges has investigated the matter and dismissed all charges of impropriety. It reflects no credit on Conservative Members to peddle this line time and time again. I strongly believe that it brings the House into disrepute.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): What is wrong with giving a statutory base to the ministerial code?

Mrs. Roche: The reason is very clear: Ministers, quite rightly, are responsible to Parliament.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Most people will recognise that Ministers are accountable to the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister decides whether they are in violation of the ministerial code. As the hon. Lady says that she is so happy for us to have a conversation about this, I am delighted to do so. First, will she confirm whether the amendment to the ministerial code recommended by the Public Administration Committee and accepted by the Government has been made with immediate effect or will it take effect only when the ministerial code is next revised after the next election? Secondly, will she consider revising the ministerial code to include a specific provision that Ministers should tell the truth in all circumstances, not just to this House, and then send a copy to the Transport Secretary?

Mrs. Roche: The Government inherited the original wording of paragraph 27 of the code from the previous Conservative Government. We accepted that announcements on Government policy should be made straight to Parliament.

I will of course be delighted to meet the hon. Gentleman. He will be aware that the code's opening paragraph makes it perfectly clear that Ministers' responsibilities are to the public and to Parliament.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Minister aware that for the past quarter of an hour the House has been discussing the fate of three people in one Department? One—the journalist, the friend of the media, the Tory BBC and all the rest—is being treated like an Olympic gold medallist. I remind the House, the Minister and the Tories that way back, when the Tories were in power, they dismissed 20,000 miners at a stroke and never shed a single tear. Then they got stuck into the shipbuilders, the textile workers and all the rest. Let us get on to the real people for a change.

Mrs. Roche: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Conservative party knows all there is to know about unemployment policy in that respect.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Notwithstanding the Minister's reply to the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay), does she understand that members of the Standards and Privileges Committee believe that there would be great benefit in incorporating in the ministerial code of conduct an explicit requirement to co-operate fully with both the commissioner for standards and the Committee? Will she reflect on that and consider it further?

Mrs. Roche: I appreciate that point and understand that it has also been made by the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) in business questions. When the consultation process is under way, the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends may well want to make representations of that kind.

E-Mail

7. **Lawrie Quinn** (Scarborough and Whitby): If he will make a statement on progress towards his target for making electronic communications from the public to all Government Departments feasible. [40123]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mrs. Barbara Roche): All Departments can be contacted via e-mail. The Government are committed to providing those services that can be delivered electronically by 2005. The latest figures show that more than 50 per cent. of Government services are now available online, with 74 per cent. predicted by the end of this year.

Lawrie Quinn: Has the Minister had a chance to study last night's Adjournment debate in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen)? Can she confirm that the so-called digital divide will not be used as an argument by the civil service or the Government to prevent targets being met or improved upon so that the public can have access to e-government?

Mrs. Roche: I am aware of the debate that took place last night and can give my hon. Friend the reassurance that he needs. It is right for us to ensure that we can deliver more services online, and it is also right to try to ensure that people who are currently without internet access receive those services. That is why—to give one example—the Department of Trade and Industry and the Post Office have just completed a six-month pilot of public information kiosks in post offices.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): Seventy-four per cent. is an encouraging figure, but will the hon. Lady look at how many online Government services are accessible to people who do not have Windows? An increasing number of services are accessible only if one has Windows, so that rules out people who use Apple, Unix or other software. Will she ensure that the Government's choice of software is dictated by the need for maximum access rather than by relationships with software companies?

Mrs. Roche: As a former DTI Minister, I understand the hon. Gentleman's point and will ensure that it is brought to the attention of the relevant officials in the Department.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Does the Minister agree that there should be two-way communication? There should be ways for the Government daily to describe their policy to the electorate. For example, they could explain why, today, there will be no statements on Zimbabwe, on the police dispute or on the fact that the channel tunnel is closed. All we shall have is a worthy—although no doubt important—statement on audits and accountability.

Mrs. Roche: That was a valiant try—the hon. Gentleman is ingenious in his methods. When the Government have something to communicate to the House on all those matters, I am sure that he will be the first to know.

Civil Service Bill

8. **Norman Baker** (Lewes): When he expects the civil service Bill to be published; and if he will ensure that it includes measures to reinforce civil service impartiality. [40124]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Christopher Leslie): The Government are committed to introducing civil service legislation and to maintaining an impartial civil service. Any legislative programme will be announced in the normal way.

Norman Baker: Did the Minister read the comments in *The Times* today of Jonathan Baume, the leader of our senior civil service union? He warned that the civil service is being undermined by Ministers through the drip-feed of unattributable leaks and that it is being politicised by stealth. Does the Minister agree that we need to take action to ensure that the impartiality of the civil service is not further undermined? Will he begin by rescinding the powers that have been given to special advisers Alastair Campbell and Jonathan Powell to issue instructions to impartial civil servants?

Mr. Leslie: The hon. Gentleman should not believe everything he reads in the newspapers. We have always emphasised our commitment to a permanent, impartial civil service of the highest standard as a cornerstone of the British constitution. It is about time that we heard more tributes and less criticism of the civil service, which is helping the Government to deliver our public service reforms, as well as economic prosperity and policies such as the national minimum wage. Our goal is to have an Administration who deliver results and we want to bring in the best people to help to implement our policies.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Will the Bill contain a clause restricting the number of special advisers in any one Department, and will it also define precisely what their role should be?

Mr. Leslie: As we said before the Select Committee on Public Administration, we are minded to consider questions such as a cap on the number of special advisers. All those matters will be dealt with in future consultation. I understand that the Cabinet Secretary will make a speech on the issue shortly.

"Women and Public Service"

9. **Ms Meg Munn** (Sheffield, Heeley): If he will make a statement on the Cabinet Office consultation document "Women and Public Service". [40126]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mrs. Barbara Roche): The report "Better Services—Better Working Lives" was published on 10 December. It reported on women's experience of education and health services and the reforms being introduced by the Government.

Ms Munn: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer.

Given the number of women who work in public services, what percentage of women would my hon. Friend like to see in senior management and what suggestions does she have for achieving it?

Mrs. Roche: I should like to see the number of women in such positions to be 50:50—as we are in the population. Some progress is being made but we need to do much more. That is why we are holding a seminar on women taking up public appointments. It is also important that, through the election of women Members of Parliament, the House should reflect women in the country far more than it does already.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [40145] **Geraldine Smith** (Morecambe and Lunesdale): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 13 March.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Geraldine Smith: The Prime Minister will be aware of Consignia's current proposals, which threaten the financial position of the Post Office, jeopardise the provision of post office services and threaten thousands of postal workers' jobs. In view of that and of the fact that the Post Office is, after all, a publicly owned company, will the Prime Minister tell me what representations he has made to Postcomm—the postal regulator—about those appalling proposals? Will he also tell me whether he has asked for an extension of the consultation period, because it has been appallingly short?

The Prime Minister: I entirely understand people's concerns about Postcomm's proposals. As my hon. Friend will know, Consignia—the Post Office—faces major structural challenges to do with changes in technology, changes in the market and changes in the liberalisation of postal markets right across Europe, but I know that it will be mindful of the primary duty of Postcomm, which is to protect the universal service. I know also that people will listen very carefully to the representations being made by my hon. Friend and many others, and I am sure that we shall find a way through that allows us to make the necessary changes to the Post Office, while ensuring that basic services are protected.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Now that the Prime Minister has finished his latest Government relaunch, may I take him back to phase 1 of new Labour? In his 1997 election manifesto, the Prime Minister promised "zero tolerance" of street crime. Five years on, will he tell us exactly what he meant by that?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I meant that it is important that the Government get crime down, and I am happy to tell the right hon. Gentleman that crime has actually fallen under this Government since 1997. It is true, however, that street crime has gone up very sharply in London and elsewhere in the last year. It is precisely for that reason—

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): What are you doing?

The Prime Minister: The right hon Gentleman asks what we are doing. First, there are more police officers—more than 1,000 in the last year. Secondly, there are major changes to the criminal justice system. Thirdly, we are making sure that we have sufficient secure accommodation places for young offenders. In each of those areas, therefore, we are taking action. Yes, I accept entirely that street crime has been a problem, particularly in the last year, but we are acting on it.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister, as ever, talks about the things that he was doing, but he fails to recognise that none of them has had any effect on bringing down street crime. In London alone, there are 218 street crimes every day; 150 knife crimes every week; and 275 gun crimes every month—so much for phase 1 and failure, but no apology. In phase 2, the Prime Minister made another manifesto pledge. *[Interruption.]* Labour Members do not like being reminded of what they promised, so let us remind them. He said that he would bring 100,000 more criminals to justice under the next phase of Government. Was that not another worthless pledge?

The Prime Minister: No. First, I shall deal with street crime. Contrary to what the right hon. Gentleman has just said, I did not say that there was no problem with street crime; I admitted that there was a problem. He said that we were refusing to say what we would do about it. Let me repeat to him that we need extra police officers; we have got 1,000 extra in London. We need measures to change the criminal justice system; we are taking those measures. We need more places in secure accommodation; that is precisely what we are doing.

As a result of the Metropolitan police safer streets initiative, taken in the last few weeks, there has been a 15 per cent. drop in street crime. However, we need to do more. We need even more police officers, which is exactly why we are increasing the numbers to the highest level that this country has ever seen. We need to make sure that the Proceeds of Crime Bill goes through so that we tackle some of the organised crime. Many of its measures are being opposed by the Conservative party in Parliament. We need the major changes to the criminal justice system outlined in the Auld report. We support those changes and we support the extra numbers of police through investment—does he?

Mr. Duncan Smith: As ever, when the Prime Minister is asked a direct question, we get more promises and pledges, but never any delivery. I asked him a specific question about his promise to bring 100,000 more criminals to justice. He did not answer it. The reality is that his figures show that he has gone backwards. Some 80,000 fewer criminals are being brought to justice. Nine out of 10 crimes go unpunished and, when criminals are caught and convicted, under his Government they are released early to commit more crimes. Surely he must now agree with the chairman of the Victims of Crime Trust, who said:

> "I have never seen the criminal justice system in such disarray."

Is that a good verdict on phase 2?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman accuses us of making promises but not delivering on them. This country has the highest numbers of police that it has ever had. The reason for that is additional investment. The vast majority of police in this country do a superb job, but two things are needed: first, we need to make sure that we carry on getting additional police numbers, which we will do; and, secondly, we need to introduce the major changes to the criminal justice system that we want.

If we look at crime over the past few years, we see that there is a real problem with street crime. However, overall crime is down. Let us compare that with the record of the 18 years under the Conservatives. The Conservatives cut police numbers before we came to office—*[Interruption.]* Yes, they did. The Conservatives scrapped the housing allowance, which did more damage to the recruitment of police officers. The number of convictions fell by a third. The amount of time that it took to get persistent young offenders to court soared, and crime doubled. The last people from whom we will take lessons on crime are the Conservatives.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I remind the Prime Minister—I know that he does not like being reminded of this—that he has been in power for nearly five years. He cannot go on blaming somebody else. Not one of the measures that he has mentioned has had a positive effect. Street crime is rising, violent crime is rising, and muggings are up. All of those are failures by the Government. Worse than that, fewer people are being brought to justice and more dangerous criminals are on the street—no wonder police morale is at an all-time low.

The Prime Minister gave one pledge: that he would put more police on the streets. The only place he has put them on the streets is here in Westminster, where they are getting angry about this lot. The reality sits on his shoulders: phase 1, make the promise; phase 2, break the promise; phase 3, blame anybody else.

The Prime Minister: Let us go back to police numbers. As I said, the vast majority of police officers in this country do a superb job, with immense dedication and commitment. Let us remember that when we came to office the numbers of police in London and elsewhere were falling; today, we have the highest number of police officers that we have ever had. Since we came to office, car crime and burglary have gone down. It is true that street crime has gone up, which is precisely why we are introducing these measures: more secure accommodation, changes to the criminal justice system and more police on the beat. All of that requires support for our proposed changes to the criminal justice system and extra investment. Let me repeat what I said a moment or two ago: that is what we say is the solution—will the right hon. Gentleman now back it?

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): Those of us with an interest in homelessness have warmly welcomed this morning's announcement that in two years' time the Government intend to end the use of bed-and-breakfast accommodation for families. Does my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister agree that bed and breakfast is only the sharp end of a housing crisis that is affecting public sector recruitment in London as well as homelessness? Will he ensure that the comprehensive spending review makes resources available to boost housing supply, particularly in London and the south-east, to help with public sector recruitment and to fulfil the target on bed and breakfast?

The Prime Minister: I am sure that what my hon. Friend says about the problems of housing in London and elsewhere is true. It is for that reason that we have been seeking to increase investment. In particular, the starter homes initiatives for staff such as teachers, police officers and nurses in London will ensure that at least hundreds of people in those professions get the chance of a decent home in London, which they need to go to work.

As for homelessness more generally, my hon. Friend will know that we have cut the number of rough sleepers, but we are well aware of the fact that bed-and-breakfast accommodation is not the right accommodation—medium or long term—so we are looking urgently at how we manage to increase the provision of housing and reduce the reliance on bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): When thousands of police officers make their way to Westminster to lobby us all, and when one listens to the genuine sense of anger and betrayal that they feel, will the Prime Minister take this opportunity to explain to them why they are so mistaken?

The Prime Minister: I believe, as I said a moment or two ago, that the vast majority of police officers do a superb job. They do a great job with immense dedication and commitment. I think, however, that the right hon. Gentleman will find that the vast majority of police officers agree with the changes that we are making to the criminal justice system and agree with much of the police reform that we want to introduce. It is true, however, that there are points of disagreement. They are now subject to conciliation, which I hope very much will allow us to reach an agreement. As the chairman of the Police Federation said earlier, the right hon. Gentleman will find that there is a very large measure of agreement on the Government's programme between the police and the Government.

Mr. Kennedy: I do not know about the points of disagreement, but the points of agreement are pretty well camouflaged, judging by what has been said by police officers today. Does the Prime Minister acknowledge that he is now beginning to preside over the biggest period of public sector discontent since the winter of discontent? Whether it is teachers in London, police officers at the door here at Westminster today or rail workers, is not the hard fact of the matter that many public service employees do not value the Government because they do not think that the Government value them?

The Prime Minister: There are about 140,000 more public sector staff compared with when we came to office. There are more nurses, more doctors, more police and more teachers. The truth, however, is that, no matter how much money is put in and no matter how many people we recruit, the Liberal Democrats never think that it is enough because they think that there is a bottomless pit and that we can simply get as much money out of it as they can possibly imagine. The truth of the matter is that, of course, we value public service staff enormously, but I think that the Liberal Democrats will make a very big mistake if they set their face, as they have, against any changes in the health service, any changes in education or any changes in the police or criminal justice. It is important that we work with staff to get these reforms but, in circumstances in which we are putting in the largest investment any Government have ever put into health, education and policing, it is also important that we make sure that we get the reforms necessary to make that money work.

I said to the right hon. Gentleman a moment or two ago that the vast majority of the police do a fantastic job. He will have seen from the advertisement of the Police Federation that it supports much of what the Government are doing. There is a process of conciliation and we will go through it. However, I think that he and several other Members of the House will find, in a few weeks' time, that we are with the police and on the same side making the changes that we all want to see.

Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Does my right hon. Friend agree that unilateral action by major states in this modern, interdependent world is usually inappropriate? Was he as angry as the steelworkers in my constituency at the action taken by the Government of the United States to impose tariffs on our steel exports—the best exports in the world—and will he support his Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in making direct representations to the United States Government to get them to reverse that decision?

The Prime Minister: Of course we totally disagree with the decision taken by the United States and we have been making our views clearly known to the American Administration for the past few months. The decision will be subject to a procedure under the World Trade Organisation, invoked by the European Union. I very much hope that the United States changes its position. I very much hope that if the WTO rules in our favour, it will change its position. I think that most people realise that not merely is the decision wrong in terms of international trade, but it is not an answer to the problems of the US steel industry.

Q2. [40146] **Mr. John Randall** (Uxbridge): Perhaps the Prime Minister can explain why this lunchtime not one of the 55 London Labour MPs could be bothered to meet rank-and-file members of the Metropolitan police across the road. Will he arrange to meet them and listen to what they really think, apologise and show more bottle than his MPs?

The Prime Minister: I am sure that Members on both sides of the House will meet police officers. Indeed, the Home Secretary met them this morning and we are well aware of their concerns.

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): Does the Prime Minister agree that if the serious concerns about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction are borne out by further information, the United Nations should be the first port of call for raising the problem so that we get the broadest possible coalition to counter the threat?

The Prime Minister: Of course it is to the United Nations that we have constantly gone because of the problems of Iraq acquiring weapons of mass destruction. It is for that reason that many, many UN Security Council resolutions call on Iraq to destroy those weapons and to let the inspectors back into the country to ensure that they are destroyed. For that reason, we will continue to put maximum pressure on Iraq to come back into line with international law and UN Security Council resolutions.

Q3. [40147] **Mr. Nigel Waterson** (Eastbourne): Will the Prime Minister tell the House whether he favours an amnesty for IRA terrorists on the run—yes or no?

The Prime Minister: As I said in Prime Minister's questions last week, we have no doubt that the issue has to be dealt with. How that is done, however, is a matter of discussion. I simply say to the hon. Gentleman and to those of his hon. Friends who oppose dealing with the problem at all, that over the past few years we have made very significant progress in Northern Ireland. People sometimes forget just how enormous that progress is. I hope that whatever measures we take, people will look at them in that light. I also hope that when people gaze across to the situation in the middle east, they see what happens when a peace process fails.

Q4. [40148] **Andy King** (Rugby and Kenilworth): May I welcome the Government's commitment to eradicate poverty and social exclusion? Is my right hon. Friend aware of any steps that are being taken to ensure that families on the minimum wage and working families tax credit are not inadvertently penalised for working?

The Prime Minister: The very reason why we introduced the combination of the minimum wage and the working families tax credit was to ensure that families are better off when they work. Those who work full time, with a minimum income of about £225 a week as a result, are some £90 a week better off than they would have been on income support. That makes a huge difference.

One reason why we have been able to put our public finances in such a healthy position is precisely because we got down the bills for the social and economic failure of the Conservatives. Unemployment rose to more than 3 million under the Conservatives; we have managed to get 1 million extra jobs in the economy. My hon. Friend will know that many of those people who are working are doing so precisely because we have made work pay.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Does the Prime Minister agree with what the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions said last December? He told the House that

> "there is no reason why . . . there should be large increases in council tax."—[*Official Report*, 4 December 2001; Vol. 376, c. 169.]

The Prime Minister: I do, because the amount that we have given in the local government settlement—more than 7.5 per cent.—makes the settlement one of the best that local government has had for a long time. In the five years of this Government, there has been a 20 per cent. real terms increase in the amount of money that we have given to local government. If the right hon. Gentleman compares that with the five years of the previous Government, when there was an increase of less than 1 per cent., he will see that my right hon. Friend was entirely justified in making that comment.

Mr. Duncan Smith: It is another fine mess that the Secretary of State has gotten him into. The Prime Minister needs reminding about something. He seems to think that everything is all right, but bills are set to rise by three times the rate of inflation for the fifth year in a row under this Government. The reality is that a typical household now pays £300 a year more in council tax than when he came to power. He perhaps does not visit his constituency that much, but he may want to recognise that those who have the worst of it will be very angry. It is a stealth tax by any means. I remind the Prime Minister that a few years ago he said:

> "We've no plans to increase taxation at all."

Yet again, is not the reality: phase 1, make a promise; phase 2, break a promise; phase 3, blame anybody else?

The Prime Minister: As I pointed out to the right hon. Gentleman a moment or two ago, it is councils that set council tax bills, but they do so on the basis of the settlement from central Government. The fact is that that settlement has been far more generous than during the previous Conservative years. Nor is the settlement merely more generous; when we announced in the comprehensive spending review that we were increasing it by 7.5 per cent., his party said that that was too generous. If he were on this side of the House, council taxes would be even higher.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): In fair trade fortnight, will my right hon. Friend welcome initiatives such as that in Garstang, in Lancashire, which is linking with New Koforida, a village in the cocoa-producing area of Ghana? Are not such local initiatives precisely in line with new economic policy for African development, and with efforts to make globalisation work for the poor across the world? *[Interruption.]*

The Prime Minister: I am sorry that Opposition Members jeer, because the point that my hon. Friend makes is right. As the Chancellor has said, we have recently taken some £200 million off Ghana's debt. That has been achieved because Ghana qualified under the heavily indebted poor countries rules, and it has therefore reduced its debt repayment substantially. That money can now go into its health and education services. As a result of changes led by this Government, not only has aid to Africa been doubled; because of debt relief—led by my right hon. Friends the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for International Development—countries across the world can put their money into basic services that improve the lives of their people, rather than into debt repayments. That is not just morally good and right for Africa; it also means that we can do business with those countries in the future, and that they will be more wealthy and prosperous, and more stable as a result.

Q5. [40149] **Dr. Jenny Tonge** (Richmond Park): Is the Prime Minister happy—[Hon. Members: "Yes."] Is the Prime Minister happy to allow the teaching of creationism alongside Darwin's theory of evolution in state schools?

The Prime Minister: First, I am very happy. Secondly, I know that the hon. Lady is referring to a school in the north-east, and I think that certain reports about what it has been teaching are somewhat exaggerated. It would be very unfortunate if concerns about that issue were seen to remove the very strong incentive to ensure that we get as diverse a school system as we properly can. In the end, a more diverse school system will deliver better results for our children. If she looks at the school's results, I think she will find that they are very good.

Q6. [40150] **Ms Claire Ward** (Watford): I should tell my right hon. Friend that, like many of my colleagues, I shall meet police officers this afternoon.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that the continuing disproportionate response of Israeli armed forces in Palestine is making it increasingly difficult to achieve a peaceful solution? Will he ensure that this Government, in supporting the views expressed by Kofi Annan, concentrate on bringing both sides back to the negotiating table before any more innocent Palestinian or Israeli lives are lost?

The Prime Minister: I agree very much with the United Nations Security Council resolution that demanded the immediate cessation of all acts of violence. This is a situation in which tragedy is rapidly turning into catastrophe for that part of the world. What is necessary—and I hope that it will arise from the visit of Anthony Zinni, the US special envoy—is, first, that minimum steps of security be agreed on both sides to restore confidence; and, secondly, that we get back into a proper process that leads to a settlement of the issues between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

In my view, there is no alternative but to start from two fixed points of principle in that process. The first is the right of Israel to exist securely, and that should be accepted not just by the Palestinians but by all the Arab world. Secondly, there should be a viable Palestinian state, and that should be accepted by Israel and the international community. If we started from those two fixed points of principle, the other matters could be negotiated. What we need in the meantime are the minimum steps of security and confidence that would allow some of the hatred and bitterness that exists at the moment to ebb and allow space for the process to begin again.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): The Prime Minister will be aware of the mass lobby of Parliament by the Police Federation today. Given that we all expect the absolute loyalty of the police—and receive it—is not it high time for the Home Secretary to enter into respectful negotiations with the Police Federation and to desist from rubbishing it from afar?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend has been entirely respectful in the conduct of the negotiation. Most people accept that three things must be done: first, we need to increase the number of police officers; secondly, we need reform in policing to ensure that we use police officers more effectively and that they spend as much time as possible out on the street and not in the station; and, thirdly, we need to make the changes to the criminal justice system that we all—well, certainly Labour Members—want to see. For that reason, it is important to continue in conciliation, which is where we are, with the police officers so that we ensure that in the end we get an agreement, because the vast majority of police officers actually support the programme of change. They have real concerns about some of the changes to their terms and conditions of employment, and that is precisely what is the subject of conciliation at the moment.

I think that the hon. Gentleman will find that at the end of the process the vast majority of us agree on all three things, but they can be done only if people are first prepared to agree the extra investment that increases police numbers and, secondly, to agree to the fundamental changes in the criminal justice system that will mean that when people are arrested and brought to court, they are subject to a proper judicial process.

Q7. [40151] **Paul Goggins** (Wythenshawe and Sale, East): The Prime Minister will be aware that on Monday the Queen began the final countdown to the Commonwealth games when she launched the jubilee baton relay. With the City of Manchester stadium almost ready, with 500,000 tickets already sold and with 10,000 volunteers ready to welcome the athletes and visitors, will my right hon. Friend ensure that all Government Departments continue to liaise with the games organisers so that in July in Manchester we can all look forward to a wonderful celebration of international sport and friendship?

The Prime Minister: The stage is indeed set for the Manchester Commonwealth games to be enormously successful. As my hon. Friend pointed out, more than 500,000 tickets have been sold already. Manchester, which is an exciting, go-ahead city at the moment, is well geared up for it. I assure him that all Government Departments will carry on working with Manchester to ensure that it is the success and showcase for the city that we want to see.

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): Will the Prime Minister give an assurance that I can take to the Police Federation this afternoon that community support officers, as proposed in the Police Reform Bill, will not be imposed on police authorities by ring-fencing or any other means, and that the authorities will retain the freedom to spend their money on real police officers?

The Prime Minister: Of course community support officers will not be imposed; there has never been any question of that. The hon. Lady should realise that, with the number of additional police officers and the increasing numbers of civilian staff that we have, we must have the flexibility to use different methods to police our communities properly. Indeed, the Leader of the Opposition paid tribute to the community warden scheme in Kent a short time ago. Such schemes are operating all over the country, and they will not be imposed on people, but there has to be flexibility to use civilian and police staff better for the future.

In circumstances where we are increasing the number of police officers, paying tribute to the fantastic work that they do and increasing the number of civilian staff, it is very difficult to say that we are taking our obligations to the police other than seriously. I hope that the hon. Lady will agree that the changes in the Police Reform Bill should go through. I hope that she and other Conservative Members will support the changes to the criminal justice system and drop their opposition to the Proceeds of Crime Bill. I hope that all Members will support the extra investment in our police that we want to see.

Audit and Accountability (Central Government)

3.31 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Andrew Smith): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the Government's response to Lord Sharman's report, "Holding to Account", which made recommendations about audit and accountability in central Government. Copies of our response are available in the Vote Office.

The structure of audit and accountability, springing from the Gladstonian reforms, is an important matter. The House and the country have benefited enormously from the work of the Comptroller and Auditor General and the National Audit Office. While they are accountable to the House, they have a remit that is independent of both Government and Parliament.

Over the years, Members of the House, and particularly the Public Accounts Committee, have expressed concern that the remit of the Comptroller and Auditor General has become artificially restricted. It has been the policy of the Government to appoint the CAG to audit each non-departmental public body set up since 1997, but despite that commitment to openness, there are still significant areas of central Government where the CAG is not the auditor, including about 50 non-departmental public bodies that had been established previously with auditors appointed by individual Secretaries of State. In a number of areas, the CAG is also dependent on negotiated administrative access.

In debates on the Government Resources and Accounts Bill, the subject of the CAG's remit was raised and I undertook to review the position. Accordingly, I set up an independent review of audit and accountability in central Government to look at all areas of the accountability framework and to take evidence from interested parties. I am grateful to Lord Sharman for leading that review, and to all members of the steering committee, including, when he was Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis), my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) and the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel).

Lord Sharman reached independent conclusions and made recommendations that were addressed to the Government, the Comptroller and Auditor General, the Public Accounts Committee and the Public Accounts Commission. The response that I am publishing today sets out the Government's position on Lord Sharman's report. In considering Lord Sharman's recommendations, I have been mindful that reforms need to command confidence on both sides of the House. They also need to be workable, and I am very grateful for the constructive discussions that have taken place with the CAG and his staff and which are reflected in the response.

I am pleased to inform the House that the Government have accepted the main recommendations that Lord Sharman directed to the Government and that we support those addressed to others. There are five central recommendations. First, the Government agree that the Comptroller and Auditor General should audit all non-departmental public bodies. That will make him the auditor of bodies such as the Environment Agency, English Partnerships, English Heritage and the Housing Corporation. Secondly, subject to legislation, that extension to non-departmental public bodies will include those that are established as companies, for example the Student Loans Company, the Film Council and the National Consumer Council. Thirdly, the Government agree that the Comptroller and Auditor General should have statutory access to the documents needed for his audit work in place of the current non-statutory arrangements. We welcome arrangements to ensure that that right of access is exercised to minimise any additional burdens on either public or private sector bodies.

Access by the Comptroller and Auditor General to documents will be extended by right, for example, to registered social landlords, train operating companies and contractors, including those in private finance initiative contracts. Fourthly, the Government accept that information underpinning reports on progress against targets on public service agreements must be reliable. We therefore propose the extension of external validation of departmental data systems relating to those targets. The Government intend to invite the Comptroller and Auditor General to take responsibility for the validation of such data systems, usually on the basis of a three-yearly review.

Finally, the Government welcome Lord Sharman's acknowledgement of the steps being taken to promote strong management and innovation across government in the delivery of public services. Before implementing those proposals, the Government will consult bodies affected by the changes. I am confident that the proposals that we are setting out today will strengthen audit and accountability and improve transparency in the interests of this House and all those we represent. I commend the new arrangements to the House.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): May I begin by thanking the Chief Secretary to the Treasury for his statement and for allowing me advance sight of it? I warmly welcome, as I suspect do many right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House, the initial establishment of the Sharman committee which, the right hon. Gentleman will acknowledge, followed insistent pressure during the passage of the Government Resources and Accounts Bill from my immediate predecessor as shadow Chief Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) and, importantly, my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis), now the chairman of the Conservative party but then, of course, the respected Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee.

The Chief Secretary was right to acknowledge the importance of the work of the steering committee, to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden and, in addition, to acknowledge the important contributions of the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) and the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel). I cannot help wondering whether the Chief Secretary should be subjected to a little independent audit himself. After all, Lord Sharman reported on 13 February 2001, 393 days ago. There has been justifiable consternation at the inordinate delay in the Government's reply. Lord Sharman has complained, as has the Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission, the right hon. Member for Swansea, West, bemoaning a delay which he described as "abnormally long". Baroness Noakes, a distinguished former president of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales, lamented Ministers sitting on their hands. Lord McIntosh of Haringey, as recently as 26 February, was under the misapprehension in a debate in the other place that the report had been published; he said that he was "completely astonished" to discover that it had not been.

As for the substance of this important issue, no one can overstate the importance of strong and independent audit of public expenditure or, indeed, of accountability for the way in which public money is used. The Chief Secretary was right to pay warm tribute to the Comptroller and Auditor General and to the National Audit Office. I echo that tribute. Their work is invaluable, and so is the important report of Lord Sharman.

I shall pose a number of questions to the Chief Secretary. We welcome the extension of the power of audit to all non-departmental public bodies. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that as there are 1,025 such bodies the length and breadth of the United Kingdom, which employ 30,000 people and spend approximately £25,000 million, it is right that they should be comprehensively audited and investigated? Transparency is of the essence.

Does the Chief Secretary agree that there are other routes to effective scrutiny? For example, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition has urged that the heads of such non-departmental public bodies should appear before Select Committees for confirmation hearings. Does the Chief Secretary agree, or will he at least undertake to consider the suggestion?

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the suggestion that the National Audit Office should audit companies which are established by public bodies could usefully have been applied to the New Millennium Experience Company? That is a striking example of a body which, if so scrutinised, would itself have benefited and hugely relieved the overburdened and long-suffering taxpayer.

We endorse the call for external validation of performance information for central Government. Such validation should be progressively developed, not least in relation to public service agreement targets, of which there are about 160 covering key areas of government. Those targets are intended, as the report says,

> "to be a clear commitment to the public on what they can expect for their money".

Does the Chief Secretary agree, therefore, that so far as is possible, the agreement on the credibility of their measurement is of the utmost importance?

Both the report and the new Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh), have argued that access rights of the CAG should be extended to the BBC. After all, in 2000-01, it spent £2,425 million. Gavyn Davies, a very distinguished figure in our national life, having reviewed the funding of the BBC in 1999 and before he became its chairman, recommended that

> "the Government should amend the Royal Charter to give the National Audit Office inspection rights to carry out periodic financial audits of the BBC's accounts and its fair trading arrangements".

Why are the Government ignoring that recommendation? Does not the Chief Secretary recognise that there will be widespread disquiet? Has he cooked up a cosy deal with the director-general of the BBC at the expense of licence payers and taxpayers alike?

We would suggest that the Financial Services Authority should be included in extended audit. Will the Chief Secretary consider extending the Comptroller and Auditor General's access rights to the FSA? Although it is a company limited by guarantee, the FSA is funded by a compulsory levy on firms in its sector and in many ways it resembles a public body. Does the Chief Secretary therefore agree that the grievous distress suffered by many of our constituents as a result of the Equitable Life saga makes a compelling case for greater transparency?

Of course there should be consultation, but can the right hon. Gentleman offer us some reassurance that the consultation will begin at once and that it will be conducted expeditiously?

The Sharman report is a step towards greater transparency in public sector accounting, but does the Chief Secretary agree that there is a great deal further to go? Can he undertake to look at the presentation of Government liabilities under private finance initiative and public-private partnership contracts, so that it is clear what the scale of liabilities is? Is he aware that the Government accounts do not always make it perfectly clear how much is spent on what, particularly when responsibility for a function is divided between different levels of government, and that the public have a right to expect greater transparency?

Does the Chief Secretary agree that the Government have a liability in the form of pensions to be paid in the future that are not reflected in the Government accounts? Has not the Chancellor obscured the presentation of the tax burden through his treatment of the working families tax credit as a tax cut rather than benefit expenditure?

The report and the Government's largely sensible response to it herald an advance in the scope of audit and in the capacity of the legislature to hold the Executive to account. Nevertheless, more needs to be done. The debate will continue. The Opposition will participate in it with the seriousness and resolve that it merits.

Mr. Smith: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments on what he describes as largely sensible action by the Government. In setting up Lord Sharman's inquiry, we were responding to concerns expressed not merely by Conservative Members, but by Members of all parties on the Public Accounts Committee. Today, following Lord Sharman's report, we have taken action where the Conservatives in government did not do so for more than 18 years.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the time that it has taken to publish our response. It would have been nice if we could have done so sooner; I genuinely believe that it is a good-news statement for the House. However, we faced a choice. We could have replied earlier on the principle, leaving much of the detail and the matters set out in section 3—the protocols for access and so on—to be negotiated later. In such circumstances, many hon. Members, including the hon. Gentleman, would have had a lot of questions about how the detail would work. However, we have come back with a comprehensive and detailed response and he should have welcomed that.

I noted that it took the hon. Gentleman a long time to get to the substance of the statement; indeed, his remarks were considerably longer than the statement itself. He asked a number of questions. He referred to the New Millennium Experience Company and asked whether it

[Mr. Smith]

was a good example of a body that would have benefited from access by the Comptroller and Auditor General. The answer is yes. Subject to the points that I made, precisely that access will be provided by our proposals.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to the position of the BBC. In considering both the original Davies report and that of Lord Sharman, the Government have weighed the matter very seriously. We believe that the editorial independence of the BBC, even in terms of the impression that it could be compromised in any way, should not be risked. That is why we have decided not to proceed with the specific recommendation in question.

The Financial Services Authority was established relatively recently and its audit arrangements were extensively debated, along with other matters, in the House. The Government have not ruled out the possibility of the Comptroller and Auditor General undertaking a value-for-money study of the FSA in future. Subject to implementation of our proposals, we will consider that possibility.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the credibility of PSA targets, on which I agree with him. That is why we are taking measures that add to the substantial external validation that is already carried out by the Office for National Statistics and the Audit Commission, the ability of the Comptroller and Auditor General to oversee the data systems as a whole. That should build confidence on all sides in the reliability of the measures that we are taking and help us to not only reform public services, but deliver on our targets.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement? As he said, it represents a victory for the Public Accounts Committee in a battle that it has fought for well over 10 years. His remarks about quangos, companies and validation represent a notable addition to parliamentary accountability, for which I thank him.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will not think me churlish if I echo one of the points made by the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) about the BBC. It is unfortunate that he has not seen his way to agreeing with Sharman, who was himself echoing the recommendations of the current chairman of the BBC before he suffered his conversion on the way back from Damascus. I hope that if we advance further arguments in support of the recommendations, he will at least indicate that he is willing to listen to them as positively as he listened to previous arguments.

Mr. Smith: I thank my right hon. Friend for his welcome for our proposals. I should like to place on record my appreciation and that of the House for all his work on this agenda over the years.

I would never consider any of my right hon. Friend's remarks churlish. I clarified the position on the BBC in my earlier response. The fact that we have made these proposals proves that we are listening. At an early stage of the procedure, I was the only Minister in living memory to appear before the Public Accounts Committee, where I said that with goodwill and co-operation on all sides we could make substantial progress on these matters of mutual concern. That is exactly what we have done today.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): I wholeheartedly welcome almost all the Chief Secretary's statement. In effect, he has announced the Government's complete acceptance of the arguments that I and hon. Members on both sides of the House raised two years ago during the passage of the Government Resources and Accounts Act 2000.

I join the Chief Secretary in congratulating my noble Friend Lord Sharman. Does he agree that his announcement is an important victory for Parliament, and that he should therefore continue to work closely with hon. Members as he implements the new regime as speedily as possible?

As for the detail, will the Chief Secretary say more about the Government's proposals for auditing performance measures? Sharman and the Government both favour a step-by-step approach to introducing the external validation of performance information. Will he give a more detailed timetable for full implementation? His statement suggests that the Government are limiting the definition of performance measures to public service agreements, yet surely external validation should cover all relevant public performance measures if we are to have confidence in such figures.

Finally, does the Chief Secretary realise that there is extreme disappointment and anger about the Government's decision not to extend the Comptroller and Auditor General's remit to the BBC? Does not he realise that his arguments against that are so weak as to be ridiculous and fly in the face of the logic of the rest of his statement? We all share his desire to protect the BBC's independence and editorial freedom, but that is completely irrelevant to financial audit. The NAO has audited universities. Universities have academic freedom, but the NAO's remit nevertheless applies to them. It is ironic that Gavyn Davies, before he became chairman of the BBC, recommended that the NAO should audit the BBC. Will the Chief Secretary explain why on earth the BBC should be exempt from NAO audit given that all other bodies, including private finance initiative contractors, are to be included?

Mr. Smith: I thank the hon. Gentleman for welcoming my statement. As he says, it is a victory for Parliament and for parliamentary accountability. The Government's performance in delivering public services and our other objectives is strengthened by the effectiveness of parliamentary scrutiny. That is the important philosophy that underpins the proposal.

We have made a huge step by inviting the Comptroller and Auditor General to take overall responsibility for external validation. As regards areas that are already validated by the Office for National Statistics or the Audit Commission, we would not normally expect them to have much more work to do. Ultimately the Comptroller and Auditor General will make decisions on the reliability of the systems in instances that are drawn to his attention.

It is wise to take a step-by-step approach to these matters. The hon. Gentleman has a point when he says that there are other measures of performance that are not included in public service agreements. It would be sensible to concentrate on those PSAs that are quantifiable. Most importantly, we must accept the responsibility of ensuring that the underlying systems are independently validated.

I do not intend to repeat what I have said about the BBC. It would be a grave error even to give the impression that its editorial independence was in any sense being called into question.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): As Chairman of the Select Committee on the Treasury, I welcome my right hon. Friend's proposals. I can do no better than to echo the words of the official Opposition spokesman, who said that the proposals were hugely sensible. Putting the auditing of all non-departmental public bodies on a statutory basis is extremely welcome.

In the words of Sharman,

> "Audit arrangements should not discourage innovation, change and well-managed risk taking."

Will my right hon. Friend ensure that that process still goes on?

Finally, has my right hon. Friend given any thought to merging the National Audit Office and the Audit Commission?

Mr. Smith: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments, and I pay tribute to his work in this area. The answer to his last question is no, I have not given further consideration to that matter. His comments on innovation and risk management are entirely right, and we welcomed the way in which the report of the Comptroller and Auditor General and the National Audit Office showed how properly judged risk and risk evaluation were perfectly compatible with proper accountability for financial probity. As the former Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee said, there is a world of difference between well judged risk and its management, and gambling. We are in favour of the former in these matters, but not the latter.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): I thank the Chief Secretary for his important statement, and pay tribute to his officials for the constructive way in which they have worked with officials from the National Audit Office. We have made a great deal of progress today. We have ensured that the Public Accounts Committee—recognised by the Sharman report as the senior Committee in the House of Commons—can continue the work that it has carried out since 1861 on directing the harsh light of parliamentary scrutiny into all the nooks and crannies of waste and incompetence inside government. I am, therefore, very pleased with the statement.

I want, however, to echo comments made by others, particularly the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams), about the BBC. The Public Accounts Committee feels strongly that, as the BBC levies the equivalent of a poll tax on virtually every household in the kingdom, and as it is a vital national resource, Parliament should not be denied its right to hold this body up to public scrutiny through the National Audit Office. My Committee is fully cognisant of the importance of preserving the editorial independence of the BBC. The NAO already looks after the World Service, and there is no question of its interfering in the independence of its programming. My Committee would never get involved in questions of what programmes should be shown, but we are talking about very large sums of public money, and we want Parliament to be involved.

My Committee also feels that the civil list should be open to scrutiny by Parliament. The system has worked well with regard to royal palaces and royal travel; there have been no complaints there. We recognise that this is a sensitive area, but the Committee believes that Parliament has a right to hold the civil list to account in the way that other public expenditure is held to account. Having said that, I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his statement, and I pay tribute to my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis), for the work that he has done in this area.

Mr. Smith: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's kind remarks, and I join him in congratulating officials not only from the Treasury but from the National Audit Office and the office of the Comptroller and Auditor General. As the hon. Gentleman said, this is a model of how working sensibly, often in sensitive areas, can lead to a sensible way forward being found. I also acknowledge the contribution of his predecessor as Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, and the contribution that the hon. Gentleman himself is making.

The hon. Gentleman reminds us of the importance of the constitutional legacy of probity and regularity, and of shining the light of audit and accountability on to affairs for which we have a responsibility. I note what he says about the BBC; I do not intend to repeat my previous remarks on that. He acknowledges that the civil list is a sensitive area. There has been a longstanding bipartisan agreement that Ministers should stand between the civil list—the royal family—and accountability to Parliament, except when there are grant-in-aid issues, as in the examples that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. I think it wise to leave those arrangements in place.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): I welcome these reforms, which will bring greater accountability and transparency to the public finances. As we move to spend more on public services, it is clearly in the public interest that there should be independent external validation of how that money is spent. Do not these reforms mark a real break with the past, as we give substance to our determination deeply to entrench the reforms we are making to the public finances? Opposition Members tend to emphasise that we must stamp out waste, and of course that is right, but greater transparency will also help to identify areas in which we need to spend more. An audit, for example, might have helped the Opposition realise that the capital funding of schools in my constituency fell to £15 per pupil in 1996-97. It is more than £200 per pupil per annum today.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend is right. There is a break with the past that is a great step forward in terms of accountability and security of value for money. Value for money does not imply spending as little as possible. Instead, it implies spending for the best possible effect. Without being drawn into my hon. Friend's invitation to make party political points, the Government are keen to engage in that spending.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): The Chief Secretary's statement is extremely welcome,

[Mr. Nick Gibb]

and especially his acceptance of the importance of strong management across government. To that end, he will be aware that one of the greatest achievements of the NAO in recent years has been the exposure of the level of social security fraud, with about £3 billion being lost every year in terms of both jobseeker's allowance and income support. There are more than 300,000 cases of fraud every year, but only 5 per cent. of those cases are prosecuted. I am not making a party political point. The situation has been the same for more than a decade, during which the accounts of the Department have been qualified by the NAO.

Will the Minister enter into discussions with his colleague, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with a view to increasing the proportion of prosecutions in an attempt to introduce strong management in this area and to reduce the level of fraud?

Mr. Smith: Not only will I do so, but the Government are already acting on that agenda. We are identifying and bearing down on fraud in social security as in other areas. That did not always happen until quite recently. Performance was not even measured by previous Governments. Further strong management to cut fraud will be brought to bear.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): My question is churlish and ill tempered. As one who was rebuked and chastised by the late Donald Dewar, in 1998, for daring to suggest that the Scottish Parliament's costs would rise a penny above £40 million, will my hon. Friend ask either the Paymaster General or the Financial Secretary to examine carefully the assertions in today's edition of *The Scotsman* that consultant's fees alone are now £40 million? The cost of the project has increased by at least eightfold on what was originally envisaged. Is my right hon. Friend able to draw any lessons from a giddy escalation in costs?

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend will be well aware that these are devolved matters for which the Scottish Parliament and its audit and accountability relationships are responsible.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): It is important that the full audited accounts of the bodies concerned be put in the public domain. Does the Minister agree that these accounts, and district auditors' full accounts on local authorities, should always be put in the public domain in unabridged form, with names and details provided in respect of all major contracts?

Mr. Smith: I support the general principle of publication and information being in the public domain. I hesitate to give a blanket commitment, because I think that we can all imagine circumstances of individual privacy or commercial interests where that would not be appropriate.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): My right hon. Friend will know that for a cost of about £50 million a year, the NAO and the Public Accounts Committee save billions of pounds of public money during a Parliament. Does he agree that the recent extension of their franchise to be the auditor of the Housing Corporation, English Heritage, the Environment Agency and other non-departmental bodies, and access to social landlords, the train operating companies and PFIs, for example, will enormously increase the savings by multi-million pound figures?

Will my hon. Friend continue to have an open mind on further access to other bodies that have already been mentioned? Will he extend his thoughts also to international contributions that we make to various bodies to ensure that, through the help of the Comptroller and Auditor General, we can deliver value for money to the taxpayer?

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend is undoubtedly right about the enormous savings made through proper scrutiny of public expenditure, and through the Government's acting on the recommendation of the Comptroller and Auditor General and the Public Accounts Committee. Contributions to international bodies are already scrutinised, but the accounts of the bodies themselves fall outwith the arrangements for domestic audit and accountability.

Although, as my hon. Friend says, the proposals will involve the Comptroller and Auditor General in a good many additional responsibilities, he has made a clear commitment—as the proposals show—to contracting out a significant proportion of his work. Indeed, he has already done that.

Where the audit is being taken over by the CAG, money to pay for it will be paid to him rather than to a private sector auditor. Any additional net costs should arise principally in relation to the external validation of public service agreement systems, rather than the rest of the CAG's audit and accountability.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): Proper external validation of public service agreement targets will be a big step forward, but will the Chief Secretary say a little more about the new access to bodies involved in the private finance initiative? Will the CAG be able, for example, to investigate the increasingly opaque nature of some of the special-purpose vehicles that are being established for PFI schemes, and will he be able to comment on the extent to which some longer-term liabilities are now being kept off the public balance sheet?

Mr. Smith: Access for the CAG will depend on the status of the vehicle, company or organisation concerned. In general his rights of access follow the money, whether it be by grant or by contract. The big step forward that today's proposals represent is that whereas in the past the CAG has had to negotiate access or agree it by administrative means, which has not always been easy—there have been delays, and so on—he will now have a statutory right.

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): I too welcome the Chief Secretary's proposals, particularly the proposal to extend access to PFI contractors. Will that include access to documents pertaining to pre-contractual negotiations between Departments and preferred bidders appointed at the outline bidding stage? Concerns have been raised over why the final agreed contracted price for PFI projects is sometimes as much as two or three times that envisaged at the outline bidding stage.

Does the Chief Secretary agree that that is a legitimate area of inquiry for the CAG, especially as preferred bidders have never been deselected, so effectively this is a single-tender process?

Mr. Smith: When documents, evaluations and so forth are relevant to the CAG's inquiries, whether as part of his normal audit work or as part of a value-for-money study, he will have access to them.

Mr. Brian Jenkins (Tamworth): As my right hon. Friend knows, the Audit Commission and the National Audit Office have areas of responsibility that abut one another and sometimes almost overlap. That causes difficulties with certain arrangements. When my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) asked whether he and his Department had even considered the possibility of a merger, he said no. Why?

Mr. Smith: I was asked whether I had given the matter further consideration. That was the question to which I answered no.

It is important for there to be effective collaboration between the respective bodies that are responsible for public audit. There is, in fact, a public audit forum. When my hon. Friend has a chance to read the proposals, he will see what steps are being taken to continue that work. I did not want to set hares running, and I do not want to do so now, by suggesting that such an amalgamation is on the agenda.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I am grateful to the Chief Secretary for his response and for his kind words about my small part in the Sharman steering committee. I welcome the Government's response, particularly because almost all the recommendations of the Public Accounts Committee have been adopted—better late than never.

There are two outstanding matters. First, the Chief Secretary said that all non-departmental public bodies that currently exist and are not audited by the NAO will be audited by it when their contracts come up for renewal. Can he assure us that, at least under his Government when he still has responsibility, any new NDPBs that come into existence will be audited by the NAO?

Secondly, the BBC is undoubtedly the one real weakness in the Government's response. People throughout the country pay tax of over £100 a year towards Government funding for the BBC. That is a huge sum and needs to come under parliamentary scrutiny. The important point about what the Chief Secretary said about editorial independence is that the NAO is Parliament's auditor, not the Government's auditor. We would all be worried about editorial independence if the auditor were to report directly to the Government. If it reports to Parliament, it reports to all the people of this country. Surely in those circumstances, there should not be a problem about editorial independence.

Mr. Smith: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his contribution to the Sharman steering committee. Any future NDPBs that are set up will be audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General. Should any of those be companies, amendments to legislation will ensure that he can audit companies—that is our clear intention.

I have already dealt with the BBC. I take the opportunity to underline that the BBC is fully and properly audited. What is more, the Comptroller and Auditor General already has the opportunity to access the funding department in following the application of the licence fee.

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): The Chief Secretary said that he had already dealt with the BBC. Many hon. Members on both sides of the House may beg to differ. Concern and disappointment have been expressed from both sides about the fact that the Government have excluded the BBC from the remit of the NAO. The Chief Secretary's justification appears to be that it would be a "grave error" if even the impression were created that the BBC's editorial independence could be compromised. As the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) pointed out, it is hard to see how that could be the case when the NAO is itself independent of Government. Does the Chief Secretary recognise that he has not advanced a sufficient argument, and that he will therefore need to start to explain why anyone should begin to think that the independence of the BBC should be compromised by the fact that it was audited by the NAO?

Mr. Smith: The BBC has a special status, set down in its charter. As I said, there would have to be very careful thought before even the impression of any infringement of editorial independence were given. While I have absolute confidence in the independence and impartiality of the Comptroller and Auditor General and the National Audit Office, one does not need a great imagination to see how some of the issues that may arise may become the subject of quite heated political speculation and debate that could give the impression of editorial independence being put at risk.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Does the Minister accept, with respect to the BBC, that in the public interest it is essential that full accountability be achieved? The answers that he has given have so far been, if not evasive, then somewhat lacking in clarity. Would he be good enough to ensure that he writes to me and indeed to the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee to explain the reasoning behind the arguments that he has advanced? Many licence payers regard the amount of money that they have to pay as warranting proper analysis. Furthermore, it is a matter of great public importance. Can he give any other example of a chartered body that has the right to charge a licence fee and manages to avoid the full accountability that he seems to be avoiding at the moment with respect to the BBC?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman is one of those hon. Members with a special interest in this matter, and he asks whether I will write to him about it. Later on, I shall be the second Minister to make an appearance before the Public Accounts Committee. I am sure that there will be an opportunity to discuss these matters further. My answers will, of course, be on the record.

Points of Order

4.15 pm

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek your advice. At the end of last week, I—and, I presume, all other Members of Parliament—received a letter from the police federations of Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland about the meetings being held today. The letter said that the meeting with London Members of Parliament would be held at 4.30 this afternoon at the QEII centre. However, at Prime Minister's Question Time, the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) alleged that Labour Members were not prepared to meet members of the Metropolitan police. I have checked with my office, and have found that we received an e-mail at 12.12 today to change the arrangements for some regional meetings. However, the e-mail listed no changes to the time and place of the London meeting. How can I place on the record a correction to the allegation made about Labour MPs?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has made not a bad job of putting that on the record.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I do not have chapter and verse details of the Scotland Act 1998 in front of me, but some of us endured many hours listening to Mr. Donald Dewar and Mr. Henry McLeish telling us how much consultation there would be between Edinburgh and London. My question to my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary was very careful. I did not ask him to ask my hon. Friend the Paymaster General and my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury to do anything, let alone to meddle. My question was different: I asked what conclusions and lessons could be drawn from a situation in which the giddy costs involved were escalating. Local authorities are becoming more and more skint because those costs come out of their finite budgets.

Given that I asked that lessons be learned, and not that Ministers should do something, am I not entitled to ask that they at least take an interest in what has happened?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows that I am not responsible for the Minister's reply.

Foreign Exchange Transactions Tax Commission

4.17 pm

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): I beg to move,

> That leave be given to bring in a Bill to establish a Commission to inquire into the feasibility of a foreign exchange transactions tax; to provide for the Commission's remit and duration; and for connected purposes.

I was pleased to learn during the statement that a special purpose vehicle was part of the private finance initiative, and not a type of four-wheel drive vehicle, as I had thought.

I shall begin by describing as straightforwardly as I can the benefits of a foreign exchange transactions tax, and then set out why I think that that would be very timely. The tax is commonly known as the Tobin tax, following proposals made in 1972 by the Nobel prize winning economist James Tobin, who promoted the idea of a small tax on foreign exchange transactions. He believed that the tax would help promote free trade, by assuring countries that they could open their markets without exposing themselves to disruptive movements of "hot money". Tobin did not, however, see that as an extreme move against free trade. In promoting this Bill, I am anxious that his original aim should not be forgotten.

The aim of a Tobin tax is to provide a useful tool for stabilising currencies and much needed funds for international development to help free trade work fairly. It would be complex to establish the tax as, to be effective, it would require new means of international co-operation. That is why I propose that a commission be established in the first instance, to analyse the challenges of implementing such a novel tax regime. However, the current state of the financial markets means that a decision in principle by the UK would be highly significant in developing the proposals.

At present, 84 per cent. of all foreign exchange transactions occur in just nine countries, of which the UK is one. An indication of willingness on the part of those nine countries to introduce the tax would take us most of the way to finding a workable solution. Our Chancellor of the Exchequer has shown himself open to the idea. In a speech to the Federal Reserve in New York, he declared his willingness to examine the practicalities of "innovative ways" to finance development, including currency taxes. In addition, our Prime Minister argued in his speech to the Labour Party conference that

> "our economy should not be run for speculators and currency dealers".

I assure them that there would be widespread support in Parliament and among the general public if they really can place the UK at the forefront of international negotiations on the Tobin tax.

In Parliament, 88 MPs have so far signed an early-day motion tabled by the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) on this subject. Outside Parliament, organisations such as War on Want, Oxfam, Christian Aid, Save the Children and Unison have signed up to the Tobin tax declaration, along with 38 others.

The tax would produce a win-win situation for the world's poor, so who would lose? More than $1 trillion changes hands every day on global foreign exchange markets. More than 80 per cent. of that trading is of a speculative nature—buying and selling money for profit's sake. Although such currency gambling has enabled some banks and investors to make multi-million dollar profits, it is not part of any genuine trade or investment. Instead, these volatile movements of capital destabilise entire economies, causing serious financial crises such as we have seen in south-east Asia, Latin America—most recently Argentina—and Russia, disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable in those societies.

On some estimates, more than 10 million people lost their jobs in the first few months of the east Asian crisis in 1997-98. Millions more were caught up in the aftermath, pushed into poverty and debt, while Governments had to divert resources from social programmes into propping up their currencies. The ripples from these crises are felt around the world, giving us all a direct interest in resolving them in addition to our natural concern for the people of the affected countries.

The Tobin tax, while helping to stabilise currency, would also generate funds that could be put towards international development programmes. A minimal tax of, say, 0.1 per cent. on currency transactions would not hold back productive business transactions for trade and investment but would hit speculative transactions. War on Want, which leads a campaign for the tax, estimates that taxing at that low rate could raise between $50 billion and $300 billion a year. That would more than cover the estimated cost by the United Nations development programme of $40 billion a year to eliminate the most extreme forms of poverty and to provide access to sanitation and basic education in all developing countries.

I hope that the House will accept that such taxes merit further investigation by a commission, and that it would be very timely to do so for the following reasons. First, there is to be a major United Nations summit in Monterey, Mexico, next week on financing for development. The need for substantial increases in aid for developing countries has been recognised, but we are still a long way from finding the solutions.

I commend the Chancellor of the Exchequer for his launch yesterday of a £10 million education fund for deprived nations, but that is against a background of the UK's continued failure to deliver the United Nations pledge to raise aid levels to 0.7 per cent. of gross national product. Any receipts from new taxes such as the Tobin tax should be in addition to the United Nations aid target and not seen as a substitute for it. I urge the Chancellor at the United Nations summit to commit the UK to reaching the 0.7 per cent. target and exploring additional new funding methods.

Secondly, there is a growing movement in this country and internationally to introduce a Tobin tax. That has come together with a series of events today on what has been termed Tobin tax day. They include an expert seminar this afternoon, followed by a deputation to the Treasury to present a declaration ahead of the UN summit.

This evening, Parliament will host a movie premiere as a new advertisement for the Tobin tax is shown in Portcullis House. If the music of Radiohead and the voice of Ewan McGregor are not enough to attract hon. Members to that event, they may be drawn by the knowledge that the advertisement has been deemed "banned". That follows a judgment that its content is too political for broadcast on television. However, the full uncensored version is available on the Tobin tax website, where no such restrictions apply, at www.tobintax.org.uk.

On the international scene, a Bill to accept a foreign exchange transactions tax is today being passed by the Belgian Parliament. Belgium will join the French Parliament, which passed a law in November committing France to the introduction of the tax when other European Union countries have signed up to it, and the Canadian Parliament, which passed a motion in 1999 calling on its Government to promote the tax internationally.

Thirdly, it is important to consider the international context, as we live in times of international insecurity. Much of our time is taken up with talk of conflict and in such a climate it is more important than ever to explore positive measures to enhance security through development rather than ever-increasing armament. I was brought up at a time when cold war rhetoric kept me living in permanent fear of nuclear annihilation. I do not want to see a new generation growing up in a state of permanent war, fearful that the anger of the dispossessed and desperate may break out into violence at any time.

I was impressed by a speech made recently by US Congressman Dennis Kucinich, in which he set out an alternative vision. He said:

> "Let us pray that we have the courage to replace the images of death which haunt us, the layers of images of September 11 . . . Let us replace those images with the work of human relations, reaching out to people, helping our own citizens here at home, lifting the plight of the poor everywhere."

We should not underestimate the harm that fear causes, especially to our young people, and we should be more determined than ever to demonstrate our willingness to find peaceful solutions to international instability wherever possible.

Sadly, the introduction of my Bill has been made more topical by the death of James Tobin earlier this week. I quote a remark that struck me from one of his obituaries:

> "Mr. Tobin was one of those economic theorists whose influence reaches so far that many people who have never heard of him are nonetheless his disciples. He was also, however, a public figure, for a time the most prominent advocate of an ideology we might call free-market Keynesianism—a belief that markets are fine things, but that they work best if the government stands ready to limit their excesses."

I feel very much in step with James Tobin's thinking. This Bill is not an anti-globalisation measure. There are widely contrasting views of globalisation at present. One view would have it as a force of neo-imperialism that will create a world in which the power of the strong to exploit the weak is entrenched so that the rich get richer and the poor ever poorer.

Another view is that globalisation is a progressive force, leading to a world in which all people can exchange goods, services and culture on an equal basis, free from unnecessary and harmful barriers. That is where we should be putting our political energies. We should introduce measures to ensure that free trade really is fair trade; that development is sustainable and of benefit to ordinary people; and that markets work for mankind rather than mankind working for the markets.

The Tobin tax would be a small but valuable part of that body of work. I urge the House to support the creation of a commission to take that work forward.

4.26 pm

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): I declare my registered interest in Commerzbank. Furthermore, since 1991 I have worked in foreign exchange markets.

[Mr. Bill Wiggin]

The Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) is probably the most naive and short-sighted proposal that I have heard since becoming a Member. It is the financial equivalent of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, from a party that embraces the single currency above all else.

The hon. Gentleman is right that the UK foreign exchange market is one of the largest in the world, transferring more than $1 trillion a day. However, that size is numerical and is used to advertise the advantages of doing business in the UK. It is a free market which, by its nature, is international. Owing to electronic transfer of funds, currency can be—and is—moved anywhere in the world.

The success of the United Kingdom as a foreign exchange player is based on three criteria: the UK is a good, English-speaking place to do business; there is wise and gentle governance by the Bank of England; and there are no extra burdens of cost or taxation. The Government have many better things to do—for example, improving our public services—than trying to find a way of pushing more foreign exchange business away from Britain.

The average margin on a foreign exchange deal would be less than 0.0001 of that currency—we call that a pip. The size of the profit means that only a huge amount of money would make it practical to continue doing such business.

The proposal is ill thought out. Its acceptance is, of course, in the grant of the Government. It reflects the greedy nature of a Government seeking to increase taxation through stealth, and would in the end kill the goose that lays the golden eggs—the huge amounts of income tax and company tax levied on companies conducting foreign exchange business—for the sake of chasing a difficult market that is far more liquid and international than any tax collector. I hope that the House will reject the Bill.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North) *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Only one Member is allowed to respond.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Richard Allan, Mr. Harry Barnes, Peter Bottomley, Dr. Jenny Tonge, Mr. Simon Thomas, Mr. Neil Gerrard, Tony Baldry, Ms Julia Drown, Mr. Paul Marsden, Angus Robertson and Andrew George.

FOREIGN EXCHANGE TRANSACTIONS TAX COMMISSION

Mr. Richard Allan accordingly presented a Bill to establish a Commission to inquire into the feasibility of a foreign exchange transactions tax; to provide for the Commission's remit and duration; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 19 April, and to be printed [Bill 111].

4.30 pm

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will be aware that the channel tunnel is still closed. I do not know whether you are aware that many jobs are at risk, not only those of the 6,000 or more people employed by English, Welsh and Scottish Railways, but those of people in my constituency and other parts of the west midlands who use the channel tunnel as the link to supply parts and equipment to the continent. The tunnel has now been closed to freight for several days, and there are still only 15 gendarmes and five security officers in Calais trying to protect the compound against several hundred illegal asylum seekers who are trying to enter the United Kingdom.

I do not have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, while we are at it, that we are still failing to sell any beef to France. Given that the Prime Minister has said that we are now at the heart of Europe and that he has considerable influence with the French, I wonder whether he or anyone else has told you that—in addition to the very important statement on audit that we have heard today—he would like to make a statement on whether we can resume exports to the European Union through the channel tunnel.

Mr. Speaker: I have had no indication of such a statement being made.

Orders of the Day

Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill *[Lords]*

[2ND ALLOTTED DAY]

As amended in the Standing Committee, further considered.

Schedule 6

PREMISES EXCLUDED FROM RIGHT TO MANAGE

4.32 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stone): I beg to move amendment No. 73, in page 100, line 6, leave out sub-paragraph (4).

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 74, in page 101, leave out lines 13 to 15.

No. 84, in clause 74, page 35, line 30, after the "company", insert—

'(4A) The regulations shall include provisions which shall insure that in the opinion of the appropriate national authority RTM companies shall have access to sufficient working capital to function effectively.'.

No. 83, in clause 78, page 38, line 46, after "before", insert—

'(2A) The delivery of a notice of invitation to participate by hand at or by recorded delivery to the flat held by the person required to be served under section 78(2) hereof shall be deemed to be good service on the day of such service.'.

No. 72, in clause 87, page 43, line 37, leave out—

'the claim notice is deemed to be withdrawn'

and insert—

'the tribunal may, on the application of any person specified in section 86(2)(a) above, make an order declaring the application to have ceased to have effect on such dates as may be specified by the tribunal.'.

Government amendments Nos. 33A and 34.

No. 71, in clause 105, page 54, line 12, at end insert—

'(6) The tribunal shall have the power to appoint a new manager in the place of the RTM company if—

(a) the RTM company wishes to withdraw; and

(b) it is just and convenient to appoint a new manager.'.

Mr. Cash: We certainly had lengthy proceedings on the first day of consideration, and I have no doubt that we shall have some interesting debates today, particularly later, on forfeiture. We also wish to raise several important matters in the debates on the proceeding amendments.

Under amendment No. 73, we propose that certain provisions should be left out of paragraph 1(4) of schedule 6, which deals with premises excluded from the right to manage and buildings with substantial non-residential parts. That paragraph states:

> "For the purpose of determining the internal floor area of a building or of any part of a building, the floor or floors of the building or part shall be taken to extend (without interruption) throughout the whole of the interior of the building or part, except that the area of any common parts of the building or part shall be disregarded."

We are concerned about that for the following reasons. As currently drafted, paragraph 1(4) appears to mean that, if a mezzanine floor has been built in part of a flat, it is deemed to run throughout the entire building. We simply do not agree that that is an appropriate assumption. In fact, anyone who visits my room in the House of Commons would find a similar situation. Paragraph 1(4) may be intended to provide that the area taken up by internal walls should be treated as floor area, but that is not its meaning as currently drafted. We suggest that a measurement code such as that used in the building societies legislation should be adopted in the Bill. That is a perfectly well understood way—and the more appropriate way—of dealing with the situation.

Amendment No. 74 would also leave out certain words in schedule 6 with regard to premises owned by a local housing authority. The words in question are:

> "This Chapter"—

which, as I said, is an important one relating to premises excluded from the right to manage—

> "does not apply to premises falling within section 72(1) if a local housing authority is the immediate landlord of any of the qualifying tenants of flats contained in the premises."

We do not believe that there is any justification for disallowing local authority tenants from exercising the right to manage. Furthermore, in many cases, such tenants might feel that they, in particular, need to be able to exercise that right. The question is related to the issue of whether local authority tenants should be put in a different position from those of other tenancies. I think that the Minister has something to say, but perhaps she would prefer to wait until she makes her speech. There is a problem, but perhaps the Minister has a good answer, in which case I would be more than happy to hear it.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Cash: The Minister nods. Therefore—in the hope that she will satisfy me on that question—I shall not need to take up a great deal of time.

Amendment No. 84 relates to clause 74, on the right to manage, and deals with the question of regulations. Serious questions arise about the right to manage and the membership and regulations provisions. Those are in common form and will therefore be applied across the board. Many of those who will be affected will want to know that there will be proper and adequate backing for the running of so-called right-to-manage companies. Because the provisions will be in common form, it is even more important that there should not be any unfortunate mishaps arising from a failure to provide proper and adequate working capital.

Our proposed new subsection states:

> "The regulations shall include provisions which shall insure"—

it should be "ensure", but I do not suppose that we need to worry about that—

> "that in the opinion of the appropriate national authority RTM companies shall have access to sufficient working capital to function effectively."

That is a reasonable position to adopt. It raises a matter that has been debated here and in another place. The problem is one of working capital. An RTM company will

[Mr. Cash]

be a small business. Like any business, it will need working capital if it is to avoid insolvency. An RTM company only has one source of income—the service charge paid by the lessees, which is not a quick source of funding. Before a demand for service charges can be made, various statutory hoops must be jumped through. Inevitably, it takes time to raise money through a service charge.

I am sure that we all agree that it is in the nature of building maintenance that money is sometimes needed urgently. When a roof starts leaking or an underground water main bursts, urgent and possibly expensive works may be necessary. We all have experience of that, and it usually happens at the most inconvenient time. Work is required urgently and, when the regular repair work is started, more repairs frequently come to light, so that the cost increases dramatically. We all know that, after the urgent repair work has started, builders have a way of discovering things that require attention. Builders require prompt payment—otherwise they will simply walk off site.

An RTM company is likely to take over the management of a block after there has been widespread dissatisfaction with the existing landlord. In such cases, some tenants are likely to be withholding their service charge. That is normal and explains why it is necessary to have the right-to-manage arrangements. If there were no problems and everyone was always satisfied, there would be no need for such provisions. The first thing that the RTM company might need to do is bring leasehold valuation tribunal proceedings to extract the service charges due. The costs to the RTM company of such proceedings are irrecoverable, and that is another important ingredient in the practical approach to the problem.

The problem with the Government's proposals is that RTM companies have absolutely no working capital, yet to meet perfectly ordinary and foreseeable obligations—we not only imagine but know that they will happen—the RTM company will need working capital. The Government propose that such companies should be limited by guarantee and we discussed some of the arguments relating to companies limited by guarantee when we debated commonhold.

The members of a company limited by guarantee are unlike the shareholders of an ordinary limited company because they contribute no money up front to the company. I had an interesting discussion on that point with the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, the hon. Member for North Swindon (Mr. Wills), because he is handling the Bill's commonhold provisions. I repeat for his benefit and that of the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble), who is dealing with the Bill's leasehold provisions, that there is a real distinction between a company limited by guarantee and an ordinary limited company that has shareholders.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Michael Wills): That is not relevant.

Mr. Cash: The Parliamentary Secretary says that that point is not relevant but it certainly is when determining whether a company has sufficient working capital for the urgent circumstances that I have described. As a matter of normal prudence, it should have enough money in the kitty to ensure that the inevitable repair bills and builders' costs can be met. The company should not have to call upon the money in an emergency fashion. Under the provisions for companies limited by guarantee, all the members of such a company give a guarantee to the company that, if the RTM company goes into liquidation, they will contribute the sum guaranteed to the company's liquidator.

I understand the legal propositions behind the Government's proposals. I believe that that are extremely well advised and, like the rest of us, Ministers have practical experience. Most of us have flats, have lived in flats or have children who live in flats. I have described the practical questions that crop up and many Members of the House and huge numbers of the public have experience of companies limited by guarantee, but they do not necessarily examine the small print or appreciate that such companies are not like ordinary limited companies. Many people have taken part in activities related to companies limited by guarantee without realising that that is the state of play. We need to consider that problem because we are trying to improve the Bill and to reflect on the practical implications. We are not being difficult or awkward, but constructive. I hope that both Ministers appreciate that we are adhering to that line.

4.45 pm

Mr. John Taylor (Solihull): Unfortunately, I have lost the thread of the argument since we were in Committee because I was not here on Monday. Of course it is important to have working capital. That stands out a mile in the argument that my hon. Friend is making extremely well. However, where will people gain access to working capital? Will the banks be interested in helping out RTM companies, or will they need collateral to borrow? Perhaps my hon. Friend could develop that.

Mr. Cash: Yes, indeed. My hon. Friend is greatly experienced in such matters. As a practising solicitor, he would have known about tenancies and the management of flats. I do not think I am breaking any confidence by revealing that as a tenant of a block of flats he took part in such deliberations.

Mr. Taylor: It is in the Register of Members' Interests.

Mr. Cash: It is even in the register.

There is a market for banks and others who want the arrangements to work effectively to provide the working capital. However, they are not likely to do that unless there is an incentive. The money has to be made available. It will not be a huge sum, although it depends on the size of the flats. My hon. Friend's suggestion is important and we should consider the problem from a practical point of view.

Mr. Taylor: Is it not an incentive for people with long leases on flats to acquire the freehold and invest in the RTM company, as the Bill will enable them to do, because that will allow them make a more serious approach to the bank to borrow money?

Mr. Cash: Again, I am grateful to my hon. Friend and agree with him. Indeed, the RTM company could get borrowing power by borrowing against the guarantee given by each of its members. I regret, however, that the Government propose that a member should give the grand sum of £1, which makes the guarantee worthless. That needs serious consideration and the Minister should respond to it, because it raises practical problems.

Various proposals have been made during our deliberations on the Bill, such as increasing the amount of the guarantee to a more realistic figure. The Government, for a reason that escapes me, have rejected every proposal on the basis that it would make an RTM company unattractive. I fail to understand that. It is in the interests of those who are engaged in RTM companies and in the general interests of making the Bill work that none of those problems exists. We do not want to render the operation unworkable or present hazards to the smooth running of the arrangements. It is not difficult to provide for or to determine a reasonable amount of money to be made available through working capital. That could be decided by regulation. I do not think it is beyond the wit of man to come up with such an arrangement, even at this stage, given that the power exists to provide for regulations. I hope that the Minister agrees that the opportunity remains for such an arrangement. That would show that she is responding constructively.

The Opposition do not want RTM companies to be unattractive, but if they go belly-up because they have no working capital, they are likely to prove most unattractive. However, concrete proposals that we made at an earlier stage have been rejected. As the Minister knows, in general I am against giving Ministers the power to make regulations, but we need to be realistic at this point. Given that much of the detail of commonhold will now be included in regulations, they should deal properly with the need for working capital. The amendment, which is a useful and practical proposal, would oblige Ministers and the Welsh Assembly to consider seriously RTM companies' viability as commercial units.

For a reason that I do not entirely understand, amendment No. 83 refers to clause 78. In fact, it should refer to clause 79, but I doubt whether that point will trouble the Minister, as it is the argument's substance that I intend to address. Clause 79 deals with notice of claim to acquire right and general provisions relating to the right to manage. Clause 79(1) states:

> "A claim to acquire the right to manage any premises is made by giving notice of the claim . . . and in this Chapter the 'relevant date', in relation to any claim to acquire the right to manage, means the date on which notice of the claim is given."

Clause 79(2) states:

> "The claim notice may not be given unless each person required to be given a notice of invitation to participate has been given such a notice at least 14 days before."

The amendment would deal with the issue of delivery by adding a new subsection (2A), and because delivery is important, it should be accepted.

When the issue was considered in the other place, Lord Falconer of Thoroton acknowledged that my noble and learned Friend Lord Kingsland had identified a technical problem in respect of notices that need to be remedied. So shocked was Lord Kingsland at that admission that Lord Falconer felt it necessary to advise him to keep hold of his seat lest he should fall off it.

The Government promised to introduce amendments to remedy the defect, but unfortunately they do not fully meet the point. The problem is a simple one. Perfectly sensibly, the Bill provides that, before an RTM company applies to take over management of a block, it should give notice to all long leaseholders in the block and invite them to become members of the company. Clause 78, which deals with notice inviting participation, sets out the various matters that must be included in such a notice. Subsection (7) states:

> "A notice of invitation to participate is not invalidated by any inaccuracy in any of the particulars required by or by virtue of this section."

In other words, inaccuracies in the notice will not invalidate it.

Such matters are not unimportant. We all receive bits of paper every day, and even if those relating to the running of one's premises are ostensibly not the biggest or most important bits they ever get, if the relevant bit does not reach the right person, the consequences could be hugely inconvenient, including the need to consult lawyers or managing agents. If someone has children, they might lose the notice—we all know how easily that can happen—or mix it up with invitations and other pieces of paper. It is important that the notices should be received, and we can all think of examples in which notices could go astray, so recorded delivery is obligatory.

Clause 78(7) also provides that inaccuracies in the notice shall not invalidate the notice. So far, so good. The problem that Lord Kingsland identified, and which the Government said they would remedy, was the difficulty of ensuring that every qualifying tenant in a block was served with a notice of invitation to participate. A block might contain more than 100 flats—in Westminster, blocks often do—and it would be absurd if the failure to serve one of the tenants in the block resulted in the whole RTM procedure being treated as null and void. The Government seem to have accepted that point—at least, we hope so—but unfortunately the clause does not deal with that problem.

Clause 111 makes some provisions about the service of notices—I see those whom we are not supposed to see taking a look at some of the provisions I mention—but it makes no provision for any form of deemed service. I hate deemed provisions but, in this case, they are justified.

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): My hon. Friend is a powerful advocate and he has taken me with him so far, but I have some reservations about amendment No. 83. My concern is that it may be too draconian in practice. I shall give him an example that might lead to a miscarriage of justice. Many flats are served by a communal front door, with one letter box, where the mail for all of the flat occupants is delivered and the occupants collect it later. I know from experience that if a postman has a recorded delivery letter, he will ring the bell for every flat and asks whoever answers the door to sign for it. If the amendment is accepted, a situation could arise in which a recorded delivery letter is signed for at an address by one tenant on behalf of another. The latter could be away on holiday and know nothing about the contents of the envelope, but under the terms of the amendment he would be deemed to be served.

Mr. Cash: That is an interesting intervention, but there are grave dangers in assuming that it would be lawful or desirable for people to accept recorded deliveries by signing on behalf of other people without authority.

[Mr. Cash]

My hon. Friend is in interesting territory but his example does not present an insuperable obstacle to the points that I am making. The Minister may have something to say on that point and we might be able to address it in the arrangements for the service of notices. Perhaps the change could be made without using precisely the wording that we have chosen.

5 pm

As I was saying, if the RTM company fails to serve one tenant in a block of a hundred flats, that still leaves the question of the nullity of the claim notice. That follows from clause 79(2), which prohibits the service of a claim notice until all tenants have been served with a notice of invitation to participate. This is very much a drafting question. We are all aiming in the same direction because we all want the Bill to work properly, but if, to some extent, it does not, the general power to make statutory instruments may enable us to address some of these matters. Of course, I take careful note of the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight).

The intention of the amendment is to make a simple deemed service provision. The RTM company can prove service either by hand-delivering a notice or by sending it by recorded delivery. In either case, a failure by some misadventure in service on a tenant will not invalidate the claim notice subsequently served by the RTM company on the landlord.

Amendment No. 72 to clause 87 aims to defeat the mischief of deemed withdrawal provisions by deleting the imposition of a deemed withdrawal date and providing that an application can be made to a tribunal to end the original application in appropriate cases. In our experience and that of the Law Society, deemed withdrawal provisions do not protect tenants but serve only to frustrate otherwise valid claims.

These matters have been carefully considered by the Law Society, which concludes that the provisions are akin to the automatic strike-out provision, which was part of the county court rules, order 15, rule 11, prior to the introduction of the civil procedure rules. It was abolished owing to the unnecessary hardship caused to claimants and the proliferation of satellite litigation as a result of its application. No doubt the Minister can take the matter into account when she replies.

Amendment No. 71 deals with clause 105 on cessation of management. Subsection (1) states:

> "This section makes provision about the circumstances in which, after a RTM company has acquired the right to manage any premises, that right ceases to be exercisable by it."

The clause then makes provisions about agreements and the circumstances in which the right to manage ceases to be exercisable, such as when a winding-up order is made, a receiver or manager is appointed, a voluntary arrangement is made or an RTM company's name is struck off the register. Subsection (4) says:

> "The right to manage the premises ceases to be exercisable . . . if a manager appointed under Part 2 of the 1987 Act to act in relation to the premises . . . begins so to act".

The right to manage ceases to be exercisable also if the company ceases to be an RTM company in relation to the premises.

The amendment would insert a new subsection which states that the valuation tribunal shall have the power to appoint a new manager in place of the RTM company if the RTM company wishes to withdraw and it is just and convenient to appoint a new manager. At the moment, there is no provision for the tribunal to appoint a new manager in those circumstances. The amendment seeks to close that loophole to secure the smooth, efficient and effective management of a property in the event that the RTM company no longer wishes to continue or to manage.

Our amendments are practical. Some are very important indeed, particularly the one on working capital which, subject to the Minister's response, makes an unanswerable case for the making of arrangements to ensure against the RTM company being unable to deal with problems such as urgent works and things of that kind, which I described.

Ms Keeble: I shall deal with the points made by the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash), although not in the order in which he made them, simply because my notes are organised otherwise.

This group of amendments deals with various aspects of the right to manage. Many of them reflect the fears and concerns expressed in Committee by hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Stone, about the financial viability of the RTM company, the competence of its management and what happens if it fails. The right-to-manage provisions in the Bill will provide a robust framework for a new and important right, and will deal with many leasehold issues raised by hon. Members on both sides of the House. I shall now deal with each amendment in turn, including the Government amendments.

Amendment No. 71 relates to clause 105 which, as the hon. Member for Stone said, sets out the circumstances in which an RTM company would lose the right to manage premises. As provided for in subsection (2), that may happen because the leaseholders no longer wish to carry on as managers. When that happens, they need to negotiate handover arrangements with the landlords, to whom the management would revert, before being able to withdraw. When they cannot agree such arrangements, or when no landlord can be found with whom to negotiate, the company can apply to a leasehold valuation tribunal for its own replacement as manager by virtue of schedule 7. As hon. Members know, individual leaseholders also have the right to apply to an LVT for the replacement of a manager if the RTM company is no longer functioning. I cannot understand the reasoning behind the amendment, as the LVT already has the power to appoint a new manager in the place of an RTM company.

Amendment No. 72 provides that a landlord may apply to an LVT for a determination that the claim notice is withdrawn if the RTM company either fails to apply to an LVT to dispute the landlord's counter-notice or if the RTM company withdraws such an application. While I understand the intention behind the amendment, I do not accept that it would have any practical benefit. If the RTM company does not apply to an LVT to dispute the landlord's counter-notice within two months of such a notice being served, the claim notice is deemed to be withdrawn. While the amendment would give the landlord the right to apply to an LVT, the time limit of two months would still apply, and it is doubtful whether proceedings could be concluded in that time.

Amendment No. 73 would have the effect of removing what is to be taken into account in calculating the floor area of a mixed use building. I wondered whether the hon. Member for Stone would propose a replacement for sub-paragraph (4) of schedule 6, rather than simply deleting it altogether. Paragraph 1 of Schedule 6, he explained at length, excludes properties that mix residential and non-residential uses, such as flats above shops, from the right to manage if more than 25 per cent of the internal floor space is in non-residential use. In making the necessary calculations, any parts, including garages, which are for the sole use of a particular residential tenant are counted as residential floor-space and any common parts are disregarded. Trying to determine what percentage of the common parts was residential and what percentage was commercial would prove difficult and, we fear, would be the subject of much contention. The complete removal of sub-paragraph (4), as the amendment provides, would result in uncertainty about which areas of the premises were to be included in the calculations. That would not be helpful. We believe that we have taken the correct approach in disregarding the common parts.

I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman is interested in the details of the 25 per cent. rule. If it would be helpful, I am happy to put it on the record for him.

Mr. Cash *indicated assent.*

Ms Keeble: The 25 per cent. rule is based on the general rule that commercial floor space is broadly three times more valuable than the same amount of residential floor space. That means that a commercial unit that takes up 25 per cent. of the property accounts for roughly half the value of the whole property. Where, therefore, the commercial parts account for more than 25 per cent., it will be the landlord who holds the majority stake in the premises. Where that is the case, we would not be justified in allowing the leaseholders, as the minority interest, to take over the management of the block.

That has been the subject of much debate both in this House and in the other place. We made clear our position on the 25 per cent. threshold during those debates. I hope that I have clarified the matter now, as we have not discussed this aspect at any other stage in our extensive discussion of the Bill.

Amendment No. 74 would extend the right to manage to local authority tenants. The hon. Gentleman argued strongly for that. However, under various legislation, local authority tenants, including leaseholders, already enjoy a range of options for becoming involved in the management of their premises. Those options include a right to manage. We do not think it right that two rights to manage should be exercisable for the same property, as that would lead to conflict and confusion.

Mr. Cash: I hear what the Minister says, and we know that many blocks of flats already have right-to-manage arrangements, but the Government say that we should have special, carefully tailored, leasehold right-to-manage arrangements, with all the memorandums and articles in common form, to achieve a degree of synergy and coherence. That, after all, lies at the heart of the Bill. Given the fact that the Government have given so much time and attention to the matter, and have produced the draft provisions so that we can consider them, and all the relevant regulations, why cannot they simply make the same arrangements for people who live in premises that are owned and run by local authorities? In other words, why should there be one rule for those who operate in the local authority context and others of a similar kind, and another rule provided for in the Bill? That does not make sense and will create great confusion.

Ms Keeble: It seems that the hon. Gentleman has not quite taken my point. Local authority tenants, who include leaseholders, as they have long leases rather than shorter ones, already have a range of options to assist in the running of their premises. That includes the right to manage. It is not helpful for people to have a right to manage under two different pieces of legislation. That would create confusion, as has already occurred in the discussion. As local authority tenants already have a right to manage, we do not intend through the Bill to provide them with a second right to manage. I hope that that makes it clear to the hon. Gentleman that we are not excluding local authority tenants; we are saying that a different route is available to them under different legislation.

5.15 pm

Mr. Cash: The Minister has not quite answered my question. Why should different legislation contain arrangements that are not coincidental with those in the Bill? I suspect that we are reaching a point at which we cannot agree, but an important question remains unresolved. Perhaps we will have to leave it at that.

Ms Keeble: I do not think that there is a big difference from existing measures: local authority tenants previously had a right to manage, so it could be said that other leaseholders are merely catching up. We are not ensuring that local authority tenants, including leaseholders, will not have a right to manage, because they had that right first. That is why it would be confusing—our discussion of the issue has been fairly confusing—if one group of leaseholders had two rights to manage, while another group had only one.

Mr. Cash: I shall try once more. Let us take a practical example, bearing it in mind that the matter has been discussed extensively; indeed, it must have been debated about five times, so if the point has been missed, a lot of people in the other place and here have missed it on many occasions. As the Minister knows, we believe strongly that working capital will be needed, for reasons that I have explained and that she will no doubt deal with in a moment. However, in terms of a minimum amount of £1, why should provisions be introduced that put all the right-to-manage arrangements at some risk, while local authority right-to-manage arrangements are effectively subsidised by the local authority itself? She disagrees, but if the arrangements are vested in what is laid down by a given local authority, where will the working capital for them come from?

Ms Keeble: Perhaps it will help if I put the boot on the other foot. If we limited the local authority right to manage to the provisions in the Bill, we would disapply the existing rights of tenants, who would no longer be qualifying tenants in that way. A whole lot of local

[Ms Keeble]

authority tenants would therefore lose their right to manage, which would be wrong, as it would narrow the whole ability that the right to manage confers.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the source of working capital and what happens to local authority leaseholders. There are a number of issues in relation to charging policies, but the matter in question specifically concerns who has the right to manage. The reason why we are limiting the right to manage in the Bill to exclude local authority leaseholders is clear: as I said, local authority tenants, including leaseholders, already have such a right. I realise that we might seem to be refusing to give something to local authority leaseholders, but that is not the case, as they already have it. That is why we feel it better not to apply a narrow leaseholder-only right to local authority properties, when a broader right to manage exists in respect of them that includes tenants with shorter leases. However, I assure him that the Government will continue to consider closely how we can further encourage and facilitate the involvement of all local authority tenants in the management of their homes.

Amendment No. 83, which was also tabled by the hon. Gentleman, deals with the delivery of notices. It would provide that if the RTM company delivers

"a notice of invitation to participate by hand . . . or by recorded delivery",

the notice will be deemed to have been served on that day. The amendment is unnecessary. Clause 111 provides that any notices under chapter 1 must be in writing and may be sent by post. Under the Interpretation Act 1978, service by post is effective as of the time that the letter is delivered in the ordinary post. Subsection (5) of the clause further provides that the notice may be given at the flat contained in the premises to which it refers. In other words, the issue is already covered by existing legislation and the amendment would confuse matters.

Amendment No. 84 provides for regulations to include provisions to ensure that in the opinion of the national authority the right-to-manage company has sufficient working capital. We would assume and expect those to be the prescribed provisions adopted by the RTM company as its memorandum and articles. We are dubious about the purpose of the amendment and whether it would have the desired effect. It is difficult to see how such a provision could be incorporated in the regulations or the memorandum and articles or how the opinion of the national authority would be deemed to have been given in each particular case. Indeed, the national authority is not defined for such purposes.

Those technical difficulties aside, I appreciate concerns that the leaseholders who take over the management of a property should have the necessary funds behind them to be able to do the job properly. We intend strongly to encourage them to do so, but that is a matter for guidance, not primary legislation. Leaseholders already have to pay for the management of the property and will therefore exercise the right to manage in the knowledge that they will have to meet the costs that they run up.

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): Is the Minister saying that the guidance notes will precisely clarify how much working capital is required or the amount of working capital that is adequate? She seems to have conceded the principle of the amendment—that that is desirable—but is leaving it to the guidance.

Ms Keeble: I did not quite say that. I said that we would encourage leaseholders to make the necessary arrangements. They already pay for the management of their property, so they will not be going into the unknown. In deciding about exercising the right to manage, they will want to ensure that they have made proper arrangements for the maintenance of the building—after all, it is their money that is invested in it. We will encourage them to make proper provision, but expect them to make proper financial arrangements for the maintenance of their building. That judgment will be based on their knowledge of how much it costs to run the building.

I turn to Government amendments Nos. 33A and 34. Amendment No. 33A tightens the existing provisions relating to approvals once the right to manage has been exercised. As hon. Members know, we never intended that the right-to-manage company should take on management functions under leases of commercial units in a block. The RTM company should not get involved in the relationship between commercial tenants and the landlord. Concerns have been expressed that it could be argued that the RTM company would have functions relating to approvals in relation to commercial tenancies under clauses 98 and 99. That could mean, for example, that a commercial tenant would have to get consent from both the landlord and the RTM company for permission to assign the lease. This technical amendment is intended to deliver our original objective and to ensure that the RTM company has functions that relate only to approvals for premises that are held under a long lease by a qualifying tenant.

On amendment No. 34, it may assist hon. Members if I give a short explanation of the clause to which it relates. Clause 102 gives effect to schedule 7, which sets out how the relevant provisions of leasehold and associated law apply while the RTM company is responsible for the management of the premises. It is a lengthy schedule. For example, paragraph 2 makes section 4 of the Defective Premises Act 1972 binding on the RTM company. This has the practical effect of making the company responsible for ensuring that the property is kept in a sufficient state of repair for it not to represent a threat to public safety.

Clause 102(2) gives the appropriate national authority the power to modify other enactments for the same purpose. The amendment will mean that the power can be used to modify other Acts that are made after the Bill receives Royal Assent. If this provision were not included, the rules of statutory interpretation would mean that it would be doubtful whether it could be used in these circumstances. Of course, any new Acts should be drafted to take account of RTM, but until it is established, it may not be factored into policy making. This is a technical amendment that makes it clear that the power in clause 102(2) applies to subsequent Acts of Parliament and that it applies to the provisions of the Bill. On that basis, I invite the hon. Gentleman to withdraw his amendments.

Mr. Cash: I have listened with great interest to the Minister's arguments but, for a variety of reasons, not least of which is the fact that she has not answered the question on working capital to my satisfaction, I intend to divide the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 179, Noes 295.

Division No. 193] **[5.26 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prentice, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Charles Hendry and
Mr. John Randall.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Barron, Kevin
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blizzard, Bob
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dobbin, Jim
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*

Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Fraser Kemp and
Mr. Ian Pearson.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 98

FUNCTIONS RELATING TO APPROVALS

Amendment made: No. 33A, in page 50, line 5, at end insert—

'; but nothing in this section or section 99 applies in relation to an approval concerning only a part of the premises consisting of a flat or other unit not held under a lease by a qualifying tenant.'.—*[Ms Keeble.]*

Clause 102

STATUTORY FUNCTIONS

Amendment made: No. 34, in page 52, line 18, after "leases" insert—

'(including enactments contained in this Act or any Act passed after this Act)'.—*[Ms Keeble.]*

Clause 116

QUALIFYING LEASES

Amendment made: No. 35, in page 59, line 9, at end insert—

'(2) In section 69(1)(b) of the 1993 Act (estate management schemes), for "by virtue of the amendments of that Chapter made by paragraph 3 of Schedule 9 to the Housing Act 1996 (c. 52)" substitute "in circumstances in which, but for section 116(1) of the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002 and the repeal by that Act of paragraph 3 of Schedule 9 to the Housing Act 1996 (c. 52), they would have been entitled to acquire it by virtue of the amendments of that Chapter made by that paragraph".'.—*[Ms Keeble.]*

Clause 121

RTE COMPANIES

Ms Keeble: I beg to move amendment No. 36, in page 61, line 7, after "notice" insert "to the company".

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 37 to 42.

Ms Keeble: These amendments are all consequential to the change to the valuation date for flats, as provided for in clause 125. As hon. Members may recall from previous debates, under existing law the valuation date for flats is the date on which the terms of acquisition are agreed or determined. The Bill would provide that, instead, the valuation date was the date on which the right-to-enfranchise company served its initial notice on the landlord. We have subsequently realised that that could have some unintended consequences and these amendments are designed to rectify them.

First, under the proposals currently contained in the Bill, it could be argued that the price for the freehold should be based on the number of participants when the initial notice was served. That is plainly not what we had intended and amendment No. 41 makes it clear that, though the property should be valued as at the date of the initial notice, the valuation should be based on the number of participants at the point where the landlord and the RTE company actually exchange contracts.

Of course, we also need to ensure that the landlord knows how many participants there are at that stage. When the initial notice is served, the landlord will be told how many leaseholders are participating at that point. Amendment No. 40 will ensure that the landlord is sent a copy of any participation notices given to the RTE company after that point. Amendments Nos. 36 to 39 are consequential. Amendments Nos. 37 and 38 specify the time by which assignees and personal representatives have to give notice to participate.

Secondly, existing law provides that the landlord must be notified of any agreements between the nominee purchaser and non-participating leaseholders which provide for the disposal of a relevant interest in relation to the enfranchisement. Under existing law, the nominee purchaser must tell the landlord of any such agreements entered into between the serving of the section 13 notice and the valuation date.

Amendment No. 42 makes a consequential amendment requiring the RTE company to notify the landlord of any such agreements entered into at any time before the exchange of contracts.

I commend the amendments to the House.

Mr. Cash: It is clear that the Government have concluded that adjustments need to be made to this part of the Bill. As I have said from the beginning, we are anxious to see improvements to the Bill.

On amendment No. 36, the Minister perhaps got through the explanation a little speedily. That does not alter the fact that it is important that we put on the record exactly what its implications are. The clause in question is clause 121, which deals with the exercise of the right to collective enfranchisement.

Under clause 120, the right is exercisable only by the RTE company. Therefore, it is important for us to know exactly what kind of company we are dealing with and to understand what the word "company" means in relation to amendment No. 36. What is this company?

5.45 pm

In the first place, a company is an RTE company in relation to premises if

> "(a) it is a private company limited by guarantee, and
>
> (b) its memorandum of association states that its object, or one of its objects, is the exercise of the right to collective enfranchisement with respect to the premises."

New section 4B in clause 121 is to be inserted in the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993, which the Minister did not explain. In the chapter, participating member, in relation to an RTE company,

> "means a person who is a member by virtue of subsection (1)(a) of this section".

Subsection (1)(a) of the newly inserted section 4B, which is put after section 4 of the 1993 Act, states the persons who are entitled to be members of the company. Therefore, where we talk about giving a participation notice to the company, we are referring to the company limited by guarantee. Participating members are

> "qualifying tenants of flats contained in the premises".

A participating member means a person who

> "(a) has given a participation notice before the date when the company gives a notice under section 13 or during the participation period, or
>
> (b) is a participating member by virtue of either of the following two subsections."

That refers to section 13 of the 1993 Act. New Section 4B is being inserted by way of amendment.

I have attempted to go through part of this by way of explanation and by reference to the provisions. I do not criticise the Minister—she has a job to do, which is to get on with the Government amendments—but it is necessary to try to put on the record what the amendments are doing in relation to existing legislation, which in this context is the 1993 Act. It is just a matter of context. In so far as she is right to explain simply what she believes it is necessary to explain in the Bill, I feel that it is my job to explain exactly what is happening in the context of the pre-existing legislation and how that is being amended.

Amendment No. 37 again relates to clause 121. The amendment arises, for those who are interested in following these matters, in respect of page 61, line 14. In line 14, the Government propose—we are dealing again with the membership of RTE companies inserted in the 1993 Act—that

> "A member who is the assignee of a lease by virtue of which a participating member was a qualifying tenant of his flat is a participating member if, within the period of 28 days beginning with the date of the assignment, he gives a participation notice to the company."

I understand that the Government want to improve the Bill, as do the Opposition. They now propose to leave out the words after "if" to the end of line 16, and to insert:

> "he has given a participation notice to the company within the period beginning with the date of the assignment and ending 28 days later (or, if earlier, on the execution of a relevant conveyance to the company)."

[Mr. Cash]

That is the right approach, for the reasons that the Minister gave, but serious difficulties can be encountered when periods are specified. The

> "period beginning with the date of the assignment and ending 28 days later"

is likely to be a fixed date. I do not think that there would be any difficulty with that, but the amendment goes on to state:

> "(or, if earlier, on the execution of a relevant conveyance to the company)".

Many problems can arise with the alleged execution of relevant conveyances to companies, or with relevant conveyances of any type. It is by no means impossible that what was thought to be the execution of a relevant conveyance could turn out not to have taken place, or to have been performed incorrectly. I shall not press the point, but I am concerned about the uncertainty that can arise when such language is used.

The Minister may ask what other words could be used. I suggest that the word "valid", or something along those lines, could be inserted before

> "execution of a relevant conveyance".

These are drafting questions, related to last-minute Government amendments. The Bill has been through five processes, in the other place and in this House. It is incumbent on us to examine the wording carefully to ensure that everything is in order before the Bill gains Royal Assent.

Government amendment No. 38 deals with clause 121(6), which at present states:

> "And if the personal representatives of a participating member are a member, they are a participating member if, at any time, they give a participation notice to the company."

Such language may be necessary as a matter of law, but it is complex and convoluted. The amendment would insert, after the second "if",

> "they have given a participation notice to the company at any time (before the execution of a relevant conveyance to the company)."

As I said earlier, there is sometimes uncertainty about whether a conveyance has been duly executed.

Mr. Greg Knight: If there are only two participating members and one dies, and if the survivor is a personal representative of the deceased, does my hon. Friend think that there is one participating member, or two?

Mr. Cash: That question reminds me of the Schleswig-Holstein succession problem. It was said that only three people knew the answer to that, and that one was dead, one had forgotten, and one was mad. My hon. Friend can take his pick as to which description fits him, but it is certain that a participating member who is a personal representative will be able to perform his functions in relation to a dead person. We can assume that that person will have to be mad, or that he has forgotten. I hope that that answer helps my right hon. Friend as much as his question helped me.

Mr. John Taylor: Surely the situation is perfectly clear? The one who is mad would be represented by a receiver in a court of protection, and the one who is dead would be represented by his or her executor or personal representative. I do not see a problem with that.

Mr. Cash: My hon. Friend is a solicitor, and has the advantage of much more experience of trusts and wills—although, of course, I had to pass the requisite papers on such matters in my examinations many years ago. If we continue this dialogue, my hon. Friend and I will not be forgotten, but one of us will go mad.

Mr. Knight: I am troubled by my hon. Friend's earlier reference to the execution of a conveyance. I am not happy with the proposed wording. My hon. Friend will know that lawyers can have a conveyance executed, but can then hold it to the order of their client, until the time has come for completion. Does my hon. Friend agree that the amendment could be defective, as the words

> "execution of a relevant conveyance"

may not mean what the Minister intends?

Mr. Cash: The support of so many hon. Friends from the legal profession leaves me feeling like a wagon train surrounded by red indians. I know what the words "in escrow" mean, but the Minister must satisfy the House that the words proposed would be appropriate in all circumstances, as it is possible that the conveyance would be invalid. The serious point underlying the banter is that it is essential that all conveyances covered by the amendments are valid.

Government amendment No. 39, would replace "a" with "the" in line 20, page 61. I shall not confuse the House by arguing about that substitution. I will now pass on rapidly to the next amendment, having noted that, for the benefit of those who read *Hansard*, we did not miss the fact that "the" has been substituted for "a" in the amendment.

6 pm

Government amendment No. 40 to clause 121 is much more substantial. The clause deals with RTE companies, entitlement to be members of the companies, the nature of their relationship to one another and the procedures that must be followed. The amendment states:

> "For the purposes of this section a participation notice given to the company during the period—
>
> (a) beginning with the date when the company gives a notice under section 13, and
>
> (b) ending immediately before a binding contract"—

my hon. Friends, particularly my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight), will notice those important words—

> "is entered into in pursuance of the notice under section 13,
>
> is of no effect unless a copy of the participation notice has been given during that period to the person who (in accordance with section 9) is the reversioner in respect of the premises."

One marvels at the knowledge of those who draft these Bills.

The Minister seems uncertain as to whether I am referring to a clause that is covered by this group of amendments. I am talking about Government amendment No. 40 and, just in case she has not read it, it stands in her name on the amendment paper. I merely mention that in passing.

The participation notice and the question of validity remain at the heart of the problems that we face.

Mr. John Taylor: Does not this amendment share some of the characteristics of the Brandt report—he may have written it but he undoubtedly had not read it?

Mr. Cash: That also applies to the Maastricht treaty and a number of others. I am quite sure, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the last thing you want is for me to go down that route. I shall simply say very briefly that there was a certain famous Chancellor of the Exchequer—or perhaps it was Foreign Secretary—who seemed to claim with pride that he had not read it. At all events, one or other of them did not read it, and that is very unwise. I shall read the Bill and make sure that what the Government are doing goes on the record. I know that the Minister will not mind because she has been giving a very good truncated explanation of what is involved. For our part, we intend to explain just what is involved in this group of amendments.

Mr. Greg Knight: It is rather hard on my hon. Friend to have to perform part of the Minister's duties without being in receipt of her salary. What does my hon. Friend understand by "gives" in proposed subsection (a) of Government amendment No. 40? Does it mean when the company draws up and dates the notice or when the notice is served?

Mr. Cash: I am intrigued by my right hon. Friend's point. Proposed subsection (a) refers to

> "beginning with the date when the company gives a notice under section 13".

That suggests that it means the moment when there is a transmission of that notice. Whether that transmission under section 13 follows the drawing up of the notice, there can be no doubt—one can give something only after it has been in one's possession or it has been established that it exists. Therefore, it has to be after the date of transmission—notice would be impossible to give if it had not been drawn up. Therefore, "gives" is the right word in this context, and I congratulate the Government on getting that right.

Government Amendment No. 41 takes us deep into the territory of schedule 8. Again, I congratulate the Government on improving the Bill on Report. They have come to the conclusion, after the Bill has been through the process about five times, that these words need to be changed. I am sure that they are right, but I still raise the point about a binding contract. I admit that I would not have wanted to raise that point but for the fact that what is or is not a binding contract is tied to validity and the date of notice is tied to whether or not there is a binding contract.

Government amendment No. 41 refers to

> "persons who are participating members of the RTE company immediately before a binding contract is entered into in pursuance of the initial notice".

Proposed paragraph (b) states:

> "for 'participating tenants, once' substitute 'those participating members, once'".

The Government's intentions are clear. I am still concerned about whether a contract could be known to be binding. That raises serious problems about timing. Having said that, and assuming that the Government are as close as possible to getting it right, I think that we would be able to support that amendment.

Government amendment No. 42 relates to clause 125, which deals with the separate questions—at least, so it seems to me—of purchase price and valuation date. The amendment proposes introducing a new subsection (2), which would be added to another amendment to the Leasehold Reform Housing and Urban Development Act 1993, which we have discussed on a number of other occasions. Clause 125 states:

> "In Schedule 6 to the 1993 Act (purchase price payable), for 'the valuation date' (in each place) substitute 'the relevant date'."

The Government propose to add the words:

> "In section 18(1) of the 1993 Act (duty to disclose existence of agreements affecting premises etc.), for 'valuation date for the purposes of Schedule 6' substitute"—

these are the most important words—

> "'time when a binding contract is entered into in pursuance of the initial notice'."

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am sorry that it has taken me some time to go through the provisions, but I am sure that the House will appreciate not only that I have tried to put them in context but that I have complemented the Minister's short remarks by a more adequate explanation. I have also drawn attention to concerns about the validity of the contracts. Throughout this group, we can see that shining star—the question whether a contract is binding or whether a conveyance will take effect at a given point in time.

I hope that my explanation of those important matters has not taken too much of the House's time. At least, the record will show exactly how the pieces fit into the jigsaw. We may be no wiser than the mad person who could not work out the Schleswig-Holstein succession, but at least some people will be able to make sense of the provisions that we have been discussing.

Mr. John Taylor: I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) not merely on his forceful advocacy—to which my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight) has referred—but on his comprehension and lucidity. He gave a master class which was greatly appreciated by those of us who had the privilege of listening to him. I look forward to the day when he is indeed our Attorney-General. We shall look to him with confidence to resolve problems such as the Schleswig-Holstein question.

I should declare an interest, since I am involved in the management committee of a splendid block of apartments in Solihull. We shall have to wrestle with problems such as those we are discussing. For reasons unknown to me, my fellow residents sometimes look to me for elucidation, so I shall give them all copies of *Hansard* and draw their attention to the speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stone. They will then understand the issues. If they make me their chairman—as is threatened—I shall have *Hansard* ready at all times to show them what our learned friend said today.

It is not possible for me to leave the Schleswig-Holstein question as easily as my remarks may have suggested. Conservative Members will recognise in those three central characters the first three people to speak from the floor at any meeting of the 1922 Committee.

[Mr. John Taylor]

I am especially interested in the parts of the Bill that relate to RTM and RTE companies. We live in an age where we are beset by acronyms. RTM and RTE are not particularly elegant, although I suppose that we shall learn to live with them; but this is the country of Milton and Shakespeare and we ought to be able to do slightly better than that. I am reminded of phrases such as "sustainable scenarios" that emerge from our planning departments.

6.15 pm

In the light of my current personal experience, it is entirely likely that in a well ordered and promising situation a series of long leaseholders would see their best interests served by the evolution of an RTM into an RTE. That would be a good thing. In my own case, I sincerely hope that we shall be able to acquire the freehold through the RTE mechanism. The management company will then have a serious asset. It will have a realistic balance sheet and a capital basis.

That relates to our earlier discussions. Such management companies will need working capital and they will be in a much stronger position to acquire it if they have a freehold as collateral. As the value of the freehold will almost certainly increase, they will have an appreciating asset on their balance sheet.

There is still the question of how to build a reasonable kitty in the early stages, although few right-to-manage companies will come into being—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware that the scope of the amendments is narrow. He should address his remarks to those amendments.

Mr. Taylor: I should actually find that extraordinarily difficult, Madam Deputy Speaker, because I rose to my feet with no particular intention of speaking to the amendments. My remarks are in almost terminal decline, so I thank the House for listening to me with such warmth and I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for rebuking me with such courtesy.

Mr. Sanders: I hope to say in five minutes what the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) said in 28. I hope effectively to scrutinise the provisions rather than to "excrutinise" them.

Amendment No. 36 is relatively simple. Such a wide discussion of such a straightforward amendment is a disrespect to this place. Amendments Nos. 37 to 41 are clarifications.

Amendment No. 42 is the only provision that one might question. I do not fully understand why it was necessary to alter the wording and I hope that the Minister can clarify that point.

We could have dealt with the other amendments in two minutes.

Mr. Greg Knight: Conservative Members will take no lessons from the Liberal Democrats on what is disrespectful to this place when the majority of their party were notable by their absence from our debates on Report. They deigned to appear only when the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) moved a new clause on Monday evening. He should look to his own party if he is concerned about disrespect to the Chamber.

Mr. Cash: In view of the somewhat surprising and intemperate remarks of the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders), my right hon. Friend may remember that one morning in Committee, at only 10.30, I had to ask a question about the fact that the hon. Gentleman was fast asleep—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind hon. Members that we are discussing specific amendments.

Mr. Knight: I do not complain when the hon. Member for Torbay is asleep—that may be the time when he makes the most sense.

I was a little hard on the Minister in an earlier intervention. In general, she has handled the Bill well, but her brevity on this group of amendments was unfortunate and has given rise to concern from Conservative Members. So I hope that when she replies to the debate she will answer fully the concerns that we have expressed.

I do not follow my hon. Friend's concern about the words "binding contract", but I am concerned about amendment No. 38, which uses the words

"execution of a relevant conveyance to the company",

for the reasons that I gave in an earlier intervention. What does that phrase mean? When is the relevant conveyance actually executed? In the normal meaning of that phrase, the conveyance is executed when it is signed by the parties to it, but as lawyers will know, the conveyance itself may be held back until a later date before it is deemed to become effective. So I hope that the Minister can assure the House that she is confident that that phraseology will not lead to numerous court cases in future, with people questioning precisely what it means.

Mr. John Taylor: I believe that my right hon. Friend still holds a current certificate to practise as a solicitor. I should tell the House that I went straight many years ago and have given up practising the law, so I may be a bit out of date. Would he care to tell me whether it is still necessary, under English land law, for a conveyancing deed to be signed, sealed and delivered?

Mr. Knight: My hon. Friend is right to say that I am a practising lawyer. I still hold a practising certificate, but this area of law is not my speciality, so I hesitate to give advice to the House that may be incorrect. However, I am sufficiently concerned to raise this issue with the Minister. A better form of words could be found, and I hope that she will respond to that point.

Ms Keeble: On Monday evening, one of your colleagues, Madam Deputy Speaker, said that the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) had got on to a loop line. This time he has got on to a circle line and gone around it several times, and the hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) was on it with him for a short time, until he seemed to leap off in mid-flow. I say that because these are technical amendments, which deal with a change to the 1993 Act in relation to the valuation date. I hope to go through all the details.

Mr. Cash: I wish to indicate the sort of concerns that we have by referring to the famous story of Catherine the

Great writing to Voltaire. Voltaire wrote a clever constitution—very complicated stuff—and she wrote to him saying, "Monsieur Voltaire, you write exquisitely"—indeed, this Bill is written exquisitely—"but I have to write upon the human skin, which is mighty ticklish."

Ms Keeble: Well, I think that we just went around the circle line again, without making much progress, and the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) made some very fair points about that.

These technical amendments are purely designed to ensure that the Bill operates as intended. As I said, they are consequential to the change in the valuation date. I shall deal with the most serious point first. Amendment No. 42 will require the RTE company to notify the landlord of any such agreements entered into before the exchange of contracts, so it relates to the change in the valuation date. I hope that deals with that.

Apart from reading out different parts of the Bill at great length, the hon. Member for Stone asked what a participating member was and read out various explanations of that term. Of course, it is particularly important to ensure that the landlord knows how many participants there are. That is part of the intention behind many of these amendments, and he will see that that is exactly the case if he looks through them.

The nub of the hon. Gentleman's concern—he made exactly the same point in Committee—goes to the heart of this group of amendments. His real argument is about the valuation date. He argued previously that the valuation date should be the date of the landlord's counter-notice, whereas something quite different is argued in these proposals. Our concern about his suggestion is that, in fact, many landlords have chosen to spin out proceedings as much possible with a view to persuading leaseholders to give up the enterprise altogether—a bit like the way in which the hon. Gentleman has spun out the proceedings in debating these amendments.

I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman hopes that the Government would give up these amendments completely, but we have no intention of doing so, because the Bill provides that the valuation date is fixed as the date of the initial notice, to ensure that the landlord will be encouraged to proceed with all speed and, as a consequence, that any movement in the market in the intervening period will not be material. All these amendments are consequential to that and are intended to produce more orderly arrangements. These purely technical amendments are consequent on something that we have already dealt with.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 37, in page 61, line 14, leave out from "if" to end of line 16 and insert—

'he has given a participation notice to the company within the period beginning with the date of the assignment and ending 28 days later (or, if earlier, on the execution of a relevant conveyance to the company).'.

No. 38, in page 61, line 18, leave out from "if" to end of line 19 and insert—

'they have given a participation notice to the company at any time (before the execution of a relevant conveyance to the company).'.

No. 39, in page 61, line 20, leave out second "a" and insert "the".

No. 40, in page 61, line 22, at end insert—

'(7A) For the purposes of this section a participation notice given to the company during the period—

(a) beginning with the date when the company gives a notice under section 13, and

(b) ending immediately before a binding contract is entered into in pursuance of the notice under section 13,

is of no effect unless a copy of the participation notice has been given during that period to the person who (in accordance with section 9) is the reversioner in respect of the premises.'.—*[Ms Keeble.]*

Schedule 8

ENFRANCHISEMENT BY COMPANY: AMENDMENTS

Amendment made: No. 41, in page 115, line 7, leave out from "tenants" to end of line 8 and insert—

', as" substitute "persons who are participating members of the RTE company immediately before a binding contract is entered into in pursuance of the initial notice, as", and

(b) for "participating tenants, once" substitute "those participating members, once".'.—*[Ms Keeble.]*

Clause 125

VALUATION DATE

Amendment made: No. 42, in page 63, line 31, at end insert—

'(2) In section 18(1) of the 1993 Act (duty to disclose existence of agreements affecting premises etc.), for "valuation date for the purposes of Schedule 6" substitute "time when a binding contract is entered into in pursuance of the initial notice".'.—*[Ms Keeble.]*

Clause 127

DISREGARD OF MARRIAGE VALUE IN CASE OF VERY LONG LEASES

Amendment made: No. 43, in page 64, line 4, leave out from first "of" to end of line 6 and insert—

'the lease held by any of those participating members exceeds eighty years, any increase in the value of the freehold or any intermediate leasehold interest in the specified premises which is attributable to his potential ability to have a new lease granted to him as mentioned in sub-paragraph (2)(a) is to be ignored.".'.—*[Ms Keeble.]*

Mr. Cash: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I wonder where amendment No. 43 came from?

Madam Deputy Speaker: It was debated on Monday.

Clause 131

PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVES

Ms Keeble: I beg to move amendment No. 44, in page 65, line 2, leave out "one year" and insert "two years".

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Government amendment No. 45.

Ms Keeble: These amendments will extend the period in which personal representatives can exercise their rights. Instead of the arguments that we heard in the previous debate, which neither helped to elucidate the law nor

[Ms Keeble]

proposed any changes, I hope that we shall hear some cogent arguments from Labour Members on these amendments, which were tabled in response to the very persuasive arguments made in Committee by my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac).

It might be helpful to begin with a little background to amendment No. 44, which relates to the right to new longer leases for flats. Under existing law, when leaseholders die, their personal representatives can be left in a difficult position. Their inheritance may consist of a lease that is too short to sell easily, and the freeholder may insist that they pay over the odds for an extended lease. The Bill provides that, when the deceased leaseholder would have qualified for the right to a new longer lease, that right will pass to the personal representatives, but that they will have to exercise that right within a year of the grant of probate or letters of administration. The amendment will extend that period to two years.

Arguments have been made previously for a longer extension, but it is worth noting that, after holding the lease for two years, the personal representatives will qualify for the right to a new longer lease in the normal way, and, for the information of the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash), clauses 129, 137 and 138 will apply. Personal representatives will no longer need to rely on the special rights granted to them.

Amendment No. 45 makes an equivalent change to clause 141, which pertains to the right to a lease extension and the right to enfranchise as it relates to personal representatives of leaseholders of a house.

I commend the amendments to the House. They will make a welcome addition to the rights of leaseholders and their personal representatives.

6.30 pm

Mr. Cash: I am extremely glad that the amendments have been tabled. I well remember that the matter was thoroughly considered in Committee, and the reasoning behind the amendments has been explained by the Minister. The hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) has made a useful contribution to these changes, and it would also be fair to say that the Committee as a whole greatly benefited from the suggestions that were made.

I think that I am right that, in Committee, the question was whether we should leave out "one year" and insert "five years". There was a good deal of discussion about that, and I find in the *Official Report* of Standing Committee D that I referred to the Committee making progress. I added:

> "I agree with the hon. Member for Cleethorpes and I also agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Leominster about making the period too long. Will the Minister consider the possible bar in the mechanics of the provision of information by the freeholder?"

I then made a point that I have made many times:

> "All hon. Members have an interest in ensuring that these proposals work . . . as we proceed, we think of ways to make the Bill more workable. That is in the interests of leaseholders and freeholders. I have no doubt that huge numbers of leaseholders will benefit from provisions of this sort in the interim period".

Indeed, the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) said:

> "The Minister has proposed a happy compromise, which we shall support on Report, but I wonder why it had not been thought through beforehand. If one can enfranchise after two years' residence, why make the period one year in the case of inheritance?"

He then congratulated the hon. Member for Cleethorpes on

> "prompting the Government in that direction".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 22 January 2002; c. 141.]

The hon. Member for Cleethorpes then withdrew her amendment, although she does not have to do so on this occasion, as a Government amendment has been tabled. That demonstrates the wonderful alchemy of the Government and their Back Benchers—they can turn one year into two years, and it turns into gold.

I strongly commend the Government amendment. Matters have been explained at length in Committee, and perhaps the hon. Member for Cleethorpes will want to make a few remarks. It is extraordinary how such a small amendment—changing "one year" to "two years"—might have a considerable effect in the circumstances. I therefore congratulate the hon. Member for Cleethorpes—and the Government on listening to what she had to say—and other members of the Committee who tried to make a small contribution at not too great a length.

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): With such an invitation, I cannot resist taking part in this debate. I welcome the Government amendment. The hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) is right that I focused on the issue a great deal in Committee, although I shall not go into it at such length today.

I started lobbying on the matter back in July 2000. That gives the hon. Member for Stone some idea of how long it has taken to get to this stage. In July 2000, I was given leave to introduce a Bill on leasehold reform under the ten-minute rule. At that time, I focused on inheritance problems. I found that far too many residents in my constituency were very badly affected by the inadequacies of the law on inheritance.

Many of the people concerned were elderly, and although they knew that they were in leasehold properties, the cost of enfranchising meant that they did not proceed with buying the freehold. Others did not even realise that their houses were leasehold properties. Sometimes, people who had grown up in a property found when their parents passed away that their parents had not owned the house, as most of us would assume if they had paid off a mortgage. Because their parents were tenants, those families could not buy the freehold. Some families therefore found out that they were likely to lose their family homes.

Mr. John Taylor: The hon. Lady vividly describes the kind of problems faced by some of her constituents. Does she agree that those problems are compounded by the absence from the Bill of a valuation formula demonstrating to the leaseholder what he must pay for the freehold?

Shona McIsaac: I thank the hon. Gentleman. We discussed that issue in Committee, and he may recall that my hon. Friend the Minister said that in the near future—I think that she referred to a period of six months—she would consider consultation on information that would have to be provided to the enfranchising leaseholder. I hope that the hon. Gentleman recalls that.

Mr. Taylor: I recall it but I am not holding my breath.

Shona McIsaac: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that.

In reference to family members, the Bill uses the dry wording of "personal representatives". However, we are talking about family homes and the emotions that families go through when somebody passes away. A period of one year in which grieving families could choose to enfranchise—I accept that one year was a significant move forward anyway, as that right did not exist previously—was far too short. Families must deal with their grief, and there would have to be discussion among family members on whether they wished to purchase the freehold of the deceased parent's property and then they would have to raise the money to do so. That one-year period was out of kilter with the other arrangements, and I welcome the introduction of consistency.

The change will make a phenomenal and significant difference to many residents in my constituency, particularly elderly people, who, because of the publicity that has been given to these debates and to the Bill, have realised that without such a change their homes might have been lost. I know that many of them will be reassured by the measure, and I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for tabling this Government amendment.

I realise that in Committee I suggested a period of five years, but that was an old trade union negotiating technique. I started at five years hoping that I would get two.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Lest it be thought that there is not all-party unanimity in our admiration for the work of the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) on this issue, I too pay tribute to her long-standing efforts to sort out the matter. During the passage of the Homelessness Act 2000, when I was successful in persuading the Government to change their mind on some key issues, the Committee awarded me the privilege of sending a postcard home. I suspect that she merits a similar award.

Although the hon. Lady did not refer to the point in detail, it is important that there is a degree of symmetry in a Bill. One of the amendment's merits—over and above the human ones that she mentioned—is that it provides the symmetry that was lacking in the Bill's earlier versions. She was right to push the issue for a number of reasons, so on behalf of the Liberal Democrats I express my delight at her success in persuading, with the support of colleagues on both sides of the House, the Government to table such a sensible amendment.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): My hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) referred to me earlier, so I shall explain why I spoke on this sensitive subject in Committee. As will be made repeatedly clear in our debates, there were two reasons for the original design of leaseholds. First, they were designed so that a leasehold house might be sold in a similar fashion to a freehold. The second reason was to enable the house to return to the freeholder after a short period—but more than 21 years.

It has been a tremendous achievement of the Committee and of the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) to have incorporated this two-year period in the Bill. It takes at least two years to proceed through the legal minefield, so the amendment is sensible and compassionate. It will become clear later that some leases were put together with the idea that they should return to the freeholder. However, a two-year period is very reasonable under the circumstances. I congratulate the hon. Lady.

The hon. Lady also said that there might be consultation in about six months, but that period may quickly disappear. I hope that the Minister will review the formula that my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) mentioned, although I noticed a little frown sneak across her face when he raised the issue. I look forward to reassurance from the Minister so that we can count down to the time when the formula will be reviewed.

6.45 pm

Ms Keeble: Members on both sides of the House have recognised the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) in securing this amendment. The whole House recognises her long track record on campaigning on the leasehold issues affecting her constituents. We shall later debate other provisions that she has played a large part in securing. She has performed a real service to her constituents. We all know—she has often told us—that many of them are elderly people who live in leasehold houses. The points that she made about personal representatives and the interests of family members are very profound and real.

I want to clarify a point about the provision of information on the valuation basis. I have a feeling that the hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) was talking about the formulaic assessment of the valuation that he has often mentioned, so I should clarify the remarks that I made in Committee. Under the Leasehold Reform Act 1967, we already have powers to prescribe the form and content of the landlord counter-notice, and we will consult on proposals to require information about the basis on which the landlord's counter-offer has been calculated. That will form part of our consultation on the secondary legislation that will implement the Bill. We have to consult on several issues in order to take the Bill forward. However, I note that the hon. Member for Solihull has not held his breath; he is no longer in his place.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 140

TENANCIES NOT AT LOW RENT

Mr. Cash: I beg to move amendment No. 88, in page 68, line 1, at end insert—

> '(a) after paragraph (a) insert—
>
> "(aa) the tenancy was granted for a term of years not exceeding 80 years".'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 62, in clause 142, page 68, line 37, at end insert—

> '(1A) Nothing in the omission from section 16 of the 1967 Act provided for by subsection (1)(a) above shall prejudice the operation of any provision of a private Act by which an interest in property

vested in a body for the benefit of the public may not be sold, leased, granted or otherwise disposed of otherwise than in accordance with that private Act.'.

Mr. Cash: Amendment No. 88 is in my name and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown), who has raised an important constituency issue that arises out of the Bill.

Amendment No. 62 was tabled by the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale). Although it is interesting, I am not sure how it connects with amendment No. 88. I shall be interested in the hon. Gentleman's explanation, not least because I am curious to learn what type of private Acts the amendment refers to. He may reveal interesting facts about how the private Acts that he has in mind will operate.

I return to the gravamen that led my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold to seek to amend the Bill. For a variety of reasons, it is a racing certainty that my hon. Friend will not be able to return to the House to deal with this issue, but I can do just that for him. His constituent Mr. Mason lives in Adlestrop in Moreton-in-Marsh, a place that I know well. As chairman of the Adlestrop residents' association, Mr. Mason has set out with great clarity his concerns about enfranchisement, which, as he says,

"are not currently addressed by the Bill."

The Minister may already have been in correspondence with Mr. Mason and, if she has, she will be thoroughly briefed on how to reply to the arguments of the Adlestrop residents' association, which I shall now set out. It is an interesting feature of the landscape of our parliamentary proceedings that we have an opportunity to focus on a problem that would otherwise be swept aside in ministerial correspondence.

Mr. Mason says in his letter to my hon. Friend:

"As you know, Adlestrop is a small village with some 70 adult inhabitants and is somewhat unusual in that it comprises a number of long leasehold properties. The freeholder of these properties is the Trustees of the Adlestrop Settlement. Apart from one freehold property, the remaining properties in the village are owned by the Adlestrop Trustees and are let on short term tenancies at an open market rent."

There are currently 18 long leasehold properties and an almost identical number of properties that are let on short-term tenancies. The letter continues:

"The 18 long leasehold properties fall into three different categories . . . There are properties where leases contain a Prince of Wales Clause and which qualify for enfranchisement under the 1993 Act."

In light of that, perhaps we should consider whether the consent of the Prince of Wales or the Duchy of Lancaster should be signified to the proposal. However, such a technical question would only tickle the fancy of legal advisers.

Mr. Mason then says:

"There are properties where leases were not at a low rent but which now qualify for enfranchisement as a result of the Housing Act 1996 . . . There are properties where leases are not at a low rent but which will not qualify for enfranchisement under the 1996 Act on account of the fact that the freehold of the property 'is owned together with adjoining land which is not occupied for residential purposes.' These properties would be enfranchiseable but for the exclusion of certain properties in rural areas contained in Section 1AA(3) Leasehold Reform Act 1967, which was of course introduced by the 1996 Act.

The pattern that was followed in Adlestrop is that long leases were granted on a number of properties in the early 1970s at a rent which was not a low rent. Subsequently, during the period between the mid 1970s and the late 1980s, leases appear to have been granted with Prince of Wales Clauses."

Mr. Wiggin: Will my hon. Friend briefly explain what a Prince of Wales clause is?

Mr. Cash: The Minister may be able to help, because I am not sure. As I understand it, a Prince of Wales clause is a special provision in Acts to save the rights, properties, privileges and liabilities of the Prince of Wales. *[Interruption.]* Would the Minister be good enough to repeat what she has just said from a sedentary position? Obviously not, and in the absence of my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold, I am afraid that I can only take a stab at it. Perhaps we can elucidate such matters in due course.

The letter goes on to say:

"Subsequently, from 1990 onwards leases have been granted with a formula which ensures that the lease is not at a low rent. I can let you have copies of leases for each category . . . The leases were granted at terms in excess of 99 years and in most cases were for a term of 120 years or more.

In each case the properties were sold at a premium by the trustees. The only reason for the sale of the properties on long leases, rather than by way of the sale of the freehold, was to enable the freeholder to retain control over the development, character and amenity of the village. There is no prospect that the freeholder will wish to resume possession of any of the properties on expiry of the leases. In each case a substantial premium was paid on the grant of the lease which would have been broadly equivalent to the price on the sale of the freehold (reflecting the length of the lease). In layman's parlance, the properties were effectively sold. In most cases, the properties were in very bad repair or involved the sale of a building plot which was subsequently developed by the lessee. The lessees have therefore expended considerable sums on the properties.

The control of the development, character and amenity of the village can of course be met equally through an Estate Management Scheme. An Estate Management Scheme was introduced in 1998 in anticipation of the eventual enfranchisement of a number of properties within the village."

There are many estate management schemes for rural estates. It is by no means improbable that the problems faced by Adlestrop are also shared by others who live on estates that are owned by individual freeholders. It is surprising how many villages are in that situation and have properties that are let on the basis of similar arrangements which give rise to the problems that I have described. Unless the Minister has evidence to the contrary, I do not think that Adlestrop is an isolated case and, as my argument has a general application, I hope that I can help to elucidate some of the problems.

The residents' association continues:

"To date, only one property has been enfranchised. In that case enfranchisement took place by agreement between the parties outside the Act and prior to implementation of the Estate Management Scheme. The lack of enfranchisement reflects the fact that, where properties are enfranchiseable, lessees have been awaiting clarification of the marriage value issue"

which Mr. Mason hopes will be resolved by the Bill. The letter says:

"In other cases, properties are not enfranchiseable.

The problems of Adlestrop were the subject of the debate in the House of Lords prior to enactment of the 1996 Act which resulted in introduction of the rural exemption provision. I understand that this was intended to avoid enfranchisement of country properties which had been let for more than 21 years at a rent in excess of the

> low rent and where it was clearly anticipated that the freeholder may wish to regain possession of the property on the expiry of the lease. This is not a situation which is applicable to Adlestrop, but unfortunately the rural exemption extends to all leases over 35 years which are not at a low rent in designated rural areas."

So the problems that Adlestrop faces are applicable elsewhere.

The letter continues:

> "I understand that rural areas have been designated by the Secretary of State and which include Adlestrop.
>
> The end result so far as Adlestrop is concerned is that some properties are enfranchiseable whereas others are not."

Mr. Mason then says:

> "You will be aware that the nature of the properties does not justify such a distinction."

Shona McIsaac: I am interested in what the hon. Gentleman says. At the eighth sitting of the Committee, I introduced new clause 13, which dealt with rural exemption. The Minister responded by saying that there is some sympathy with the desire to create a level playing field, but that she would need to consult first. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman can convey that to the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown).

Mr. Cash: In a vicarious fashion, and given the charm of the hon. Lady's intervention, I am glad to endorse her comment. It is clear that there is a problem which the Minister may be prepared to address.

There is, however, a further difficulty in relation to Adlestrop:

> "in the case of some of the properties which are not at a low rent, the application of the test as to whether the freehold of the property 'is owned together with adjoining land which is not occupied for residential purposes' is not clear. Consequently, it is not clear whether such properties are or are not excluded under section 1AA(3). This reflects the nature of the village and its properties."

My hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold apparently met Mr. Mason and the then Minister with responsibility for such matters—the right hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr. Raynsford)—on 31 January 2001 to discuss the Adlestrop problem. Indeed, the Minister was also present at that meeting, so—unlike me—she is very familiar with the problem. It is in the nature of our affairs that we take a special interest in matters affecting our own constituencies. Had my hon. Friend been able to attend today's debate, I could have asked him exactly what went on at that meeting.

7 pm

According to Mr. Mason's letter, he suggested at that meeting

> "that a distinction should be drawn between properties which had been sold, albeit on long leases, and those which had been let on a long lease in anticipation that they may eventually revert to the freeholder."

Apparently, the right hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich was sympathetic to the problem, and concurred that it needed to be addressed; according to Mr. Mason,

> "He suggested that an amendment should be proposed to the Bill which was then under consideration in the House of Lords. He suggested that I"—

Mr. Mason—

> "liaise with the Leasehold Advisory Service concerning the drafting of an appropriate clause. Unfortunately, they have not been able to be of any assistance due to pressure of work. The Bill was . . . then lost as a result of the General Election and has subsequently been reintroduced."

Mr. Mason adds:

> "I would be surprised if there are a large number of properties in rural areas which have been let for a term in excess of 21 years, but which have not effectively been sold, and which therefore require the protection of the rural exemption, but it does appear . . . that there are at least some such properties which require protection. Presumably these may have been let at a rent which was not then a low rent in order that the leases of such properties should not be enfranchiseable. However, there are no such properties in Adlestrop.
>
> I suggest that the position of Adlestrop, and any other similar situations, can be met by a simple amendment to Section 1AA(3) of the Leasehold Reform Act 1967 by the addition of paragraph (d):
>
> '(d) The tenancy was granted for a term of years certain not exceeding 80 years'."

Mr. Mason then proposes further amendments. His letter continues:

> "The purpose of the amendment is to draw a distinction between those properties which have been sold off and those which have merely been let. Accordingly, properties which are let for a term in excess of 80 years would be outside the rural exemption, whilst those let for a shorter term would remain within the rural exemption."

Any infelicities in the amendments that we are considering would not alter the fact that a considerable problem exists, and it is surely not beyond the wit of parliamentary counsel to sort it out. Mr. Mason continues:

> "I would expect that any properties which are let with any reasonable prospect that they would revert to the freeholder would have been let for a term somewhat less than 80 years. I have suggested a term of 80 years in order to accord with the marriage value provision, although that is applicable to leases where the unexpired term is in excess of 80 years, whereas my suggested amendment refers—I think correctly—to the original term. If it was wished the length of term could instead be 90 years.
>
> Such an amendment would mean that all properties within Adlestrop would be enfranchiseable on the same terms. If such an amendment is not introduced there would be a continuing distinction between properties which are or are not enfranchiseable. Such a situation is clearly inappropriate in a small village such as Adlestrop.
>
> The amendment would not only address the present anomaly but would also do away with the current lack of clarity as to the status of certain properties in Adlestrop. However, it would not prejudice properties in rural areas which were let for less than 80 years and which would continue to be excluded by Section 1AA(3).
>
> There may be other similar situations to Adlestrop which would also be addressed by the amendment . . . I would hope that the Government would consider it appropriate to include such an amendment in the Bill."

In her letter of 13 February to my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold, the Minister said:

> "It is most unfortunate that the Leasehold Advisory Service has been unable to assist your constituent, as we're now in a position that it will not be possible to complete the procedure he would expect before supporting an amendment such as your constituent would like to be made to the Bill.
>
> We do not think that it would be right to amend the law to meet the particular concerns of one class of interested party without first consulting all interested parties. Therefore, it is not something that we could realistically resolve at this late stage in the Bill's proceedings."

We shall shortly consider an amendment—tabled by the hon. Member for Wimbledon—that relates to private Acts, but I should first point out that this important matter

[Mr. Cash]

can be resolved. I look to the Minister for an assurance that it will be resolved. It appears that the provision could take on the character of a hybrid provision, because it could affect certain persons in a manner different from other persons in that category. The Minister shakes her head and I am glad that she does—I simply thought on the spur of the moment that such a problem might exist. If no such problem exists, there is even less reason for not dealing with the matter by way of future assurances. The Minister shakes her head again—I find this process of mute exchange difficult to bear.

The Minister's letter concludes as follows:

> "I'm sorry I can't give a more positive response. If your constituents would like to come and talk through their concerns, they would be welcome."

I am glad to note that the Minister now nods her head.

Shona McIsaac: I have listened carefully to the concerns of the residents of Adlestrop, but does the hon. Gentleman consider the Adlestrop question or the Schleswig-Holstein question the more difficult?

Mr. Cash: I am pleased that the hon. Lady has asked such an incredibly perceptive question. In doing so, she has introduced a completely new dimension to the Schleswig-Holstein question, which establishes three categories of person: one who is dead, one who has forgotten, and one who has gone mad. However, it is not clear which category is relevant to this case. As I do not represent Cotswold, I do not know the details of this case, other than what is contained in Mr. Mason's extremely erudite letter on behalf of the Adlestrop residents' association. I am therefore unable to add anything to what my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold could have contributed himself.

Mr. Greg Knight: Is there not a danger that the current residents of Adlestrop will themselves be dead before the matter is resolved? As I understand it, a meeting with the Minister took place 14 months ago, in January 2001. How much more time must elapse before the consultation period is brought to an end?

Mr. Cash: I have great sympathy with what my right hon. Friend has just said. The Department is well aware of the issue, which has been discussed extensively for a long time. The Minister had to admit that, despite the sympathy expressed by the right hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich, the Leasehold Advisory Service was unable to deal with the issue. However, I consider the reasons given thoroughly unconvincing.

Ms Keeble: The original intention was that the Leasehold Advisory Service might advise leaseholders on their individual circumstances, not that it should advise on the drafting of an amendment.

Mr. Cash: That is no more convincing. The more the Minister comes to the Dispatch Box to answer my points—and the more she sits and shakes her head—the more concerned I become. I am determined to divide the House on this issue, because it is very strange.

Ms Keeble: If the hon. Gentleman had been so concerned, he could have met the constituents of the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) and talked through the matter with them. He would then have had a much better grasp of all the issues involved in this complex case.

Mr. Cash: I do not want to get into a slanging match with the Minister, but from the evidence that I have it is clear that the advisory service did a minimal job on this point. The Minister said that it was not for the advisory service to engage in drafting exercises, but this is not the most difficult undertaking. It is a matter of public interest that goes beyond Adlestrop, for the reasons that I have given.

Ms Keeble: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should read the correspondence in his possession carefully, to see how many people in Adlestrop can be identified as having expressed an interest in enfranchising. That would give him some indication of the scale of the issue.

Mr. Cash: The Minister implies that relatively few people are affected, but the issue is not a matter of special pleading in relation to Adlestrop. It may apply to a range of other people throughout the country. When I made that point earlier, the Minister nodded because she knows that the case raises questions on the rural exemption, which the hon. Member for Cleethorpes mentioned, and for many estates in country areas. Such situations could arise in many villages, so the Minister's response is not good enough. I do not wish to engage in a slanging match, but I am concerned that the hon. Lady is being obtuse. It would not be difficult to resolve the question. The hon. Lady has not replied to the debate yet, but I am not happy with the direction of her argument.

Mr. Greg Knight: Is an injustice any less of an injustice if it affects only a few people?

Mr. Cash: That is exactly my point. If the operation of the law in respect of a minority is defective, we have an opportunity to remedy the problem. I am increasingly concerned that the Minister has made a policy decision that the Government will not assist a relatively small number of people in Adlestrop with a problem that has arisen as a result of great complexity in the law. I do not doubt that it has cost the people in question considerable time and expense, but the problem has arisen because earlier legislation is defective. It is a matter of putting right something that is wrong.

The hon. Member for Wimbledon is about to speak to amendment No. 62, dealing with private legislation. I have great experience of those matters and I can tell the Minister that private Acts have been introduced over and over again to deal with special cases that give rise to considerable difficulties in practice. Anomalies exist, and this issue is an example on which the Government could help out. Where is their sense of social justice?

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): Does my hon. Friend agree that the letter from Mr. Mason states that the previous Minister—now the Minister for Local Government—accepted that the problem needed to be addressed? It appears that the Department's policy has changed, because the present Minister's predecessor—she shakes her head, but we have it in writing from Mr. Mason—agreed that the problem needed addressing.

Mr. Cash: I shall not pursue the argument any further.

7.15 pm

Mr. Wiggin: Following my unhelpful previous intervention, I am especially grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way again. Bearing in mind the lack of complexity of amendment No. 88, what does he imagine the Minister would have said to the constituents she offered to meet when they came to talk through their concerns? Would she have tried to persuade them that they did not want to enfranchise? What advantage would the constituents have gained from meeting the Minister on such a straightforward amendment?

Mr. Cash: That is a good question, and we have put it vicariously to the Minister, because she will have heard my hon. Friend's remarks. The mere fact that anomalies affect a limited number of rural areas is no reason—if the Government mean what they say about rural communities, social justice and playing fair with people—to resist the opportunity to remedy a defect in the law. The Bill is before the House and the amendment has been selected. Why will not the Government take the appropriate action? If they are not prepared to do so, we will divide the House on the question. I shall give the Minister the benefit of the doubt until she replies. She knows all about this matter, because she has already told us that she was at the meetings with the Minister for Local Government. I shall listen with great interest to her reply, but without prejudice to any comment I may wish to make on what the hon. Member for Wimbledon says on his mysterious and fascinating amendment.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): Amendment No. 62 stands in my name, but I can confirm that I shall not seek to divide the House on it. I wish to seek some assurances from the Minister in relation to a matter that affects my constituents in Wimbledon, but I do not wish to detract from my overall support for the Bill in any way. I was unfortunately not called to speak on Second Reading and could not serve in Committee because of my commitments on another Committee. That is why I am raising this issue on Report.

I am sure that the Minister will accept that I have been a champion of the Bill on behalf of many leaseholders in my constituency who wish to apply for the right to manage and, perhaps, eventually acquire freeholds. On behalf of Mrs. Robertson and the residents of Grosvenor Court, Langham Court and many other constituents, I strongly support the Bill

Amendment No. 62 is compatible with the Bill's overall objectives. However, every new rule requires exceptions in particular circumstances. In this case, those circumstances arise in relation to a particular category of leaseholders in my constituency—those who lease property on Wimbledon common.

To anticipate any possible interventions, I should say that I am not referring to the Wombles, because I have spent many happy hours with my young daughter looking for their houses so far without success.

There are properties on Wimbledon common that are leased and are subject to a private Act. Like my constituents, and indeed the mythical Wombles, my daughter and I have been able to enjoy many happy hours roaming freely on Wimbledon common because the land is protected by that private Act.

Members who are familiar with the flight path into Heathrow from the east will know that just before planes fly over the neighbouring borough of Richmond, disturbing the residents' sleeping patterns, they fly over a vast green space in south-west London which is Wimbledon common. It is green space because it has not been sold off for development, and that is because it has been protected since 1871 by the private Act.

The private Act is an Act of Parliament that safeguards private property for the public benefit. It allows the property to be leased, but the freehold is held inalienably under its provisions. The Act concerned is the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Act 1871. Like many other 19th-century statutes governing open spaces, the Act provides that the commons are to be maintained for the benefit of the public and, in consequence, prohibits the sale of any part of them. Hon. Members will appreciate that the prohibition on sale is intended as a guarantee against alienation of the land.

In anticipation of my speech, hon. Members have asked about the background to the Act. It goes back to when the railway came to Wimbledon and many people sought to move to the area, so there was a premium on the land. Earlier laws and rights going back to feudal times meant that local people could gather firewood and graze their cattle on Wimbledon common. New house owners, who were not themselves dependent on grazing cattle and collecting firewood, were nevertheless aware of those rights, and they came to Parliament and had the rights enshrined in the 1871 Act.

Mr. Cash: Does the hon. Gentleman know which railway it is?

Roger Casale: It is the railway line that goes through Wimbledon station.

Mr. Cash: Which one?

Roger Casale: It is the line that goes into London Waterloo. Before we get distracted—in Committee we heard long treatises about railway stations and embankments throughout the country—I want to emphasise the uniqueness of the provisions enshrined in the 1871 Act.

We in Wimbledon are proud of the tradition that led to the Act and grateful for the measures that have allowed people to enjoy the commons since that time. Clause 142 abolishes the current bar on a tenant who has been granted an extended lease on a property having a claim to the freehold. It so happens that there is a property on Wimbledon common that is held on an extended lease. It might therefore be argued that even though the 1871 Act provides that no part of the commons can be sold, clause 142 trumps that provision and entitles the leaseholder to claim the freehold. Such an outcome would be extremely unfortunate because it would mean that part of the commons would be alienated.

The amendment seeks to put the issue beyond doubt by providing explicitly that clause 142 does not allow the acquisition of the freehold of property held inalienably under a private Act such as the 1871 Act. As I said, I believe the amendment to be consistent with the Government's overall objectives. The consultation paper that preceded the Bill recognised the potential difficulty

[Roger Casale]

over property held inalienably for the public's benefit under such private Acts. It compared the position with that of properties held by the National Trust, noting in paragraph 92:

> "Both the Leasehold Reform Act 1967 and the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993 make specific exemptions from leasehold law for properties owned by the National Trust. It is not possible to enfranchise a house or a block of flats or to renew the lease of an individual flat where the property is on land which has been declared inalienable by the National Trust. These provisions are necessary to prevent the Trust losing control of properties which it holds for the nation under powers granted to it by Parliament".

The Government recognised that the position of other properties might not be entirely clear and stated in paragraph 94 of the consultation paper that they were

> "minded to apply the exemptions enjoyed by the National Trust to other properties held and protected under Acts of Parliament."

The paper indicated, however, that there might be difficulties concerning the ability to identify all properties that could or should be caught by such an exception. I recognise that difficulty and I have tried to counter it in the wording of the amendment.

I appreciate that the absence of provision in the Bill is consistent with the assumption that provisions in private Acts that prohibit the sale of property held for public benefit will continue to govern, making an amendment unnecessary. Whatever the explanation, I should be grateful for the Minister's reassurance that it is not the Bill's intention to override private Acts that prevent the sale of land held for the public benefit in circumstances such as those that exist on Wimbledon common.

In Wimbledon, where so many of us depend on the common for leisure and recreation, we do not want to start to undo the work that was started 150 years ago to protect the common for the enjoyment of the community.

Ms Keeble: The amendments deal with very specific circumstances involving individual Members' constituency interests. Amendment No. 88 would limit the rural exemption to cases in which the lease was originally granted for less than 80 years. The matter was raised by the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown), who is not here, and the amendment was inspired by the circumstances of Adlestrop.

I note that several Conservative Members have entered the Chamber and are making all kinds of remarks about the matter. I assure them that, unlike their spokesman, I have not only exchanged correspondence with the people concerned but had a meeting with them at which the issues were discussed in some detail. I told them that it would not be possible for the Government to amend the Bill to support their position. However, it may help if I go through some of the issues.

Mr. Cash: We all understand the constraints on the Commons Report stage of a Bill that was introduced in the Lords. Although obviously we hope that the amendment will be made, which is why we shall divide the House, the question is whether the Minister is prepared to give an assurance that the problem will be dealt with in future legislation if the Government are not minded to accept the amendment.

Ms Keeble: If the hon. Gentleman had considered the issue before coming here and simply reading out the letter that he had been given, he would understand exactly why it is not possible to deal with the matter in the Bill. That has nothing to do with how long people have known about the matter; it has to do with the circumstances of the individual case.

It is not clear from the discussions that my predecessor and I had with the hon. Member for Cotswold and a representative of the leaseholder whether the Adlestrop leaseholders are caught by the rural exemption, which, as the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) rightly says, is the point in question. The leaseholders were directed to the Leasehold Advisory Service, not to get an amendment drafted—that is not the role of the service—but to get advice on their existing rights and on whether they would be entitled to enfranchisement under existing legislation, let alone under the Bill. As I said, it is not clear whether they are caught by the rural exemption; that is a point on which they must seek legal advice. It would be irresponsible of any Government to introduce a provision whose effect was not fully understood, not only by us but by the people in question, who may not have not determined whether they are entitled to the franchise.

7.30 pm

We have no way of knowing the amendment's full effect or who would be affected by it. The provision would limit rural exemption in cases when the lease was originally granted for less than 80 years; the length of different leases provided at Adlestrop would have to be determined exactly. I do not know whether the hon. Member for Stone has that information in the letter that he was given, but I certainly have not seen it. It is not clear whether the people of Adlestrop want to enfranchise, nor whether there have been any discussions with the landlord. It is not clear how they are affected by different pieces of legislation and whether they are affected by rural exemptions. We are not willing to change a law with a national application to meet the concerns of certain people—and I do not believe that Members of Parliament would want us to do so—when we do not know how many people are affected; we do not know how many people in that settlement are involved and even whether they would be affected by the measure. There has not even been any consultation on the matter.

That said, as the hon. Member for Cotswold is aware, I recently received detailed correspondence from a representative of the Adlestrop leaseholders. Although he is not here, I can assure him that I will make sure that the matter is dealt with as helpfully and fully as possible. I shall give our view on whether those properties are exempt or not, which will involve getting a fair amount of information that so far has not been forthcoming.

Shona McIsaac: Much has been made in our debate about the clause on rural exemption. I have had a chance to look at the Minister's words in Committee, and I hope that she will reiterate her message tonight, so that people are clear where she and the Government stand. She told the Committee that the Government

> "have some sympathy for the suggestion that the rural exemption should be amended so that it is better targeted".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 24 January 2002; c. 212.]

She went on to say that interested parties should be consulted before that was done. If she will repeat that message clearly for the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash), he may be reassured and not divide the House so that we could get on and discuss forfeiture.

Ms Keeble: I am happy to repeat my previous assurances, although I do not believe that that will have any effect on the Opposition—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Stone may make rude remarks, but the Opposition are not even remotely familiar with the case that they have raised. They have not provided any evidence that they know how many properties in Adlestrop would be affected by the measure and how many leaseholders want to enfranchise. They have received a letter from one person, but that is all. They are not proposing to abolish rural exemption, but to deal with properties with a lease of less than 80 years. They do not even know how many properties would be affected.

Mr. Cash: The Minister is getting unnecessarily personal.

Ms Keeble: I said, "They".

Mr. Cash: All right. I simply note that there is a certain stroppiness in relation to Adlestrop.

We now have conclusive evidence in the form of the allegations that the Minister has just made, which I do not dispute. However, I have provided the best description that I can of the circumstances, with which I was furnished by my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown). The Minister has proved that there is a fourth category in the Schleswig-Holstein question—a Government who do not know the answer.

Ms Keeble: That is nonsense. I am not surprised that the hon. Member for Cotswold is not here. He has represented fairly his constituents' interests, but they have not been advanced in this evening's discussion. As I have said repeatedly, and as I told the representative of the Adlestrop leaseholders, we are prepared to look at further information. At our meeting with the representative and the hon. Member for Cotswold, there was not a lot of information available about the circumstances of all the properties in Adlestrop and the consequences of any change to the law for the settlement, let alone anywhere else.

I shall now deal with amendment No. 62. I welcome the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale) on the Bill and its importance to his constituents. The amendment would exempt all land held under local Acts of Parliament from the provisions of clause 142. As Members will know, clause 142 amends the Leasehold Reform Act 1967 to allow leaseholders who have extended their lease to buy their freehold or to benefit from security of tenure when that lease comes to an end. Currently, people who extend their leases under the 1967 Act are left in an unfavourable position. Once the extended lease begins, they lose the right to enfranchise for ever. Moreover, when the extended lease ends, they have no security of tenure and may face eviction from their home, which is unduly harsh. If a leaseholder can afford to pay a fair price for the leasehold of their home, they should be entitled to buy it. If instead they are prepared to pay the appropriate rent for the property after their lease comes to an end, they should be able to stay in their home as renting tenants.

The clause will amend section 16 of the 1967 Act accordingly. The new rights will apply to leases that have already been extended as well as those extended after the Bill has come into force. My hon. Friend said that the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators were concerned that land that they hold under a local Act will be adversely affected by the clause. We are sympathetic to those concerns, but clause 142 will not in fact have the effect that he suggested. As I said, it affects the position of leaseholders who have already taken advantage of the provisions of the 1967 Act to extend their leases. They will now be able to use the provisions of that Act to acquire the freehold, but clause 142 does not confer any additional rights on such leaseholders; if they were previously unable to acquire the freehold because the landlord was unable to dispose of it, the situation remains unchanged. We do not consider it appropriate to do anything that could take away any rights that tenants currently enjoy under the 1967 Act.

My hon. Friend mentioned the consultation paper that my Department issued in August 2000 which made reference to that particular problem. However, only the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators have identified any property that would be affected by the new provisions. As I said, we do not consider it appropriate to do anything that could take away any rights that tenants currently enjoy under the 1967 Act. If the Bill mentioned a local Act and made provision for it to be treated differently from anything similar, we would risk making the Bill a hybrid, which would obviously wreck it. We do not want to do that. My hon. Friend said that he supports the Bill in principle and is definitely not a wrecker.

On the basis of my response, I invite my hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Stone not to press their amendments.

Mr. Cash: I shall be brief because we have discussed the problem at length. I am glad that the Minister recognised that the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale) could lead to hybridity. There is another problem, as private Acts could also apply to land in Epping Forest, the New Forest and many other places.

We are not at all convinced by the arguments that the Minister advanced with regard to Adlestrop, and we intend to press the amendment to a Division.

Roger Casale: I wish to put it on record that I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for the assurances that she has given in respect of the matter that I raised.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 113, Noes 325.

Division No. 194] **[7.39 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Collins, Tim

Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Gibb, Nick
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hoban, Mark
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Paterson, Owen
Prisk, Mark
Randall, John
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Wilshire and
Mr. Charles Hendry.

NOES

Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Barrett, John
Barron, Kevin
Beard, Nigel
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry
(B'ham Hodge H)
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian

Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead. Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Dan Norris.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 141

PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVES

Amendment made: No. 45, in page 68, line 27, leave out "one year" and insert "two years".—*[Ms Keeble.]*

Clause 150

CONSULTATION ABOUT SERVICE CHARGES

Amendment made: No. 60, in page 71, line 25, leave out Clause 150.—*[Ms Keeble.]*

Clause 151

STATEMENTS OF ACCOUNT

Ms Keeble: I beg to move amendment No. 46, in page 73, line 40, at end insert—

> 'required to be supplied under this section.'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Government amendments Nos. 47, 49, 51 and 59.

Ms Keeble: This is a minor consequential amendment made in light of new clause 11, which provides for leaseholders to be sent a summary of their rights and obligations in relation to service charges whenever they are sent a service charge demand. New clause 11 also gives the Secretary of State power to prescribe the form and content of such summaries. Clause 151 requires leaseholders to be sent a summary of their rights and obligations in relation to service charges, but these summaries are to be sent out with leaseholders' annual accounting statements, and the Secretary of State would also have power to prescribe their form and content. The amendment makes it clear that the power granted by clause 151 applies only to documents that landlords are required by the clause to supply.

Government amendments Nos. 47 and 51 could be termed the Daejan amendments. Last July, the case of Daejan Properties Ltd. *v.* London leasehold valuation tribunal was brought before the Court of Appeal. Subsequently, the court ruled that LVTs only have the jurisdiction to decide the reasonableness of disputed service charges that are still unpaid except in certain very limited circumstances. We consider that decision to be most unfortunate from the viewpoint of both leaseholders and landlords. As leaseholders become aware of its effect, they may be inclined to withhold service charges until they are certain that those charges are reasonable, because it may otherwise prove very difficult for them to launch any challenge. In turn, that will create problems for managers of leasehold property, who may find it increasingly difficult to obtain payments in advance and be reluctant to commence work without them.

We have already taken steps to ensure that under clause 151, LVTs will have a clear power to rule on service charges that have already been paid. However, last month we were informed that the London LVT had been refused leave to appeal against the Court of Appeal decision on the Daejan case. In light of that development, we decided to take another look at clause 151 to see whether there was any possibility, however remote, that it might be construed as giving LVTs the jurisdiction to rule only on unpaid service charges. We decided that it might be advisable to table a further amendment to put the matter beyond any possible doubt. Government amendment No. 47 would achieve that end.

The Bill also gives LVTs a new jurisdiction to rule on administration charges. Again, we consider it important to make it clear that LVTs are to have the jurisdiction to rule

[Ms Keeble]

on administration charges that have already been paid as well as those that are still outstanding. Government amendment No. 51 achieves that aim.

Government amendment No. 49 is a drafting amendment. Schedule 11 currently contains a definition of a fixed administration charge, but the only place where the term "fixed administration charge" is used in the Bill is in the definition of "variable administration charge". Therefore, the amendment replaces those definitions with a new definition of variable service charge, thus simplifying the provision. Government amendment No. 59 corrects an error in the drafting of schedule 14.

I commend the amendments to the House.

Mr. Cash: In the circumstances, I have no points to make on this group of amendments.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 153

LIABILITY TO PAY SERVICE CHARGES: JURISDICTION

Amendment made: No. 47, in page 76, line 31, at end insert—

'(1A) Subsection (1) applies whether or not any payment has been made.'.—*[Ms Keeble.]*

Clause 154

SERVICE CHARGE CONTRIBUTIONS TO BE HELD IN SEPARATE ACCOUNT

Amendment made: No. 48, in page 78, line 31, at end insert—

'(9A) Nothing in this section applies to the payee if the circumstances are such as are specified in regulations made by the Secretary of State.'.—*[Ms Keeble.]*

Schedule 11

ADMINISTRATION CHARGES

Amendment made: No. 49, in page 124, line 23, leave out from "Schedule" to end of line 28 and insert—

'"variable administration charge" means an administration charge payable by a tenant which is neither—

(a) specified in his lease, nor

(b) calculated in accordance with a formula specified in his lease.'.—*[Ms Keeble.]*

Ms Keeble: I beg to move amendment No. 50, in page 125, line 12, at end insert—

'*Notice in connection with demands for administration charges*

3A (1) A demand for the payment of an administration charge must be accompanied by a summary of the rights and obligations of tenants of dwellings in relation to administration charges.

(2) The appropriate national authority may make regulations prescribing requirements as to the form and content of such summaries of rights and obligations.

(3) A tenant may withhold payment of an administration charge which has been demanded from him if sub-paragraph (1) is not complied with in relation to the demand.

(4) Where a tenant withholds an administration charge under this paragraph, any provisions of the lease relating to non-payment or late payment of administration charges do not have effect in relation to the period for which he so withholds it.'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Government new clause 9—*Failure to pay small amount for short period.*

Government new clause 10—*Power to prescribe additional or different requirements.*

Government new clause 11—*Notice to accompany demands for service charges.*

New clause 3—*Abolition of forfeiture—*

'A right of re-entry or forfeiture under any proviso or stipulation in a lease of a dwelling for a breach of covenant or condition in the lease shall not be enforceable by action or otherwise.'.

New clause 6—*Balance of proceeds of forfeiture to be paid to leaseholder—*

'( ) Where a forfeiture action is successful, after deduction of all debts any balance shall be paid to the leaseholder.'.

New clause 8—*Restrictions on and relief against forfeiture of leases and underleases—*

'. In section 146 of the Law of Property Act 1925 (c. 20) (restriction on forfeiture) there is inserted—

(4A) Where the court has made an order for forfeiture pursuant to subsections (1) to (4) above, any balance remaining after the payment of the lessee's debts owed to the lessor shall be paid to the lessee".'.

New clause 19—*Leases exceeding 21 years—*

'.—(1) This section shall apply to any lease granted for a term of years certain exceeding 21 years, whether or not it is terminable before the end of the term by notice given by or to the tenant or by re-entry, forfeiture or otherwise and whether made before or after the coming into force of this section, where the rent reserved for the time being is less than £1,000 per annum.

(2) In this section a right of forfeiture shall mean a provision in a lease whereby the landlord under a lease has a right to re-enter the premises demised (or part thereof) upon the happening of specified events, whether the right to re-enter is expressed as a condition or as a proviso on breach of covenant or otherwise howsoever.

(3) No landlord may re-enter the premises demised (nor any part thereof) pursuant to a right of forfeiture, insofar as the exercise of the right of forfeiture is based on the non-payment of money.

(4) Where a tenant fails to pay monies payable under the terms of the lease, the person entitled to payment of the said monies shall be entitled to a first legal charge (herein referred to as a "landlord's charge") over the lease for the monies payable and for his reasonable costs and expenses of and in connection with the landlord's charge and the enforcement thereof, such costs and expenses to be payable on the indemnity basis.

(5) Subject to the next subsection, a landlord's charge shall have priority to all charges, underleases and other encumbrances estates easements estoppels and rights of whatever description created by or deriving title from or through the tenant, whether at law or in equity and whether created or existing before or after the coming into force of this Act (hereinafter referred to as "subsidiary interests").

(6) Notwithstanding the previous subsection, no local land charge within the meaning of the Local Land Charges Act 1975 shall be a subsidiary interest.

(7) Subject to the next subsection, a landlord's charge may be enforced in any manner in which a first legal charge may be enforced.

(8) The landlord's charge may only be enforced by sale with leave of the High Court or the County Court.

(9) On such a sale, the purchaser shall purchase free from all subsidiary interests.

(10) Where a landlord's charge has no reasonably realisable commercial value, the landlord may apply to the High Court or the County Court for an order terminating the lease, but such an order shall not release the tenant from any pre-existing obligation under the lease.

(11) Any person holding any subsidiary interest shall be entitled to have subrogated to him the landlord's charge on payment of the sums secured by the landlord's charge and shall be entitled to add his reasonable costs and expenses of and in connection the said exercise of the right of subrogation to the landlord's charge, such costs and expenses to be assessed on the indemnity basis.

(12) Where more than one person holding a subsidiary interest wishes to have subrogated to him the landlord's charge, the priority as between such persons shall be determined in accordance with the rules of equity.

(13) Where on a sale of the lease pursuant to subsection (8) hereof, there is a surplus after payment of all the monies secured by the landlord's charge, the distribution of the said surplus shall be made in accordance with the rules of equity.

(14) Rules of Court shall provide for service on the tenant and on persons holding subsidiary interests of any application made pursuant to subsection (8) hereof for leave to enforce the landlord's charge by sale and for the circumstances in which such service may be dispensed with.

(15) Notwithstanding the provisions in subsections (4) and (11) hereof permitting the adding of costs and expenses to the landlord's charge, the High Court and the County Court shall have the power to make in substitution for the said provisions some different order as to incidence, basis and amount of the costs and expenses of the holder of the landlord's charge and of the lessee and of any other person where such different order would be just.

(16) The figure for the annual rental specified in subsection (1) hereof may be varied from time to time by regulations made by the Secretary of State.

(17) Nothing herein shall affect the validity or effect of a forfeiture of a lease, whether by re-entry on or service of originating process seeking to re-enter the premises demised (or part thereof) or otherwise, effected before the coming into effect of this section.

(18) "Lease" in this section shall include underleases and "landlord" and "tenant" shall be construed accordingly.

(19) The existence or potential existence of a landlord's charge shall not prevent any person who is restricted or prohibited whether by statute or otherwise from lending money save on the security of a first legal charge from lending money on the security of a charge which, but for the existence or potential existence of the landlord's charge, would have been a first legal charge.'.

Amendment No. 26, in clause 163, page 84, line 14, leave out Clause 163.

Amendment No. 27, in clause 164, page 84, line 39, leave out Clause 164.

Amendment No. 28, in clause 165, page 85, line 43, leave out Clause 165.

Amendment No. 67, in page 86, line 1, after "(1)", insert—

'(a) for the words "exercise a right of re-entry or forfeiture" substitute "enforce a landlord's charge"; and

(b)'.

Amendment No. 64, in page 86, line 9, leave out—

'exercise a right of re-entry or forfeiture'

and insert "enforce a landlord's charge.".

Amendment No. 63, in page 86, line 27, leave out subsection (5).

Government amendments Nos. 61 and 58.

Ms Keeble: The Government amendments and new clauses deal with issues that hon. Members will have been anxious to speak about for a long time this evening. They all relate to forfeiture, which I know is a matter of great concern to hon. Members in all parts of the house and is one of the factors that has brought the whole leasehold tenure system into a certain amount of disrepute.

It might be helpful if I set out some of the background before moving on to the details of the proposals, which go a long way towards tightening up existing arrangements. I hope that they will reassure hon. Members that the Government have listened carefully to the concerns that have been expressed, especially in Committee and on Second Reading, and have worked hard to find a way of taking matters forward and providing further safeguards.

The Government accept the widespread concerns about the forfeiture system. On Second Reading, we heard about some distressing examples of leaseholders who had fallen foul of the system. Forfeiture is a draconian penalty and many people feel that it is unfair that a leaseholder can lose their home, possibly for the non-payment of a relatively modest debt, while the landlord obtains a large windfall profit.

8 pm

Some hon. Members who spoke to me about that during the discussions that took place seemed to be unaware that that is the current position and has been so for some time. The Bill includes several provisions that improve the situation, and the Government amendments and new clauses will further improve it. The Bill contains measures restricting freeholders' ability to use forfeiture and the amendments and new clauses will provide further safeguards for leaseholders. In effect, they mean that forfeiture will operate only as a sanction of last resort for leaseholders who wilfully refuse to pay money that they rightfully owe to the freeholder. We have given great thought to those measures since the Bill was debated on Second Reading and especially since it was considered in Committee. I shall give some of the background to the proposals and explain the extent to which they protect leaseholders from any continuing abuse by freeholders.

Although forfeiture has remained a sanction for freeholders, its draconian nature has meant that in practice the courts have been reluctant to grant it unless the leaseholder has failed to take advantage of opportunities to remedy matters. However, difficult cases arise, some of which have led to concerns being expressed by hon. Members on both sides of the House. Moreover, forfeiture has enabled landlords to practise a variety of abuses, including using it as a threat to extract money from vulnerable leaseholders. The Government put their mind to that problem and the amendments and new clauses deal with those issues.

In December 1999, following the Government's consultation paper on residential leasehold reform in 1998, we published a document entitled, "Leasehold Reform: the Way Forward", in which we announced that we intended to replace forfeiture with a fairer regime. Hon. Members—mostly Conservative Members—have accused us of reneging on those commitments, but that is not so. The document proposed that determination of facts would be separated from repossession proceedings; that penalties for late payment of ground rent and other administration charges would have to be reasonable; that leaseholders would have the right to challenge the reasonableness of any such charge before a leasehold

[Ms Keeble]

valuation tribunal; and that ground rent would not be recoverable unless demanded and there would be a period of grace before any additional charge could be made. The Bill will implement all—I repeat, all—those proposals.

We also proposed that where the landlord obtained possession, the leaseholder should be compensated for the loss of leasehold interest after deducting moneys owed to the landlord. That remains our long-term aim. However, although the concept may seem relatively simple, legally and practically it is a complex matter. When we drafted the Bill we considered the issue carefully, but reluctantly came to the conclusion that we could not resolve all the complexities without delaying the Bill's introduction. The Bill implements all the proposals in "Leasehold Reform: the Way Forward" except, owing to practical difficulties, the proposal on deducting moneys. As the Bill extends many other benefits to leaseholders, it is right to proceed with it.

The complexities surrounding the provision of the new regime cannot be properly resolved by a single new clause such as those tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) or the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash). Instead, we decided to focus our attention on the main abuses associated with forfeiture, including using it as a threat to extract payment and exploiting leaseholders' fear of challenging unreasonable charges or breaches of covenant that are unfounded. Hon. Members on both sides of the House cited examples of such cases that they have had to deal with in their constituencies.

Let me explain how the Bill will set about ending those abuses. The provisions are scattered throughout the Bill and we did not debate the relevant clauses in Committee, so we have not yet considered their impact. Clause 162 provides that forfeiture proceedings cannot be brought against a long leaseholder for non-payment of ground rent unless the landlord has issued a written demand and the rent has remained unpaid for more than 30 days. Regulations will prescribe the form and content of the demand and we intend that they will include a requirement clearly to spell out leaseholders' rights.

Clauses 163 and 164 prevent the commencement of forfeiture proceedings for breaches of covenant—including the issue of notices under section 146 of the Law of Property Act 1925, which are often phrased in threatening terms—unless a leasehold valuation tribunal or court has determined that a leaseholder is actually in breach of their lease and has been given a period to rectify the matter.

Clause 165 similarly prevents the commencement of proceedings for non-payment of service charges or administration charges unless a leasehold valuation tribunal or court has determined that the sums claimed are legally payable and reasonable.

Those are important measures that will dramatically reduce the scope of unscrupulous landlords in exploiting leaseholders' fears. They also deal with issues related to debt and with other breaches of covenant such as persistent antisocial behaviour or littering or dumping in communal areas. Much of the discussion of forfeiture has revolved around payment of debt, but it can also arise as a result of other breaches of covenant, so the regime must deal with those as well.

In effect, the Bill provides for a two-stage legal process—first, to go to the tribunal to establish whether there has been a breach of the terms of the lease and, secondly, to go to the courts for approval for forfeiture.

Permanent elimination of abuses of forfeiture would require its complete abolition, as proposed in new clause 3. In considering such a measure, we must accept that managers of leasehold properties need an effective means of redress against those who fail to comply with the terms of the lease. Unfortunately, some leaseholders refuse to pay their fair share of the cost of maintaining their block or estate, no matter how reasonable those charges may be, or carry out structurally damaging repairs—for example, demolishing internal load-bearing walls or taking similar actions that damage the property interests of other leaseholders and of the freeholder. We discussed earlier the importance of ensuring that there is proper financing to pay for the maintenance of property.

One of the advantages of the leasehold system is that it provides a means of enforcing certain rules on a group of individuals living in a community, whether it be in a block of flats or on a housing estate. Simply abolishing forfeiture in the manner proposed by the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) in new clause 3 would seriously undermine that system. Leasehold management companies, which are unlikely to have a substantial capital reserve, are particularly vulnerable if irresponsible leaseholders fail to pay their fair share. Other leaseholders may suffer the consequences of essential repairs not being carried out through lack of funds. Ordinary civil debt recovery or injunction proceedings are lengthy and not always effective against those who are determined to avoid their responsibilities. We would need to replace forfeiture with an alternative that provided an effective enforcement mechanism, but without the same scope for abuse.

Mr. Sanders: Can the Minister explain why the proposals on commonhold include a provision that prevents the right of forfeiture?

Ms Keeble: The answer is that commonhold and leasehold are two different types of tenure.

As I have said repeatedly during our consideration of the Bill, creating an alternative to forfeiture is not a simple matter. Indeed, the Law Commission has been wrestling with the problem for many years, and its work has now reached an advanced stage. It has been developing proposals to abolish forfeiture across the board. One of the major objections to forfeiture is that, in the rare cases in which a lease is forfeited, the leaseholder is left with nothing. That can be a draconian penalty. To avoid this, the Law Commission is considering the scope for providing that a long lease be assigned to a third party, and for the value of that lease to be shared out. That would remove the unfairness of the current system, in which all the value passes to the landlord. The commission is also considering the scope for imposing penalties when landlords act improperly.

Hon. Members have repeatedly expressed concern about the length of time the Law Commission has taken on this project, and have asked when we might expect to see the results. I understand that the commission plans to put forward revised proposals for consultation during late spring or early summer, with a view to preparing a draft

Bill during the 2002–03 Session. I very much hope that this will produce a fairer and workable solution in the longer term.

The hon. Member for Stone has tried to pre-empt the Law Commission's work with his new clause 19. I recognise some of the thinking behind his new clause from our consideration of possible alternatives to forfeiture, and he has no doubt borrowed from the Government's work. He has failed to achieve his goal, however, because his new clause has run into the same problems as our own work did, and into even greater ones. It leaves completely unresolved a number of practical and technical issues, which is why the Government cannot accept it.

I do not want to run through all our concerns on the new clause—that would take far too long, and I recognise that other hon. Members wish to speak—but I shall deal with just one, to demonstrate how unworkable it would be, and what chaos it would introduce into the system. Subsection (13) proposes that any surplus should be distributed in accordance with the rules of equity. Equity, as the hon. Gentleman must know, is not a set of rules but a broad legal principle, and it is far too vague to determine the basis of apportionment. Given the proven track record of many of those who abuse the forfeiture process at present, it is essential that there is no room for argument over such a fundamental issue. The hon. Gentleman completely fails to set out who would make the distribution. Should it be the landlord or the court? To be workable, any provision would have to spell out clear, unambiguous rules and procedures for all foreseeable circumstances, and specify how disputes were to be resolved.

A further weakness that the hon. Gentleman might not have realised is that the new clause applies only to forfeiture for debts—for failure to pay money. It would have no effect on the widespread abuses relating to use of forfeiture for other breaches of leases, such as the failure to obtain consent for buildings—an issue raised in Committee by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Crausby). Unlike the Government's new clause 9, which I will describe shortly, it does not prevent the use of forfeiture for small sums, so leaseholders could face the prospect of the forced sale of their homes for non-payment of small amounts if they did not respond to proceedings.

At this late stage in the Bill's progress, there is no scope for us to consider this matter further, or subsequently to introduce a revised new clause. In any case, we could not contemplate introducing such a major change to property law without full consultation with all interested parties. For example, in making any changes to property law, we would need to be satisfied that they would not affect the ability or willingness of lenders to provide mortgages.

We have discussed briefly the proposed new clause with the Council of Mortgage Lenders. Its initial response was that the proposal was far too hurried and would need detailed consideration and guidance. It was also concerned that the measure could lead to an escalation of costs, which would be added to the landlord's charge, thereby eroding mortgagees' security. That could lead to lenders being reluctant to lend a high proportion of the value on leasehold properties, which would clearly not be in the interests of current or prospective leaseholders.

I shall now move on to the Government's amendments. As I said in Committee, we have considered carefully the strength of feeling on this important issue, and the desire for further measures in the Bill to deliver better protection for leaseholders. We have proposed further safeguards for leaseholders, and I would like to explain the additional safeguards that these amendments would provide.

8.15 pm

To assist hon. Members in understanding the extent of the new safeguards that the existing provisions, and these new ones, would extend to leaseholders, officials have helpfully drawn up a flow chart of the steps that freeholders would need to follow before a leasehold property could be forfeit. These have been laid in the Library, and hon. Members may consult them at their leisure. They will see the extensive range of steps that a freeholder would have to follow. The flow chart illustrates this rather complex process, which is far removed from the simple procedure that it is sometimes thought to be. Almost all the safeguards in the flow chart arise from the Bill and the Government's amendments.

New clause 9 is intended to prevent the use of forfeiture for small amounts of money. Forfeiture proceedings would be prohibited unless the amount outstanding exceeded a prescribed sum or unless the amount, or any part of it, had been outstanding for more than a prescribed period. This is designed to deal with the problem of ground rent grazers, and of people losing their homes for the sake of small amounts of money, or being frightened by demands for the money and paying up.

In the Bill, the prescribed sum is set at £500. The level at which it would be introduced would be set by regulation, and we would consult on that, although our current thinking is that it should be set at about £350 in the first instance. That is the kind of sum that hon. Members have suggested in discussions. We would expect to set the prescribed period at about three years. That would make forfeiture unavailable for amounts of less than £350, unless they had been outstanding for more than three years.

Regulations made under the power would be subject to the affirmative procedure by virtue of amendment No. 58, so there would be an opportunity to examine the matter closely, and to debate it at some length. Administration charges and penalties for non-payment of an outstanding amount will not be taken into account in determining whether the prescribed sum has been exceeded. This would prevent landlords trying to evade the provision by adding further charges to push the total above the prescribed sum. I am sure that all hon. Members will see the logic of that.

New clause 10 deals with an abuse repeatedly mentioned by hon. Members in Committee. The proposal is intended to protect vulnerable leaseholders, such as those who suffer from a mental illness, who are unable to respond to the various warning notices required under existing legislation or other provisions of the Bill. We propose to require landlords to take reasonable additional or alternative steps when there is no response to demands or notices. We will consult on what steps would be appropriate, practicable and reasonable. This may include a duty to investigate the leaseholder's circumstances.

That power would not apply in relation to properties subject to a mortgage. That is because mortgagees are normally informed of forfeiture proceedings, and have a

[Ms Keeble]

right to seek relief. They invariably do so to protect their security. It is the leaseholders who do not have mortgages—for example, the elderly whose mortgages have been paid off—who would be protected by this measure. A number of hon. Members, including my hon. Friends the Members for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) and for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), identified older people in their constituencies who have been vulnerable to bullying and abuse by freeholders, and who are in particular need of protection. We would hope that that would be of help to some of them.

Regulations made under this power would also be subject to the affirmative procedure—amendment No. 58. There would be an opportunity closely to debate the provisions.

New clause 11 is intended to ensure that leaseholders are aware of their rights and obligations by providing a power to require certain information to be provided with service charge demands. It should help also to prevent forfeiture being used as a threat by unscrupulous landlords. The form and content of these notices would be prescribed. It would set out leaseholders' rights to challenge service charges that they consider to be unreasonable. The notices would have to set out also restrictions on forfeiture. In addition, they would point out the possible serious consequences of non-payment of service charges and the dangers of ignoring demands. They would suggest that leaseholders take advice. Amendment No. 50 provides a similar power in relation to demands for administration charges.

We believe that it will be important to improve awareness among leaseholders and landlords of their rights and obligations in this somewhat complex but important and sensitive area. It is therefore also our intention to produce a guide that will summarise in plain English, as hon. Members have repeatedly requested, all the relevant provisions concerning forfeiture proceedings.

Amendment No. 61 provides that new clauses 9 and 10 would be binding on the Crown. The other changes already apply to the Crown by virtue of clause 166.

I appreciate that I have taken quite a long time to set out the proposed measures. The new clauses and amendments have been carefully crafted by officials to meet some of the concerns that have been raised on both sides of the House on forfeiture. The additional measures, together with the existing provisions, should go a long way towards preventing the distressing cases that have been described, and which have been raised repeatedly by hon. Members. If hon. Members examine the flow chart of the steps that a freeholder would have to take, they will see clearly the safeguards that we have provided. They will see also that in practice forfeiture can be used only where leaseholders have wilfully and persistently defaulted on their obligations and have harmed other leaseholders or created the potential of harm. They should also ensure that landlords are not able to intimidate leaseholders with threats of the loss of their homes to secure payment of unreasonable charges.

The additional safeguards that we are providing show that the Government have listened carefully to the views of hon. Members, and have responded with a range of measures that will be of real benefit to the constituents whose interests and homes hon. Members rightly seek to protect, and for whom they have been vocal in making a case. They represent major improvements in the safeguards for leaseholders, and represent also some major improvements to the Bill. I urge Opposition Members to withdraw their amendments and to support the Government amendment.

Mr. Cash: We have heard an interesting justification for the Government's proposals as set out in their amendments and new clauses. I noticed that the Minister said that, reluctantly, it was not possible to deal with all the issues. However, it seems that the Government have been pushed into a situation of coming up with a half-way house. To some extent, we discussed the issue vaguely in Committee, but the Bill has been round the houses five times. I am surprised that the Minister is not able to come forward with something that deals with the problem more effectively.

The Government could have done better. Despite the Minister's remarks about new clause 19, it is my belief that that clause is better than the measure that the Government are proposing. The Minister mentioned that the Law Commission is at an advanced stage of coming up with comprehensive proposals.

A cause of great concern has been whether, for example, there would be any reasonable substitution for forfeiture where, for example, premises were being used for prostitution or for other illegal activities such as drug dealing. The issue is not whether we like forfeiture but whether it is appropriate in all the circumstances. It is our view that forfeiture is not appropriate in respect of non-payment of money or service charges.

The basic principle is that if a tenant breaches the terms of his or her lease, the landlord can forfeit the lease. The landlord can repossess the property and either sell it or rent it out to someone else. Where the tenant has a long lease at a low rent, the landlord ordinarily receives a considerable windfall. As I stated in *The Daily Telegraph* yesterday, the law is now more complicated than the simple equation of breach equals forfeiture. It is necessary to distinguish between two quite different regimes that apply. The first regime is where a tenant fails to honour some obligation to pay money. The second is where the tenant breaks some other non-pecuniary obligations under the lease.

With the second case, a landlord who wishes to forfeit must first serve what is colloquially called a 146 notice, under the Law of Property Act 1925. The notice must specify the breaches alleged and give the tenant a reasonable to time remedy the breaches insofar as they are remediable. Even if the tenant has not performed the remedies of the breaches within a reasonable time, he or she can still apply to the court for relief against forfeiture. My amendment is concerned only with non-payment of money and has no impact on the other forms of breaches. I shall explain why.

I turn to the first case, where the breach consists of non-payment of money. In this instance, equity has always treated the provision for forfeiture as being simply security for the payment of sums due. That means that if the tenant pays the moneys due, the court will grant relief from forfeiture so that the tenant does not lose the flat. A tenant can, within reason, even apply for relief from forfeiture after the landlord has repossessed the property.

In practice, it often happens that the tenant's mortgage company steps into the breach and pays off the arrears owing to the landlord. The reason is simple. If the landlord forfeits the lease, the mortgagee loses its security because the lease which is charged to the bank or building society ceases to exist. This is a highly effective way of obtaining payments of rent and service charges from tenants. It is right that there should be an effective way of obtaining payment of those moneys. In particular, in connection with service charges, every sum of money which one tenant escapes paying is money which other tenants will have to pay.

The issue is not whether there should be a strong means of enforcement of tenants' obligations. There should be. That may be a point of distinction between Opposition and Government. The issue is whether forfeiture is the right way to go about it. I mentioned that the amendment is not concerned with forfeiture for breach of non-pecuniary obligations. The reason is that there are circumstances in which it is right that a lease should be forfeited. Suppose the tenant uses his flat for drug dealing. In such a case, the landlord and other tenants must have a right to throw out the offending tenant.

In principle, the right to forfeit should exist in at least some cases; whether in all cases, as at present, might be doubted. It is likely that improvement can be made on the current law of forfeiture. We know that the Law Commission is considering that. The question is whether the Government have come forward with enough, despite the fact that they have been harried by us and by others, including Labour Back Benchers, into coming to a conclusion. They have been making a case—I think that it probably goes too far—for the abolition of forfeiture in all instances. The same applies to the Liberal Democrats. We are trying to strike a reasonable balance to ensure that there is a degree of proper remedy available for the non-payment of money and service charges.

We recognise that this is a complicated area. We will not go into the question of forfeiture other than for non-payment of money or service charges.

8.30 pm

The position is quite different in the case of non-payment. Here all the parties are interested in is money. The main objection to the current law is that it allows landlords to make large windfall gains, as it is insufficiently flexible. As the Minister said and as I pointed out in *The Daily Telegraph*, there may also be threats and the accumulation of expensive correspondence. The situation may be exploited, and people may be put at a disadvantage and at risk.

If a tenant falls into arrears with rent and service charge, the landlord can repossess the property. When the tenant is living in the property that requires a court order, but the court has no discretion in regard to whether to order possession, it can only delay eviction by a short time. Arrears equal eviction. We do not agree with that.

The consequences of forfeiture are eye-opening. We want to preserve a proper balance in the interests of the many millions of people who could well be affected. We know that more than 3 million people hold long leases at what is probably a low rent—a considerable number of people who vote for all parties.

Under forfeiture, the landlord recovers vacant possession of the property. He can then sell a new long lease on the flat at full market value. It makes no odds that the tenant may owe only a few thousand pounds, or even less; the landlord repossesses, and can then sell the flat for possibly hundreds of thousands of pounds. To add insult to injury, the landlord does not even need to give the tenant credit for the service charges for which the landlord was able to forfeit. Not only does the landlord collect the full capital value of the flat; he can carry on enforcing the arrears.

We think that that goes much too far. Yes, there must be an efficient way of enforcing ground rents and service charges, but there is no need to give landlords such massive windfall gains. We do not think that abolishing those gains would pose any human rights problem.

The Government's amendment does not deal with our complaints. It merely tampers with forfeiture in a way that we believe will lead to the worst of all possible worlds. It sounds well and good to say that forfeiture shall not be permitted for sums under £500. It might be said that obviously it should not be permitted for trivial sums. The amendment, however, removes any cost-effective remedy for the recovery of small sums due from tenants to landlords. The only remedy a landlord will have is to go to the small claims court to enforce his claim against the tenant. He will then have the bother of enforcement through the county court bailiffs, which is notoriously ineffective. Charging order proceedings would be wholly disproportionate, and the landlord will have no claim against the mortgagee.

This is what will happen in practice. Tenants will realise that they are effectively bullet-proof up to the sum of £500. Landlords will not bother to collect such sums. Mortgagees will feel under no obligation to pay such small arrears, because it will not affect their security. Once again, honourable tenants who pay their service charges in full will be subsidising dishonourable tenants who bilk their obligations. The Government's proposals may strike some as rational and tenant-friendly, but any more detailed consideration shows them to be gravely defective.

So what is the way forward? Our amendment picks up the equitable rule that landlords are entitled only to security for moneys owed to them. It substitutes a charge over the lease for non-payment of money for the right to forfeit. That would have two advantages. First, the landlord recovers only what is owed to him, receiving no windfall at the tenant's expense, and secondly the court has well established powers to allow debtors to pay off secured moneys without losing their homes.

New clause 19(1) limits the proposal to long leases at a low rent. This is where the problem lies. Where leases are short or granted for a market rent, it is only right that a landlord should be able to repossess for non-payment of rent. By contrast, it should make no difference whether the lease is residential, business or agricultural. If the lease has a capital value, forfeiture should give way to a system that recognises that capital value.

Subsection (2) defines what is meant by forfeiture. Subsection (3) abolishes forfeiture for non-payment of money. The new clause gives the landlord a charge over the lease, which extends to anyone owed money under the lease. That is designed to deal with the common situation in which service charges, for instance, are payable to a management company rather than a freeholder.

[Mr. Cash]

Subsection (5) is central to the workability of the proposal. At present, as I have explained, the tenant's mortgagee has an incentive to pay the arrears in order to avoid forfeiture. That will continue under these proposals.

Shona McIsaac: I think the hon. Gentleman's proposal is flawed. He keeps referring to mortgagees. Many people who are threatened with forfeiture have paid off their mortgages. They may be threatened with forfeiture because payment of a £5 annual ground rent is late. The hon. Gentleman has not addressed that issue of threat, which I think would be addressed by a de minimis level of £500.

Mr. Cash: In the circumstances, we shall simply have to disagree. I want to get on so that others can speak.

Up to now, underlessees have had either to pay up or to lose their leases. That will continue. Subsection (5) ties in with subsection (11), which provides for mortgagees and underlessees to come in and pay off the arrears. In turn, those subsidiary interest-holders will take over the landlord's charge from the landlord.

I have spoken at some length because this issue is important to the lives of many people throughout the country. Let me finally say that forfeiture for arrears of rent and service charge is a remedy whose time has passed. It is savage and unnecessary. The Government's proposals do not improve the workings of forfeiture; they worsen them. We propose something better.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): New clause 3 would abolish the forfeiture of leases. Amendments Nos. 26, 27 and 28 are identical to amendments I tabled in Committee, but agreed to withdraw in order to give the Government more time to consider them before Report. When I went to the Public Bill Office to re-table them, I found that the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) had pipped me at the post. New clauses 6 and 8, which relate to compensation, would fall if the Government accepted new clause 3 and amendments Nos. 26, 27 and 28.

I am surprised that this was not a big issue in the other place. It was hardly discussed, if indeed it was discussed at all. It has, however, been a big issue here, both in Committee and on Report. I am disappointed that, at 8.38 pm, we still have a huge batch of amendments and new clauses before us. I must criticise the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) for delaying the proceedings, just as he did on Monday. This should have been the major debate of the day, as it relates to an issue that is extremely important to people out there. I am pleased that the Minister and the Government have been listening. I thank the Minister for tabling the amendments, which will make it far more difficult to proceed along the route of forfeiture. Nevertheless, the threat of forfeiture is still there. I would have liked it abolished completely.

I hear what the hon. Member for Stone and the Minister say about the reasons other than financial reasons for having forfeiture on the statute book, but if someone is running a house of disrepute or a person in a block of flats is selling drugs, what has happened to the police? There are other ways of dealing with those problems—they may be dealt with through the courts and the judicial process. That is not an excuse for maintaining forfeiture.

We have had a lot of lobbying on the issue, which has been around a long time. The Minister mentioned the Law Commission. It has been examining the subject for more than 17 years. It knew that the Bill was coming to this place. Almost as soon as the Government got in, there was talk about the Bill. There was plenty of discussion on the draft Bill. Indeed, in December 2000, the Government published the results of the consultation on the draft Bill. Paragraph 12 of that document states:

> "We accept the need for effective sanctions against defaulters but we do not believe it is right that a landlord can gain a windfall profit by obtaining absolute possession at the expense of the leaseholder. Instead we propose that where the landlord obtains possession the leaseholder should be compensated for the loss of his interest after deducting moneys owed to the landlord."

I do not believe that anyone in the House tonight and in the other place could argue that it is natural justice if a person pays off a mortgage for a flat in Camden worth £350,000—I cited the case in Committee—the landlord goes along the route of forfeiture, wins the case and the leaseholder of the flat loses the entire amount of £350,000. Can anyone in this place or in the other place claim that that is natural justice?

I will not push my new clauses in relation to forfeiture because I think that we will come back to that issue. Indeed, the Minister has promised to come back to it. I ask her how long it will be before the Law Commission comes up with the lengthy proceedings that it has debated for more than 17 years. Can she assure us that we will get a Bill very soon on that subject? It is a crucial matter.

I am prepared to let that ride until the relevant Bill is introduced, but I am not prepared to accept that forfeiture should remain on the statute book and that a person can lose such vast sums of money as the sum that I have just mentioned. I am afraid that I am minded to press the case for compensation, because that is natural justice.

I cannot believe that this is as complicated as the Minister said it was. It seems such a simple issue. If a person has gained a large sum of money, highway men should not rob them of it. If the judicial system cannot get its act together within a few weeks or even a few months and sort that one out, people should be compensated.

I am aware of the time. I had a lot more to say but I shall finish on the following point. I am grateful to the Government for introducing the Bill, which has made huge strides. It is a good Bill and on the whole I am very supportive of it; but it could have been a Rolls-Royce Bill if many of the issues that have been around for a long time had been addressed properly. Abolition of forfeiture is one of them but, more important, compensation when that happens is critical.

Mr. Sanders: There is no doubt that the amendment improves the Bill but it still keeps forfeiture on the statute book. It is therefore necessary to press new clause 3.

As the Minister has admitted, the Government have recognised the unfairness of the use of forfeiture for the collection of debt, because in the case of commonhold units there is a provision preventing a right to forfeiture. The issue for leaseholders is that, where forfeiture of a long lease occurs, particularly for the non-payment of ground rent or service charges, the landlord will obtain benefit that is wholly disproportionate to the breach. Its existence enables landlords to practise a wide variety of abuses. It encourages unreasonable charges, because landlords know that they have the final sanction in order to secure them.

Leaseholders have felt reluctant to challenge unreasonable charges for fear of losing their homes, and because it is the lessee who has to pay the costs of obtaining relief against forfeiture.

8.45 pm

Strict time limits are imposed, and these can often be missed. The fact is, good landlords do not need forfeiture, as owed moneys can be reclaimed through normal debt recovery procedures. The fact that forfeiture exists goes against natural justice. It appears archaic in the modern legal context, which is supposed to seek a fairer balance of the rights of individuals at law, and it helps to perpetuate the discredited reputation of leasehold tenure—one of the factors behind the Bill.

A lease can be drafted so that service charges are described as being

> "by way of further rent."

That means that freeholders can issue legal proceedings without the necessity of having the service charge dispute resolved.

Forfeiture is a one way street, heading in the landlord's direction. If a tenant refuses to pay ground rent because, for example, a roof is faulty, he can be faced with losing his home. If the home is lost, the "homeless" leaseholder is not compensated for his loss, following the sale of "his" property.

The Government will say that forfeiture is used only rarely, as the Minister noted earlier. It could therefore be argued that it is unnecessary to keep it on the statute book at all. A Conservative Member said, in Standing Committee, that forfeiture was akin to state-sanctioned theft. That summed the matter up.

Forfeiture is not appropriate in modern property management. For long leases, it could be abolished straight away, as the law provides other mechanisms for recouping moneys owed. The threat of losing one's home is out of proportion to the scale of debt, and causes a vast amount of distress. It is a punishment that far outweighs the crime.

Liberal Democrat Members are not able to support the Government amendments, even though they are an improvement, as they do not address the principle. That principle is forfeiture, and it must go.

Mr. David Lepper (Brighton, Pavilion): I welcome the Government amendments, which go some way towards removing the central abuse involved in forfeiture. That abuse was not necessarily the loss of a home, which happens relatively rarely, as has been acknowledged. The main abuse of forfeiture has been the fear factor, which has threatened tenants and leaseholders for so many years. Indeed, it would be hard to pick an aspect of leasehold that more clearly represents the feudal relationship that exists between freeholder and leaseholder.

I am pleased that the Government have introduced proposals that will go at least some way to removing the freeholder's right to use the blunt instrument of forfeiture. The term "blunt instrument" was used by Peter Haler, the chief executive of LEASE, in a letter to me picking up some comments of mine on Second Reading. He wrote:

> "Whilst it is quite correct that relatively few cases of forfeiture are enforced by the courts, the present archaic law provides opportunities for mischief by some landlords, and this is a major cause of concern for us."

He added:

> "what we find reprehensible is the use of the forfeiture procedure as a blunt instrument to harass leaseholders."

The Government have recognised that. However, the Labour Opposition before the 1997 election carried out extensive consultation about leasehold reform and the introduction of commonhold. I am not sure that the Law Commission has been considering the matter for 17 years, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) said, but an answer from my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department on 11 March suggested that it had brought forward a draft Bill on the matter in 1994.

Reform of the leasehold laws has been discussed for many years. I therefore find it hard to understand why, with only 10 minutes or so to go before the last stage of voting on the Bill, insufficient thought has been given to including in it provisions for the abolition of forfeiture, and for compensation.

I am one of the vice-chairs of the all-party group on commonhold and leasehold reform. In our submission to the Government at the earlier stage of consultation on the draft Bill, we welcomed their desire to curb abuses of forfeiture. We went on to say, as a cross-party group, that forfeiture should be abolished. Such debts should be handled primarily through the small claims courts and ultimately it should be possible to force a sale of property to pay a debt. However, the balance of funds after settlement of the debt should revert to the leaseholder.

I am realistic enough to see that there is no hope of the new clause to abolish forfeiture succeeding this evening, but I hoped that the Government would accept the principle of compensation. I note what my hon. Friend the Minister says about intending to deal with compensation at a later date, which takes me back to my earlier points about the time scale. For those reasons, I will be supporting my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East this evening.

Ms Keeble: We have had an important discussion this evening on an issue of major concern to hon. Members on both sides of the House. I share the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon); our earlier discussions about some small, technical amendments have meant that the amount of time available for debating this matter has been curtailed. It is a matter of great importance, because it is a principle and because of the serious practical consequences arising from measures in the Bill.

We have listened carefully and sought to strike a fair balance. We all recognise the need to protect vulnerable leaseholders from oppressive behaviour by unscrupulous landlords and from threats and bullying. However, there is also a need to protect responsible landlords and other leaseholders and to make sure, at this late stage, that there are proper orderly arrangements in place for people's homes, and that includes financial arrangements.

[Ms Keeble]

The hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) was muddled in his thinking. He has recognised throughout the Bill's proceedings that the ultimate sanction is the termination of the lease, which is a factor in leasehold arrangements. However, he has not carried through the logic of his argument, for purely party political reasons, I suspect, and not because he is thinking carefully about the best arrangements for leaseholders. New clause 19 does not provide an orderly alternative for sanctions for non-payment of the lease. Given that the hon. Gentleman is presumably trying to present it as a credible alternative, I am astonished that he has not even attempted to discuss his proposal with the Council of Mortgage Lenders.

I recognise the consistent concerns expressed on this issue by hon. Members, including in particular my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East and the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders). They have raised these concerns on Second Reading and in Committee, and have pressed the issue in various discussions. The Law Commission is due to come back in the spring or summer of this year and produce a draft Bill in time for the 2002–03 Session. I realise that it has been a long time in coming, but the Law Commission has got a long way down the road and is very near to concluding its work.

I point out to the hon. Member for Torbay and to my hon. Friends the Members for Bolton, South-East and for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper) that I clearly stated the Government's intention and the principles set out by my Department on the removal of forfeiture and a fairer regime for leaseholders. However, it was not possible—especially at the stage when the measure came to this place—to set up a system that would replace the current regime. We have listened—

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Cash: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Keeble: We have all been extremely tolerant of the hon. Gentleman, but I intend to close my remarks—

Mr. Cash: The Minister is being patronising.

Ms Keeble: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman is being patronised for the first time in his life.

I shall give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones).

Lynne Jones: I thank my hon. Friend as I have not yet had an opportunity to intervene.

Is my hon. Friend actually saying that the Government—with all the resources that they have at their disposal—intend to put the matter off for a future legislative opportunity that may well not occur? We know about the pressure on the legislative programme, so surely now is the time to deal with these matters.

Ms Keeble: The entire debate has turned on those points. We have listened carefully. We have taken on board the points that were made. My hon. Friend herself referred not to the ending of forfeiture but to some of the safeguards that have been set up because it was not possible to come up with a workable system within the time constraints. We have come forward—

Mr. Cash: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Keeble: No, I do not intend to give way. I have made it clear that I do not intend to give way. We have spent a large amount of time listening to the hon. Gentleman during the two days of debate on Report.

We have drawn up the most stringent safeguards and protections consistent with orderly arrangements for people's homes. We also have to consider carefully the financial arrangements for people's homes. That is why—even at a late stage—I asked officials to discuss the proposals made by the hon. Member for Stone with the Council of Mortgage Lenders. We take seriously the need to protect and safeguard people's homes.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion rightly raised concerns not only about the impact of forfeiture but about the threat to vulnerable leaseholders, especially the elderly. Those issues are dealt with by our amendments. A comprehensive range of measures will oblige freeholders to go through a two-stage legal process before they can even begin to consider forfeiture. A variety of safeguards will be provided to ensure that leaseholders are thoroughly informed of their rights and have the opportunity to deal with all the issues. There is a de minimis level so that people do not lose their homes over a small amount of money. We have provided for further safeguards and protection through secondary legislation so that hon. Members can be consulted and can debate the issues.

Together, those measures will provide a real charter to safeguard leaseholders. Although we have not been able to set up the compensation arrangements that we discussed on many occasions, the Government have produced some workable proposals and amendments to safeguard leaseholders and to ensure that there are proper sanctions for non-payment, consistent with good property management. Those measures will also ensure that the cases raised by hon. Members on Second Reading and in Committee are a thing of the past and that we do not hear of such things again. So I urge hon. Members to support the Government amendment, which will do a very real service for the millions of leaseholders throughout the country.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): In the light of the debate, I am prepared to allow the House to divide on new clause 3 and new clause 19 if that is desired.

Dr. Iddon: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I should like the House to divide on new clause 8.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) happy with new clause 8? I shall not allow Divisions on lots of new clauses.

Mr. Don Foster: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Perhaps you could explain to the House whether it would be possible to combine new clause 3 with new clause 8. I understand that that would not be possible, and we would therefore wish to press new clause 3 to a Division.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: In that case, the House will divide on new clause 3.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I ask you to reconsider your decision not to select new clause 8? We are dealing with two distinct issues, the first of which is the abolition of the forfeiture altogether and the other relates specifically to compensation. They involve two distinct principles, so I urge you to consider allowing Divisions on new clause 3 and new clause 8.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is for the occupant of the Chair to decide such matters, and I will so decide.

It being after Nine o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *pursuant to Orders [31 January and 11 March], put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that hour.*

New Clause 3

ABOLITION OF FORFEITURE

'A right of re-entry or forfeiture under any proviso or stipulation in a lease of a dwelling for a breach of covenant or condition in the lease shall not be enforceable by action or otherwise.'.—*[Mr. Sanders.]*

Brought up, and read the First and Second time.

Motion made, and Question put, That the clause be added to the Bill:—

The House divided: Ayes 48, Noes 278.

Division No. 195] **[9.2 pm**

AYES

Allan, Richard
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Carmichael, Alistair
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Heath, David
Holmes, Paul
Hopkins, Kelvin
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Keetch, Paul
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David
Lepper, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
McDonnell, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Moore, Michael
Price, Adam
Pugh, Dr John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sedgemore, Brian
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tyler, Paul
Wareing, Robert N
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Andrew Stunell and Sue Doughty.

NOES

Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Barron, Kevin
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Lazarowicz, Mark
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona

McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Dan Norris.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I understand that the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) wants to divide on new clause 19.

New Clause 19

Leases exceeding 21 years

'.—(1) This section shall apply to any lease granted for a term of years certain exceeding 21 years, whether or not it is terminable before the end of the term by notice given by or to the tenant or by re-entry, forfeiture or otherwise and whether made before or after the coming into force of this section, where the rent reserved for the time being is less than £1,000 per annum.

(2) In this section a right of forfeiture shall mean a provision in a lease whereby the landlord under a lease has a right to re-enter the premises demised (or part thereof) upon the happening of specified events, whether the right to re-enter is expressed as a condition or as a proviso on breach of covenant or otherwise howsoever.

(3) No landlord may re-enter the premises demised (nor any part thereof) pursuant to a right of forfeiture, insofar as the exercise of the right of forfeiture is based on the non-payment of money.

(4) Where a tenant fails to pay monies payable under the terms of the lease, the person entitled to payment of the said monies shall be entitled to a first legal charge (herein referred to as a "landlord's charge") over the lease for the monies payable and for his reasonable costs and expenses of and in connection with the landlord's charge and the enforcement thereof, such costs and expenses to be payable on the indemnity basis.

(5) Subject to the next subsection, a landlord's charge shall have priority to all charges, underleases and other encumbrances estates easements estoppels and rights of whatever description created by or deriving title from or through the tenant, whether at law or in equity and whether created or existing before or after the coming into force of this Act (hereinafter referred to as "subsidiary interests").

(6) Notwithstanding the previous subsection, no local land charge within the meaning of the Local Land Charges Act 1975 shall be a subsidiary interest.

(7) Subject to the next subsection, a landlord's charge may be enforced in any manner in which a first legal charge may be enforced.

(8) The landlord's charge may only be enforced by sale with leave of the High Court or the County Court.

(9) On such a sale, the purchaser shall purchase free from all subsidiary interests.

(10) Where a landlord's charge has no reasonably realisable commercial value, the landlord may apply to the High Court or the County Court for an order terminating the lease, but such an order shall not release the tenant from any pre-existing obligation under the lease.

(11) Any person holding any subsidiary interest shall be entitled to have subrogated to him the landlord's charge on payment of the sums secured by the landlord's charge and shall be entitled to add his reasonable costs and expenses of and in connection the said exercise of the right of subrogation to the landlord's charge, such costs and expenses to be assessed on the indemnity basis.

(12) Where more than one person holding a subsidiary interest wishes to have subrogated to him the landlord's charge, the priority as between such persons shall be determined in accordance with the rules of equity.

(13) Where on a sale of the lease pursuant to subsection (8) hereof, there is a surplus after payment of all the monies secured by the landlord's charge, the distribution of the said surplus shall be made in accordance with the rules of equity.

(14) Rules of Court shall provide for service on the tenant and on persons holding subsidiary interests of any application made pursuant to subsection (8) hereof for leave to enforce the landlord's charge by sale and for the circumstances in which such service may be dispensed with.

(15) Notwithstanding the provisions in subsections (4) and (11) hereof permitting the adding of costs and expenses to the landlord's charge, the High Court and the County Court shall have the power to make in substitution for the said provisions some different order as to incidence, basis and amount of the costs and expenses of the holder of the landlord's charge and of the lessee and of any other person where such different order would be just.

(16) The figure for the annual rental specified in subsection (1) hereof may be varied from time to time by regulations made by the Secretary of State.

(17) Nothing herein shall affect the validity or effect of a forfeiture of a lease, whether by re-entry on or service of originating process seeking to re-enter the premises demised (or part thereof) or otherwise, effected before the coming into effect of this section.

(18) "Lease" in this section shall include underleases and "landlord" and "tenant" shall be construed accordingly.

(19) The existence or potential existence of a landlord's charge shall not prevent any person who is restricted or prohibited whether by statute or otherwise from lending money save on the security of a first legal charge from lending money on the security of a charge which, but for the existence or potential existence of the landlord's charge, would have been a first legal charge.'.—*[Mr. Cash.]*

Brought up, and read the First and Second time.

Motion made, and Question put, That the clause be added to the Bill:—

The House divided: Ayes 151, Noes 286.

Division No. 196] **[9.14 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Malins, Humfrey
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Paterson, Owen
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Julian Brazier and
Mr. David Wilshire.

NOES

Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Barron, Kevin
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry
(B'ham Hodge H)
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady

Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Dan Norris.

Question accordingly negatived.

Remaining Government amendments agreed to.

New Clause 9

FAILURE TO PAY SMALL AMOUNT FOR SHORT PERIOD

'(1) A landlord under a long lease of a dwelling may not exercise a right of re-entry or forfeiture for failure by a tenant to pay an amount consisting of rent, service charges or administration charges (or a combination of them) ("the unpaid amount") unless the unpaid amount—

(a) exceeds the prescribed sum, or

(b) consists of or includes an amount which has been payable for more than a prescribed period.

(2) The sum prescribed under subsection (1)(a) must not exceed £500.

(3) If the unpaid amount includes a default charge, it is to be treated for the purposes of subsection (1)(a) as reduced by the amount of the charge; and for this purpose "default charge" means an administration charge payable in respect of the tenant's failure to pay any part of the unpaid amount.

(4) In this section "long lease of a dwelling" does not include—

(a) a tenancy to which Part 2 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954 (c. 56) (business tenancies) applies,

(b) a tenancy of an agricultural holding within the meaning of the Agricultural Holdings Act 1986 (c. 5) in relation to which that Act applies, or

(c) a farm business tenancy within the meaning of the Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995 (c. 8).

(5) In this section—

"administration charge" has the same meaning as in Part 1 of Schedule 11,

"dwelling" has the same meaning as in the 1985 Act,

"landlord" and "tenant" have the same meaning as in Chapter 1 of this Part,

"long lease" has the meaning given by sections 76 and 77 of this Act, except that a shared ownership lease is a long lease whatever the tenant's total share,

"prescribed" means prescribed by regulations made by the appropriate national authority, and

"service charge" has the meaning given by section 18(1) of the 1985 Act.'—*[Ms Keeble.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 10

POWER TO PRESCRIBE ADDITIONAL OR DIFFERENT REQUIREMENTS

'(1) The appropriate national authority may by regulations prescribe requirements which must be met before a right of re-entry or forfeiture may be exercised in relation to a breach of a covenant or condition in a long lease of an unmortgaged dwelling.

(2) The regulations may specify that the requirements are to be in addition to, or instead of, requirements imposed otherwise than by the regulations.

(3) In this section "long lease of a dwelling" does not include—

(a) a tenancy to which Part 2 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954 (c. 56) (business tenancies) applies,

(b) a tenancy of an agricultural holding within the meaning of the Agricultural Holdings Act 1986 (c. 5) in relation to which that Act applies, or

(c) a farm business tenancy within the meaning of the Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995 (c. 8).

(4) For the purposes of this section a dwelling is unmortgaged if it is not subject to a mortgage, charge or lien.

(5) In this section—

"dwelling" has the same meaning as in the 1985 Act, and

"long lease" has the meaning given by sections 76 and 77 of this Act, except that a shared ownership lease is a long lease whatever the tenant's total share.'.—*[Ms Keeble.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 11

NOTICE TO ACCOMPANY DEMANDS FOR SERVICE CHARGES

'After section 21A of the 1985 Act (inserted by section 151) insert—

"21B Notice to accompany demands for service charges

(1) A demand for the payment of a service charge must be accompanied by a summary of the rights and obligations of tenants of dwellings in relation to service charges.

(2) The Secretary of State may make regulations prescribing requirements as to the form and content of such summaries of rights and obligations.

(3) A tenant may withhold payment of a service charge which has been demanded from him if subsection (1) is not complied with in relation to the demand.

(4) Where a tenant withholds a service charge under this section, any provisions of the lease relating to non-payment or late payment of service charges do not have effect in relation to the period for which he so withholds it.

(5) Regulations under subsection (2) may make different provision for different purposes.

(6) Regulations under subsection (2) shall be made by statutory instrument which shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.".'.—*[Ms Keeble.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

Order for Third Reading read.—[Queen's Consent, on behalf of the Crown, and Prince of Wales's Consent, on behalf of the Duchy of Cornwall, signified.]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.—*[Mr. Spellar.]*

9.27 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Michael Wills): It is usual at this stage of progress of a Bill to thank those who have scrutinised it in Committee, and that is a convention that I am very happy to observe on this occasion. As the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) said before he began his marathon efforts on the first day of consideration on Monday, the content of the Bill has been considered in very great detail, both in this House and, because of the timing of the general election, twice on Second Reading and in Committee in the other place. Progress has been mostly good-natured, and important contributions have been made to improve what was already a good Bill.

It is, of course, disappointing that, despite having logic and reason on our side, it has not proved possible for us to persuade Opposition Members of the underlying wisdom of the 100 per cent. rule or the even-handedness of the Bill's approach to marriage value. Nevertheless, the Government have been open to constructive criticism and assistance from both sides, inside and outside Parliament, and the Bill has undoubtedly been improved by the efforts of Members in both Houses. I hope that Opposition Members and indeed my hon. Friends will feel able to agree that although the final product that we shall send back to the Lords may not be all that they wanted, it is still a very good Bill.

First, and perhaps most important, the Bill introduces two entirely new concepts into the law relating to land. The no-fault right to manage in part 2 will give leaseholders who wish to employ it a right to make arrangements for the management of their homes. They will not have to prove that their landlord is in default of any of his duties, neither will they have to buy out his or her interest. At a stroke, that right will address many of the problems faced by many leaseholders.

The other new concept is, of course, commonhold. We have been criticised for not calling a halt to new leasehold developments and imposing commonhold as the new exclusive standard. We know why that has been suggested and we are not without sympathy for that point of view, but we have explained at length why we cannot go as far as that. None the less, we believe that commonhold could speedily take its place in the market as a robust alternative to long leasehold and we firmly expect that, over time, as people gain confidence in the scheme, it will supplant leasehold without the need for the Government meddling in the market, with all the possible unintended consequences of that.

The detailed consideration of the proposals in both places has helped to develop a scheme that will be practical, easy to use and therefore popular. Part 2, having introduced the right to manage, goes on to liberalise the right of collective enfranchisement. More leaseholders in many more properties will be able to take advantage of enfranchisement.

Once the Bill receives Royal Assent, as we hope it will, there will be much work to do publicising the new schemes that it introduces. The Lord Chancellor's Department and the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions believe in the Bill. It has been in successive manifestos and, as an earnest of the Government's commitment, it was reintroduced at the earliest opportunity after the last election. Plans are already in hand for making the contents better known and the advantages to all those whom it could affect widely realised. We shall promote it through many channels.

If, regrettably, some still believe that the Bill falls short of perfection, we are convinced that most, including Members on both sides of each House, recognise it as a

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

[Mr. Michael Wills]

great step towards freeing leaseholders of the worries to which the current long leasehold system can give rise if its management is left in the wrong hands. This is a great step towards the ultimate goal, which I hope everyone in the House can support, of secure home ownership.

9.32 pm

Mr. Cash: I concur with the Minister in saying that the Bill is a step forward, and I am extremely glad to be able to say that we have played a constructive part in the proceedings. The Bill has been through the best part of six stages, and we have covered an enormous amount of ground. If there were one or two harsh words towards the end of the proceedings, we can put them behind us now. We are glad that the Bill will go on to the statute book, but we still have a number of reservations.

First, as the Minister has just said, we have doubts about the unanimity rule. As I said in a letter to *The Daily Telegraph* yesterday, that will render the Bill largely unworkable. In fact, it will mean that its application will be confined largely to new developments. Time will tell. It is astonishing and a great shame that the Government should have stuck doggedly to something as indefensible, to our minds, as the unanimity rule. In a large block of flats, it will be almost impossible to get agreement across the board.

I happen to know that many Labour Members share that view. They may not has been as vociferous in the subsequent proceedings on the Bill as in the heat and fury that we saw on Second Reading, but I appreciate that the power of the Whips is all-pervasive. The pungent whiff of the crack of the whip gave me the impression that Labour Members had even faltered a little on forfeiture as well. However, the arguments have been deployed, and it is important in the House that we deploy arguments as well as voting on them.

There are other matters that other hon. Members will want to address, and I do not propose to say any more except to thank those in the various Departments who helped to put the Bill together. I am grateful also for the advice that we received from the Law Society and distinguished members of the Chancery Bar. These are complicated matters, and the Bill is technical. Proceedings on it have been good natured, and it is a step forward. It may be a faltering step; there is no reason why a few more things could not have been sorted out but, as they have not, we should be content with the Bill's progress and look forward to a time when further improvements can be made: we shall be glad to support them if they are in line with our thinking.

9.35 pm

Dr. Iddon: It is a privilege to serve as a Member of Parliament and to contribute to proceedings on the Bill. I should like to place on record my thanks to both Ministers for listening to those of us who fought a few battles during the passage of the Bill.

I became interested in the Bill because of my concern about nominated insurance. Many people in my constituency wrote to me, upset at being forced by the Compton Group to get insurance with Axa Insurance. Provisions on the issue were not included in the draft Bill that was originally submitted to the House. The Ministers listened to us and we now have a Bill that, when enacted, will make nominated insurance companies illegal. I thank both my hon. Friends for listening to us and bringing about that change.

A big chunk of the Bill deals with the introduction of commonhold and the right to manage. The 100 per cent. rule will be tested; I wish commonhold well, even with that rule. If it does not work, we can return to the subject. However, I hope that commonhold works with the 100 per cent. rule because as the Parliamentary Secretary has said more than once, it will simplify things tremendously.

Leasehold remains as a form of tenure, although I believe that the sun will set on it one day. We wanted a sunset clause on that in the Bill, but did not get one. Marriage value, a fairly recent concept, is still present, but I am sure that we will return to it. Forfeiture has been the big battle for me in recent weeks. I thank the Ministers for listening to us in our meetings with them.

Despite my mild opposition this evening, we have made much progress on forfeiture. It will be much more difficult for freeholders and landlords to take people down that route, and I am grateful for that. However, I urge my hon. Friends to look at the figure of £350, which is not a lot in London. Many people in London are subjected to forfeiture for sums that that figure would not catch.

Finally, I am sorry that we were not allowed to discuss compensation tonight. I do not blame the Chair, who obviously made the right decision. If we had gone into the Lobby, there would have been considerable support. I thank the Minister for listening to what we said about compensation. Finally, I urge her to submit a draft Bill to the House in the next Session. I look forward to its introduction, and hope that I can see it through the House during my time here.

9.38 pm

Mr. Sanders: The high hopes of many leaseholders have probably not been met by the Bill although, importantly, commonhold and the right to manage have both been established. In some respects, rights to enfranchise have been advanced. However, the Bill will be judged on what it omits, not what it includes.

The Campaign for the Abolition of Residential Leasehold wanted five things to be included in the Bill: the introduction of commonhold, which it got; the abolition of residential leasehold, which it did not get; the automatic right to transfer from leasehold to commonhold, which it did not get; the transfer of tenure at a fair price, which is not covered by the Bill; and special measures for people unable to transfer, which are not in the Bill. CARL therefore achieved only one of its five aims. Liberal Democrat Members did better with our aims. While we failed to achieve the abolition of marriage value, forfeiture and the 100 per cent. consent to commonhold, we got the right for leaseholders to choose their insurance and recognition of estate management schemes; two out of five is not bad.

Nevertheless, for tens of thousands of leaseholders, the prospect of enfranchisement is no closer. We wish commonhold well. We have said throughout proceedings on the Bill that we support the concept. We want it to succeed and we hope that it will. We also hope that we can return to some of the unfinished business of the Bill—

marriage value, forfeiture and, later, if our fears are realised, the 100 per cent. consent required for commonhold.

Our time in Committee was enjoyable. The proceedings were conducted mostly with good humour and in a non-partisan way, with one or two exceptions. I must state on the record that not once during the passage of the Bill did I fall asleep. Despite the best efforts of some hon. Members, I stayed awake at all times.

I thank the Public Bill Office for its help. That is a resource of the House that is not often mentioned, and the help provided by its staff in preparing amendments is fantastic.

We wish the Bill success. We want more people to take more control over their lives. However, we will need to return to some of the unfinished business, which has been around for more than 100 years.

9.40 pm

Mr. Lepper: I add my appreciation to that already expressed to my two Front-Bench colleagues, despite comments made earlier in the evening. The past couple of weeks have shown the extent to which Back Benchers in all parts of the House can still influence the course and the content of Government policy. Although we may not have influenced the Bill as much as some of us may have wished, it shows that Back Benchers can influence the outcome of debates on important policy issues.

I particularly welcome the right to manage, which the Bill introduces. In my postbag, bad management remains the single biggest leasehold issue that I deal with. I look forward to the draft Bill on forfeiture that was promised by both Ministers for 2003. I also look forward to the results of the consultation that I believe is taking place on an issue that is not part of the Bill: the regulation of managing agents. I thought that it should be part of the Bill, but at least the Government are consulting on it.

The right to manage is one thing, but the next step is to make sure that managing agents, whoever they are employed by, behave in a reasonable, responsible and trustworthy way. I recommend the voluntary scheme operating in the Brighton and Hove city area through the combined efforts of the city council, LEASE, the Brighton, Hove and District Leaseholders Association and the Association of Residential Managing Agents. That model could be adopted throughout the country.

Finally, I place on record two other votes of thanks. The first is to the Brighton, Hove and District Leaseholders Association, which during the passage of the Bill, particularly in Committee, kept many hon. Members better informed than they were before about leasehold. The second is to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, who for so many years kept leasehold alive as an important policy issue in my party and in the country at large.

9.43 pm

Mr. John Taylor: Before we all drown in self-congratulation, I have a lament that resonates back to Committee. I am old enough to have been a young, newly qualified solicitor in 1967, when the Leasehold Reform Act came in, which first enabled long leaseholders of houses to acquire their freehold reversions. I remember my wise late senior partner saying to me, "Aha! It's a good idea, but how are they going to work out the price?" He added, "The political community has once again funked the real issue, which is to tell people how much they can expect to pay." I grant that this is an arbitrary consideration, but I remind the House of the old adage, "It is not so important that the law be fair but that it be certain." Most people, including the constituents of the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac), cannot afford to take lawyers to the Lands Tribunal to argue about the price. They are entitled to a mechanism to work out what they should pay for their freeholds, so that they can know the price with some certainty and budget for it.

Here we are 35 years later and the political community has funked the issue yet again. We have failed our constituents in this regard. *[Interruption.]* It is not for me but for the Government to resign. People make a great mistake when they think that the market will work the matter out. There is no market and people cannot shop around as there is only one potential seller of the freehold and only one buyer. One cannot go somewhere else as one might do to buy a pair of shoes. There is no market mechanism and people are entitled to assistance from their legislature on establishing a price. We have failed them.

9.46 pm

Shona McIsaac: I was going to start my contribution by saying that the debate had at times been dry and technical, so I am grateful to the hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) for yet again livening up our proceedings. I echo what he said: there is not sufficient clarity on how much people have to pay to purchase the freehold of their homes. The introduction of a pricing formula would help people to budget for the future. Indeed, I know of far too many constituents who, on finding out the cost of purchasing their freehold, say "I can't afford it; I'll put it off for a few years, because it is bound to get cheaper." Of course, the same assumption applies to many other purchases: for example, people know that an older car is likely to be cheaper. Often, they do not realise that freehold price will continue to grow as long as they put off the decision.

We must get information to people and introduce some sort of price mechanism that is simple and easy to understand. After all, in spite of the dry and technical nature of some of our debates on the Bill, we are talking about people's homes—the most expensive purchase that most people will ever make. There are 2 million leasehold properties, with an estimated 3 million to 4 million residents. The issue is not esoteric, but affects every constituency in the country. That is why it was vital to introduce a Bill to reform leasehold.

One aspect of the language that has been used in our deliberations is that leaseholders have been called "tenants"—an expression that I have never liked. We are talking about people's homes. They pay mortgages, and as such, they regard themselves as home owners in censuses. Indeed, in any application form that they fill in, perhaps for a bank loan, they will say that they are home owners. We must acknowledge what we sometimes forget in our debates: the passion that people feel for their homes and for owning them.

Back in 2000, I was given leave to introduce a ten-minute Bill. I took the opportunity to make certain demands because, as I said at the time, I wanted to change the law to stop leaseholders being fleeced by

[Shona McIsaac]

unscrupulous landowners. I focused on families' rights in respect of purchasing their parents' homes after they had passed away, and the right to buy the freehold if the owners chose to extend the lease after it had expired. The Bill covers those matters. Indeed, the measure provides for more than I demanded then. For example, the provisions on insurance will give many people genuine protection in law from scams.

The provisions on forfeiture are welcome. In my area, ground rents are low—in some cases, less than £10—and people are threatened with all sorts of penalties if that sum is paid even one or two days late. Threats of forfeiture have been used, and I therefore hope that the de minimis level of £500 means that those people will not be threatened again.

The Bill introduces more clarity about service charges. I have already mentioned inheritance, but the measure includes welcome provisions on enfranchisement and lease extension. I understand that the latter will apply even to people who have already extended their lease. The measure will assist my residents; it is a step forward, and I welcome it.

None the less, I shall continue to campaign for further reform because it was clear in Committee that we are considering a phenomenally complex area of law. We probably could have spent a year trying to sort out the complexities.

Mr. Sanders: No!

Shona McIsaac: That shows that the Liberal Democrats are not really committed to the matter.

I hope that, perhaps through the draft Bill on forfeiture, we can create a level playing field for people who live in leasehold flats and houses. Those who live in leasehold houses would thus get the right of first refusal to buy the freehold should the landowner dispose of the leases. That would make freehold purchase far cheaper for millions of people.

Like the hon. Member for Solihull, I want clarity on the purchase price of freehold. If abuses exist in my constituency, they concern purchase price. As I explained previously, it is wrong when one landowner asks for £2,000 and another, citing marriage value, for £20,000, for the freehold on identical properties. However, landowners get away with it because of lack of clarity. My hon. Friend the Minister said that she would like to consult on devising a mechanism whereby freeholders have to tell people how they determine a price. I would welcome that, and I am sure that she will hear from hon. Members, who, like me, will continue to campaign for further reform.

I thank all hon. Members who served on the Committee. Our proceedings were good humoured, even when the hon. Member for Solihull discussed the movies of Alec Guinness. I cannot remember how that subject got into the debate, but it was entertaining. I also thank the Whips, despite the criticism of the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash). I believe that allowing so many Labour Members who are interested in the subject to serve in Committee shows that the Government let people have a voice.

9.53 pm

Mr. Wiggin: I acknowledge with sadness the points that my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) and the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) made. Although our proceedings have been illuminating and educational for me, it is a shame that Parliament's 81st attempt to reform leasehold leaves us with three sad deficits on freehold purchase, forfeiture and, perhaps most important, 100 per cent. unanimity.

Without the efforts of the shadow Attorney-General, it would have been difficult to make as much sense of the Bill as he clearly did. His efforts were gigantic, and I pay tribute to him. He is certainly to be congratulated.

Commonhold was to be the panacea for all the ills of leasehold tenure. By their insistence on unanimity, however, the Government have, staggeringly, neutered their own Bill. I am afraid, therefore, that we will be back for an 82nd attempt at reform, and it is a great shame that we have only tinkered with the edges of the problem.

9.55 pm

Ms Keeble: I, too, express my gratitude to the many right hon. and hon. Members who have made such a lively and constructive contribution to the debates on the Bill. That includes the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash), who has sometimes been a little curmudgeonly in his recognition of the Bill's merits.

The Bill is a complicated piece of legislation, and many hon. Members have repeatedly said that it is dry and technical. However, its underlying objective is simple, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) pointed out. It is to give people greater security in their homes, and we have achieved that in two ways: the introduction of commonhold, and providing more rights and safeguards for leaseholders.

When people reflect on the discussions in Committee and the House, they will see that we have introduced a great number of substantial reforms. They include, for the first time, the right to manage. That will deal with many of the abuses that have been mentioned, without having to go to enfranchisement, which some people simply do not want to do. The Bill also opens up the right of collective enfranchisement to many more leaseholders, and denies landlords the opportunity that they have previously enjoyed to obstruct the enfranchisement process and to jack up leaseholders' costs.

The Bill also tightens the requirements for safeguarding and accounting for leaseholders' money. It abolishes the requirement to use a nominated or approved insurer for leasehold properties, and extends the rights of personal representatives. It also introduces a whole package of reforms on forfeiture—perhaps not everything that everybody wanted, but they will dramatically reduce the scope for freeholders to abuse that process, and provide many more safeguards. These are major changes.

The hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) should take some comfort from these substantial changes because, in the real world outside this place, they will produce real changes to the life chances of many thousands of our constituents. The Bill has demonstrated how the House can work well. My hon. Friends the Members for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper) and for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) have pointed out that the process has illustrated the benefits of scrutiny, and the role that constituency Members, acting in the interests of their constituents, can play in improving legislation and providing safeguards and benefits for them.

My hon. Friends the Members for Brighton, Pavilion, for Bolton, South-East, for Cleethorpes and for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Crausby) should take credit for what they have done, because, without their representations, many of the changes in the Bill would not have been introduced. My hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion mentioned the leaseholders' group in his constituency. Without the representations that that group made, both through him and directly to the Government, several of the safeguards that have been incorporated into the Bill this evening would not have been added. Dry and technical though the Bill may have been, it has nevertheless demonstrated the House working at its best.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East was right that there are issues to which we will have to return. There is still work to be done, and a number of measures will have to be dealt with by regulation, at which point further refinements and improvements will be made. We will also have to work with the leasehold valuation tribunals and use publicity to translate some of these benefits into action. We will work closely with the tribunals to ensure that people get the benefits of this legislation, and I hope that hon. Members who have brought pressure to bear on the Government to produce real improvements will also bring the same pressure to bear on the tribunals. It is one thing to enact legislation in this place and quite another to see it translated into action. I am sure that if we can translate this—

It being Ten o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *put the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Orders [31 January and 11 March].*

Question agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed, with amendments.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Speaker: With permission, I will put together motions Nos. 3, 4 and 5.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

CONSTITUTIONAL LAW

That the draft National Assembly for Wales (Representation of the People) (Amendment) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 14th February, be approved.

IMMIGRATION

That the draft Asylum Support (Repeal) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 25th February, be approved.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE

That the Local Government Finance (England) Special Grant Report (No.93) (HC 654), on the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund 2002-03, which was laid before this House on 27th February, be approved.—*[Mr. Stringer.]*

Question agreed to.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGIONAL AFFAIRS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 117 (Standing Committee on Regional Affairs),

That—

(1) the matter of the progress of the Regional Development Agencies against their objectives, being a matter relating to regional affairs in England, be referred to the Standing Committee on Regional Affairs;

(2) the Committee meet at Two o'clock on Thursday 21st March at Westminster to consider the matter referred to it under paragraph (1) above; and

(3) the proceedings at the meeting be brought to a conclusion at half-past Four o'clock.—*[Mr. Stringer.]*

Question agreed to.

Specialised Hospital Services (North-West London)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Stringer.]*

10.1 pm

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): If I return to a subject on which I addressed the House on the Adjournment before the summer recess in July 2001, a subject on which I have addressed the House during seven previous debates in the past four years—many of them moved by myself—I am genuinely not being personally obsessive. I do so because of the prolonged and agonising sagas that have afflicted Harefield, Mount Vernon and St. Vincent's hospitals, in my constituency. They have caused profound worry to my constituents, and to many thousands of others further afield. There has been the cost of many jobs already, and there will be the cost of many more. Patients in my constituency and for many miles around will be seriously deprived of excellent treatments in hospitals that they have loved and admired.

In my debate on 14 July 1999 on St. Vincent's hospital, I said that the Government's policy of dissuading health authorities from referring national health service patients to "private" hospitals could be fatal to the survival of the small, primarily orthopaedic, hospital of St. Vincent's, Eastcote, which was not private at all but a non-profit making medical charity run for many years by the religious order of the sisters of St. Vincent de Paul.

The Government ignored my warnings. The hospital duly closed, although the policy is at last changed. It is too late to save St. Vincent's, but at least NHS patients are now sent to the excellent private hospital, Bishopswood, on the Mount Vernon hospital site. However, Mount Vernon hospital is now at risk, thanks to the extraordinary way in which it has been treated by the management of the NHS and the Government, who should never allow the perpetuation of Soviet-style bureaucratic central planning which characterises the NHS today.

Soon after the Labour party were returned to power, so-called but frustrated consultation was initiated on the future of the regional burns and plastics unit at Mount Vernon, which the London region wanted to transfer to the new Chelsea and Westminster hospital in inner London.

After the most ferocious controversy, the proposal, which would have undermined the plastics unit and its complementary and supportive work for the regional cancer centre at Mount Vernon, and would have caused the move away from the hospital of the wonderful reconstruction and functional trust medical research charity, was modified in favour of a move to Northwick Park hospital in Harrow, north-west London. I pointed out that Northwick Park hospital was much too far from Mount Vernon for it properly to support the cancer centre. I said that the premises did not exist at Northwick Park hospital and that Northwick Park was already overstretched owing to its high work load as a general hospital.

Although some of the staff of Mount Vernon hospital's burns and plastics unit and that of the RAFT might be able to stay in their existing homes and perhaps keep their children in their present schools, it would be harder for the cancer centre at Mount Vernon to be supported. For staff, patients and their families, commuting to Harrow would be less than ideal. Many of the unit's skilled staff would probably leave.

To date, nothing has actually happened, although the move was due to take place this spring. The uncertainty has been bad for medical morale. Capital investment has been minimal. It has been difficult to maintain operating standards and the throughput of patients in operating procedures. Owing to the lack of investment. the premises are less than ideal. It is also much harder for the RAFT to raise private funds for its vital research.

I believe that London regions would still like our burns and plastics unit from Mount Vernon to go to Chelsea and Westminster hospital, in inner London. West Hertfordshire health authority, which has a big interest, since many patients come from its area and beyond, owing to Mount Vernon's location only a hundred yards from the Hertfordshire border, will probably not wish the burns and plastics unit to move, and certainly will not want it to move to Chelsea and Westminster hospital.

NHS eastern region is conducting a review of cancer services at Mount Vernon. It has identified three options that could have been written by a schoolboy on the back of an envelope in a moment of tedium during a dreary class. They are: to develop the existing cancer centre at Mount Vernon, to transfer services to newly developed facilities at an existing general hospital in Hertfordshire—Hemel Hempstead or Watford—and to construct a purpose-built new hospital on a greenfield site, probably south of St Albans.

On 11 March, an Under-Secretary of State wrote to me:

> "Whichever route is taken, the development of a comprehensive cancer centre will involve the relocation of services from existing hospitals, and for some models the closure of hospitals. An important element of the work has been that the model for the 'ideal' cancer centre in 2010, regardless of location, has been signed up to by the Steering Group and has the support of the National Cancer Director, Professor Mike Richards, as well as clinicians from the cancer centre.
>
> In the short and medium term (until 2008) work continues between the local trusts and health authorities to ensure that the cancer service on the Mount Vernon site receives support from other services to ensure that high quality care is maintained."

Does that mean that the burns and plastics unit is to stay at Mount Vernon at least until 2008 to support the cancer centre there, as it should? That is what I, at least, would infer from the letter.

The trouble with NHS planning is that the best all too easily becomes the enemy of the good. Mrs. Rosie Varley and her review team from eastern region, to her credit and on her initiative, presented a progress report to local MPs at two meetings at the House of Commons in the summer and the autumn of last year. All Members, regardless of party—except one "dissentient" on the second occasion—said that Mount Vernon was the ideal location for their constituents' cancer treatment, and praised the quality of the care that they received there.

The cancer research institute, known as the Gray laboratory at Mount Vernon, has made eminent submissions in favour of keeping the cancer centre at Mount Vernon—submissions which do not seem to have received the attention they deserve from the review team. I have had to bring them to the attention of the Secretary of State.

People have become totally cynical about decision making in the NHS. Their experience tells them that decisions are made behind closed doors at a high level in advance, that specialist reviews are designed to build up usually specious arguments to justify those decisions, and that the conclusions are then presented to the public for so-called consultations which are in practice a charade, as they are a dialogue of the deaf with NHS officials who are reluctant to change their predetermined policy.

That was our experience with the Government's proclaimed intention, which is an official intention, for Harefield hospital, probably the most famous cardiothoracic hospital in Britain, which has done more heart transplants than any in the world. Following a Government diktat, its in-patient services are due to move by 2006 to a new hospital in Paddington, as yet unbuilt. Its out-patient services are due to move to extra facilities, as yet unconstructed, at Watford and Hemel Hempstead hospitals. Rumour has it that land has been set aside beside Hemel Hempstead hospital in hopeful anticipation.

Those of us who care for Harefield's future—I am glad to see the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) in the Chamber, because he has been a staunch supporter of its work—believe that, despite Her Majesty's Government determination to sell much of the Harefield site for a science park, their policy is expensive and fatally flawed, and will cost infinitely more than enhancement of Harefield's facilities in its excellent location—in fact, well over £100 million more.

By contrast, Hammersmith hospital's inner London cardiac facilities are to be built up. The cost is modest, as it is building up an existing unit: the cost is £13 million. Harefield, however, which is in outer London and serves a vast catchment area throughout the south of England, is ignored in favour of a new hospital at Paddington in one of the most inaccessible, polluted, congested and overdeveloped parts of inner London—indeed, it is on the edge of the Mayor's motor congestion tax zone.

It is not surprising that Westminster City council has not granted the necessary planning permission. It believes that there was an excess of proposed retail developments on the intended medical campus. The council is also unimpressed, as is anyone else who knows the situation, by the lack of parking spaces on the proposed site. Families could only easily visit their relatives and park there after staff had gone home in the evening. Paddington basin is to be the single biggest urban development in London since docklands, bringing 30,000 additional jobs to the capital—hardly the oasis of calm and pure air which cardiothoracic patients need in abundance and currently enjoy in full measure at Harefield.

The heart of the Harefield campaign, under the indomitable leadership of Jean Brett and her many friends and associates, whose efforts I salute, is convinced that, before 2006, Her Majesty's Treasury will realise that the cost-effective solution of building up existing centres for specialist excellence, such as those at Harefield for cardiothoracics and those at Mount Vernon for cancer, burns and plastics, is much better value for money and a wiser investment of public funds than grandiose projects such as the Paddington basin.

The new cancer centre in Hertfordshire also sounds like a grandiose project, as it is going to be an "ideal" cancer centre, possibly even on a greenfield site, which has not of course been revealed by Hertfordshire county council. No one knows exactly where it is, although notional journey times have been measured to it. From those notional journey times, we secured from the review team the admission that it had picked a site somewhere south of St. Albans.

The wishes of patients and their families should count in the NHS, but they seem not to do so at present. Even the representations to the Secretary of State of the former chairman of Harefield and Royal Brompton NHS trust, Sir Geoffrey Errington, were ignored. That fine public servant stressed the benefits of complementarity of heart research and treatment on the Harefield site.

I hope that the Secretary of State will grant Sir Geoffrey the interview that he requested, and which he fully deserves. The trouble is that Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster health authority was the lead health authority in the public consultation, and it had a blatant vested interest as a member of the development partnership for Paddington basin, even before the consultation began. As a consequence, the outcome was predictable. It prejudiced the decision-making process, and it merits much further examination, perhaps in terms of its permissibility under the Human Rights Act 1998. The health authority, like the Government, ignored all petitions, debates and representations.

In conclusion, the stories of the St. Vincent's, Mount Vernon and Harefield hospitals, as I have recounted them tonight, demonstrate all that is worst in the NHS today. Staff work nobly, often against a background of total uncertainty and inexplicable bureaucratic power-plays. Patients and local residents love their local specialist hospitals, and they are appalled. No notice seems to be taken of their views, and the taxpayer pays more for decisions that cannot be justified logically. It is time to put matters right, and I hope that the Government will do so as far as Harefield and Mount Vernon hospitals are concerned.

10.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) on securing this debate about the future of specialist hospital services in north-west London. It gives me a chance to set out the work under way in relation to Harefield hospital and the Paddington basin complex.

The scheme will cost £360 million, and will bring together the NHS and the Imperial college school of medicine in a development that will be a centre for clinical excellence, innovation, teaching and research. It also represents a unique opportunity to establish hospital design at the forefront of a massive urban development.

Tonight's debate also gives us a chance to discuss the provision of some specialist services in north-west London, as well as the options for change being developed for Mount Vernon hospital cancer services. Although it is inevitable that I shall have to rehearse some of the arguments behind the options being developed in relation to services such as cancer services at Mount Vernon hospital, it is important that I do not prejudge the future consultation. I hope that the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood will understand that, given that the proposals are still very much under development and that public consultation has yet to commence, I am not in a position tonight to engage in a detailed debate about some of the matters that will arise out of that consultation process.

[Ms Hazel Blears]

The hon. Gentleman has raised in this House the future of Harefield hospital on many occasions on behalf of his constituents. I think that we all know that, under the inspirational clinical leadership of Professor Sir Magdi Yacoub, Harefield hospital has been remarkably successful in its development of heart and lung services. It has also become a centre where research and development is an integral part of the work to improve life expectancy and the quality of life for those with serious cardiothoracic conditions. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge that specialist care of the type that has been pioneered at Harefield will continue to form a crucial part of the overall network of services provided for people with coronary heart disease.

The Department of Health confirmed last October that it intended to move ahead with plans to develop a new hospital complex at Paddington. That development will bring together three world-class hospitals and include cutting-edge research facilities. The £360 million Paddington basin scheme will offer specialist services for children, with heart and lung patients being concentrated on one site in Paddington. That will bring together the strength of the Royal Brompton, St Mary's and Harefield hospitals. Specialist kidney services, including transplants, will be developed at Hammersmith.

The Paddington health complex will be a centre for clinical excellence, innovation, teaching and research, and it will form part of a major urban regeneration scheme. We should not underestimate the strength of the project being developed.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the objections of the community health councils to the proposals. Those have been considered by Ministers, and a full response was given by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Health. He was satisfied at that stage that the conditions associated with the decision and the undertakings about further work to be done will address many of the issues raised during the consultation process.

The hon. Gentleman has expressed concern in the past that the option of investing at Harefield was not given sufficient attention during the consultation process. In fact, I can confirm that the option of a centre at Harefield hospital was included in the consultation. It considered the option of developing an independent specialist centre at Harefield hospital. It acknowledged Harefield hospital's national reputation as well as the strong doubts about the ability of a single specialty hospital to continue in relative isolation. I acknowledge that proposals and decisions of that nature are difficult for local communities. There are tensions involved in bringing together services so that they can provide excellence within a setting of other specialties rather than continuing to develop in a fairly isolated situation. Sometimes those issues are finely balanced and raise tremendous concerns in local communities.

The argument presented was that Harefield, being several miles from local general hospitals with accident and emergency departments, would not be in a position to draw on support from the wider range of specialties that are found at such hospitals and that the only way to achieve these benefits would be to build a completely new major general hospital on the Harefield site. Such a proposal would seriously threaten the viability of two existing hospitals—Hillingdon and Northwick Park. The options that were shortlisted were considered more robust because, if implemented, they would make use of existing major teaching hospitals rather than requiring the creation of a new one at the expense and probable demise of two other local general hospitals.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the staff concerns about whether they will be able to transfer to the new complex at the Paddington basin. Staff recruitment and retention, particularly in this part of the country, are challenging matters for the national health service. Every NHS trust has to carry out a survey of all its staff to see how it can improve recruitment and retention, provide flexible working hours and child care facilities and ensure that when we attract the best staff into the NHS, we keep them there.

I confirm that the trust is developing plans to ensure that all staff will see a career path and options for their future that will mean that they want to continue to play a part in the provision of health services in the area. The new Royal Brompton and Harefield NHS trust will open on the Paddington basin complex in 2007, so we have a lengthy period in which to prepare and ensure that staff receive proper reassurance about their future.

Staff have raised issues such as help with transport, financial incentives, accommodation, career opportunities and working environment. An action plan for all those issues is being developed by the trust to make sure that measures are in place to address the concerns about accommodation, transport and travel in the area.

In his response to the community health councils, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State emphasised the importance of drawing a line under any uncertainty or confusion that patients or staff might feel. There is investment in the Harefield site while we are waiting for the development of the Paddington basin. More than £4 million is being put into a patient services centre and £1 million into pathology services on the site.

We have also made available £2.5 million to the Harefield Research Foundation for the further development of the heart sciences centre on that site. The centre will remain on the hospital site beyond the transfer of clinical services to Paddington. The second phase of the centre is under construction. That presents an opportunity for the development of a science park built on the success of the heart sciences centre. A feasibility study was commissioned last year and a draft report is being assessed. It appears that there is a market for a science park in the area, but further work is required in collaboration with the Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine. The two trusts are developing a full business case for the Paddington basin scheme which, as I said, should be completed by 2007. That will safeguard all the excellent research and clinical work that is going on and will provide services that are fit for the 21st century.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): On uncertainty, does my hon. Friend realise that there has been considerable concern about the future of specialist services in north-west London ever since the accident and emergency unit at Mount Vernon hospital was shut in 1996? Does she realise that the profound concern expressed by the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) about the future of cancer services at

Mount Vernon is shared by my constituents? Will she ensure that the consultation process currently under way and the considerations by her Department take into account the concerns of my constituents in Harrow as well as those of the hon. Gentleman?

Ms Blears: My hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood have referred to the uncertainty of local people. Any period of change and uncertainty in the NHS causes great distress to local people. That is partly because they value their services enormously—that great attachment to the NHS makes us realise how central its services are to local communities. It is vital that patients and the public be fully involved in all the consultation processes. The hon. Gentleman said that the voice of patients and of the public is not heard so we must consult the public creatively and innovatively rather than simply going through a formal process.

It is important to get to the heart of the concerns of local people. We want to provide modern, 21st-century services of a much higher standard than those that existed previously. It is essential to take the public with us on that journey. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) made the point extremely well.

A large number of reviews of Mount Vernon hospital have failed to deliver a long-term solution. It is essential to clarify the long-term future of the whole cancer network so that decisions about medium and long-term investment can be made sensibly.

The Mount Vernon cancer review started in February 2001 and an interim report was published in September. Feedback has been received on the three options for developing the cancer centre: at Mount Vernon; at a greenfield site; or at an upgraded district general hospital in Hertfordshire. A detailed site survey was conducted at Mount Vernon and the other district general hospitals under consideration to identify their condition and capacity for further development. A further survey of public and car transport has been undertaken. Access to those services is a key issue for local people.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): In our area we almost feel consultatively abused at present—we have been reviewed and consulted so often. The test of any review or consultation is wh[illegible]er anyone is listening. In relation to the latest rev[illegible]w, the community is unanimous—across the political [illegible]ectrum of all the MPs representing the area—in opposi[illegible] the move. I hope that this time someone will actually l[illegible].

Ms Blears: My hon. Friend mak[illegible] an important point. No matter how good the consultation process, the proof of its success is that people not only listen but act on the points made by local communities. In this review, the issues were closely investigated and that will continue—especially as regards people's concerns about access to services. In the past such concerns have not always weighed as heavily as the clinical issues. My hon. Friend is right.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): The hon. Lady referred to the importance of these services to local communities. Does not she consider that that is one of the paramount reasons for retaining such services in those communities?

Ms Blears: As I said to the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood earlier, decisions about the reconfiguration of services are always beset with tension. We have to try to achieve the right balance between specialisation—to provide an excellent quality of service—and access for people close to their homes.

We have to listen to all the parties involved to ensure that people have the high quality services that they rightly demand and expect and that those services are accessible to as many local people as possible. That balance is difficult to find but we should not shy away from entering the debate.

The model being developed for cancer services is the right one. It brings together diagnosis, surgical treatment and oncology and has been widely endorsed in the interim report. I understand the concerns of the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood about the future of the cancer centre, and I shall ensure that the consultation is rigorous and takes into account the views of local people in deciding the way forward for those services that are so important to the constituents of all the hon. Members who have spoken this evening.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 14 March 2002

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF LONDON (WARD ELECTIONS) BILL *(BY ORDER)*
Order for further consideration, as amended, read.
To be further considered on Thursday 21 March.

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Individual Learning Accounts

1. **Mr. John Baron** (Billericay): What plans she has to compensate individual learning account training providers who have suffered financial loss as a result of the closure of the scheme. [40719]

3. **Mr. Stephen O'Brien** (Eddisbury): How many providers have been investigated by her Department in relation to abuses of the individual learning account scheme. [40721]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (John Healey): The Department has no plans to compensate learning providers in relation to the closure of the individual learning accounts programme.

The Department's special investigations unit has completed one case and is investigating a further 105 registered learning providers. In addition, the police are investigating another 66.

Mr. Baron: I thank the Minister for his response, but I believe that that answer is shameful. Given that it is generally recognised that because of poor controls the Government allowed this initiative to turn into a shambles, which has cost £65 million in fraud, left many students in the lurch and forced many learning providers to shed jobs—and, in some cases, go out of business altogether—why will the Government not honour their responsibilities and at least compensate those learning providers who invested in this initiative but rue the day they ever took the Government at their word?

John Healey: Quite simply because the Government's first duty is to safeguard public funds and to look after the interests of individual learners. The business decisions that learning providers took to take part in the programme were a matter for them. There was no contract between the Department and learning providers, and the legal advice that the Department has is very clear.

Mr. O'Brien: The Minister has had two weeks' notice of my question yet all he produces is that vacuous answer. Is it any wonder that the Government's complete incompetence has rendered them impotent in the light of this ridiculous scandal over ILAs and the alleged fraud, with only one completed investigation?

Will the Minister try to answer an easier question? Evidence given recently by his officials to the Select Committee on Education and Skills showed that his Department had no control over ILAs. Will he now admit that he has responsibility for the waste of an estimated £65 million of public funds? How many teachers could that have provided?

John Healey: The hon. Gentleman may have missed my answer, but I gave him precisely the answer that his question required. One investigation into learning providers has been completed by the Department and a further 105 are under way. Some 66 investigations are being undertaken by the police, 11 further cases are being discussed with the police, and 44 arrests have been made, with 13 people charged and one convicted. That is an effective early start to mop up the problems that we had with the individual learning account scheme.

If the hon. Gentleman reads the Select Committee evidence, particularly mine—I have given evidence before it three times in about three months—he will see that I explained clearly that the problems in the scheme began to arise and accumulate over the summer. We took action during that time to tighten the scheme's rules and operation. We were simply unable to do so within the design of the scheme and were left, regrettably, with no option but to announce on 24 October that we had to close the scheme to protect public funds and the interests of individual learners who were being abused by the minority of learning providers taking advantage of the scheme.

Judy Mallaber (Amber Valley): One of the most rewarding jobs that I have undertaken as a Member of Parliament has been to present education certificates to trade unionists who have been helped by their union to take up education opportunities for the first time in many years. They have often been helped by individual learning accounts. I urge my hon. Friend to introduce a successor programme to ILAs as soon as possible and also to take steps to encourage the development of union learning representatives who are often in the best position in the workplace to encourage non-traditional learners to take up education opportunities.

John Healey: My hon. Friend may know that alongside the task of managing the closure of the ILA scheme and getting to the bottom of the problems that we had with it, we are working very hard on the design of a successor programme. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have both confirmed in the House that there will be a successor scheme. In the design of that scheme we are conscious of the fact that unions, often through union learning representatives in the workplace, have made imaginative use of ILAs and, by so doing, have helped reach target groups such as part-time workers, older male workers and shift workers whom we have been unable to reach within the lifelong learning system.

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire): The Minister's belated understanding of the fact that his Department has a duty to protect public funds caused a sharp intake of breath and a reference to the Trade Descriptions Act. Who does he think has been most damaged by the disaster with individual learning accounts? Is it the students, the learning providers, or the Government themselves, who, in pursuit of yet another lazily conceived manifesto target, have lost the confidence of everyone they needed to make a perfectly good idea work?

John Healey: The hon. Gentleman misses the point. Individual learning accounts certainly encouraged new learning and brought new business to learning providers. I am conscious of the fact that both groups are affected by our regrettable, but inevitable, decision that we had to close the scheme. If, with hindsight, the hon. Gentleman is saying that it was so clear to so many people for so long that there were problems with the ILA scheme, why was it that from the general election until 24 October when we announced the closure of the scheme, only one parliamentary question on ILAs was tabled by Opposition Members? The hon. Gentleman and his colleagues on the Conservative Front Bench did not ask a single question.

Student Financial Support

2. **Mr. David Laws** (Yeovil): What recent representations she has received regarding the review of student financial support in higher education. [40720]

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Estelle Morris): We have received correspondence from a range of individuals and organisations. We will be taking their opinions into account as we develop our policy.

Mr. Laws: Will the Secretary of State take this opportunity to congratulate the Liberal Democrat-Labour Administrations in both Wales and Scotland on their decisions to bring back maintenance grants for students on lower incomes?

Estelle Morris: The decision was properly taken by the Assembly. I note that that is the way it has chosen to deal with the issue—I will say no more and no less than that.

Mrs. Lorna Fitzsimons (Rochdale): Will my right hon. Friend consider the people who study for higher education in a further education setting, in particular those whom we are desperately trying to get into higher education and who have child care needs? Under the present funding formula, such people cannot receive any contribution towards the cost of child care whereas if they were studying in a higher education setting, they could do so. Will she also assure me that she will take no lectures from the Opposition parties? When in power, they spent all their time trying to do down students and student funding.

Estelle Morris: My hon. Friend has a fair point. In this country, there is a long-established tradition of supporting students in higher education, but she is right to point out that traditionally students who go into further education have not received that level of personal support. Since 1997, the Labour Government have invested a great deal in child care support for students in further education as well as for those in higher education. Given her interest in the matter, she will recognise that. I have no doubt that in future years, as we progress our wish to ensure that 50 per cent. of the under-30s have experience of higher education, many people will come through non-traditional routes such as FE colleges. Clearly, their needs must be part of our thinking in the medium and long term.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): Does the Secretary of State agree that, if and when grants are reintroduced in England, at least part of the cost should fall on the general taxpayer, since all taxpayers benefit from getting more students from less well-off backgrounds into higher education, and that the rest of the costs should be borne by graduates who go into good well-paid jobs rather than by upfront tuition fees?

Estelle Morris: The hon. Gentleman is making the case for a graduate tax, I think. What is clear is that funding students in higher education has to be a combination of contributions from the Government, who have the responsibility, the learner who is the biggest gainer and from the family. We are looking into how to achieve that combination. Clearly, those are the three sources of income and that will remain the case.

Gillian Merron (Lincoln): May I tell my right hon. Friend that at a meeting with students at the university of Lincoln last week to discuss student finances, I was struck by the fact that their perception of the amount to be repaid on their loans was far in excess of the reality of the repayments? Will she ensure that the review looks into ways to get clear and accurate information to would-be students as well as actual students and their families, so that people are not unnecessarily put off going to university?

Estelle Morris: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. Another point that is often misunderstood is that while people are not working, they do not have to repay the loan. Indeed, some of the changes that my right hon. Friend the former Secretary of State for Education and Employment introduced following the 1997 election have made repayment far easier than was formerly the case. One misunderstanding is that people think they are paying all the fees, if they pay a fee at all. In fact, those students who pay fees—even if they pay the maximum contribution—pay only a quarter of the total amount and the state picks up the remaining three quarters.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): I congratulate the Government on reintroducing grants last autumn in the form of opportunity bursaries. Between 400 and 500 such bursaries have been awarded to students in universities in the north-east of England. However, I have spoken to many of those in receipt of the bursaries and can tell my right hon. Friend that the basis of any future student grant scheme will have to be much broader and wider than the opportunity bursaries, whose tests of parental income and parental experience of education are drawn far too narrowly.

Estelle Morris: As my hon. Friend knows, the opportunity bursaries were initially payable in the excellence in cities areas. If he casts his mind back four years, he will recall that we started the excellence in cities programme in six urban areas; it now covers a third of all the country's secondary schools. The opportunity bursaries have been widely welcomed: from a £36 million fund, a grant of £2,000 has been paid to students whose family income is less than £20,000. Such students are often the first generation to experience higher education. I have heard my hon. Friend's comments, however, and no doubt as part of our comprehensive spending review considerations we shall look at the success of the opportunity bursaries and reflect on whether they are a good form of further Government investment.

Foreign Languages

4. **Mr. John Randall** (Uxbridge): What plans she has for the teaching of foreign languages. [40722]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Ivan Lewis): Our aspirations for language learning and teaching were set out in the pamphlet "Language Learning", published last month. One of those aspirations is to widen the opportunities for language learning in the primary sector. The pamphlet invited views from key stakeholders. Those views will inform our national strategy which we plan to publish in the autumn.

Mr. Randall: I thank the Minister for that reply. Which language should be the principal language taught in our schools, and why?

Mr. Lewis: I am not sure to which wing of the Conservative party the hon. Gentleman belongs in relation to Europe. Clearly, there would be automatic consensus on both sides of the House that the most important language that young people should learn in this country is English. The issue is then to ensure that the maximum number of pupils have the choice to study—and have access to—as many foreign languages as possible. That is why the Government's proposals to give primary school pupils, for the first time, a proper chance to have access to modern foreign languages are such an important development.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Does my hon. Friend agree that a large number of people welcome the Government's fresh thinking on foreign language teaching? Both the Green Paper and the "Language Learning" document refer to the innovation of teaching foreign languages at primary level. Will he take on board the fact that we must get right the methodology of teaching languages? During the past 30 to 50 years, we have seen a deterioration in language education in British schools. Surely we should look at some of the best practice worldwide. The Select Committee on Education and Skills recently visited the United States. Some of the innovative approaches to language learning at Stanford are revolutionary; I hope that my hon. Friend will consider them.

Mr. Lewis: That is absolutely right; there certainly should be more emphasis on spoken languages in primary schools. We have to ask ourselves some fundamental questions: for example, last year, why were about 36,000 pupils disapplied at 14 from modern foreign languages as part of the national curriculum? If we are not motivating and encouraging young people to take modern foreign languages, we are clearly getting something wrong; so it is right that we learn lessons from international experience in countries where modern foreign languages are popular with young people so that we can improve our teaching methodology in order to motivate and enthuse them about the importance of learning modern foreign languages, which are essential in a global economy.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): We are all grateful to the Minister for confirming that the Government's policy on language teaching has descended into utter confusion. Why is it important, according to the recent Green Paper, that languages should be taught in primary schools and to adult learners, while it is also apparently Government policy that language in secondary schools should be optional, like the teaching of Darwinian evolution? What resources will the Government provide for the teaching of languages in primary schools? What is their strategy for providing the extra 18,000 language teachers who will be needed if there is to be one in each of our primary schools? Is not the Government's strategy on language teaching just another example of what Lord Hattersley derided on Monday as the declaratory arm of Government in action?

Mr. Lewis: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that constructive contribution to the debate. The issue is straightforward: most of those who believe strongly that young people should have access to modern foreign languages have believed for many years that we need to start in the primary sector if we are to get it right. The Conservative Government did nothing to encourage that. We are ensuring that young people will continue to study a modern foreign language between the ages of 11 and 14 and will be entitled to continue with that beyond the age of 14, but we do not believe that it is right to force young people, against their will, to study foreign languages. That is constructive neither for their educational development nor for the teachers who are expected to teach them a subject in which they have no interest. *[Interruption.]*

By 2012—an ambitious and optimistic target—all primary school children will be entitled to study modern foreign languages. *[Interruption.]* There are already 20 per cent.—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister has done very well.

Valerie Davey (Bristol, West): I acknowledge and share the Minister's enthusiasm for introducing modern foreign languages at primary level. Will he acknowledge that many young people enter school bilingual and that there are many languages that we should encourage, so that those who speak them can establish their level of attainment at GCSE?

Mr. Lewis: I entirely agree. It is sensible to build on the skills that young people have in the early years and to encourage them through primary education, so that by the time they reach 14 they are far more likely to be motivated to make a positive choice to continue studying modern foreign languages, rather than being compelled to do so.

Performance-related Pay

5. **Mr. Mark Hoban** (Fareham): What recent meetings she has had with the NASUWT to discuss performance-related pay. [40723]

11. **Ian Lucas** (Wrexham): If she will provide extra funding for performance-related pay for teachers. [40729]

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Estelle Morris): My hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards met representatives of all the teacher associations on 18 February and last met the NASUWT on 5 March. Since 1997, we have so far spent more than £700 million to fund threshold payments, and we have made available a further £250 million in special grant over the next two years to help schools pay for the performance points that they decide to award.

Mr. Hoban: I thank the Secretary of State for that terribly complacent answer. Having dealt a further blow to morale in the teaching profession by refusing to fund performance-related pay fully, will she accept that the wreckers of the public services are not those who work in them but those who run them—Ministers and the Government?

Estelle Morris: The hon. Gentleman is just a touch confused. Providing £700 million to fund threshold payments fully is not complacent. That £700 million to fund excellent teachers was not available under the Tory Government, and neither was the further £250 million to fund performance points.

In 1998, when we launched performance pay, we said categorically that we would fund fully on demand a £2,000 pay increase for every single teacher who met the threshold. We have done that fully and promptly, with money straight from Government to teachers' pay packets, and that has made a difference. We made it absolutely clear that we would make available a further four performance points for teachers above the threshold. Indeed, in 1998 we did not commit any money to that, but since then, we have committed a further £250 million. The hon. Gentleman describes that as complacent; I hesitate to say that there are many people in the public sector, let alone in the private sector, who would think it exceptionally generous.

Ian Lucas: I very much welcome the fact that the original threshold payments were demand-led and fully funded by the Government. Talking to head teachers in my constituency, there was an element of misunderstanding about the funding position on performance points. In a spirit of co-operation, which I know the Secretary of State adopts, what steps will she take to repair the damage and change the present position?

Estelle Morris: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. Let us be clear about what we are asking head teachers to do. We are asking them to take decisions about which teachers should get performance points above the threshold for sustained good performance. Head teachers already make those sort of decisions every day of the week: they look at their resources and make decisions about how many management points they should give and whether they should use their resources to further reward a good head of maths or English. They have never before had the option of making decisions about staff who want to be good classroom teachers.

For the first time, head teachers have a pay structure which permits them to reward staff for good classroom teaching; I applaud and welcome that. Of course, it is a tough decision, but that is what leadership in our schools is about these days. I have every confidence that our heads can exercise the same judgment, professionalism and commitment in deciding which staff should earn those performance points that they exercise in their decisions about the rest of the allocation of resources. Because it is a difficult task, we are further helping them by putting an additional £250 million into the pay system. Managing change is never easy, but I have every confidence that head teachers are up to it; this is about transforming and modernising our public services.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): I wonder how the Secretary of State can keep a straight face. Nowhere in the Green Paper "Teachers Meeting the Challenge of Change" is there any question of 50 per cent. of the people who have gone through the pay threshold being barred from getting an additional reward. People are going through the threshold having met all the performance criteria, only to be told by the Government that only half of them will be funded. People are going on to the management pay spine, only to be told that one in four of them can be funded. Surely the Secretary of State should be ashamed of that level of duplicity.

Estelle Morris: That was mock anger from the hon. Gentleman; I cannot believe that he has misunderstood the original announcements in the Green Paper so much. Let us be clear: nowhere did the Green Paper say that performance points above the threshold would be demand-led; it did not lay down a set of criteria, nor did it say that if those criteria were met, performance points above the threshold would be achieved. It clearly said that there would be a national set of criteria for threshold payments. To make sure that those criteria were implemented nationally, we established a system of assessors to ensure that public money was properly spent.

Every utterance that I have made in the past three years on the subject has always made it clear—if the hon. Gentleman did not understand, teachers' representatives did—that performance points above the threshold were different from performance points at the threshold. The threshold is demand-led against nationally agreed criteria; the external assessor is a safeguard for making sure that public money is well spent. Points above the threshold are entirely different; they are about criteria decided by Government bodies and head teachers. Head teachers make decisions—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have to tell the Secretary of State that I want to call another Member.

Jim Knight (South Dorset): In the past month, I have visited some dozen schools in my constituency, most of them primary schools. My right hon. Friend will be pleased to know that, in every case, their head teachers very much welcome the introduction of performance-related pay and the ability to pay up to the threshold. However, in Dorset standard spending assessment funding for education is very low: compared with neighbouring Hampshire, it is at least £100 per pupil less. Head teachers in Dorset struggle to find the extra funding for performance-related pay. What hope can she offer that they will have that extra funding, so that our fine teachers can be rewarded?

Estelle Morris: Quite simply, the money for threshold payments and performance points above the threshold is ring-fenced and cannot be used for any other purpose. It is additional to the base budget for head teachers in my hon. Friend's area, so he should be able to return to Dorset and reassure them of that.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): Everything that the Secretary of State has said in the past five minutes has amply confirmed the original charge of complacency made by my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban). When she and her Ministers discuss performance-related pay with the unions, will she reflect that she is the first Education Secretary since state education was introduced in 1870 to unite head teachers in threatening industrial action? In considering that and today's strike, which is closing schools across London, how much responsibility does she think that she bears for the anger felt by teachers towards this Government?

Estelle Morris: Teachers in London who go on strike today are entirely responsible for their own decisions. On pay in London, the salary of a teacher who started teaching in London when we came to power is now 63 per cent. higher than it was in 1997. The previous Conservative Government could not boast such a record. Let us be clear: the Conservatives opposed the threshold payments that, for the first time, pay a 10 per cent. increase to people after seven years in the profession. Shortly, it will be paid after just five years.

I am the first Education Secretary who can say that our pay structure rewards teachers for teaching well in the classroom. I do not describe as complacent a £700 million threshold and a further £250 million for performance points. It is a sign of this Government's absolute determination to reward teachers well, and to recognise those who teach well and who manage effectively.

Mr. Green: It is transparently obvious that very few teachers would agree that the Secretary of State is not being complacent. No Opposition Member would support strike action that damages children's education, but, unlike the right hon. Lady, I have some sympathy for teachers. They are being driven beyond endurance by the never-ending stream of interference from her Department and by the Government's lack of support for issues that matter to teachers—from performance-related pay to enforcing proper discipline in schools. Does she not recognise that the underlying reason for the first NUT strike since the 1970s is that teachers are angrier than they have been since those years? If she does not change her policies and her tone, she will, like her 1970s Labour predecessors, preside over public sector strikes and terrible damage to educational standards.

Estelle Morris: The hon. Gentleman's memory is selective. He moves from the strikes of the 1970s to today, thereby missing out the 1980s. In respect of educating our children, more days were probably lost in the 1980s—under a Tory Government—than at any previous time. He talks about complacency, but let me list a few things. We are rewarding advanced skills teachers who stay in the classroom, and establishing threshold payments of £2,000 and a pay structure that involves performance points. On training salaries, those who train as teachers receive £10,000. Through education legislation, I am establishing the power to pay off loans—"golden hello" training salaries—for those who train to teach in our schools. None of those measures were in place before 1997, and every single one has been opposed by the Tories.

We offer more than words. We have shown by our actions and our investment that we value teachers. That is evidenced by this year's report of Her Majesty's chief inspectorate of the Office for Standards in Education. According to it, the quality of teaching in our schools is better than it has ever been in this nation's history. That has been achieved through excellent teachers and through a Government who, for the first time in a very long time, are committed to supporting them. We will continue to do so, but we will be tough on strike action, because it should not happen.

Student Grants

6. **Mr. Simon Thomas** (Ceredigion): If she will bring forward proposals to reintroduce student grants. [40724]

The Minister for Lifelong Learning (Margaret Hodge): Our review of student finance is considering a number of options. We shall make an announcement on the outcome of the review when it is complete and will consult on proposals for change.

Mr. Thomas: I thank the Minister for that helpful reply. Will she accept that the decision to reintroduce student grants in Wales was triggered by an independent report that clearly showed that poorer students were not accessing higher education in Wales and that maintenance grants needed to be reintroduced? I cannot believe that the situation can be very different in England. Does not the Minister think that equity demands a maintenance system for poorer students in England and does not the Barnett formula and the decision by the National Assembly of Wales also have an implication for her Department?

Margaret Hodge: I am surprised by that contribution because the strength of devolution is that the National Assembly can and does take decisions that differ from those taken by this Parliament. I would have thought that the hon. Gentleman would support that. I wish that ensuring that more people access our higher education system was as simple as introducing student grants. The issue is much more complicated and is equally about raising the attainment of young people in schools, keeping them in school and raising their aspirations so that they see university as an option for them.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): My hon. Friend will be aware that there are many students from low-income backgrounds in my constituency, especially those studying at Anglia polytechnic university. Those students are finding it a struggle. Many work such long hours that it impacts on their studies. Could she make it clear to the House that the Liberal Democrat campaign to abolish tuition fees has no effect on poorer students because they do not pay tuition fees? However, in the review of student finance, will she look sympathetically at the introduction of maintenance grants for students from low-income backgrounds?

Margaret Hodge: I thank my hon. Friend for drawing the House's attention to the fact that half of our students pay no fees and only a third pay the full fee. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, the full fee barely covers a quarter of the actual tuition cost and the rest is met by Government. The purpose of the review of student funding is to ensure that debt, or the fear of debt, does not prevent people—especially those from low-income backgrounds—from going to university. We will have that at the centre of our concerns.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Has the Minister studied the survey undertaken by UNITE, a company that provides accommodation for students? The poll was carried out by MORI and involved some 1,600 students. It drew attention to growing student debt and the increase in part-time working by students, especially those from low-income families. What is the Government's reaction and what response will they make?

Margaret Hodge: I thank the hon. Gentleman for drawing attention to that survey, because it also said—I hope that he does not mind me quoting some figures at him—that more than 90 per cent. of those involved believed that their university education was worth while, 86 per cent. enjoyed university, 88 per cent. were happy with their lives and 86 per cent. were optimistic about their future. So the survey gave a balanced view. It is true that more students—about half—now work part time and we need to get the balance right between supporting themselves through part-time work and continuing their studies. It is also true that average debt on leaving university is going up, although not as much some predicted. One of the reasons for that is the greater generosity of the loan scheme compared with the scheme that was in place under the hon. Gentleman's Government.

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde): Will my right hon. Friend reassure the House that the key criterion being considered in the review of student finance is the 50 per cent. target? Does she agree that in working out how we can reach that target the most important factor is raising the number of people staying on after 16 and that, therefore, in considering the priorities for funding we also have to think about education maintenance allowances? Those are already making a big difference in my constituency and need to be extended further around the country.

Margaret Hodge: I completely concur with my hon. Friend's important points. The rate of young people staying on in full-time education and training after the age of 16 is very poor. If we cannot increase that rate—on which our 14 to 19 agenda is focused—we will not build the skills that are needed to be successful in the economy. One of the most effective levers that we have so far identified for supporting an increase in participation after 16 has been the introduction of the education and maintenance allowance. Over 5 per cent. more students have stayed on at 16, and even more have remained in education at 17 and gained achievements. We will build on that and bear it in mind as we determine how to move forward on student funding.

Grammar Schools

7. **Hugh Robertson** (Faversham and Mid-Kent): If she will make a statement on the future of grammar schools. [40725]

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Timms): Our position remains unchanged. There will be no new grammar schools, but changes to the future admission arrangements of existing ones are for parents to decide through the ballot process.

Hugh Robertson: I thank the Minister for that answer. However, he will be aware of the confusion and distress caused to many parents in my constituency by the adjudicator's recent decision on admissions policy in Kent. One of the things that is often said at my surgeries is that that is regarded as a covert attack on the grammar school system. Will the Minister therefore confirm to my constituents, who simply want the best possible education for their children, that the Government have absolutely no plans to abolish grammar schools.

Mr. Timms: I can confirm that, as we have done on a number of occasions. The situation in Kent is complex, and there are competing interests between those parents who want a comprehensive school place as their first choice and those who want a good comprehensive as a fallback if their children are unsuccessful in grammar school selection. There have been three adjudicated decisions recently in Kent, which have addressed different issues. Our priority is raising standards across the entire secondary system, and it is clear that we are succeeding.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): Does my hon. Friend agree that raising standards across the whole secondary sector would be easier if that sector were properly consistent? The presence of grammar schools distorts pupil admissions to schools in some areas. It creates a problem in Greater Manchester in particular, where some boroughs have had comprehensive education for a generation but admissions procedures are totally distorted by the drag effect of authorities where grammar schools exist. That is not in the interests of getting 50 per cent. of pupils into higher education, especially among poorer people.

Mr. Timms: As my hon. Friend knows, we do not favour selection at 11. Research shows that the most able pupils perform just as well at comprehensive schools as at grammar schools, if not better. However, where grammar schools exist, local parents should be able to determine whether they should continue. That is the right way in which to make that decision. We also take the view that existing grammar schools can contribute to raising standards in other local schools, and they should be encouraged to do so. However, it is right that those decisions should be made locally through the ballot process that we have established.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): Is the Minister aware of the financial problems that are being caused to grammar schools in Buckinghamshire and to a fair number of comprehensive schools elsewhere by the Learning and Skills Council's decision to withhold an element of the sixth form capitation payment on the mistaken assumption that 10 per cent. or more of those sixth form students will drop out before completing their courses? Will he agree to review that policy?

Mr. Timms: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the funding for sixth forms has been transferred to the Learning and Skills Council. I am aware that there have been some local difficulties. We have provided additional grant to seek to address those problems, but these are matters for the Learning and Skills Council to conclude. All the evidence that I have seen is that those arrangements are being reached satisfactorily up and down the country.

Teaching Assistants

8. **Mr. Andrew Love** (Edmonton): How many teaching assistants are employed in schools in England. [40726]

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Timms): There were 95,815 full-time equivalent teaching assistants in maintained schools in England in January 2001. That was an increase of more than 50 per cent. on the 1997 figure. The figure for January 2002 will be available in a few weeks.

Mr. Love: The number of classroom assistants in my local authority has increased from 440 to 650 in the past three years. As a result, educational standards have improved in six of my local primary schools by more than the national average. However, we must—and can—do more to assist. What is my hon. Friend the Minister doing to improve the training and qualifications of classroom assistants to help them support teachers better in the classroom?

Mr. Timms: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight the very important contribution made by teaching assistants to raising standards in schools up and down the country. The Government made a firm manifesto commitment to increase the support for teachers in schools with at least another 20,000 additional support staff of all types—teaching assistants and others—in this five-year term.

We have set aside £400 million over the next two years to recruit and train additional teaching assistants. Research confirms the value and importance of well trained and managed teaching assistants. They have a key role in our vision of a remodelled school work force in which teachers have the support that they need to be able to concentrate on teaching. We are investing in developing the necessary skills and non-vocational qualifications so that there is a better career structure for teaching assistants. That is a very important consideration in our discussions with trade unions and others about remodelling the school work force.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): Does the Minister accept that classroom assistants at best can be a supplement to teachers, but never a substitute for them? Why, therefore, has the pupil teacher ratio in state secondary schools, which improved in the Conservative years, deteriorated every year under this Government—in Hertfordshire, and in most counties?

Mr. Timms: The right hon. Gentleman knows well that the Government are committed to achieving a substantial reduction in class size for infant schools. That reduction has been delivered. We have 11,000 more teachers today than in 1997, the end of the period of Conservative Government. Recruitment to teacher training is up by more than 20 per cent. this year compared with last year. We will have twice as many people this year as last in the graduate teacher programme, which allows people in mid-career to come into teaching. That shows that we are also making very good progress with teacher recruitment.

The right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) is right that teaching assistants are only a supplement. It is vital that we recruit more teachers and bring more people into the profession. We have put in place the measures to achieve that, and we are being successful.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is my hon. Friend the Minister aware that some of those teaching assistants work at North Derbyshire college in my constituency? That old mining college had to readjust totally after the pit closures, and there have been some reports that it has run into difficulties. I emphasise that I, the Labour-controlled Derbyshire local authority and other councils in the area are determined to ensure that the college, the largest employer in the district, remains. It was the Tory proposition to close things: it must be Labour's to repair things, mend things, make them successful and keep people in work.

I hope that the Minister has got the message.

Mr. Timms: My hon. Friend has made his views very clear. We are waiting for the inspection report on that college, and we shall give its findings careful consideration.

Individual Learning Accounts

9. **Mr. Desmond Swayne** (New Forest, West): What progress she is making towards replacing ILAs and expanding the availability of these vehicles by the end of 2002. [40727]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (John Healey): There will be a successor ILA-style scheme, which will build on the lessons, good and bad, that we have learned from the ILA programme. It will take into account the findings of the current wide consultation exercise which are due in early April. I regret that I cannot, therefore, confirm when we will launch the successor scheme.

Mr. Swayne: My postbag is full of letters from a great number of people of very modest means who have made significant sacrifices, both of a financial nature and in the way in which they organise their lives, and who are now up the creek without a paddle. Is it true that the Learning and Skills Council warned Ministers of the possibilities for fraud in the ILA scheme and that those warnings were ignored? Will that lesson be taken on board for the new scheme, and how on earth will the Minister regain the confidence of those people who have suffered so badly in the shambles that this business has become?

John Healey: The first question on the Order Paper was about the successor scheme. The Learning and Skills Council came into operation on 1 April 2001, and we launched the ILA scheme in September and October 2000, so the answer to the hon. Gentleman's first question is no, and many other interests were consulted in the run-up to the design of the scheme. I am conscious of the fact that our decision to close the ILA scheme, which was regrettable and inevitable, has left many learners unable to take up the opportunities that existed under that scheme. The hon. Gentleman may be aware that 85 per cent. of those who used their ILA said that it opened up new options for them in training and learning, and 91 per cent. said that the learning met or exceeded their expectations.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

The Solicitor-General was asked—

Sex Abuse Cases

33. **Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas** (Crosby): What steps she is taking to ensure that there is consistency of approach between each Crown Prosecution Service area in respect of the *(a)* scrutiny and *(b)* credibility checks undertaken by the staff of the CPS in relation to sex abuse cases. [40755]

The Solicitor-General (Ms Harriet Harman): All case files received by the CPS are individually reviewed in accordance with the code for Crown prosecutors. The code is there to ensure fairness and consistency in case work decision making. It applies to cases involving sex abuse as it does to any other sort of case. Crown prosecutors are trained in how to apply the code, they are supervised in their work and they are inspected by Her Majesty's CPS inspectorate.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: The Minister will be aware of my significant interest in the activities of the CPS which arises from my role as chairman of the committee for abuse investigations. Although I appreciate her comments about the consistency of procedures, my concern is whether there is any evidence that the procedures have not only efficient results but just and efficacious outcomes.

The Solicitor-General: As my hon. Friend says, I am well aware of her long-standing interest in the prosecution of sex offences involving children in care homes. I am aware also that in response to her work in the field, the Home Affairs Committee is to set up an investigation into these issues. Certainly the CPS wants fair outcomes as well as efficient investigations. I urge her to take up the invitation of John Holt, the chief Crown prosecutor in her area, Merseyside, to talk to some of the front-line prosecutors involved in investigating and prosecuting these very difficult cases. She will be reassured by the level-headed approach that they take to these difficult, sensitive issues.

Serious Fraud Office

34. **Mr. Jim Cunningham** (Coventry, South): How many prosecutions the Serious Fraud Office has instituted over the past 12 months; and how many have been successful. [40757]

The Solicitor-General: The job of the Serious Fraud Office is to investigate as well as to prosecute cases of serious and complex fraud. In the past 12 months prosecutions against 22 defendants were concluded by the SFO; 18 were convicted and four acquitted. The 80 cases that the SFO is currently investigating involve fraud of over £2.5 billion.

Mr. Cunningham: What is the level of fraud in the City and what is my right hon. and learned Friend doing about it?

The Solicitor-General: It is estimated that in the economy as a whole there is about £14 billion of fraud. My hon. Friend is right to bring that to the attention of the House because fraud is a problem not only for the individual who is defrauded but for the economy and our financial services institutions. I work closely with other Departments, as does the SFO with Customs and the Inland Revenue. It is right that we go after white collar crime so that we do not have a situation where the richer people are, the more likely they are to get away with it. In that respect, the SFO is a bit like David facing Goliath, but it does a very good job in making sure that people cannot get away with crime just because they have billions of pounds of the proceeds of crime with which to defend themselves.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): I am sure that the Solicitor-General will agree that it is crucial for Government Departments to work together to combat fraud, and that co-ordination of Government effort and expertise is essential to bring forward successful prosecutions.

Customs and Excise prosecutors have come recently, or are about to come, under the aegis of the right hon. and learned Lady's Department. What plans are there for Inland Revenue prosecutors?

The Solicitor-General: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that Customs and Excise prosecutors are shortly to be accountable to the Attorney-General. There are several principles at work. It is important to ensure the independence of the prosecutors. It is important also to ensure proper accountability to the House for all prosecutors throughout government. Further, it is important that they all work together.

There were particular circumstances where it was felt that the independence of Customs and Excise prosecutors would be reinforced if they were to become directly accountable to the Attorney-General. As the hon. Gentleman says, that is about to happen. However, I am not aware that it is suggested that that should be the case for Inland Revenue prosecutors. We work closely with Inland Revenue prosecutors, and I visited the team a few weeks ago.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): I welcome everything that my right hon. and learned Friend has been saying.

The director of the Serious Fraud Office has already acknowledged that the office is scraping only the surface of fraud in the United Kingdom. Given that the SFO has had many recent successes, would it not make sense for the office to have responsibility for all fraud prosecutions?

Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that Mr. Ernest Saunders, formerly of Guinness, is helping the national health service with a special research project into miraculous cures for pre-senile dementia?

The Solicitor-General: My hon. Friend makes an important point about the valuable work that is done by the SFO. Given its size, it can undertake only a certain number of investigations and prosecutions. I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is on the Government Front Bench to hear about the importance of the SFO's work and the need to expand it. I am sure that he will take these matters seriously.

It has been suggested in the past that the SFO should take on minor frauds. It is right, however, that it should take on complex and serious frauds. Such cases involve specialist legal and accountancy work that ranges across different jurisdictions. When I was in the SFO yesterday, it was explained to me that sometimes there are different defendants in different countries, with witnesses in different countries. The office has to deal with the proceeds of crime in different countries, and it has to translate its documents into different languages.

We will not allow big, international fraudsters to get away with their activities by crossing jurisdictions. It is important that the SFO's work is recognised and that it has the resources that it needs to do its job.

Crown Prosecution Service

4. **Helen Southworth** (Warrington, South): What assessment she has made of the recommendation of Lord Justice Auld that the charges against defendants should be decided by the Crown Prosecution Service rather than the police. [40758]

The Solicitor-General: Sir Robin Auld's review of the criminal courts, published in October 2001, proposed that the Crown Prosecution Service, rather than the police, should have responsibility for determining the charge against defendants except in minor or routine cases. This is to ensure that the right suspect is brought to court with the right charge and the right evidence.

Helen Southworth: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for that answer. In her opinion, is it more likely that allegations of domestic violence will proceed to court in cases where the Crown Prosecution Service was involved in the charging?

The Solicitor-General: It is sometimes thought that the police think, "Perhaps we should not put this case forward to the prosecution because it might drop the case. Therefore, there is no point." It might be that it is not clear about which are the best charges or what the best evidence is.

There are five pilot schemes, and we are examining how the prosecution can take forward charges rather than the police. The schemes will show whether by working together at a local level we can have the right charges and a better outcome. In difficult cases, such as domestic violence or where there is an element of racial aggravation, it is important to get the charges right at the outset. There is nothing more demoralising for victims than to see downgraded the charge as laid, or for it to be dropped altogether. The work that has been done in Halifax, for example, shows that the process has been taken forward successfully.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): The Prime Minister said yesterday that crime rates had fallen under the current Government since 1997, but that is simply not the case in my constituency and many others. Much of that failure relates to the manner in which criminal charges are brought against defendants. Does not the Solicitor-General agree that the indictment by the recent inspectorate report on the CPS established the existence of understaffing and weak management—yet another failure on public services by this Government—and, furthermore, that the CPS fails to respond to defence correspondence and to disclose evidence? Did she note in last week's edition of *The Sunday Times* the remarks of the defence lawyer who said with regard to CPS failures:

> "As a defence lawyer, I think it is great. As a taxpayer, it is disgraceful"?

In other words, criminals are walking free and the Prime Minister was wrong.

The Solicitor-General: That particular issue concerns a defence lawyer who was trying to drum up business for himself and, more importantly, to plug the book that he had recently published. None the less, the hon. Gentleman made some serious points about the historic understaffing of the CPS, which has had insufficient lawyers and administration staff, and the fact that improvements have been needed. The inspectorate reports show that those improvements are under way. I refer him to the evidence that the Director of Public Prosecutions gave to the Select Committee on Home Affairs last month, which could allow us to have cautious optimism that we will get the independent, fair and effective prosecution system that he and I both want.

Banking Services (Small Businesses)

12.31 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): With permission, Mr. Speaker, in presenting the Competition Commission's report on the supply of banking services to small and medium-sized enterprises, and my response and that of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, our starting point and guiding objective is our belief in competition as the spur to efficiency, innovation and competitiveness.

This is underpinned by our statement last July that, just as in the last Parliament it was right to make monetary decisions independent of political influence under an independent authority—first de facto and then de jure—so too it is right to make competition decisions—de facto and then de jure—independent of political interference, with Government accepting the decisions of independent competition authorities. Having already moved de facto to such a regime in the way in which we handle merger cases, in the forthcoming enterprise Bill we will legislate to make decisions on mergers and complex monopolies independent.

There are more than 3.5 million small businesses in the United Kingdom, representing 55 per cent. of jobs, 50 per cent. of all business turnover and £1 trillion of economic activity each year. The access to finance and quality of service that they receive from banks are critically important to their productivity and prosperity and that of the British economy. So when the Cruickshank report on banking services found little prospect of effective competition emerging in the small business market, the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and I referred small business banking to the Competition Commission for a full investigation. Its report is published and laid before the House today.

Under the Fair Trading Act 1973, there are three necessary tests, all of which must be met before it can be concluded that a complex monopoly is operating that is harmful to the public interest. The first test is that at least a quarter of the services under consideration must be supplied by a group of persons. The Competition Commission found that the eight largest clearing banks supplied at least a quarter of banking services in the UK, with the four largest providing 86 per cent. of services, and that that degree of concentration had changed little over the past 10 years. The second test is that the group of persons must be found to conduct its affairs

"as in any way to prevent, restrict or distort competition".

The third test is that the restriction or distortion of competition caused by the complex monopoly must be shown to operate against the public interest.

Let me set out the Competition Commission's findings. First, it finds that the banks concerned had failed to compete on price by refusing to pay interest on current accounts and only paying low rates of interest on smaller, short-term deposit accounts; and that they had been maintaining a structure of charges not related to costs.

Secondly, the Competition Commission finds that those banks had reduced choice, and the ability of small businesses to make savings on bank charges, by restricting small businesses to business rather than personal bank accounts; failing to inform small businesses about possible benefits from set-off and sweep facilities which allow for credit balances in one account to be set off against debit balances in another; and requiring small businesses wanting a deposit account or a loan also to hold a current account.

Thirdly, the Competition Commission finds that those banks had made it hard for small businesses to compare the deals available from different banks by failing to provide small businesses with a breakdown of interest charges on their current account and offering discounts only to selected customers.

Fourthly, the Competition Commission finds that those banks had made it more difficult and expensive for new entrants and alternative suppliers to attract small businesses by confining free banking to business start-ups and to small businesses that had moved from another bank, and negotiating reduced charges for small businesses that were likely to switch banks.

The Competition Commission concludes that all eight of the largest clearing banks in the UK were found to be carrying out one or more of those practices, which operated against the public interest. Moreover, it finds that

"the average return on equity between 1998 and 2000 is 36 per cent. compared with an estimated cost of equity of about 15 per cent. We however, recognise that a number of adjustments should be made to these figures."

It continues:

"despite the cautious approach we have adopted to a number of those factors, we have concluded that the four largest clearing groups . . . are together charging excessive prices . . . and therefore making excessive profits in England and Wales of about £725 million a year over the last three years with adverse effects on SMEs."

Profits are absolutely central to the effective and efficient working of a market economy. They are the engine in the dynamic process of competition, innovation and meeting the needs of consumers. Where high profits are due to relative efficiency rather than monopoly—as the Competition Commission found in the case of Northern bank—the question of whether high profits are against the public interest does not arise.

Where high profits are derived from an absence of competition or through a complex monopoly situation, and are earned by overcharging customers, the effectiveness of the market is reduced. Indeed, as the Competition Commission observed, where the consumers concerned—in this case small and medium-sized companies—are themselves operating in a highly competitive market, the adverse effects on the public interest are exacerbated.

Because practices carried out by the eight main clearing banks—and the overcharging by the four largest in England and Wales—were found by the Competition Commission to operate against the public interest, it recommends that all eight clearing banks identified make a number of changes to their practices to help promote competition in this market, including being required to facilitate the switching of accounts; providing—if requested—a portable credit history; making the charges for their services more transparent; investigating the feasibility, costs and benefits of a national scheme for sharing branches; and extending the business banking code.

Taken together, the Competition Commission states that those remedies, along with others that it proposes, would help to promote greater competition in banking services.

The Competition Commission also wants

"a decisive and significant shift towards what"

the commission

"consider to be competitive levels",

and it states:

"competition and entry has to date not been effective in reducing excess profits and prices, nor is the immediate prospect of new entry in"

the commission's

"view sufficient to reduce excess profits and prices in a reasonable time period."

It recommends a further transitional remedy requiring the four largest banks operating current accounts in England and Wales, where evidence of excessive charges was found, to offer all small businesses one of three possible options: a current account that pays interest of at least the Bank of England base rate minus 2.5 per cent; or a current account free of money transmission charges; or a choice between the two.

The Competition Commission concludes that since certain current banking practices have operated against the public interest, and led to small businesses paying more than they should for services, it would be wrong to let the situation continue for several more years until the behavioural remedies to promote competition took effect.

From our starting point—our belief in competition as the spur to efficiency—the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and I considered the Competition Commission's report carefully. We examined the recommendations and remedies proposed to promote competition, to encourage new banking suppliers to enter the market and directly to address the lack of choice and information. Until the competition authorities are fully independent, the Government have legal responsibility for decisions on complex monopoly cases. In preparing the Government's response, we sought and received additional advice on the report's technical analysis and recommendations from independent experts.

The advice of the Director General of Fair Trading, which is published today, agrees with the Competition Commission that the limited extent and difficulty of switching bank accounts is a key factor in inhibiting competition in the small business banking market. In his advice, which I am also publishing today, Sir Bryan Carsberg, the former chairman of the International Accounting Standards Board and former Director General of Fair Trading, concluded that

"the framework adopted by the Commission is sound and would be accepted as appropriate by most independent experts".

Like the Competition Commission, we recognise that for banks to be robust and play their key role in the economy, it is necessary and desirable, at certain points in the economic cycle, for them to make higher than average profits. However, although we are pro-profit, we are also pro-competition, and we cannot be on the side of any monopoly or other behaviour that unfairly restricts competition in markets.

The Competition Commission explicitly concludes that practices by banks operate against the public interest. Having carefully considered its report, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and I agree that action must be taken to promote greater competition.

First, the Competition Commission recommends that banks be required to facilitate the switching of accounts to enable small businesses to move accounts from one bank to another easily and quickly by completing a substantial percentage of all account switching within five working days, by publishing their performance objectives and efficiency in achieving them, and by imposing no charges for closing accounts. We agree with the commission's recommendation.

Secondly, the commission recommends that banks be required, if requested by a small business, to provide a portable credit history—a statement of the business's credit performance that can be passed to other banks and which will improve the prospects for smaller competitors and new entrants into the banking sector. We agree with the commission's recommendation.

Thirdly, the commission recommends that banks be required to stop bundling services and imposing requirements on small businesses to hold a current account in order to obtain a loan or deposit account. We agree with the commission's recommendation.

Fourthly, the commission recommends that banks be required to make their service charges more transparent by routinely publishing their standard tariff prices for money transmission services and for interest paid on current and short-term deposit accounts, allowing small businesses easily to compare charges. We agree with the commission's recommendation.

Fifthly, because lack of access to a bank branch represents a key barrier to many substantial new competitors entering the market, the commission recommends that banks be required to investigate the feasibility, costs and benefits of a national scheme for sharing branches, and to publish their findings within a year. We agree with the commission's recommendation.

The Julius report concluded that the principles underlying the voluntary code for banking and mortgages for households should be extended to small businesses. Consequently, the Competition Commission made several other informal suggestions, some of which are incorporated in the new code announced by the British Bankers Association last week, which we welcome. The Competition Commission recommends that other suggestions, such as banks improving their procedures for dealing with errors and paying compensation, should be added to the code.

Those and other remedies proposed by the Competition Commission are in pursuit of competition and we ask the banks to work with the Director General of Fair Trading to implement the recommendations speedily.

In seeking an earlier and decisive switch towards a better service for small businesses, the Competition Commission considered more radical proposals—for example, divestment of bank branches and small and medium-sized enterprise banking businesses, whereby banks would be forced to give over some of their branches or customers to other banks. It also considered a licence fee, an obligatory fund and a windfall tax. The Competition Commission rejected those proposals, and we agree with that rejection.

The Competition Commission recommends a transitional remedy that would not prevent companies from earning high profits but would simply ensure that they could do so only as a result of a genuine competitive advantage—a remedy that

"imposes no restriction on new entrants . . . and should not interfere with the natural emergence of desirable competition".

[Mr. Gordon Brown]

Thus the commission recommends, and we agree, as a transitional measure, that the four largest banks operating current accounts in England and Wales be required to offer any small and medium-sized enterprise either a current account paying interest of at least the Bank of England base rate minus 2.5 per cent, or a current account free of money transmission charges, or a choice between the two. The Director General of Fair Trading recommends, and we agree, that we ask him to obtain undertakings from the banks to implement that remedy.

The commission suggests that all remedies be put in place within six months. We hope that the Director General of Fair Trading will be able to reach an earlier agreement on the transitional remedy. The commission also recommends that the Director General of Fair Trading review all the remedies three years after their implementation. Under the Fair Trading Act 1973, there is flexibility for a review to take place sooner. We state our view that if at any time within the three years the Office of Fair Trading observes more effective competition emerging, or banks have proposals that they believe would make for a more competitive environment, an early review could and should take place.

Our goal is to create an environment where new entrants can compete with existing banks on a fair basis and both can secure more competitive services for small businesses. I urge the banks to work with the Director General of Fair Trading to achieve what is in everybody's interest: a better service and a fairer deal for Britain's 3.5 million small businesses.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): I thank the Chancellor for affording me some advance notice of the statement and the large report that he has published today. However, may I also register my protest at the fact that this statement did not appear on the annunciator until seven minutes past 12, giving hon. Members only 23 minutes' notice that the Chancellor intended to make a statement today, whereas this morning's newspapers and news broadcasts were full of speculation that he may well make such a statement. The other statement that is to be made today was announced on the annunciator at 11 o'clock this morning.

There was absolutely no reason why this statement should not have appeared on the annunciator at the same time. It is typical of the contempt that the Chancellor shows for the House every time he comes before it. I hope he will not suggest that there is any question of market sensitivity, because, as I said, the newspapers and news broadcasts this morning were full of speculation that such a statement might be made and, anyway, I would expect the Chancellor to know by now that the markets can do in 23 minutes what they can do in an hour and a half.

Can the Chancellor confirm that the Government received the report of the Competition Commission five months ago? Can he explain to the House the reasons for the delay in publishing it? Was that delay entirely due to the widely reported in-fighting between the Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry, or were there other factors and, if so, what were they? Would it not have been very much better had the Government published the commission's report when they received it, so that there could have been consultation on its recommendations before the Government made their decision?

On the substance of the statement, of course I entirely agree with the Chancellor that the best protection that can be given to the consumer, including the consumer of banking services, is competition. Is it not the case that since the commission began its inquiry, there has been a welcome and not insignificant enhancement of competition in this sector, with the entry of HBOS, Abbey National and the National Australia group into this sector of the market? Can he clarify whether the recommendations made by the commission, which he has accepted, will apply to all the banks in this sector, including new entrants, or only to the biggest four banks, which, as he said, cover 86 per cent. of the market?

More widely, would not the greatest contribution that the Chancellor could make to enhance competition in the provision of banking services be to work for the relaxation of the provisions of the UCITS directive, which inhibit the development of money market funds in this country, along the lines of the measures that have been so successful in the United States?

I accept, nevertheless, that when competition is not working effectively, it is right that action should be taken to improve it. I, too, would accept most of the recommendations of the Competition Commission. There are some that require further consideration than can be given in half an hour, and we shall give them that consideration. For the most part, however—although not in every respect—it would appear that the Competition Commission has arrived at some sensible proposals, and the Chancellor is right to accept them.

Will the Chancellor tell us a little more about some of the recommendations? For example, he says that he accepts the commission's recommendation that banks be required to investigate

> "the feasibility, costs and benefits of a national scheme for sharing branches"

and to publish their findings within a year. What action does he have in mind for banks that are either unable or unwilling to conduct such a feasibility study?

Does not the Chancellor recognise, as he stands here today posing as the champion of small business, that he and his Government have done enormous damage to the small business sector in this country by the piles of regulation that they have imposed on small business—4,642 last year alone: one for every 25 minutes of every working day in the year? Is that not the main factor that is impairing the ability of small business to prosper? Is not the Chancellor failing completely to take any action to remedy it?

Mr. Brown: If the shadow Chancellor supports us on the competition measures that we are putting forward today, he should have been able to tell us that he supported the switching of accounts, the portable credit histories, the changes in the British banking code and the transitional remedies. He noticeably refused to do so. If he is not prepared to support those measures, he will find himself at odds not only with the small business organisations of this country—including the Federation of Small Businesses—but with the Competition Commission.

It was the Conservative party that said, in 2001:

> "Competitions decisions are best left to independent regulators and the competition authorities."

The Competition Commission recommends all these measures. The shadow Chancellor should, therefore, be saying that he will back up the competition authorities, but he has not been prepared to do that. We have suggested a number of remedies, particularly the transitional remedies, on which he has been absolutely silent.

On the question of the publication of the competition report, it was received in October. We then put it to the Director General of Fair Trading for advice, and also asked Sir Bryan Carsberg to work on it. We have considered all the recommendations in detail. There have never been so many recommendations in one report on banking as there are in this report, and we have considered them all carefully. I think that the House would prefer that we proceeded in that way on this matter.

Equally, as for a statement to the House on this matter, the right hon. and learned Gentleman himself was the Minister responsible for the City and financial services in the 1980s. No monopolies and mergers statement was brought before the House. We are bringing a statement before the House in a way that has never been done before. I also have to tell the shadow Chancellor, who is a barrister, that we have had to satisfy all the legal technicalities involved in the publication of the report, which also goes to the Stock Exchange—*[Interruption.]*—none of it has appeared in the press—and which also has to go to the banks themselves.

There now follows a period during which the banks will be approached by the Director General of Fair Trading on the basis of the undertakings relating both to the transitional and to the other remedies. He will then report to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and to me.

The shadow Chancellor asked about the changes that had taken place, with a number of companies announcing that they wanted to enter the market for small business. That, as he will discover, is dealt with in both the Competition Commission's report and in what we have received from the Director General of Fair Trading. The report says

> "We do not believe that"

behavioural remedies

> "will have sufficient impact on competition within the next two to three years to ensure that the incidence of excessive prices for banking services . . . of the four largest clearing groups in England and Wales . . . would disappear in a reasonable period of time."

That is exactly why the Competition Commission has proposed the transitional remedies on which the shadow Chancellor—because he has not faced up to these questions—is silent this morning.

The report says that

> "lack of competition has permitted and would continue to permit overcharging of SMEs for these services."

The Competition Commission does not believe that, even given additional new entrants into the market, behavioural remedies—entry and more competition—will of themselves have sufficient effect on services to small businesses over the next two or three years. That is why the Director General of Fair Trading has recommended the transitional remedies.

I hope that, just as after a time consensus was reached on the independence of the Bank of England and acceptance of its interest rate decisions, consensus can now be reached on the independent competition authorities. I hope that after some reflection the Conservative party will agree not only that competition is right in general, but that the specific remedies that have been recommended are necessary if we are to do our best by the 3.5 million small businesses in this country.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): The Select Committee on the Treasury will welcome the report. In the next month or so, we shall be inviting the banks to give evidence on what they have done since the Cruickshank report.

Is it not the case, however, that too many small businesses are still being charged as much as 250 to 300 times more than is justifiable? Is it not the case that not enough small-scale risk capital is available, and very little venture capital? Those problems must be tackled if we are to achieve our twin aims of more jobs and more productivity. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the banks will have to go on playing their part and come to terms with their wider role, responsibility and duties to the communities from which they derive their funds?

Mr. Brown: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments, and welcome the work that his Select Committee is doing on banking.

The banks—I pay tribute to them—are working with us on the creation of venture capital funds in the regions and the high-unemployment communities. Britain is now more advanced than other countries in terms of its development of its venture capital industry in the regions, and I hope that the banks will continue to work with us to solve the problem of the venture capital funding gap in some high-unemployment areas.

Let me refer to some of the general measures. As I have said, there are 3.5 million small businesses in the country. It is estimated that they were overcharged by some £725 million in 1998-2000, although that depends on the interest rate that was prevalent at the time. Both the transitional and the long-term remedies take account of the problem. I hope that the banks will work with us to find a solution to what most Members on both sides of the House would agree has been a perennial difficulty for small businesses in all our constituencies, some of which contain 3,000, 4,000 or even 5,000 of them—many very small indeed. We are in a position to make progress, and I hope there will be consensus on the report's findings.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I welcome the Chancellor's statement, and the Government's commitment to prompt and full implementation of the report's recommendations.

Does the Chancellor agree that the report fully vindicates the findings of the Cruickshank report, published two years ago, despite their rubbishing by the banks themselves? Does he agree with the central conclusion of that report that there are profound competition problems in this sector as a result of complex monopoly, the leading clearers' control of the central clearing system and, indeed, the banks' continued enjoyment of regulatory privileges—for instance, the fact that the Government are their lender of last resort? Does the Chancellor accept that basic analysis?

Does the Chancellor also accept that his cautious approach—it has taken two years, since the publication of the Cruickshank report, to reach the conclusions—

[Dr. Vincent Cable]

has meant that the small business sector had roughly £1.5 billion of excess profits taken out of it by the banking system? That has swamped the positive incentives that he put back into small business, such as £200 million for the small business research and development tax credit. As the Office of Fair Trading report rejects the idea of a levy on banks, what measures does he propose in order to retrieve some of the £1.5 billion excess profit of the past two years and to put it back into small business?

The Cruickshank analysis has been vindicated. It suggested that there was up to £5 billion of excess profits altogether, much of it taken from personal consumers as well as small business. In light of that, when do the Government propose to implement their long-promised recommendations to introduce Paycom, a payments regulator? Ministers have told me in response to written and oral questions and Adjournment debates for more than two years that that is imminent, but it has yet to materialise.

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who has taken a long-standing interest in such matters. I am also grateful to him for dealing with the specifics, unlike the shadow Chancellor.

First, Ms DeAnne Julius's work on the banking code is moving ahead as a result of the Cruickshank report. Secondly, we are committed to opening up the money transmission services. That is Government policy. Thirdly, however, we reject a windfall tax, as does the Competition Commission. The previous Conservative Government imposed the only windfall tax on banks, and that was for the same reason—to deal with the failure of banks to pay interest on current accounts at a time of high interest rates in the early 1980s.

We believe that because the injury is to small businesses themselves, the best thing is to reduce costs for small businesses. That is why the option for the transitional period is either to pay a rate of interest on current accounts or to provide free banking services for the money transmission services that are involved. Both of those could be worth substantial amounts of money to a small business if properly implemented, and it is now for the Director General of Fair Trading to work on that.

Our proposals are directed at the problem, which is that small businesses must get a better deal. As I said, I hope that we can make progress quickly on the recommendations. Although the Competition Commission says that there are six months in which the undertakings can be discussed, we hope—and I believe—that the Director General of Fair Trading also hopes that we can move forward sooner.

As for incentives for small business, the hon. Gentleman will have noted my statements in the past few weeks in which I have made it clear that we are determined to do more to help small businesses to amass the funds to invest and to be able to seek equity, to start exporting and to hire new employees. That is our aim, and it will be advanced by measures in the Budget.

Mr. James Plaskitt (Warwick and Leamington): The 5,000 small businesses in my constituency will welcome the Chancellor's statement. The commission's report is a serious document. It basically finds the banks guilty of monopoly exploitation. In view of that, does my right hon. Friend agree that the banks should respond quickly to the findings? They should at least do something about charges and current account terms in less than the six months envisaged by the report. That would make a start on repaying more than £700 million-worth of overcharges.

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is also a member of the Treasury Committee. I hope that its work on this matter will yield results.

My hon. Friend is right to say that we should make progress as quickly as possible. All hon. Members know that we are dealing with a long-standing grievance and, indeed, a long-standing problem; the evidence is that action should be taken. However, I stress to him and the 5,000 businesses operating in his constituency that will benefit from the measures announced today that a healthy and profitable banking sector is in everyone's interests. There will be periods in the economic cycle in which banks should and will have to earn above average profits. Where those arise from the absence of competition, we should act. Therefore, I hope that all the recommendations that are central to the improvement of competition can be followed through.

On the transitional remedy, my hon. Friend will note that the Director General of the British Chambers of Commerce said only a few days ago:

> "To stop this overcharging, we would advocate that the Secretary of State must cap the charges of the big four banks until the competition is more secure."

Our remedy is more flexible than that, but it is clear that many of the business organisations are demanding action, and demanding action now. We can be both pro profit for banks and pro competition.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): In making such major changes, will the Chancellor bear in mind the danger of undermining one of our most successful institutions, which has high standards that are greatly appreciated by people all over the world? Does he accept that, with regard to small businesses, the banks have to carry a massive burden of bad debts and failed businesses, and that it is only fair to take that into account? What are the figures?

On competition, does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the Clydesdale bank in Scotland—happily owned by Australians—pays interest on its current accounts to people like me? Is it not unfair to undermine the banks by talking only about the costs and not the massive burdens? Will he give a figure on the banks' bad debts and failed businesses?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who has taken an interest in these matters at a British and European level for some time. He seems to have a more intimate knowledge of the banking system than the shadow Chancellor.

The hon. Gentleman rightly raises the assessment of the methodology that was used by the Competition Commission, and what allowance has been made for the large amount of bad debts that have to be written off by the banks. The Competition Commission also took into account in its methodology the effects of the economic cycle in which, at certain points, higher than average profits can be expected to be earned. There is also the issue of the allowance made for intangible assets by the methodology adopted by the Competition Commission.

We have considered these matters carefully, as has the Competition Commission. It is because the questions raised by the hon. Gentleman are rightly raised by members of the public and the banks that we asked Sir Bryan Carsberg, a renowned international expert on these issues, to look at the methodology. The notation with the documentation that the House has shows that he has expressed his confidence in the general approach taken. I believe that people will reach exactly the conclusion that we reached when they look at the figures that are available.

On the general point about banks, of course the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Britain wants and should be proud of a healthy, profitable banking sector, but it cannot be at the expense of little competition or a complex monopoly. When that is the case, it is our duty to take action. The hon. Gentleman speaks from the Back Benches and has done for these past 20 years; I think that he will agree that it is sad that when this problem was put to Conservative Ministers in the 1990s, they did nothing about it.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): For 10 years during that period, and before I entered this House, I ran a business in the City and suffered exactly the sort of banking disservice that was provided to small and medium-sized enterprises such as mine. I welcome this report with the enthusiasm of somebody who suffered under those practices for so long.

My right hon. Friend referred to radical measures which have been discussed and considered in the report. In particular, I would have urged him to pursue the windfall tax, but I take the reasons and the rationale behind his decision not to pursue that course and go out of line with the regulator's suggestions. However, if there is any dilatoriness on the part of the banks in implementing the recommendations, sorting out their service to the public and repaying the extra profits that they have made through an improvement of service, I urge my right hon. Friend to hold that option up his sleeve.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Bravissimo!

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman should not be so unkind to my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner), who at least has views on the matter that he is prepared to express, unlike the shadow Chancellor, who had nothing to add to the debate.

My hon. Friend is right to say that action is needed now. That is why the proposals have been put forward under such a time scale. It is also the case that the new banking code proposals—I applaud the banks—were made in the past few days. Many of the proposals are a welcome advance on the previous position, and I welcome the specific recommendations in them. The Competition Commission believes that there should be further reforms of the banking code and has made informal suggestions about compensation and other matters where it feels there are errors that should be taken into account. Equally, we can move forward quite quickly with the other recommendations.

I do not agree with my hon. Friend about the case for a windfall tax, as I have explained. Perhaps the Conservative party will be the only party to propose that, as it imposed a windfall tax on the banks in the early 1980s. It is important to say that we are both pro profit—we need the banks to be profitable—and pro competition.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Does the Chancellor accept that the statement that he began reading at 12.30 pm was one of the longest that he has made since he took office other than on Budget day? Does he accept that that means that it must have been a considerable time in the drafting? Does he also accept that he has given a totally inadequate response to the shadow Chancellor on his discourtesy in notifying the House at only seven minutes past 12 that such a statement would take place? Will he give an undertaking not to show such discourtesy to the House in the future? Finally, does he recognise that that was not only a discourtesy to the House and to the Opposition, but that it particularly upset his friends in the Liberal Democrats, whose Treasury spokesman was not even here to hear his statement?

Mr. Brown: I take it that the hon. Gentleman was trying to make a point about the Liberal Democrats by a very circuitous route. The fact of the matter is that this Government are bringing the Competition Commission report to the House with a statement, which he should applaud. We are also the Government who are publishing all the documents: the report of the Director General of Fair Trading, Sir Bryan Carsberg's report and today's report. We are doing so in a way that does not offend the normal procedures that must legally be pursued for Competition Commission reports. I would hope that the shadow Chancellor, as a lawyer, would begin to understand that.

All these points about procedure from Conservative Members are designed to obscure the most important fact to come out of this discussion—that they cannot even tell us at this point whether they support the major remedies that are proposed.

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. Could he clarify what action is proposed to reimburse small businesses? I am sure that he knows that although most businesses are overcharged, they do not receive 100 per cent. reimbursement. Will he say a little more about that?

Mr. Brown: We are proposing action for now and for the future; we are not proposing retrospective action and neither was the Competition Commission report. We have said that competition decisions should be independent of political interference. I hope that, in the light of what the Conservative party said at the election and what the Liberal Democrat party has said consistently, there can be all-party consensus that these decisions are best made by independent authorities under rules established by the House in legislation. While we prepare to legislate for that, we have the legal responsibility to announce and make those decisions.

We have done everything in our power. We appointed Sir Bryan Carsberg and consulted the director general, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and I have studied in detail all the recommendations. It is right to go ahead now to implement those recommendations, which have been put forward by the Competition Commission, supported by

[Mr. Brown]

the Director General of Fair Trading—the methodology having been assessed by Sir Bryan Carsberg. I hope that there can be consensus on that.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I welcome the Chancellor's strong commitment to competition and the remedies that will improve the service to small businesses. I wish that his belief in competition would extend to the currencies that they might bank in so that they could continue to have the choice of the pound or the euro. Is he at all worried that if the banks plan sharing branches at the same time as their revenues are cut, their response will be another big round of branch closures? What will he do to stop that getting out of hand and damaging the service, which we would not want?

Mr. Brown: I see no need for that to happen, but it is precisely so that the details can be studied that the Competition Commission has recommended—we support that recommendation—that the banks should prepare a report for the Director General of Fair Trading. I appreciate that that is one concern that will be expressed. We believe that it is a soluble problem. The right way to proceed is for the banks and the director general to consider those detailed undertakings and for the work to be done on that. I take it that the right hon. Gentleman supports not only the independence of the Competition Commission but its recommendations in general.

Mr. Redwood *indicated assent.*

Mr. Brown: The recommendations are detailed and it is good that we have the right hon. Gentleman's support. I hope that we can now have the support of the shadow Chancellor.

Mr. Ben Chapman (Wirral, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, because a successful small firms sector is essential as the seedbed of future growth, the banks, by gaining excess profits—in effect, by ripping off small companies—have damaged the enterprise culture? Notwithstanding his earlier remarks, does he think that, in those circumstances, a withholding or a windfall tax might have been used to provide the venture capital and the higher risk financing that those small firms so desperately need?

Mr. Brown: I know that my hon. Friend was formerly a business adviser. I also know that during the next few days strong feelings on these matters will be expressed in every phone-in programme and letters column because people feel strongly about the costs of banking services and about the failure in many cases to pay interest on current accounts.

However, we have a balanced set of recommendations that point our way in both the present and the future. I am in favour neither of the withholding tax in Europe nor of the windfall tax that has been examined by the Competition Commission. The commission examined and rejected the tax—as we are right to do—but I hope that we can move ahead with agreement on all the other measures that offer the prospect of opening up competition in the small business market while giving small businesses an immediate remedy as we wait for that competition to take effect.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): Neither the Scottish National party, Plaid Cymru nor any of the Ulster parties received an advance copy of the Chancellor's statement. Surely it is unacceptable that some parties received an advance copy while others did not.

That said, on behalf of the SNP and Plaid Cymru, I welcome the recommendations as a step forward. We are especially interested in the Chancellor's remarks about a national network of sharing branches. Does he realise that, due to branch-network closure programmes over the past few years, there are no bank branches at all in many rural and some inner-city areas? When he discusses those matters with the banks, will he consider proposals for extending banking to those areas to encourage small businesses to set up and continue there? When there are no bank branches, it is difficult for such businesses to continue to operate—especially those that are cash-intensive.

Mr. Brown: It is precisely for those reasons that there is work to make the network available to new entrants. It is also for those reasons that the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South (Nigel Griffiths), who has responsibility for small business, has taken a great interest in bank branches in rural areas. The Post Office also has a role.

I ask the House to bear in mind not only that, historically, statements about the Competition Commission, or the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, have not been made in the House—that was the practice followed by the previous Government—but that the shadow Chancellor asked me a question. I wrote to him this morning, stating that:

> "The reports contain information about particular [illegible]sinesses"—

individual companies—

> "which until the report is published is confidential under section 133 of the Fair Trading Act and onward disclosure is prohibited under this section."

I have to take account of the legal requirements on me when I make information available before a statement. The previous Conservative Government never made statements on such matters; they must have had a good reason at the time.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement because—as perhaps he can confirm—many thousands of businesses in my constituency might be being overcharged by between £250 and £300 a year for banking services. Although Members on both sides of the House—but not the shadow Chancellor—support the proposals, does my right hon. Friend agree that it is the Labour Government who are listening to the needs of small businesses through the operation of the Small Business Council and other bodies? It is this Government who are standing up for the interests of small businesses and taking action to promote enterprise and competition. It is this Government who are succeeding for small businesses where the previous Government failed.

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There are more small businesses in this country, and the measures that we are adopting are designed to encourage even more. He is also right to say that, if the overcharging from 1998 to 2000 is in the order of £725 million a year—of course that depends on the interest rates in operation at any particular time—many small businesses are paying a high tariff for their banking services, which could be removed with this remedy, or they are not receiving interest on their current accounts, which the banks can now consider. The flexibility of our remedies allows banks to make a choice between those two.

I believe that the Liberal and nationalist parties are prepared to support our measures. It is unfortunate that, although the putative shadow Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), has expressed support for them, the shadow Chancellor himself has still not said what he thinks.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I want to give everyone who wants to the opportunity to speak, but I ask hon. Members to be brief and ask one question, and one question only.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): The Chancellor gave the costs of overcharging as £725 million. What is his estimate of the total cost to business of additional Government regulation imposed in the past two Parliaments? Are those who say that it is £5 billion right?

Mr. Brown: The Minister of State at the Cabinet Office announced only a few days ago the scrapping of a whole series of regulations that had been introduced by the Conservative Government and other previous Governments. We are working with the small business community in our regulatory taskforce to remove regulation. The hon. Gentleman should remember that we cut the rate of small business tax from 23p to 20p—to the lowest rate in our history—and that we introduced a 10p starting rate for small businesses on profits up to £10,000, and a rate between 10p and 20p on profits from £10,000 to £50,000. He should also remember that, despite all the talk from the Conservative party, it was the Labour Government who cut capital gains tax.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): Small businesses in my constituency will see the publication of the report and the Chancellor's actions as vindication of their deep-seated concerns over many years about excessive profit-taking by the largest four banks. Is there any hope of his predecessors as Chancellor heading to Palace Green to apologise for failing to take the action that he has taken?

Mr. Brown: That is a matter for previous Chancellors. My hon. Friend is right to say that it was time to take action. It is regrettable that at the time when small businesses were complaining most, especially in the early 1990s, so little was done to help them. It is possible to build a consensus around developing the enterprise culture, and I would have thought that all parties would now be prepared to join it. My remarks are directed to the shadow Chancellor, and I seek his views on our proposals.

Michael Fabricant: Like my right hon. and learned Friend the shadow Chancellor, I welcome the statement, but as with all such matters, the devil is in the detail. It is unfortunate that the Chancellor had cloth ears when my right hon. and learned Friend was speaking.

It is a great disappointment to me personally, and no doubt to others who are listening to our debate, that the Chancellor did not say anything about funds deposited by ZANU-PF, Mugabe and others in this country, which could have been seized, and—

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is no need for the Chancellor to answer that question.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): When does the Chancellor believe that the cartel of the money transmission service or central clearing will finally be ended?

Mr. Brown: We will announce detailed proposals on that matter in due course.

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): Has the Chancellor concluded that there is clear evidence of monopolistic practice in the personal banking market, and if so, what is the timetable for taking action?

Mr. Brown: That is not the subject of the statement, which is about small business banking. We referred the matter to the Competition Commission, which has produced a report that is now before the House. Along with the commission, we are proposing to take action. As for the personal banking sector, that is not the subject of the review.

Zimbabwe

1.24 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on Zimbabwe.

Yesterday, Robert Mugabe was declared the official winner in the presidential election. That result should, however, surprise no one. ZANU-PF had long been bent on achieving precisely that outcome by any means and at all costs. The Zimbabwean Government have subjected their electorate to two years of violence and intimidation. They have harassed Opposition candidates and supporters, manipulated the voters' rolls and restricted access to polling stations. They have exploited every instrument of the state—the military, the police, media, youth militias and the bureaucracy—to distort the outcome of the election.

ZANU-PF did its utmost to conceal the extent of its violence and malpractice from the eyes of the world. It excluded European Union election observers, monopolised domestic television and radio, and restricted international media organisations, including the BBC. None of those actions were the actions of a party confident of its ability to win a free or fair election. The elections can be judged only by agreed international standards, not least the declaration signed by Commonwealth Heads of Government, chaired by President Mugabe, in Harare in 1991.

Only three months before the election, in December last year, on the basis of the principles of the Harare declaration, the Commonwealth concluded that

> "the situation in Zimbabwe constitutes a serious and persistent violation of the Commonwealth's fundamental political values and the rule of law".

That conclusion was reinforced in January, and again a week before the polls closed. The situation got worse during the election.

A key yardstick by which any electoral process must be judged is impartial electoral administration, but there was nothing impartial about the process in Zimbabwe. Robert Mugabe staffed Zimbabwe's electoral supervisory commission with partisan army officers. The names of who could and could not vote were not settled until just days before the election, amidst allegations of fraudulent practice. During the election itself, the electoral commission reduced the number of polling booths in urban areas to restrict the Opposition vote. In many rural areas, the Opposition say that their polling agents and monitors were prevented from inspecting ballot boxes before voting started. Others were not allowed inside polling stations. Many Opposition workers say they were abducted, detained or arrested by supporters of the ruling party or the security forces.

As the House will know, while European Union and other observers were excluded from observing the electoral process, some groups of election observers were allowed into the country. Earlier today, I received the preliminary report of the Commonwealth observers group, which comes to a number of coruscating conclusions about the conduction of the election. It said:

> "The violence and intimidation created a climate of fear and suspicion."

It said that the police

> "appeared to be high-handed in dealing with the MDC and lenient towards supporters of . . . ZANU-PF. This failure to impartially enforce the law seriously calls into question the application of the rule of law in Zimbabwe."

It said:

> "We were concerned that the legislative framework within which the elections were conducted . . . was basically flawed."

It went on:

> "Limitations on the freedom of speech, movement and . . . association prevented the opposition from campaigning freely."

It continued:

> "We . . . found that thousands of Zimbabwean citizens were disenfranchised".

It concluded:

> "All the foregoing brings us to the conclusion that the conditions in Zimbabwe did not adequately allow for a free expression of will by the electors."

That set of conclusions has been confirmed in a report by parliamentary observers from the Southern African Development Community. It makes similar, very serious criticisms of the process, and concludes that

> "the electoral process could not be said to adequately comply with the Norms and Standards for Elections in the SADC region."

I shall place both reports in the House of Commons Library.

Zimbabweans have plainly been denied their fundamental right to choose by whom they are governed. I am sure that I speak for the whole House in expressing my admiration for the people of Zimbabwe—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]—whose faith in democracy was so strong that they queued for days to vote, in the face of police violence. In some cases, they were denied the right to vote. They are the true democrats, but they deserve a great deal better.

What adds to the tragedy is that, until recently, Zimbabwe was the pride of Africa—the bread basket of the continent. Robert Mugabe's disastrous economic polices have severely damaged his own country. Unemployment is running at 70 per cent. and inflation at 112 per cent. Last year, its gross domestic product declined by 10 per cent., and the same decline is expected this year. In the space of two years, Robert Mugabe's prime achievement will have been to contract Zimbabwe's economy by at least a quarter.

The failure of the electoral process in Zimbabwe is a tragedy not just for Zimbabwe, but for the people of southern Africa as a whole. The rand of the Republic of South Africa depreciated by 40 per cent. in the past year. The people of southern Africa deserve better, too. Their Governments will inevitably bear most of the responsibility in helping the region to recover, and we shall of course continue to work with them in that task.

The House will know that, on 18 February, the European Union decided to impose sanctions, which were targeted against the leadership of ZANU-PF. They included a travel ban, an assets freeze and a ban on arms sales. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I will travel to Barcelona this afternoon, and at the summit to be held in that city we will review the position with our EU partners.

We are also working closely with the United States Government. They have already announced a travel ban on the ZANU-PF leadership and are considering a possible broadening of sanctions, along the lines of those already enforced by the EU. We will continue to work closely with them, and with our G8 and SADC partners.

The House will know that, at the turn of the year, Her Majesty's Government took the view, on evidence available then, that Zimbabwe should be suspended from the Commonwealth. Events since then have simply confirmed that judgment. Regrettably, Commonwealth Heads of Government decided not to follow that course, but to appoint instead a troika of South Africa, Nigeria and Australia to decide on Zimbabwe's Commonwealth status. We await its conclusions in the light of the strongly worded Commonwealth observers group report, to which I have already drawn the House's attention, and the more detailed report that the observers group promises.

In the face of the deprivation heaped on them by their own Government, it is crucial that we and the international community stand by the people of Zimbabwe. We will therefore maintain our programme of humanitarian assistance, and our assistance in the fight against HIV-AIDS. However, I tell the House that we will continue to oppose any accessing by the Government of Zimbabwe of international financial resources until a more representative Government are in place.

Robert Mugabe may claim to have won this election, but the people of Zimbabwe have lost. We are faced with a leader who is determined to ignore the international community, to ignore his people and to ignore the grave consequences of his actions. Change will have to come to Zimbabwe. One day—I hope soon—we can look forward to a democratic Government of Zimbabwe, acting in the interests of all their peoples, and taking their rightful place in a modern Africa.

Some have sought to suggest that this is a conflict between Africa and the west, black against white and south against north. I reject that totally. At its heart, this is a matter of the universal worldwide principle of the right of people, wherever they live, freely to determine their own future. That principle has been flouted in Zimbabwe, and all democrats should speak with one voice in condemning what has taken place.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): I thank the Foreign Secretary for making his statement today on Mr. Mugabe's election result and for letting me see a copy in advance.

I refer to Mr. Mugabe's election result rather than his victory, because the word "victory" has glamorous connotations. Yesterday's result in Zimbabwe contained nothing glamorous at all. It was sordid, dishonest, underhand, undemocratic and wrong. It should not be allowed to stand. President Bush is right to have made it clear that he will not recognise the result, and we should do the same. For all the Foreign Secretary's fine words, I am disappointed that nothing in what he said suggested that that would be the case.

We must avoid the temptation of a emotional reaction. We need to look dispassionately at the evidence of what has happened and to be able to demonstrate that the election was not only flawed, but rigged well in advance of polling and neither free nor fair. It has not been free for months. The long run-up to the elections has been marked by violence, intimidation and the use of terror as a political weapon. The House should not forget that in the 12 months to January this year we had already seen 48 political murders, 329 abductions and 2,245 cases of torture, and there have been many more since. We have seen the media gagged, and reputable international broadcasters expelled and labelled as terrorists. All those are the attributes of fascist regimes through history.

Nor was the election fair. From the outset the process has been corrupted, as the Foreign Secretary set out in detail today and as the reports from the Commonwealth and SADC so clearly and graphically confirm. It is worth remembering that in March last year SADC set out 11 election recommendations that were subsequently endorsed by all SADC members, including Zimbabwe. Not one of the 11 recommendations has been adhered to.

I shall remind the House of some of those recommendations and what happened. They included impartial international and regional election observers at the earliest possible stage—that did not happen; equal access to the media for opposition parties—that was not allowed; impartial policing of the ballot—laughable; presidential candidates to be provided with free and adequate security during the election process—laughable; and unimpeded freedom to campaign and freedom to vote throughout the country—laughable.

The result sets several serious tests in different areas. It is a test for southern Africa of whether the region genuinely adheres to the principles of democracy set out in the Harare declaration. It is a test for the Commonwealth of whether the principles on which it is founded mean anything at all. It is also a test for the Prime Minister, who has spoken about

"healing the scar . . . that is Africa"

to show whether he can, even belatedly, give the leadership to mend what is not just a scar but an open and bleeding wound on the body of that great continent.

I do not believe that what the Foreign Secretary has said today goes nearly far enough—it sounded like just more of what we have heard before. Once again, it is hope against experience. Why does not the Foreign Secretary today make it clear that the Government do not recognise the result or the legitimacy of the Zimbabwean Government and take steps accordingly?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Denis MacShane): He did.

Mr. Ancram: He did not.

Will the Foreign Secretary urgently consult his European Union counterparts in Barcelona this evening to see whether the targets of the sanctions can be extended in the way that the MDC has called for today? Will he seek the maximum degree of non-recognition of this result and of the Government of Zimbabwe throughout the international community, including suspension from the Commonwealth? Will he and the Prime Minister, together with the United States, take a lead in building an international coalition, including Europe and responsible members of the Commonwealth, to bring real and determined pressure to bear on Zimbabwe for new presidential elections to be held? Mr. Mugabe has got away with this election because the international community in general, and our Government in particular, did not show him months ago that we meant business when we called for free and fair elections. Like all tyrants, Mugabe has fed on the belief that brave statements from

[Mr. Ancram]

this Government and others were all words and would not be backed up by action. To our shame, for many months, he was correct in that belief.

The time for mere words is now over. There must be no more quiet diplomacy, no more hand wringing and no more supine inaction. They have all failed, and they have failed the people of Zimbabwe in the process. For the sake of the people of Zimbabwe, and for the sake of democracy, the Government must recognise that the time has come to stop talking and to start doing.

Mr. Straw: I understand fully the right hon. Gentleman's anger and frustration about what has happened because I share it, but much of his response amounted to tilting at windmills. He asks for us to take action in the Commonwealth. We have sought to do so. I have been in the lead in that regard, but the fact is that the Commonwealth is a free association of 54 countries. There was not a majority—and still less unanimity—in the Commonwealth for suspension before elections took place. I hope that there is now agreement inside the troika, because that would be an important mark of the Commonwealth's disapproval of what has happened.

The right hon. Gentleman asks us to build an international consensus. With respect, that is exactly what we have been doing. He asks for action. That is exactly what has been secured inside the European Union.

Mr. Ancram: Does the right hon. Gentleman recognise the result?

Mr. Straw: I thought that I had made it palpably obvious that we do not recognise the result or its legitimacy. There is no difference between the position that we have taken and that taken by President Bush.

As the right hon. Gentleman asked for action, I say to him gently that we were able to secure the required unanimous approval of the European Union to impose sanctions. As it happens, those sanctions are being imposed on a broader basis than those that the United States, with which we have been working closely, has introduced up to now. Had the right hon. Gentleman been holding my office, with his party's approach to the European Union, would that unanimity have been achieved?

I regret the tone of the right hon. Gentleman's concluding remarks. Neither Opposition spokesmen nor anyone else should move the blame for what has happened from where it must lie. It cannot be moved to the international community or to the House. The blame and responsibility must lie fairly and squarely on the shoulders of Robert Mugabe and ZANU-PF. Nothing would please them more than if they were let off the hook by the kind of ill-advised remarks that we have heard from the Opposition Front Bench.

I hope that the House will send out its determination that it recognises where the responsibility lies but, equally, that it recognises our responsibility to continue relentlessly to do all that we can by deeds as well as words to ensure that Mugabe and ZANU-PF are accorded neither the international status nor the assistance and recognition that they seek. Instead, we shall strive for a democratic election in Zimbabwe and a democratic Government.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): I feel constrained to echo the words of my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) when the Prime Minister reported after the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting—that if ever there were occasions on which the House should speak with one voice, it is occasions such as this.

The Foreign Secretary said that we should not be surprised by the result. We should not be surprised either by the conduct of the elections, as the behaviour of ZANU-PF during them was entirely consistent with the campaign of violence, abuse and intimidation that characterised its behaviour towards opponents in the period running up to them. The sad and unpalatable truth is that, for all its optimism, it would have taken little short of a miracle for the Movement for Democratic Change to have won the election.

In light of the Commonwealth observers group's trenchant and unequivocal condemnation, would not it be inconceivable for the troika to reach any conclusion other than that suspension was a necessary and inevitable response from the Commonwealth? What hope would there be for the Commonwealth as an institution based on the rule of law and on respect for human rights if its response to these events was seen to be feeble?

The Foreign Secretary is right to put his trust in concerted action, and to engage the European Union. This is an occasion on which we should acknowledge the helpful, even exemplary, support that the United States has shown in these matters, both in the Administration and in the Congress.

Finally, does the Foreign Secretary share my disappointment about the consequences of Mr. Mugabe's re-election? The right hon. Gentleman outlined the terrible domestic conditions in Zimbabwe, which will now continue, but Mr. Mugabe's behaviour has also placed an enormous burden on the whole of the region of southern Africa. Is not it a terrible tragedy that these events may set back, perhaps irretrievably, the renaissance for Africa in which so much hope has been invested?

Mr. Straw: May I commend the remarks of the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell), and the tone in which they were offered? I agree that this debate should not be an occasion for partisanship in the House. There needs to be unanimity. After all, an important element here is that hon. Members are democratically and freely elected. Some of us have lost quite a few elections, even in the free and fair conditions that apply in this country. I spent 18 years in opposition, so I know about losing elections freely. That is bad enough, but to have an election stolen from one is much worse.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): Freedom!

Mr. MacShane: Just like Israel.

Mr. Straw: I will not be drawn down that route.

The right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife asked whether it would be inconceivable, in the light of the trenchant comments made in the Commonwealth observers' initial report, for the troika not to recommend suspension. I understand the strength of that view. He and the House know very well that, even on the evidence available in December, the Government thought that the Commonwealth ought to suspend Zimbabwe's membership. Given that the evidence has mounted since then, and given what Commonwealth observers have concluded, we think that still more today.

The right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife asked about the future of the Commonwealth. I happen to believe that it is a strong organisation. Those of us who have attended some of the Commonwealth celebrations and seen, for example, the breadth of the non-governmental organisations involved will appreciate the huge contribution that the Commonwealth makes to civic society—and not just to inter-governmental relations—in its 54 member countries. Plainly, however, the Commonwealth's reputation could not but be damaged if no action were taken in the light of the Commonwealth observers' report.

I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife for mentioning the exemplary support that the United States has shown. I would add, parenthetically, that, of course, the US has interests in Zimbabwe, but that the United Kingdom's interests there are far greater. I hope that those who say that the US worries only about its own interests, is isolationist and does not consult its international colleagues, will recognise that it has been highly consultative over Zimbabwe, as in so many other matters, and that it has taken action because of its responsibility as a member of the international community rather than for its own, particular reasons.

As to the overall consequences of the election on the region, the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife asks whether it will set back irretrievably the chances of a renaissance in Africa. I do not believe so; I do not believe that we should accord Mugabe that power. This is a setback, and it will be even more of a setback if other leaders in southern Africa do not recognise the huge task that they now face to rebuild confidence not only in other southern African countries but in Zimbabwe itself.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): My right hon. Friend is right to say that this is no time for narrow party points—the situation is far too serious. One of the most important things that he has told the House is that both SADC and the Commonwealth observers have roundly condemned the election as a total fraud. That is an important message because it gives the lie to those in the Mugabe camp who try to argue that this is a north-versus-south argument, the rich against the poor in Africa. We must establish both in this country and internationally that it is the ordinary people of Zimbabwe who have been robbed in this election. I hope that my right hon. Friend will tell the House that he will take that message to Barcelona. The role of the European Union is not to lead world opinion but to work with our friends in democratic states throughout Africa and elsewhere who recognise that this election is a fraud against democratic principles.

One of the most certain consequences of the election is that the situation in Zimbabwe will continue to deteriorate. It is implausible to say that it will get better or stabilise. Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that we will continue to support people such as Mr. Tsvangirai in the MDC and those who are pushing for democratic change? When one party has stolen an election, it is legitimate to suspend the normal terms and conditions of impartiality. We should support those in Zimbabwe who will fight for democracy.

Mr. Straw: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. He is right to say that the ordinary people of Zimbabwe have been robbed by this election result. One of the many untruths that Mugabe was trying to peddle is that this is a black-versus-white issue. However, if one looks at those who have been the target of the ZANU-PF police state machine, one finds that they are overwhelmingly the blacks of Zimbabwe, particularly the urban blacks and those in rural areas who have dared to express opposition. All the reports overwhelmingly show that to be the case. As far as I know, the SADC parliamentary forum is almost exclusively black—it has condoned the outcome of the elections—and, like the Commonwealth itself, the Commonwealth observers group is multi-racial and is led by a Nigerian.

We will continue to do all that we can to support everybody in Zimbabwe who has at their heart the universal principles of democracy and of free and fair elections.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): The Foreign Secretary is aware, because I have told him, that when my father was the last governor of southern Rhodesia, I visited with him the polling stations on the first day of those remarkable elections, which were not perfect, when tens of thousands of people queued, as they have done in the past few days, to express for the first time their democratic wish. So much bright hope was vested for the future, only for it to be smashed to pieces in the last few days. The message that should go from this House to the people of Zimbabwe is that we feel for them in their great difficulty and in the grief that most of them will be suffering.

May I urge the Foreign Secretary to lobby vigorously, if he is entitled to do so, among the 54 members of the Commonwealth to ensure that the troika does its duty and that the spirit of those reports, which will have been gained with considerable difficulty, is honoured in the only proper decision that the troika could make?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his remarks and for their tone. I recall our conversation, in which he recounted with great poignancy his experiences of being alongside his father when an entirely peaceful handover of power took place. Great hope was vested in Mugabe and many others, and there was a free and fair election, which led to an outcome that was not anticipated. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that that bright hope has been smashed to pieces.

The hon. Gentleman asks me whether we shall lobby vigorously within the Commonwealth. Yes, we will. Given all the pressures on the observers, including subtle intimidation—European Union observers were refused admission—and some violence, it is remarkable that they have come out with such strident conclusions. Given those pressures, their conclusions should be treated with greater seriousness.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): My right hon. Friend made a sad statement, but one that came as no surprise to any of us who have watched events in Zimbabwe over recent years. There was an erosion of democracy in the elections and attacks on the freedom of the press and the judiciary.

[Mr. Peter Pike]

Should we not be making it clear to people in Zimbabwe, especially to ZANU-PF members and supporters, that the solution lies in their hands? It is for them to wake up before it is too late and before they have destroyed democracy and freedom in their country. They need to change direction now.

Mr. Straw: I agree with my hon. Friend. He is right to imply that there has been extraordinary short-sightedness, even for people in ZANU-PF. They will not secure a bright future for their country nor an economic recovery. Instead, by stealing the election, they will make the situation in Zimbabwe worse.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): I welcome the Foreign Secretary's robust words in condemning the farce of an election in Zimbabwe. Has the right hon. Gentleman had the opportunity to read the statement from the SADC parliamentary forum election observation mission, which indicated that even members of the mission were part of the targeted violence in the run-up to the elections?

I know that the right hon. Gentleman is off to Barcelona, and that he will be discussing Zimbabwe in depth with our colleagues in the European Union. Will he tell the House whether he plans to contact the Heads of Government in the SADC region and to support the statement from the head of the SADC observer mission, who is calling for dialogue between the leaders of the SADC Governments and Mugabe, to try to arrive at some reconciliation or a new process that could lead to democracy in Zimbabwe?

Mr. Straw: I have seen the SADC conclusions, and I am placing copies of them and those of the Commonwealth observers in the Library. We shall be in touch with relevant Heads of Government within the SADC region. One of the reasons why the SADC conclusions are so powerful is that they come not from Government representatives but from parliamentary representatives.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): In totally condemning Mugabe's tyranny, are not Labour Members being entirely consistent? In the 1960s, we used every opportunity to denounce the tyranny of Smith's illegal regime. I do not remember too many protests from Conservative Members in those days.

Has not the time come, given all that has happened this week, for the majority in the Commonwealth to come off the fence, recognise their democratic responsibilities and suspend Zimbabwe for as long as Mugabe is in power?

Mr. Straw: In the spirit of bipartisanship, I shall gently pass over my hon. Friend's earlier remarks.

It is a time for decision by those in the Commonwealth. Commonwealth Heads of Government, meeting in Coolum, Australia last week, decided to set up the troika. They have already had the published report. There will be a further, more detailed report. The view of the House is clear from the observations that Members on both sides have made and would make if they were members of the troika.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): Clearly, it is essential that the House remains united today in its condemnation of this rigged election and the abuse of human rights by Mugabe and his regime. Is the Foreign Secretary comfortable with the role that has been played by President Mbeki, especially bearing in mind this morning's press reports that South African observers have said that the election was free and fair, when clearly it was not? Will he again underline how much damage will be done to South Africa if President Mbeki makes the wrong decision at the troika, and also underline today's run on the rand, which shows that there will be terrific disinvestment in South Africa if it is seen to support the regime in Harare?

Mr. Straw: We all recognise that President Mbeki of South Africa bears a very heavy burden of responsibility not only for the economy and prosperity of his country, but, because of South Africa's size and importance, for the prosperity of the entire region and the reputation of Africa as a whole. I am sure that he will read with care the remarks that have been made by the right hon. Gentleman and many others.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree that in the history of Africa and especially southern Africa, minority military-backed regimes have inevitably been removed in time? If we look to Zambia, South Africa and elsewhere, we see that the trade union movement has played an important role in that process. In our response to this rigged election, should not we endeavour to reinforce our support for the mass independent trade unions in Zimbabwe as part of the process of democratic change?

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that one of the many arguments against military regimes is that they are inherently unstable and short-lived and must be replaced by democracies. As to the trade union movement, it is not coincidental that Morgan Tsvangirai himself was a leader of that movement in Zimbabwe. On support for trade unions across Africa and indeed the world, yes, we agree that it is necessary. My hon. Friend may know that the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane), has been doing a huge amount of work to ensure that we in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office better support the work of the international trade union movement.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Does the Foreign Secretary accept that not only this House, but the whole civilised democratic world must be united against what has happened in Zimbabwe in recent times? Does he agree that while Mr. Mugabe and ZANU-PF can claim a sordid victory, they certainly cannot claim any democratic legitimacy? Will he indicate to the House what action we can take to seek to protect Morgan Tsvangirai and members of the Movement for Democratic Change, the opponents of Mr. Mugabe and ZANU-PF? Will he also explain how we are going to help the poor people of that country, who were given a foretaste of what Mr. Mugabe would do way back in 1983-84, when he indulged in mass genocide of thousands of Matabele who opposed his Government?

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman has played a consistent and commendable role in the matter of

Zimbabwe—and, before that, of Southern Rhodesia—over many years, which I commend. He drew attention to the massacres that took place in Matabeleland in the mid-1980s. That was a shameful episode not only for Zimbabwe, but for the international community, including the United Kingdom, which failed to take action. That is another reason why the remarks of the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) were so ill judged. One of the things that makes the election results risible—I gather that this is the case from this morning's newspapers—is that it is said that Mugabe got a good vote in Matabeleland, where he is hated for palpable reasons. He could have got a good vote there only by methods that are never recognised in democratic and free countries. We will do all that we can to help people who have been in the lead of democratic movements of all kinds in Zimbabwe. I commend the hon. Gentleman's remarks about helping the poor people of Zimbabwe. The message that must go out from the House is that in everything we do as well as everything we say, we are working for the people of Zimbabwe and against a palpably undemocratic and illegitimate Government.

Tony Cunningham (Workington): I wholeheartedly support the condemnation expressed by my right hon. Friend this morning. Although we have heard condemnation from the American Government and European leaders, we also desperately need condemnation of this rigged election from African leaders. Does he have any plans to discuss this rigged election not only with SADC leaders, but with other African leaders in general?

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend will find that there has been a pretty high degree of condemnation. As I said, there has been condemnation by the Nigerian leader of the Commonwealth observers and by the parliamentary representatives who formed the SADC delegation. Earlier this year, the Ghanaian Foreign Minister condemned what had happened in Zimbabwe up to that point. It would be a huge error that would play into Mugabe's hands if we were to allow the myth to develop that Africa is supporting him while the rest of the world is not. Most of Africa is shamed by what Mugabe has done and is now, thankfully, saying so.

Angus Robertson (Moray): I fully associate both the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru with the Foreign Secretary's statement and fully endorse the efforts that he is undertaking. In addition, I endorse entirely what has been said about the necessity of strong action and reaction through the European Union. Does he share with me the concerns illustrated in papers previewing the Barcelona summit, which show that common foreign and security policy questions are 25th out of 25 in order of importance on the agenda? Will he make every effort in Barcelona to try to force the issue higher up the agenda? Will he also try to push for European Union colleagues to increase targeted measures against leading ZANU-PF members, and make every effort to secure a tougher sanctions regime that is aimed solely at the governing elite and not the ordinary people of Zimbabwe?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the support that he expressed on behalf of the SNP and Plaid Cymru. He asked about Barcelona. The reason why common foreign and security policy appears low on the agenda is that the summit is principally about the economic reform agenda that was set in place two years ago at Lisbon. I assure him that that does not mean for a second that Zimbabwe is low on the overall agenda of the European Union, which has acted commendably and swiftly in all that it has done, from moving back in the autumn from article 8 to article 96 of the Cotonou agreement, through to its decisions on 18 February to impose the sanctions. We will consider whether we can take other targeted measures and toughen up the sanctions regime, but as he said, in everything we do, we will ensure that such measures are targeted at the illegitimate leadership of the Government and not the people of Zimbabwe.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): This murderous tyrant is not only wreaking terrible damage in Zimbabwe, but seeking to provoke dangerous divisions in Africa and the Commonwealth. Will my right hon. Friend ignore the irresponsible, bellicose bluster of his shadow and continue to use careful diplomacy to try to encourage the neighbouring states to recognise that this is an issue not of race or colonialism, but of universal human rights and democracy?

Mr. Straw: Yes.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Could there not be at least one benefit from this sad tragedy that has befallen Zimbabwe and its people, namely that we may lose for ever any residual illusions about the nature of ZANU-PF and its Marxist dictator leader, Mr. Mugabe, who has acted entirely predictably, and whose actions could to some degree perhaps have been forestalled? That having been said, will Her Majesty's Government concert with the highest intensity with the United States Government, who have a good track record in dealing with rogue states in an appropriate manner?

Mr. Straw: With regard to the hon. Gentleman's first point, leaving aside ZANU-PF's ideological baggage—it is not the only party in the world to have ideological baggage—as the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames), who spoke so movingly about his experience witnessing his father's role as the last Governor-General of that country, said, for quite a long period ZANU-PF had some hope and expectation behind it. It is a huge pity that it has failed to meet that expectation. As to working with the United States, the answer is yes. We are, and will continue to be, in close touch with the United States Government.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): May I press the Foreign Secretary on a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) that I did not feel received a suitable answer? Will he assure the House that when he speaks to his colleagues in Barcelona and elsewhere, they will discuss as a priority how they can guarantee the immediate and long-term safety of all those men and women in Zimbabwe who have had the courage to stand up to Mugabe and his thugs during the past few months?

Mr. Straw: I apologise to the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) if he feels that I did not deal with that point. The answer is yes, we shall raise the issue

[Mr. Straw]

of Zimbabwe not only at Barcelona, notwithstanding the constraints on the agenda, but also in the Foreign Ministers Council and at the European Heads of Government summit on a wider range of issues that will take place in Seville later this year.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk): Particularly in the light of the inability of South Africa, and President Mbeki in particular, to show greater leadership in the region, what future does the Foreign Secretary see for NEPAD and what role in particular should the G8 play in pushing that forward in the light of the election result?

Mr. Straw: NEPAD is about—*[Interruption.]* With great respect, it is not a laughing matter. If the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight) does not know what the initials stand for, it shows a lack of information about a strategy for Africa, which I greatly regret.

The new partnership for Africa's development initiative is designed to try to turn round Africa's economic prospects and to lift Africa out of poverty. Africa is a continent which, uniquely out of all the continents in the world, has a declining, not growing, economy, and that is why the new African partnership is so crucial. The people of Africa should not be punished by the misbehaviour of one man, Mugabe, nor of his party. It is my great hope that what has happened in Zimbabwe overnight does not undermine the prospects of NEPAD, and, because of the way in which Mugabe is helping to reduce still further the prosperity of Africa, the paradox is that it becomes all the more urgent.

Mr. Charles Hendry (Wealden): The Foreign Secretary will be aware that many hon. Members have constituents whose relatives have had farms seized in Zimbabwe or who have been threatened. Some of them have been killed and some of their innocent farm workers have been killed or brutally beaten. He will also be aware that those people are more worried than ever that Mugabe's thugs will believe that they can run rampant because they are unchallengeable and above the law. Does he therefore accept that this is no longer the time for lengthy discussion but for urgent action, as each passing day brings additional threats to people's livelihoods and safety? Will he therefore tell us the time scale for the troika to make its recommendations and for the Commonwealth to react to them? Will he ensure that the views of the House are relayed in terms not just of the unanimity of action that we believe needs to be taken, but also of its urgency?

Mr. Straw: On the hon. Gentleman's first point, our concern, like that of the House, is for everybody in Zimbabwe, regardless of the colour of their skin, citizenship or nationality. It speaks volumes for that concern that no one this afternoon has directly raised the issue of all the British citizens who are there, but I should make use of the opportunity of the hon. Gentleman's question to say that we have particular responsibilities to them and we shall ensure that those are carried out. I completely understand the anxieties of the white community in Zimbabwe, but in recent months the main violence has overwhelmingly been against the black community there. One should not have to make that point, but we hope that everybody, whatever their racial origins, colour or citizenship, if they are resident in Zimbabwe, can, notwithstanding the tragedy, still look forward to a future in Zimbabwe.

As to the time scale for the troika, my understanding is that it is intended that the troika should meet next week, and as soon as I have more detailed information I shall make it available to the House.

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent): The Foreign Secretary is correct to say that the consequences of Mugabe's victory will not be confined to Zimbabwe but affect surrounding countries. What plans are the Government putting in place to deal with the poverty and famine that flow directly from Mugabe's policies?

Mr. Straw: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development has already put in place humanitarian assistance programmes in Zimbabwe. It is extraordinary that here is a country that was exporting large quantities of agricultural produce across southern Africa which now has people starving, not because of any natural disaster but because of the man-made, Mugabe-made, disaster, by which he has taken power illegitimately and, in the course of his misuse of power, has managed to collapse the Zimbabwe economy and much of the economy of the rest of southern Africa. That is his appalling legacy. I know that I speak for my right hon. Friend when I say that, within the resources available to her, she will continue to do all that she can to provide humanitarian aid across southern Africa where it is needed and assistance in fighting HIV/AIDS.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): My e-mail inbox, like that of many of my hon. Friends, has been heavy with e-mails from constituents and direct from Zimbabwe, reflecting the concern about all communities in that country. But are we not all guilty of having looked for many years through rose-tinted spectacles at dictatorships in Africa? Were not the Government whom I supported responsible for turning their face away from the intimidation in Matabeleland in the early 1980s? Have we not all patronised the Africans as somehow being undeserving of the same quality of democracy as we would expect for our people? Should we not admit those things? Will the Foreign Secretary press for a ban on international travel for any of the adherents of the Mugabe dictatorship and ensure that it is made clear that any aid that goes to Zimbabwe—aid will be greatly needed in future weeks and months—comes from those democracies that Mugabe so much reviles?

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman's opening remarks are very wise and we all have lessons to learn here. He is particularly wise to say that it is and has been patronising of the international community somehow to imply that other standards should operate in Africa. A universal principle is at stake and, in so far as it needs spelling out, the great paradox or irony of the situation is that it was spelled out for the Commonwealth at the Harare meeting of Commonwealth Heads of Government in 1991 chaired by none other than Robert Mugabe.

On the ban on travel, the European Union and United States sanctions impose travel bans on 20 or so leading members of ZANU-PF. We are of course open to representations and shall consider whether those bans should be extended.

On aid, we shall make it clear that aid comes from the democracies that Mugabe so despises. We need democracy because it applies a universal principle of freedom; one of the other truths about democracies is that they are almost always much more prosperous than dictatorships.

Business of the House

2.20 pm

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): The business of the House up to the Easter recess will be as follows:

MONDAY 18 MARCH—Debate on hunting.

TUESDAY 19 MARCH—Opposition Day [12th Allotted Day]. Until seven o'clock there will be a debate entitled "Crisis in Education and Skills Training" followed by a debate entitled "The Chinook Helicopter Crash".

WEDNESDAY 20 MARCH—Progress on remaining stages of the Adoption and Children Bill.

THURSDAY 21 MARCH—There will be a debate on education of 14 to 19 year-olds on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 22 MARCH—The House will not be sitting.

MONDAY 25 MARCH—Second Reading of the State Pension Credit Bill *[Lords]*.

TUESDAY 26 MARCH—Hon. Members will wish to know that it is proposed that the House will meet from 11.30 am until 7 pm. The business of the day will be a motion to approve the Sixth Report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges on the registration of interest by Members who have not taken their seat.

Consideration of Lords Amendments to the Football (Disorder) (Amendment) Bill.

Motion on the Easter Recess Adjournment.

The House will wish to know that on Monday 18 March 2002, there will be a debate in European Standing Committee A relating to aircraft noise. Details of the relevant documents will be given in the *Official Report*.

[*Monday 18 March 2002:*

European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Union documents: 15014/01 and 5119/02; Aircraft Noise. Relevant European Scrutiny Committee Report HC 152-xx (2001-02).]

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): I thank the Leader of the House for the business statement.

On Friday 8 March the Adjournment debate in this Chamber was replied to not by the Minister responsible for the subject of the debate, but by a Government Whip. I raised the matter at the time, as you will recall, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because you were in the Chair. Was that a one-off occurrence or is it to be routine that Ministers will not be here to listen and respond to debates on their ministerial responsibilities, but leave it to Government Whips? The hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz), who initiated the debate, said, touchingly naively, that he wanted the Government Whip

> "to assure me that he"—

the Whip—

> "will ensure that a Minister with specific responsibility for this matter will be made aware of my concerns, and will respond to the calls that I have made."—[*Official Report*, 8 March 2002; Vol. 381, c. 614.]

So the hon. Gentleman whose debate it was had to make a heart-felt plea that its subject matter would be passed on to the absent Minister, who by that time, like Elvis, had left the building.

[Mr. Eric Forth]

That raises an issue of huge importance. Will the Leader of the House assure me, very firmly, that that occurrence will not be repeated and that the Government have not walked away from their responsibilities to such an extent that Ministers are no longer prepared to come to the House to respond to debates and be held to account?

The Leader of the House will be aware of the dreadful and appalling case of corruption that recently arose in Doncaster, where several Labour councillors were convicted of fraud. He should also be aware—if not, I am about to make him so—that yesterday in the House the Deputy Prime Minister said, in response to a question by my hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins), that

> "a Conservative councillor was before the court at the same time."—[*Official Report*, 13 March 2002; Vol. 381, c. 873.]

The Deputy Prime Minister was obviously trying to implicate or smear a Conservative councillor to put him in the same disgusting category as the large number of Labour councillors who were convicted.

Will the Leader of the House confirm that the Conservative councillor was acquitted of all charges, but the Labour councillors were convicted? I will understand if he is reticent about the issue. It must be difficult for Labour leaders who were involved with Ecclestone, Hinduja, Mittal and all the others to condemn their colleagues in local government. However, as the right hon. Gentleman was involved in none of those matters, I am sure that he will have no such inhibitions.

Will the Leader of the House turn his mind to the chaotic and increasingly disordered way in which statements are made in the House? Texts of statements are given to official Opposition spokesmen much later than has traditionally been the case. Whether that is cock-up or conspiracy, I can only guess. Will he find some way of giving the House more notice of statements? Today offers a good example. A very important statement such as that made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer could well have been made after the close of the markets yesterday evening. Attendance in the House is inevitably thin today because we do not have any votes. Consequently, many right hon. and hon. Members who have a legitimate interest in the matter and would have been here had they known that the statement was to be made are, regrettably, absent. Will the Leader of the House get a grip on his colleagues? In most cases it is known at least 48 hours in advance when statements are due to be made, so will Ministers please give the House proper notice so that we can deal with them properly?

Lord Browne, who was one of the Prime Minister's much-vaunted people's peers, earned—I am happy for him—several million pounds over the past year. I know that hairdressers were disqualified from being people's peers, but can the Leader of the House tell us whether there is any limit on the earnings that those peers can enjoy?

Mr. Cook: I did not anticipate that the Conservative party would propose a reverse means test for Members of the second Chamber, but we look forward to that provision featuring in its submission on the reform of that Chamber. I am happy to say that I have no responsibility whatsoever for pay awards made to Sir John Browne. [HON. MEMBERS: "Lord Browne."] I certainly have a responsibility not to demote him; I am happy to call him Lord Browne. Having disclaimed the criticism of his pay award, I think that honour is satisfied between us.

I shall deal with the matters for which I have responsibility. On last Friday's Adjournment debate, I assure the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) that, unlike Elvis, the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), is alive and kicking. Indeed, he has shown no difficulty whatsoever about coming before the House. He has responded to 34 Adjournment debates since the last general election—by far the most achieved in a single Session by any Minister in the Government, or, I think, any in the previous Government. That is overwhelmingly because of the innovation of debates in Westminster Hall—which I welcome and support, unlike the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst.

I have known my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) for many years, including the period when he led the Labour group on Edinburgh district council. His colleagues there and in the House would be surprised by his being described as "touchingly naive". I take it that the right hon. Gentleman was trying to flatter my hon. Friend; I warn him that it will not work. Since the Adjournment debate, the Whip who replied to the debate has fully discussed the matter with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary—

Mr. Forth: Impressive.

Mr. Cook: Indeed; I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman recognises the importance of the ministerial level of the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions at which the matter was raised. The Whip also wrote to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to draw his attention to those matters that fell within the remit of the Home Office.

I can assure the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst that such practice will not be routine. In Westminster Hall, the Government rightly provided a facility that has greatly increased hon. Members' opportunities to raise matters concerning their constituencies. In those circumstances, it is not improper for the Government and the House to look at ways in which we can ensure that Adjournment debates are fully serviced and replied to, without putting on Ministers a burden that interferes with other matters with which they have to deal, such as responding to hon. Members' correspondence. *[Interruption.]* I assure hon. Members that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary does respond to correspondence.

On the Doncaster councillors, it is important for both parties to ensure that we apply the highest standards of propriety within our parties and make sure that legal requirements are fully observed. It would therefore greatly assist the House if the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst could tell us that he will use his influence with Lady Porter to encourage her to return to Britain to face the court proceedings against her relating to when she was leader of a Conservative council.

Finally, on the issue of the statement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, I have listened week after week to the right hon. Gentleman complaining that we do not have enough statements. Whenever we produce a statement, a complaint is made about it, and that happened again today. Let me remind him that this is the first time that a statement has been made to the House to announce the outcome of a Competition Commission—previously the Monopolies and Mergers Commission—inquiry. In their entire 18 years in office, a Conservative Minister never once came to the House to make a statement on the outcome of a Monopolies and Mergers Commission report, and I genuinely believe that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor deserves to be congratulated on coming to the House, not criticised for it.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): My right hon. Friend is a master of procedure, so may I ask him for advice? On Monday, we shall vote on a series of motions on hunting with dogs. If the motion to ban hunting with dogs is carried by the Commons, as I believe it will be, is there any way in which we in this Chamber—or perhaps Labour Members in another forum—can express a view on whether the Hunting Bill, which was carried by the Commons in the last Session, can be brought back and dealt with in this Session before November as an alternative to a new Bill being introduced and the business of hunting with dogs hanging round our necks for the next two and a half years?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend characteristically flatters me; I would describe myself only as a humble student of procedure, and I am constantly surprised at how much more there is to learn.

I remind my hon. Friend that the Minister for Rural Affairs has given a commitment that before we rise for the Easter recess he will respond to Monday's votes and outline how the Government intend to proceed in the light of them. I suggest that my hon. Friend save his question until that opportunity, which I understand may come next week.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Can the Leader of the House give some thought as to how best we can deal with the important issue of public disengagement with Parliament and politics? I think that he will accept that it is not just a matter of scepticism and cynicism about corruption, to which early-day motion 1003 relates, and to which reference has already been made.

[That this House condemns the behaviour of the former Doncaster councillor jailed on 12th March for accepting a bribe to change planning rules; congratulates former Doncaster councillor Ron Rose and the Yorkshire Post for their persistence in bringing the worst local government corruption case since the 1970s to light; congratulates South Yorkshire Police on its successful Operation Danum which has brought 21 councillors to justice; regrets the culture of institutionalised corruption which was allowed to develop unchecked by the national Labour Party; calls on the Government to introduce proposals for proportional representation to end one-party states in local government; and further calls on all parties to promote the highest standards of probity and public service in local government.]

Rather, there are longer-term concerns.

Has the Leader of the House had an opportunity to read the interesting article in today's edition of *The Daily Telegraph* by Sir John Nott, a distinguished former Cornish Member of the House and a former Minister of the Crown? The headline is "Thatcher obsessed with spin", which shows that some things are never new. Has he looked at the report which the Minister without Portfolio, the right hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke), apparently launched yesterday on democracy, citizenship and political engagement? Does he accept that this is a matter of concern not just to the Government but to all parties in the House? What steps can be taken in the near future to identify, one would hope, the causes for the trend of cynicism and scepticism about the democratic parliamentary process?

Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that this is not just a matter of low turnout at elections, which is perhaps a symptom of the disease, but that there are basic diseases behind that symptom? Low turnout is bad enough on average, but it is even worse in cases of safe seats when electors feel that they have no impact on the eventual result. This issue should concern every single Member of both Houses of Parliament, and should not simply be left to a Labour party document and the Labour party chairman.

Mr. Cook: I have not yet read the article to which the hon. Gentleman refers, but I shall certainly savour it. I always enjoy reading articles by Margaret Thatcher's former Ministers criticising her; it is difficult to keep up with the scale of those articles.

The issue of substance raised by the hon. Gentleman presents a profound challenge for all of us. This is not a party political point; it should exercise hon. Members in all corners of the House. There is clear evidence of a decline in esteem for this place. That is why it is so important that we modernise this place so that we appear relevant and part of the same century as our electors. However, there are much wider and deeper problems of disengagement from the democratic process, particularly among young people. That troubles me because if young people continue to be disengaged we shall face declining turnouts as that cohort of the population grows older. This is a matter to which we should all address our minds.

I am particularly concerned that, too often, publicity about the House centres on the high point of party political contests and the mud wrestling that goes with it. We are not portrayed often enough as a place of serious business carrying out a serious job of work, and until we achieve that image of ourselves, we shall continue to have a problem in gaining respect.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 927?

[That this House is aware of the deep unease among honourable Members on all sides of the House at the prospect that Her Majesty's Government might support United States military action against Iraq; agrees with Kofi Annan that a further military attack on Iraq would be unwise at this time; believes that such a course of action would disrupt support for the anti-terrorism coalition among the Arab states; and instead urges the Prime Minister to use Britain's influence with Iraq to gain agreement that United Nations weapons inspections will resume.]

It expresses the deep concern of 107 hon. Members at the United States proposals to take military action against Iraq.

[Mrs. Alice Mahon]

So far, the Government have failed miserably to make a case for supporting the unilateral action proposed by President Bush. Will the Leader of the House assure us that the Prime Minister will not announce support for that action, either in this country or on a ranch in Texas, before the House has had time fully to debate the issues based on facts, not belief? May we have a debate on that subject before the Easter recess?

Mr. Cook: I cannot promise a debate on that issue before the recess, as I have just announced business for every day before the recess. *[Interruption.]* As the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst does not appear entirely persuaded of that, he might like to consider pulling the Opposition day to make room for such a debate.

Mr. Forth: Yes.

Mr. Cook: There we are—my hon. Friend has struck a colleague in the shape of the right hon. Gentleman.

If such action were to proceed, of course it should be debated in the House. In fairness to the Government, we demonstrated a willingness to listen to the House and gave the House an opportunity to debate the issues before and during the military action in Afghanistan, when we had five full debates on the threat of international terrorism. I can certainly assure my hon. Friend that, should there be any proposal for action, the matter would of course have to be debated in the House. However, I remind her that, as the Prime Minister keeps saying, no decision has been taken and, as I said last Thursday, no decision may ever be taken.

Sir Brian Mawhinney (North-West Cambridgeshire): Notwithstanding the right hon. Gentleman's earlier reply, will he reflect for a moment on what his reaction would have been when he was a leading light on the Opposition Benches had he been told that the then hon. Member for Peterborough, as a Under-Secretary or a Minister, was too busy—or too important—to respond to a debate in the Chamber? The right hon. Gentleman said that that will not be a routine occurrence. May I tempt him to go a little further and say that it will not happen again?

Mr. Cook: The right hon. Gentleman is always tempting, but on this occasion I find it possible to resist. I welcome the fact that there are now more opportunities than there were in his time for hon. Members to vent constituency issues. That is why Westminster Hall was created, and it is fulfilling that role adequately and properly. It is right that, in response to that additional opportunity for Members, we should consider the acceptable convention in respect to replying to debates, particularly in the case of the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport, who has now responded to 34 Adjournment debates.

Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas (Crosby): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the apocryphal saying, the first will be last and the last will be first. I am normally last when it comes to oral Question Time, with the exception of two weeks ago when fortunately I was drawn first. That exceptional opportunity for me was quickly reversed when I discovered that my oral parliamentary question had been referred to another Department. I would not have objected to that one jot had not the Department—the Cabinet Office—answered a written parliamentary question on exactly the same subject only the week before. Seven other people had their questions transferred from the Cabinet Office to a range of other Departments that day, and I suspect I join them in feeling extremely miffed. Will my right hon. Friend bring his influence to bear on the various Ministers heading up our Departments, and tell them that it would be useful for Members seeking to question them about responsibilities if we knew precisely what they did? It would appear that certain activities are the responsibility of people in the Cabinet Office one day and of someone else the next day. That also applies to their colleagues at the Table Office.

Hon. Members: Send her a written answer!

Mr. Cook: I think I can handle this one myself, thank you very much.

If my hon. Friend advises me next time she is drawn first, I shall certainly intervene with the relevant Department and make sure that her question is treated with the dignity and seriousness that it requires. To respond to the issue of substance, I am well aware of the deep frustration to Members of finding that their questions have been transferred. Indeed, if my hon. Friend consults the submission that I have made on behalf of the Government to the Procedure Committee's inquiry into questions, she will find that one of the points that I highlight is the need to try to reduce the number of times when questions are transferred. I hope that we can work with the Table Office to ensure that questions are tabled to the appropriate Department in the first place. In the meantime, I shall certainly draw her remarks to the attention of the Cabinet Office.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a Minister from the Lord Chancellor's Department to come to the House next week to make a statement about the selection of city status? Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that, in the light of this morning's announcement, there is a growing view that the Government are engaged in a cynical political fix? Is he aware that, since 1997, six towns on the United Kingdom mainland have received city status, and that three of them did so six months before the last general election? Cynics might expect that those cities would all be Labour-held seats.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: They are.

Mr. Burns: They are; the hon. Lady is right. Is the right hon. Gentleman also aware that the Government have decided—rather cruelly, because the next election is not expected for at least three years—to fix it yet again today? The cities created on the UK mainland all have Labour MPs, and there is a growing fear that if a town that does not have a Labour MP, it will never become a city. That is demeaning to the honour of the process.

Mr. Cook: Of the six towns that have been declared cities today, two are in Northern Ireland and therefore do not have Labour MPs. Of course, I understand that, given the very large number of towns that now have Labour representation in this place, it is increasingly difficult to find other towns that might meet the criteria. I commiserate with the hon. Gentleman for having missed out on this occasion, but I ask him to consider carefully, before making any further remarks, whether what he has just said would be supported by the Conservative parties of Preston, Newport and Exeter, and I congratulate those new cities on their success.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there was a debate yesterday in Westminster Hall on the Government's energy review? It was a very good debate, but one and a half hours was not long enough, given the number of Members who wished to speak and the number of interests involved. Can we have a full debate on the matter in this Chamber? Energy is an important subject that affects every aspect of life in this country. While I am on my feet, may I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the way in which he responded to the opening points made by the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth)? I also congratulate the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst on the way in which he presented his points. These exchanges are now becoming the highlight of the week in the Chamber, given the inept performance of the Leader of the Opposition at Prime Minister's questions.

Mr. Cook: I am so glad that my hon. Friend got that last line in, as it explains the preceding passage.

Mr. Forth: You wrote it.

Mr. Cook: No, I could not have risen to such wit. It was entirely a product of my hon. Friend's contribution.

On the question of energy, I am conscious of the wide interest in the matter, which has been raised on a number of occasions at business questions. I will certainly reflect on what my hon. Friend has said as we consider future business, depending on the availability of time.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): Last week, I put it to the Leader of the House that it would be quite wrong for the Government to announce an amnesty for terrorists on the run during our Easter recess. Uncharacteristically, he dodged the question, and did not state categorically that no such announcement would be made during the recess. It would be quite wrong to make such an announcement, and the feeling exists on both sides of the House that to give an amnesty to such people would wreck the Belfast agreement. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman can now give us an undertaking on that, bearing in mind that the Prime Minister said—in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) yesterday at Question Time—that there would be no such announcement during the recess.

Mr. Cook: I understand the sensitivity of this issue. I am not aware of what plans there may be for any statement—or, indeed, whether a statement is to be made—but I shall certainly convey the right hon. Gentleman's points to the Northern Ireland Office.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): I welcome the Government's decision to offer a million euros towards the World Health Organisation's research into the relationship between deep-vein thrombosis and air travel. Is my right hon. Friend aware of the news today that that research programme is in disarray because of a massive funding shortage and the failure of leading nations such as Australia and America to support it? In the light of that, will he bring the matter to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health as soon as possible, and reconsider the ability of this Government to carry out their own inquiry into the connection between deep-vein thrombosis and air travel, to stop any more British citizens dying unnecessarily?

Mr. Cook: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the indefatigable way in which he has pursued this issue, and raised it on many occasions at business questions. It is, indeed, an issue of great gravity, and one that I have personally confronted lately through the experience of one of my European colleagues. I will pass on his observations to the Department of Health, but we need to recognise that, in terms of the statistical incidence of deep-vein thrombosis, the matter needs to be looked at on a global, rather than a purely national, basis. That is why a better way forward may be at international rather than domestic level. I understand my hon. Friend's concern, however, and I shall ensure that it is conveyed to the Minister.

John Barrett (Edinburgh, West): May I add my weight to the call by the hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) for a full debate in the Chamber in Government time following the publication of the energy review, particularly in relation to the infrastructure decisions that will have to be made to further the development of alternative energy generation?

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for expressing his view. I remind the House that, at the moment, we have a report from the performance and innovation unit on energy, but we have yet to see the Government's considered response to it. A number of hon. Members have made the case for an extended debate on energy, however, and I am reflecting on that.

Sandra Osborne (Ayr): My constituency has also lost out on its bid for city status, so I can assure the House that it is not only Conservative Members who have been disappointed. Will the Leader of the House consider holding a debate soon on the future of National Air Traffic Services, given its recent financial difficulties and the continuing delay over the new Scottish centre in my constituency?

Mr. Cook: On that last point, my hon. Friend will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has made financial arrangements to ensure that the service can continue, and we shall obviously follow this matter with great care.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for confirming that there is no party political bias in the allocation of city status. I think that Chelmsford has left—this is becoming like a Shakespeare history play—so I shall omit any reference to that place. I encourage my hon. Friend to try again for that status, and I wish her well when she does so. I want to make a correction to my earlier list. I am

[Mr. Cook]

told that Exeter has been given not city status, but lord mayoralty status. Stirling is, of course, the other town that has been given city status. I omitted it from the list in case Conservatives may have been upset by the observations of the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), because it is so hard these days to find the Conservative party in Scotland.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): Given that the appointment of the chairman of the governors of the BBC has now become a new Labour sinecure, at least for the moment—and working on the naive assumption that the present appointee, Mr. Gavyn Davies, still has the confidence of the Government, in spite of his remarks at the Westminster media forum yesterday—will the Leader of the House find time for a debate in the main Chamber in Government time on the future funding, responsibilities and duties of the BBC, prior to the publication of the eagerly awaited communications Bill?

Mr. Cook: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. I know that he takes a close interest in these matters. I will happily add his request to the long list of such requests that is before me, but I remind him that we shall soon have an opportunity to examine the draft communications Bill. He and others will have plenty of chances to make their points about the future of BBC funding then.

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating Preston, which receives city status today? In this jubilee year, that is a great honour for 100,000 proud Prestonians—100,000 people displaying ethnic and religious diversity—and for a town with world-beating industries and a world-beating university that is now the eighth largest in the country. Preston has never been prouder than it is today.

Mr. Cook: I [illegible] delighted that today's announcement pleased at least [illegible] Member, and I join my hon. Friend in congratulating Preston. Three criteria were required for success in the bid for city status; Preston fully met the third, which was a forward-looking attitude.

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): Many of my constituents find it weird that at a time when the national health service is in crisis and many of them wait 16 weeks for cancer treatment, when the police service is in turmoil, and when transport is in chaos and deteriorating, the Leader of the House has cleared the decks in order to focus on foxhunting.

Leaving aside that perverse priority, however, will the right hon. Gentleman tell us why the House is to debate foxhunting on Monday, a day that had long been reserved for a reception given by Her Majesty the Queen at Buckingham palace to celebrate her golden jubilee, to which I believe all Members had been invited? Why could the debate not have taken place today, on Wednesday, or on any other day? Was this a cock-up? Was it typical of the incompetence that we have come to expect of this Government? Or was it contempt for Her Majesty the Queen—contempt that the Government routinely show for the Chamber?

Mr. Cook: In my other role as President of the Council, I assure the hon. Gentleman that I would show no contempt for Her Majesty. I have the greatest respect for the enormous job she does for the country, which I had an opportunity to admire at first hand when I was Foreign Secretary. As for the question of Monday's debate, a reception at the palace had indeed been organised. The decision not to proceed with it was made by the palace, but I understand that the palace intends to rearrange it on another date.

Mr. Gwyn Prosser (Dover): Will my right hon. Friend find time for an urgently needed debate on channel tunnel security? As he will know, the storm-trooping activities of traffickers and illegal immigrants are causing havoc in Frethun, and bringing English Welsh and Scottish Railway freight services to a standstill. The destruction is threatening lives, jobs and trade.

Mr. Cook: I am aware of the seriousness of the situation. We have repeatedly pressed the French authorities to ensure that there is adequate security at Sangatte and at the rail freight terminal. The measures we have taken on this side of the channel have been quite successful in reducing the number of illegal entries, which has fallen by a quarter in the past year, and the number of people arriving in Britain with improper paperwork, which has fallen by three quarters. Despite that progress, however, I share my hon. Friend's concern about the interruption to the service—which I use frequently myself—and we will continue to press the French authorities to produce an outcome that will allow the service to recommence.

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): In Westminster Hall on Tuesday, we had an excellent debate about the future of Consignia. Nine Back Benchers were able to contribute, although had time permitted—it was only a 90-minute debate—at least as many again could have done so. May I ask again whether a subject of such importance could be given some time on the Floor of the House, where it properly belongs? Does not fairness demand that Conservative Members, especially the large number with rural constituencies, should be allowed to place on record why they do not oppose measures that will have a dire impact on rural communities?

Mr. Cook: It is not for me to speak to Conservative Members, but no doubt they heard what the hon. Gentleman said and will seek to rectify the omission before the hour is up. As for the question of our offering them, and the hon. Gentleman, the opportunity of a full debate on Consignia, I fully understand the strength of feeling in the House. Indeed, it was made clear in business questions immediately after the Postcomm statement. Fortunately for the hon. Gentleman, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is present. I am sure we will both reflect on what he said, and consider when it might be appropriate to bring the matter to the House.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): Has my right hon. Friend had a chance to read early-day motion 877, on debt and credit lending? It states

[That this House is concerned that whilst consumer debt reaches record levels (£6.8 billion new debt in December according to the Bank of England), around three and a half million adults do not have access to any

sort of bank account and seven million have no current account; expresses deep concern that over three million people are reliant on loans at high cost from licensed moneylenders; and urges the Government to act to tackle this injustice as part of a wider anti-debt strategy, within the context of the Government's antipoverty strategy.]

The motion deals with financial exclusion. As it says, 3.5 million people have no bank account and 7 million have no current account. For many of those people, the only option is paying very high interest rates on loans. Will my right hon. Friend make time for a debate so we can discuss how best to deal with the problem of extortionate lending within the wider framework of the Government's anti-poverty strategy?

Mr. Cook: That is a subject of deep concern in many inner-city areas, and many of the most deprived parts of the country. I know from my experience in Scotland how high interest rates can be for vulnerable people. It is one of the great ironies that the poorest people often end up paying the highest rates.

I commend my hon. Friend on his early-day motion, and particularly on his recognition of the role that can be played by the Post Office, which is universally available and will soon be able to provide a universal banking service. We will continue to seek imaginative ways of addressing the problem he has raised.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I believe the right hon. Gentleman underestimates the damage caused to the whole United Kingdom by the closure of the channel tunnel to rail freight. Is he aware of the Government's target of 80 per cent. for freight travelling by rail, and is he aware that that target now cannot be met within the 10-year transport plan? Is he aware that half a million pounds is being lost each day by companies such as EWS and Potters of Melmerby in the Vale of York? Will he invite the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to make a statement here on precisely what the Government are doing? There is now no freight transport through the channel tunnel, which means that all freight is travelling by road. That is unacceptable.

Mr. Cook: If I appeared not to grasp the gravity of the situation I am justly rebuked by the hon. Lady, but I told my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Prosser) that I fully understood the severity of the situation and its impact not just on Dover but on the country generally. I remind the hon. Lady that the issue at the heart of the problem is security at the freight terminal on the Calais side of the tunnel. We have no direct responsibility and no direct ability to intervene, but we will continue to press the French authorities which are responsible to provide adequate security so that the service can recommence.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Will the Leader of the House find time for an early debate on the massive and disastrous rise in council tax throughout the country? It is just another Labour stealth tax, and one that hits the most vulnerable the hardest. Perhaps such a debate would allow us to explore the reasons why Labour-controlled Castle Point borough council has increased council tax on a band D house to more than £1,000, while the neighbouring Conservative-controlled Southend unitary authority charges £300 a year less.

Mr. Cook: I thought the hon. Gentleman was going to congratulate the Government on the massive rise in Government grants to local authorities. Since 1997 the amount has increased by 20 per cent., whereas during the previous five years under the Conservatives it rose by only 1 per cent. Given the enormous difference between the way in which the two Governments have funded local authorities, I think a period of silence from the hon. Gentleman would be welcome.

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): Can the Leader of the House look closely at the timetable set for the Government's proposals on regional government? The White Paper has not been published and only today we learn that the CBI in the north-west is withdrawing from participation in the north-west regional assembly because it believes that it is wasting its time. Is not the initiative in danger of floundering and should not the Government be giving some clear direction?

Mr. Cook: The Government have given clear direction and our commitment to produce a White Paper will be fulfilled. I strongly urge all those involved in discussions about regional assemblies and regional government to remain committed to them so that their regions benefit when the White Paper spells out the way forward.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): The implication of today's comments by the Leader of the House is that the Government will arrange for Whips to reply to Adjournment debates and that a limit could be set on the number of debates to which Ministers reply. Given that, can he explain how we can expect the House to be held in greater esteem when Ministers themselves do not hold it in sufficient esteem to come here to reply to debates? How can we expect members of the public to hold MPs in greater esteem when MPs have been deprived of the opportunity of putting their points across to Ministers in Adjournment debates? That is a significant and bad development. Can the Leader of the House put his hand on his heart and say that if our roles were reversed, he would accept without demur a Whip replying to an Adjournment debate which he had initiated?

Mr. Cook: I would point out that the hon. Member who obtained and spoke in the debate, who is one of my colleagues, has made no complaint. The only complaints have come from the Conservatives. I did not suggest that the practice should be a general rule or generally applied; nor do I think that the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport, can be fairly accused of not taking his role in the House seriously. He has probably responded to more than double the number of debates than any other Minister bar one. Westminster Hall has allowed us to provide hon. Members with a much greater opportunity to raise issues. In those circumstances, we should recognise that occasionally—not as a general rule—it may be appropriate for a Whip, who is a member of the Government, to answer on behalf of a Minister.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): Will the Leader of the House tell the House which candidates for city status have been successful in Northern Ireland?

[Mr. Crispin Blunt]

In addition, according to the Order Paper, my ten-minute Bill—Trespassers on Land (Liability for Damage and Eviction) Bill—will be introduced on Tuesday 26 March. It is an important measure that will address the problem of damage caused by travellers who arrive in communities and cause damage to their neighbours' property, which is a cause for concern in Surrey. Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that I will still have an opportunity to introduce that Bill even though the business for that day has changed slightly?

Mr. Cook: I do not anticipate a problem with the ten-minute Bill proceeding on Tuesday 26 March. We will have Question Time as normal. I guarantee that the normal procedures for that day will stand, if only because it is Health Question Time and I will insist that we have it then.

On Northern Ireland, the two towns that have been successful in applying for city status are Lisburn and Newry.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): May I remind the Leader of the House of his Government's manifesto commitment of 1997 to ban tobacco advertising? Smoking costs at least 120,000 lives, and a ban on advertising would save thousands of those. Is he aware that the private Member's Bill promoted by my colleague, Lord Clement-Jones, is likely to receive its Third Reading and clear the House of Lords tomorrow? If that is the case, and given that an almost identical Government Bill went through this House before running out of time in the Lords in the previous Parliament, will the Government give the Bill time? Have they any excuse not to give such an important measure Government time to finish its passage and provide the public health initiative that the country so desperately needs?

Mr. Cook: I am well aware that the Bill has its final stage tomorrow. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government are following the debate with close interest and will reflect on our position in the light of that.

Women and Equality

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

3.4 pm

The Minister for Women (Ms Patricia Hewitt): I am delighted that we are having this debate. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House for providing us with the time, and to my right hon. Friend the Chief Whip, who had the courtesy to tell me that unfortunately she cannot join us.

International women's day was on Friday—hopefully, next year we will have this debate a little closer to it—and I had the enormous pleasure of attending the first major conference in my city of Leicester to bring together hundreds of women aged between 15 and 85 from different backgrounds and Leicester's diverse communities. We heard, as one always does at such events, stories of the extraordinary things that women are doing in their lives.

Freda Hussain was appointed some years ago as the principal of one of Leicester's large community colleges. She was the first Asian woman principal in Leicester and possibly the first Asian principal. She said that on the day of the announcement of her appointment she was approached by a boy who said, "You don't look like a headmaster, miss", and by a group of girls, one of whom said, "Thank you,miss. Now we've got someone to look up to."

We heard from Ann, an extraordinary woman in her 40s, who told us how she had gone through all her school years believing that she was thick because the teachers had told her so and had certainly made her feel like it. She got no qualifications and never had much of a job or, indeed, much of a life. Eventually, it was discovered that, like many people, she was dyslexic and it had not been diagnosed all those years ago when she was in school. She overcame that problem and gained access qualifications. She studied law and got a first-class degree. She then got a good job. Tragically, after all that, her employer could not give her the support that she needed to cope with her disability—she still cannot spell—in order to fulfil the demands of the job. I am afraid that she is unemployed again, although I have no doubt that with her determination she will soon be back in work.

We heard from Karen Wildman, a Leicester woman, who started as a receptionist at one of Leicester's engineering companies and who rose to become the managing director of that firm. She is now an executive member of the board of the parent company. She has achieved extraordinary success in business, but some of the men in grey suits that she typically meets still take her for a secretary and talk to her male colleagues instead. I suspect that many of my hon. Friends—or should I say hon. sisters—have experienced that.

We also heard from community leaders. Rita Patel, who founded Belgrave Behano, is now building a multi-million pound community centre in inner-city Leicester, and Vera Smith is an amazing, battling pensioner who fought to save a community centre in one of the outer-city impoverished council estates that I represent. I was delighted to join her the day after the conference to open a centre that had been refurbished as a result of funding provided by our neighbourhood renewal programme, but administered by resident leadership. Those were just a few of the women's voices that all of us hear in our constituencies and on whose behalf we have the privilege to speak in the House.

Listening to women at last week's conference reminded me of the question posed by Sigmund Freud nearly 100 years ago. He asked, "What do women really want?" Apparently, it was a puzzle to the father of psychoanalysis, but it is no puzzle to hon. Members in the House today. We all want the chance to use our abilities, to find the strength and potential within us, as Ann did, whatever that potential is. We want to make a contribution at work and in the wider community; we want to earn a living and to enjoy a secure retirement. However, we also want the blessing of loving relationships with our friends and family and the chance to care for other people—our children, our parents as they grow older, and others who need us. We want to be able to balance home and work and the rest of our lives. We want our homes, streets and communities to be safe for ourselves and our children—safe from the scourge of domestic and public violence. We want good health and a good health service, good schools and all those other vital services.

Of course women's aspirations are influenced by different cultural and religious traditions, social class and our parents' experience, but in essence they do not vary or change very much. What has changed is the condition of women's lives, and that has changed radically in recent decades.

I grew up in the 1950s, at a time when there was a very clear division of labour between men and women. The man worked full-time while the woman, after marriage, stayed at home full-time to care for the children, and there were powerful social and legal sanctions against divorce and illegitimacy. Not everyone lived in that way; there has always been a significant number of working-class women, in particular, who earned a living for their family. However, it is fair to say that that traditional two-parent, one male breadwinner family model was society's ideal. It underpinned the way in which employers organised work and occupational pensions; it underpinned the way in which Government organised the national insurance and welfare systems and the rest of public policy.

Just to describe that world of the 1950s is to see how far we have travelled since then. The huge social changes that we are living through were not imposed by any Government or dictated by some wicked feminist plot—they were created by women themselves, making different choices and demanding different opportunities in their lives.

Those changes are continuing. Today I have published new survey figures showing a radical change in the levels of women's employment over the past decade. Over the past 10 years, men's employment rates have stayed relatively constant, but those of women, particularly mothers, have grown rapidly. We have seen a growth rate in employment of nearly 10 per cent. for all women between 1991 and 2001, compared with an increase of only 4 per cent. for men. Most strikingly, the employment rate of women whose youngest child is under five has grown by a third over the same period. That represents the biggest increase in the rate of women's employment in our country since the wartime period. Britain now has one of the highest rates of women's employment in the European Union and across the industrialised world.

It is not the Government's job to tell women, or men, how to lead their life. Our job is to support and enable people to lead the fulfilling life that they want for themselves and their family. We can do that only if we recognise and understand these enormous changes. We must recognise that, despite the enormous increase in the wealth of our country, it is in many ways much tougher to bring up children today than it was when I and many other hon. Members were growing up. It is our job as a Government to support families—all families—in their double responsibility of earning a living and caring for children and other family members. That means that the Government have to support women, and men, in the choices that they want to make.

We will have failed if women still have to go back to work too soon after having a baby because they cannot afford to stay at home any longer. We will have failed if women have to go on working long and inconvenient hours that they believe are damaging to their families and themselves because shorter working hours are simply not available.

I should perhaps declare an interest, as I am the mother of two teenage children. Along with many hon. Members, I know just how difficult it is balancing commitments to our constituents, the House, our families and, in my case, in my role as a Minister. We have the great good fortune to do work that we love and have chosen, and to be well paid for it. How much harder is it for women such as the constituent to whom I was talking recently, who has to juggle, as she put it, not only work and family but her marriage? She is at home during the day caring for young children while her husband is at work. Three nights a week she works late shifts, getting no sleep at all, to bring in extra money while her husband is at home caring for the children.

We will have failed if women are staying at home when they do not want to because they cannot find good quality, affordable child care or a job with the hours that they need or because, as older women who have brought up their children and are ready to embark on the next phase of their life, they come up against employer prejudice against older people. Perhaps I should declare another interest, as I am 53.

When I say that "we" have to do these things, I do not simply mean the Government. I mean employers, in the public and private sectors. I welcome the fact, as I am sure the whole House does, that more and more businesses and public service organisations recognise that if they are to deliver the services that their clients and customers want and if they are to get and keep the good, skilled people they need, they have to pay attention to the needs and abilities of all the potential talent pool, not just half of it. The new figures that I have just given and the increase in women returning to work after having children in many ways represent an improvement, as women have told us, in the conditions available in the workplace.

Unfortunately, not all employers have got there yet. I recently met Michelle Chew, a former police constable with more than 12 years' experience in specialist child protection work. She is also a lone mother who had, at the time the problem arose, two children under five. Not surprisingly, WPC Chew wanted hours that worked for her family as well as the police force. For some time, that is what she had. However, she was then faced with the demand that she move to full-time work on variable shifts that would have destroyed her child care arrangements.

[Ms Patricia Hewitt]

Her application to remain in her existing post or move to another part-time post with family-friendly shifts was twice turned down without any serious consideration. What was the result? The police force lost an immensely experienced and valuable officer in a specialist area where it is not always easy to recruit. It also lost the employment tribunal case that Michelle Chew brought against them, reinforcing the fact that there is a need for reform and change as well as investment in the police service and our other great public services.

For years, the work-family balance has been a problem for women, while men have taken it for granted. Indeed, when a man in a top job in business or politics says that he wants to spend more time with his family, most people think that there must be something wrong with him. That, too, is changing; more and more men want to spend time with their family, striking a better balance between work and family. I welcome the support of hon. Members on both sides of the House who understand, from their experience, that changing approach among men.

The Government are already doing a great deal to support women and families in making the choices that will suit them. We have introduced full-time rights for part-time workers, time off for people to deal with family emergencies, the right to parental leave while children are young, and higher maternity pay, which will come into effect from April next year. At the same time, we have introduced longer maternity leave, totalling up to one year off. Furthermore for the first time ever, there is two weeks' paid paternity leave, to underline our recognition of the crucial role that fathers play in their children's lives.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon) *indicated assent.*

Ms Hewitt: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman has an interest in the subject that he would like to declare, in which case I readily congratulate him.

In the Employment Bill, we are also putting in place new legal standards for family-friendly working, to make it much easier for fathers and mothers with children under the age of six, or with older children who have disabilities, and to ensure that every workplace and manager has to consider how to reorganise work to suit their employees as well as their business.

Much has been done to ensure that parents and families have the time that they need. Much has also been done to ensure that they have the money they need: the record increases in child benefit; the working families tax credit, which benefits one and a third million families; the national minimum wage, which has given a pay rise to about 1 million women and 500,000 men; the sure start maternity grant, which is also to be introduced in April 2003 for families on lower incomes and will deliver an increase in the maternity grant to £500, which is five times the level that we inherited in 1997; and, crucially, for older women the increases in pensions and the introduction of the minimum income guarantee. As I well remember from my first job with Age Concern, women are the majority of pensioners and, above all, the majority of pensioners living in poverty. They live longer, they have much less chance of a decent occupational pension and they have fewer savings on which to rely.

We have provided not only time and money but the services that women and families need. I am particularly proud of our Government's achievements in child care, and pay tribute to the work of the Minister for Lifelong Learning, my hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Margaret Hodge), who was responsible for child care issues in our first term, and to the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, my noble Friend Baroness Ashton of Upholland, who has taken over that responsibility. We have already created new child care places for more than 750,000 children. By March 2004, we will have places for about 1 million extra children.

Much has been done, but because we listen to and represent women in our constituencies and our Government listen to women throughout the country, we all know how much more remains to be done, for instance, on the pay gap. When I was campaigning on equal pay and sex discrimination nearly 30 years ago, that gap was 37 per cent. Now, it is down to 18 per cent., but it is still far too high. The penalty paid by women in their lifetimes in forgone earnings is enormous. Research carried out by our women and equality unit found a staggering difference between the lifetime earnings of a woman with medium-level skills and two children and those of a man of similar experience. The gap in her earnings compared with his was about £380,000—a gender gap of £240,000 and a motherhood gap of a further £140,000.

I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office is doing so much to take forward the pioneering work of Baroness Castle, which will now be recognised again with the introduction shortly of the new Castle awards for employers who are making strides to close that pay gap. I certainly do not want my daughter to be campaigning on that issue in another 20 or 30 years.

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): I thoroughly support all that the Secretary of State has just said about equal pay. Does she agree that that is a cross-party issue and that all parties in the House want women to be treated equally as regards pay? Indeed, a Conservative Government introduced the Equal Pay Act in 1983.

Ms Hewitt: I was entirely with the hon. Lady until her last remark, as the Equal Pay Act was introduced by Baroness Castle in 1970 at the end of a Labour Government and was brought into effect in 1975 under the then Labour Government. However, I strongly welcome the hon. Lady's support for the action that we are taking to strengthen equal pay.

One reason why we have already delivered a great deal and will go on to deliver a great deal more—there is much more to be done—is that we have done more than any previous Government to engage women in policy making. If public policy is to deliver for all our people, policy making must be done by women as well as men. This matter concerns not simply individual women or the fate of political parties; it directly concerns the health of our democracy and the legitimacy of our political institutions.

In my constituency and throughout the country, I have been struck by the number of women who are engaged in neighbourhood and community leadership in, for example, tenants associations, community groups, the voluntary sector and faith organisations. As my hon. Friend the

Minister for Lifelong Learning said in an excellent article this morning, it is wrong to think that women are disengaged from politics. They are not.

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): I note with interest what you said about women being at the heart of policy making—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The hon. Lady must sit down when I am on my feet and she must use the right parliamentary language. She should address the Minister in the third person as the right hon. Lady.

Sandra Gidley: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Will the right hon. Lady give us an update on the mainstreaming commitment that was announced early in the last Parliament?

Ms Hewitt: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for that question because it is important. We have combined the appointment of the two Ministers for women and the establishment of the women's unit, now the women and equality unit, with moves to ensure that in every Department real attention is paid to the different lives, circumstances and needs of women and men, and that is working well. Gender analysis is thus taken seriously in policy making in every Department. The fact that we have so many women Ministers helps to ensure that that actually happens.

To return to the wider issue, women throughout the country are engaged locally in politics with a small "p"—in their own neighbourhoods and communities—but too many of them are disengaged from party politics, politics with a big "p", whether in the town hall or Whitehall. It is not surprising that that should be so. Too often when women look at their local council, or, in the past, at this House, or when they look at who is running big business, they see white men in charge, with some honourable exceptions. Women's representation as well as representation from our minority ethnic communities, for both men and women, is not a matter of political correctness; it is about the health of our democracy and the success of our economy.

Our Government and the Labour party are doing their bit. I was proud, as were many of my hon. Friends who are present today, to be part of that historic intake in 1997 when more women Members were elected than ever before. I hope to be around long enough, but not too long, for that record to be broken and for us to be part of it.

Sandra Osborne (Ayr): Does my right hon. Friend agree that we took a backward step at the last general election, especially as regards the representation of women from Scotland in this House?

Ms Hewitt: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Like her and many of my hon. Friends, I am disappointed that slightly fewer women were elected to our Labour Benches in last year's election than in 1997, but I have no doubt that action will be taken to redress that imbalance over the years to come.

Linda Perham (Ilford, North): Does my right hon. Friend share my hope that not only the Labour party but other parties will take advantage of the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002, which we introduced, to increase the number of women representatives of all parties in this place?

Ms Hewitt: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that point. I was just about to refer to that measure—I think it should have been called the women's representation Act—which had all-party support. I am sure that we shall hear from the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) about how the Conservative party intends to use its provisions. The Act will enable any political party to take whatever positive action it considers appropriate to redress the imbalance that exists even now in the representation of women and men in this place.

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that next week the Welsh Labour party conference in Llandudno will vote on a proposal for all-women shortlists for the Welsh Assembly elections? Does she agree that that is a direct result of the legislation introduced by the Government and a first step towards enacting it?

Ms Hewitt: I entirely agree with the points made by my hon. Friend. I think that the Welsh Labour party is the first political party body to take advantage of the new law that we introduced.

I am proud to be one of the seven women in the Cabinet—more than ever before in our history. I am proud to be part of a Government where one in three Ministers are women. We are doing significantly better than big business. My right hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General has done pioneering work on that subject. When we consider the FTSE 100, we find that for each woman on a board there are 17 men—not so much "Sex in the City" as sexism in the City.

Joan Ryan (Enfield, North): I am sure that my right hon. Friend is aware that before 1997 more Members were named John than were female. Currently, only one in eight Members of Parliament are women. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the only effective mechanisms to address that are quotas and the women's representation legislation?

Ms Hewitt: Of course I agree with my hon. Friend that there are not yet enough women in this place—nor are there enough women or men from our minority ethnic communities. The new law is a real step forward and will allow each political party to make its own decisions about the form of positive action that it wants to use—not to advance the career opportunities of women who are interested in politics but to ensure that our political institutions really reflect and represent all our communities and the whole of our country. That is essential if we are to deal with the problem of political disengagement at the party political or parliamentary level.

We must all address the even larger problem of under-representation on local councils. There are honourable exceptions, but far too often our local councils are run or dominated by male councillors. The Government are already addressing that in the appropriate forums.

Mr. Swire: The right hon. Lady may be right about women's representation on councils. However, later in the

[Mr. Swire]

debate, I hope to allude to the fact that the leader of the Conservative group on Devon county council is a lady—Christine Channon—who has been active in local politics for a long time. Furthermore, East Devon district council—one of the flagship councils of the land—is also controlled by the Conservatives and led by Sara Randall-Johnson who is also—as her name might suggest—a woman.

Ms Hewitt: I am delighted to hear about both those women council leaders, whom I have not yet had the pleasure of meeting. As I said, there are many outstanding exceptions to the general pattern that I was describing. Indeed, one of our many Ministers is my noble Friend Baroness Hollis, an excellent and experienced Minister, who was an extremely distinguished leader of Norwich city council for many, many years.

There are many exceptions to the rule, but the general pattern remains that across local councils as a whole the representation of women is even lower—much lower—than it is in our Chamber.

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the exceptions are so outstanding because in order for women to reach that level they must themselves be outstanding? There are many women languishing in society who are not quite as outstanding but who could easily contribute to the political process.

Ms Hewitt: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. She makes a central point: if we do not effectively extend opportunities for women—whether in business, public service, government or a range of political and other public institutions—not only will individual women miss out, but society will miss out on the contribution of talent, skills and experience of women whose abilities are not being properly recognised.

As we move towards next year's local council elections, my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office and I will be leading a drive in the Labour party to ensure that there is an increase in the number of women, drawing especially on the women to whom I was referring—those who are so active in their local communities but who sometimes, unfortunately, see the local council as a hindrance rather than a help. We need to change that and one way of doing so is to get those women into the council making decisions.

Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): I apologise to my right hon. Friend for my late arrival in the Chamber. I have come straight from the women's conference of the Trades Union Congress, where several hundred women gave details of their experience of their working environment and their working lives. We need that experience in this place. Few of those women have ever stood for Parliament. Does my right hon. Friend agree that they are the very people who should be enabled, through training and legislation, to have greater opportunities to serve on local councils and in this place?

Ms Hewitt: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I am delighted that she was able to attend the TUC women's conference—as my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office did this morning. We shall do our part as a political party to recruit women with that extraordinary range of experience to a variety of more formal political activity—in councils and in this place.

The Government are also playing their part. My hon. Friend and I—with my noble Friend Baroness Morgan, when she had ministerial responsibility for women and equality—initiated a programme of seminars and meetings throughout the country to encourage women from a range of backgrounds, regardless of political opinion, to put themselves forward for public appointments. That will allow us to tap into those women's experience and achieve our target of 50 per cent.

Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas (Crosby): I am sure that my right hon. Friend will want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the contribution that women working in science, engineering and technology have made to the quality of all our lives, and to reflect on the difficulties that those disciplines have in recruiting more women, who could only bring greater benefit to our economy if they were suitably used.

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend has enormous expertise and is making an outstanding contribution on the issue. I recently had the pleasure of meeting the Daphne Jackson Trust, which, as she will know, has been pioneering support for women with scientific degrees and other qualifications who want to return to work. There is much more that we can and should do, which is why I recently asked Baroness Susan Greenfield to report to me on precisely how we can get more women into science—both young women and those returning to work. That again underlines the point that we will never overcome our skills shortages if business and science recruit from only half the population.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): A large number of cabinet portfolio holders on Essex county council are women: Lis Pummell runs the schools; Elizabeth Hart runs lifelong learning and early years; Tracey Chapman runs environment; and Mavis Webster is deputy for social services. Those are all women who have achieved that prominence entirely on their own merit. Essex county council is Conservative-controlled and women are doing very well on it. I cannot finish without mentioning my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson), who won a seat from the Labour party entirely on merit, and who was also a shadow cabinet member of Essex county council.

Ms Hewitt: I am delighted to hear hon. Gentlemen praising their female Conservative colleagues. It is true that my party has not yet produced a woman Prime Minister, although we have certainly had outstanding women Cabinet members. Since the hon. Gentleman decided to introduce a bit of controversy to the debate, it is also fair to say that, despite the fact that the Conservative party and Government were headed for so many years by a woman of extraordinary and outstanding abilities, women in our country are doing far better under our Labour Government and our Prime Minister.

Mrs. Laing: It is very good to have some support on this side from gentlemen colleagues. I see that the hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt) has just resumed his place, thereby doubling the number of gentlemen on the Labour Benches. It is sad that there is so little support there.

Does the Minister agree that, to encourage more women to come into the House and into politics generally, those of us who are already involved have to be seen to be serious in the undertaking of our duties, and not to trivialise the matter of women's employment rights, mothers' rights and so on; and that there is a danger that, if there are continual press reports about breastfeeding in the Chamber, the outside world will find it hard to take us seriously? Should not we be discussing—as she has done this afternoon—the many millions of women out there who need support?

Ms Hewitt: I have been addressing many of the very serious issues that face women throughout our country, but breastfeeding is also a serious issue to do with the health of our children.

Our Government are working for women and listening to them every day, but it is good to have one day of the year when we debate women's interests and concerns specifically, and I look forward with keen anticipation to hearing further contributions to this debate.

3.45 pm

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): We are here to celebrate international women's day, and it is right to begin by paying tribute to all the organisations that have worked hard to improve the lot of women in society. I listened attentively to the Minister, who seemed to give the impression that all was rosy in the garden and that the Government could take the credit for all the achievements, but it is right to record our thanks to all the organisations who work so hard on our behalf.

In some ways, I find it absolutely astonishing that it is necessary for us to debate the subject of women and equality more than 20 years after the Sex Discrimination Act 1975. The fact that we have to do so takes us far beyond any party political argument and goes to the very nature of British culture. Anyone who might dispute the need for this debate should take account of some very disturbing facts.

Male graduates aged between 20 and 24—that is largely before family responsibilities come along—in full-time employment earn more than their female counterparts even when they have achieved the same class of degree, studied the same subject and work in the same occupations and industries. The pay gap widens as they get older. There is a 25 per cent. pay gap by the time that they get to their late 30s.

Apart from the obvious lack of justice, that has knock-on effects. Women who have left employment constitute the poorest group of people in the country—the most dependent on state benefits. That is partly due to the fact that women take career breaks to have families, during which time they cannot contribute to a pension scheme. Moreover, many of the schemes are geared to the male model of unbroken service from first job to retirement. This is a wake-up call to all those designing new pension products: they must take account of the typical lifetime working model for women.

That is quantifiable. The average net entitlement to a pension is £67.68 per week, but that obscures the contrast in that the male average is £82 per week and the female average £59.29. Recently retired males have higher pension entitlements than females in the same position, because of their more complete contribution record and, on average, higher earned income.

The Fawcett Society, whose work I praise unreservedly, has established that only one in five women have set aside enough provision for their retirement. We should be shouting that from the rooftops, while there is still time for younger women to prepare. The problem is that the old reliance on a husband's earnings to provide enough for a couple to live on in old age has been blown apart by the rising divorce rate and incidence of family breakdown.

Women's capacity to prepare for a dignified retirement is not helped by the fact that many of the jobs open to women are part-time and poorly paid, leaving them little leeway to set aside savings for later life. The pay gap between the genders has remained largely unchanged for part-time women since the late 1970s: a staggering 41 per cent. Those are figures provided by the Equal Opportunities Commission. Inequalities exist even in well-established, female-dominated public sector professions such as nursing. Men are 80 per cent. more likely to be in the top nursing grade H than their female counterparts. Last year, 77 per cent. of all hospital consultants were men, and only 6 per cent. of consultant surgeons were women. I know only one female consultant who has managed to negotiate part-time working, but invariably her male colleagues unhelpfully arrange administration meetings on her day off.

The Employment Bill, which is currently going through the Lords, tries to address some areas of inequality, but we want to alert the Government to some health warnings. In February, women bosses at the Institute of Directors expressed concern about increasing employment rights for women and the possibly damaging effects of the Bill on their employability. Small businesses in particular are already groaning under the burden of red tape introduced by the Government. They favour voluntary arrangements between employers and their staff, not more legislation. Maternity leave legislation can be difficult to manage, especially for small companies. Employers currently have to keep a woman's job open when she is on maternity leave, but the woman has no obligation to return. Many women choose not to do so, and for small businesses that can lead to difficulties.

The evidence is that many women decide not to return to work because of the lack of affordable child care. The Government should concentrate their resources on that problem. What is being done to encourage employers to increase child care provision without placing extra burdens on employers? The depletion in the number of child minders, who feel that they are being pushed out by the Government's preference for institutional early-years education, has been a serious blow to working women, who need the flexible, domestic-based service that child minders can provide and which institutions find difficult to match.

Sandra Osborne: Is the hon. Lady aware that under successive Conservative Governments people could not get child care for love nor money?

Mrs. Spelman: I am not here for historical debate; I was not a Member of Parliament under a Conservative Government. We are talking about women and equality

[Mrs. Spelman]

today, and the Minister set out for the House the good things that, in her view, the Government have done. I urge the Minister to focus the Government's attention on things that need to be done; many working women and many child minders have beaten a path to my door over the reduction in the number of child minders.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way—*[Laughter.]* I am sorry, I am stuck in a rut; in this place, it is usually one of them. I accept the hon. Lady's desire to make things better, but it is difficult to accept her lack of historical awareness. Under the Conservative Government, there was no financial help for women seeking child care, whether from a child minder or an institution. The working families tax credit, which has a child care element, is increasing the number of child minders in my constituency. In addition, the child care strategy is making more places available.

I like the tone of this debate, which suggests that both Government and Opposition could do better. However, we have to accept the record of the past.

Mrs. Spelman: One must be careful with the expression about who wears the trousers, but I should like to make it clear for the record that I am an hon. Lady.

Labour Members have been in power for five years, so they must accept that they have a bit of history. It is not true that there was no help with child care under the Conservative Government; there was help with out-of-school child care. I made a specific point about the demise of child minders. The Minister made an important point about changes in British society concerning women and the workplace. As she said, in the 1950s the typical model involved a delineation of roles; women wanted to stay at home much more and raise their families. Now, there is a rise in the number of women, increasingly with under-fives, wanting to go to work. There is therefore a new demand for the appropriate care of children under school age, which we must meet from the supply of child care services. I certainly want to draw to the attention of the Government the loss of child minders.

The Federation of Small Businesses gave a clear verdict on the Employment Bill, which it described as hefty and a raft of employment legislation too far. Its employment spokesman, Bill Knox, said:

> "This Employment Bill has got to be the final word . . . our members broadly support family friendly policies but there is no doubt that parental leave is generous to employees and hard on employers"

—in small businesses—

> "which can only harm productivity."

At the very least, the federation wants the Government to deliver on promises to limit the bureaucracy involved in administering those policies. That is important for small businesses; while they welcome family-friendly policies, the burden of administering them is sometimes the straw that breaks the camel's back.

Similar misgivings apply to the European Union's equal treatment directive. In a speech to European Standing Committee B in February, I made a plea for greater clarity and simplicity in the language used to describe proposed legislation in the directive. At the moment, employers may be put off employing women because of the obscurity and complication of legislation surrounding their employment. There is also the question of the cost of regulations in the directive.

Nearer to home, we need more women in Parliament; we supported the change in the Sex Discrimination Act to allow political parties to take positive action to get more women into all areas of public life. I should like to place on the record the fact that our party is doing its bit; we are going to change our selection procedures in the light of that legislative change. For the sake of Parliament's standing in the eyes of the public, we must be seen to be working in ways that do not deter half the population from taking part. I wish to correct a misconception and, in so doing, may cast doubt on the question of paternity leave, which was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire). It is generally unknown in the wider population that there is no maternity leave for women Members of Parliament; leave is discretionary and must be negotiated with the Whips. It is interesting to observe that Members of Parliament have no right to maternity leave.

Joan Ryan: Does the hon. Lady support the extension of paid maternity leave in the Employment Bill from 18 to 26 weeks? I agree that child care is terribly important, and welcome the national child care strategy—the first one we have ever had—and the expansion of child care places. However, paid maternity leave over a reasonable period is vital, and women want it. I was unsure whether the hon. Lady supported that or not.

Mrs. Spelman: I was giving the Government a health warning about the change. Under the changes to maternity leave, after only six months' employment employees become entitled to a full year's maternity leave, at the end of which they can still choose not to return. Small businesses faced with a choice of candidates for a position may start to have misgivings about employing a woman of childbearing age. I was warning the Government about the impact that the change may have on women's employability. We must balance the needs of employers and employees; without doubt, the needs of small businesses are different from those of large corporations.

My own experience is that once one has got into Parliament, being a woman is no bar to getting on; if anything, male colleagues respect one more because they know the hurdles that have had to be overcome to get into Parliament. Women make up more than half the population, but only 18 per cent. of our MPs are female, which is lower than in Turkmenistan, Vietnam, Rwanda and Namibia and an indictment of the mother of Parliaments. We could do more by mentoring candidates and providing role models to prove that it is possible to become an MP. Parliament is making some progress on more family-friendly working practices. The example of the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), comes to mind; she demonstrated that ministerial office and maternity can be combined.

On thinking about the title of this debate, I had an inkling that I would be disappointed in one respect, and I am afraid that my misgivings have been borne out. I suspected that the debate would focus on improved rights for women in the developed world, but they pale in comparison with inequality between the sexes in the developing world. We should remember that our debate is taking place in the context of international women's day.

It is no exaggeration to say that poverty has a female face, and nowhere is that more true than in the developing world. There are many disturbing facts, and I shall highlight just a few that really hit home in preparing for the debate. According to the United Nations Development Fund for Women, women are still the poorest of the world's poor, representing 70 per cent. of the 1.3 billion poor in the world. Moreover, the number of women living in poverty has doubled since 1970. In other words, we are going backwards. Rural women—mainly farmers—represent more than a quarter of the total world population. On average, they produce more than half the food that is grown, but they own only 2 per cent. of the land. Women represent two thirds of all illiterate people.

There are terrible inequalities in maternal mortality. According to UNICEF, a woman dies every minute while pregnant or giving birth. A woman who gives birth in a developing country has as high as a one in 13 chance of dying, but in developed countries such as ours the risk is one in 4,100.

On health care for women, the startling fact is that last year, 1.3 million women died of HIV-AIDS. However, In sub-saharan Africa, teenage girls are five times more likely to be infected than boys, because most are infected not by boys of their own age, but by older men. That problem needs to be addressed. Older women in sub-saharan Africa sometimes look after as many as 30 or 40 grandchildren orphaned by HIV-AIDS.

Female genital mutilation is still a problem in east Africa, despite the Kenyan, Ugandan and Tanzanian Parliaments adopting legislation to outlaw it. In Tanzania, it is still performed at an early age by about 20 per cent. of the 130 main ethnic groups.

We have all become much more acquainted with the plight of women in Afghanistan. After 20 years of civil war, a disproportionate number of widows—an estimated 50,000 in Kabul alone—head families. Tajik widows in a refugee camp whom I met complained bitterly that, without men, there is no one to push to the front of the queue to get food for them. Under the Taliban, Afghanistan was the only country in the world to ban women from secondary education. Unsurprisingly, the literacy rate for women is just 13 per cent.

Reconstruction must now partly involve re-establishing women in the country's hierarchy. In living memory—thank goodness—women Ministers have participated in Afghan politics, but there are already bad signs. Initially, the Afghan women's ministry was not funded, and it remains underfunded.

Mr. Swire: Every Member of this House will agree that, in an ideal world, more women should be involved in front-line Afghan politics, but does my hon. Friend not regret the fact that, when our forces were actively engaged in Afghanistan in the aftermath of 11 September, certain Labour Members concentrated on achieving a gender balance in an Afghan government? Perhaps they should have talked more about getting the ethnic balance right.

Mrs. Spelman: We must be very careful about imposing on Afghan people a western view of how they should run their country. Until I visited that region, I did not understand the wearing of the burqa. That seems abhorrent to us in the west, but it was explained to me that women are in purdah—behind the curtain—and if one wants to go out, one must do so behind the curtain. That point had not occurred to me. The western perspective persists that it is an abhorrent custom, but one Afghan woman told me, "You want me to remove the burqa, but you forget that I have to go home to my husband, and he hasn't changed." We must therefore be very careful about imposing a western view, but we support the Interim Administration's appointing two women Ministers.

Fiona Mactaggart: For the avoidance of doubt, will the hon. Lady confirm that she thinks it abhorrent that, in Afghanistan, women were excluded from schools and women doctors were refused the right to practise? Does she agree that that is an abuse of international human rights standards that every democratic politician in the world, western or otherwise, should be concerned about?

Mrs. Spelman: I hope that the hon. Lady was listening when I highlighted the abhorrent fact—let there be no doubt—that Afghanistan is the only country in the world to have banned women from secondary education. What flows from that is the closure to the professions that she describes. I was merely pointing out that it is important not to impose our norms on the culture of another country. Islamic societies do not necessarily discriminate against women, and I do not want anyone to think that I was arguing to the contrary.

In 1977, 15 per cent. of legislators in Afghanistan were women. Until the 1990s, women comprised 70 per cent. of all teachers, 50 per cent. of Government workers and 40 per cent. of medical doctors. Throughout the developing world, women can occupy positions of power and influence.

Helen Jackson: In the context of the disastrous treatment of women in Afghanistan, does the hon. Lady agree that women are often a strong and powerful force in conflict resolution at a community and a national level? If women are excluded in a country that is suffering violence, it is far more difficult to achieve a peaceful and democratic resolution.

Mrs. Spelman: The hon. Lady will know that such an analysis of the peaceful and reconciliatory role that women can play in conflicts applies to many parts of the world, including close to home.

Throughout the developing world, it is vital that women have better access to education, health care and the infrastructures that can help them to build up small businesses. In the most recent session of International Development questions, I called for microcredit to be used in Afghanistan to kick-start or re-direct production, thereby giving women the power to start their own small businesses. Aid agencies have helped immensely in that regard by establishing bakeries run by women.

I commend to the Government Africa's "Send a Cow" charity, with which the Minister is doubtless familiar. It gives women in the third world a cow to provide milk for their village, enabling them to build from that example. Women with a cow are more immediately respected, because they can nourish their children and sell their milk. Other schemes that provide water nearer to villages can also release women from the daily drudgery of walking several miles each day to get water.

There are many human rights abuses around the world and I cannot give a comprehensive list, but in the context of international women's day I want to discuss child

[Mrs. Spelman]

trafficking, which is of great concern. It is mainly girls, particularly from west Africa, who are lured to European countries by promises of a better life and education. Some of them end up as virtual slaves, and others end up as prostitutes. In the wake of the Victoria Climbie tragedy, the spotlight is now being turned on private fostering. However, I hope that the Government will heed calls from Conservative Members to devote resources to an education campaign for parents in west Africa, so that we can spell out the inherent dangers of selling their children, simply in order that they can come to this country.

Another abuse against women that has been in the news recently is the issue of Asian girls who have been brought up here being forced into marriages with men in India and Pakistan. In just 18 months, the Foreign Office has dealt with 240 cases of forced marriage, and has repatriated more than 60 young people who were taken abroad to be married against their will. I hope that the Government will tackle that issue.

One of the greatest vehicles of empowerment for women is education, both here and in the developing world. Through education comes better health, and through health and education comes opportunity for change. A report produced by the YWCA on "Poverty: the price of young motherhood in Britain", shows that young women with no educational qualifications are almost twice as likely to report having a child in their teens as those who have GCSEs. Although, nationally, girls outperform boys, among ethnic groups Bangladeshi young women are twice as likely as their white peers to be without educational qualifications at the age of 16. Research by the Policy Studies Institute reveals that Bangladeshi girls are falling behind the boys by 10 per cent., which challenges the received wisdom that girls now do better than boys at school. I support the YWCA recommendation for a special working group on girls' school exclusion and disaffection. That issue is often lost in the generalisation that girls now outperform boys.

It is true that when we compare the fate of women in the developed world with those in the developing world, we find that our lot is much happier, but violence against women by men is no respecter of race, class or colour. In this country we now have refuges for women escaping male violence—one for every 200,000 of the population—but in the third world such luxuries do not exist. In some cultures, it is practically the norm for men to mistreat their women. According to the secretary general of Amnesty International, Irene Khan,

> "Violence against women is one of the most pervasive yet hidden forms of human rights abuse throughout the world."

So, where does that lead us? In this country, we need to temper legislation with consensus, to teach by example, to produce role models for women to imitate, and to encourage the practice of mentoring.

We need to be sensitive to the rights of women in work to encourage them to break through the infamous glass ceiling. I often speak at girls' sixth form colleges on the subject of juggling work and family life. I advise the girls to work out their priorities in advance, to be bold in asking for what they need to balance their lives and, above all, to retain a sense of humour. However, if we fail to teach the boys at the same time that women expect to be treated as equals, we simply create a deeper gulf of misunderstanding, resentment and even violence.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: The hon. Lady mentioned domestic violence and refuges. Will she acknowledge that the Home Office has done a lot of work with police authorities to try to ensure that women do not have to leave their homes and flee to refuges with their children, which is what they have had to do in the past?

Mrs. Spelman: We could have a separate debate on domestic violence, and I might commend that to hon. Members, because it is an unspoken but important issue. As a new Member of Parliament, I was struck by what the police told me about domestic violence. When a case occurs, the problem is that they all too often have to send the woman back home. While the Home Office is beginning to address the issue in the domestic setting, it is vital that women have somewhere safe to go while the wider ramifications of the domestic dispute at the heart of the violence are investigated. I have learned from my surgeries that there are two sides to a story, and that an initial interview with one person does not always reveal all the aspects. If a woman has a safe place to go with her children, it can create the breathing space to consider the extent and nature of the problem.

All that we do to help women achieve the equality for which they strive must be done in the certain knowledge that it is no mere concession to political correctness. By not treating women as equals, we are missing out on a lot of talent, skills and knowledge. We must carefully scrutinise legislation to achieve our aims. We must not allow red tape protecting women's rights at work to become another tool to beat women with, or an excuse not to employ them.

Not for the first time since taking up my brief as shadow Secretary of State for International Development I have been struck by the huge gulf between what are seen as major problems in this country compared with what is happening in the developing world. That is never more true than in this debate on women and equality. As I hope I have been able to show, the lot of women in the developing world is a difficult, dangerous one. Yes, we must work to right our own inequalities, but let us not lose sight of the women of the third world who are centuries behind us and where the words "equality" and "woman" seem at present on opposite sides of a giant chasm.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. I remind the House that Mr. Speaker has put a time limit of 12 minutes on all Back-Bench speeches, which applies from now on. We have had three statements today, which has taken a lot of time out of this debate and many hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye. If Members can limit their remarks to less than 12 minutes, fewer of them will be disappointed.

4.16 pm

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): I welcome this debate. It is too rare that we discuss the issue of equality and women, and we need to acknowledge that those two words still do not mesh together as well as they should. Equality for women is still a long way off. However, many of the formal barriers that women used to have to jump over have gone. The higher pass marks for those girls trying to get into grammar schools have gone. Lower pay for women teachers has theoretically gone, although in practice we know that women in the public services are not paid as well as men. I also wish the hon. Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter) luck in his attempt to get rid of another formal barrier to women in private clubs.

We know, however, that women still face constant and chronic disadvantages that make our society less effective. Like the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman), I looked at the issue in an international context. As a supporter of an organisation called Womankind Worldwide, I wish to focus on four areas of literacy that it has described as important for women in developing countries and that are also important for women in Britain today. Those are literacies of the word, of money, of the body and of civic society.

The obvious literacy that we all know about is the right to read. Indeed, my maiden speech was about the human right to read. I celebrate wholeheartedly the improvements in children's literacy achieved through the literacy strategy. When I first stood for election, less than half of 11-year-olds in my constituency reached the expected literacy standards, but that figure is now up to three quarters. That is good work, but an important job remains. We must give women in the poorest countries access to the right to read, but we must also give it to women in this country. Women who did not succeed in school or benefit from developed literacy strategies often work in jobs with less access to learning and training on the job than men have. We need to focus directly on women's education.

We could make a difference in two specific areas. The first is those jobs where women help other women and other professionals to do their job better—nursing auxiliaries and teaching assistants are the two that come to mind. Fantastic, talented women who missed out in their first education do those jobs for terrible pay—teaching assistants, for example, are often only paid in term-time—and have the capacity to achieve more but cannot afford to take time out of those poorly paid jobs to go on full-time training courses. There are still not enough opportunities for teaching assistants to become teachers. I used to teach people to be teachers, and I know what it takes to be a good primary teacher.

First, it takes the ability to talk to children. I used to work at one of the most high-powered education institutes in this country, and I taught many clever young men who did not know how to talk to children—it was as though they were talking to Martians. The wonderful thing about teaching assistants is that they know how to talk to children, so they have the first thing that they need.

We must do a better job for nursing auxiliaries and teaching assistants to give them a ladder on which they can progress from their present situation to gain professional qualifications. For the most dynamic among them, those ladders exist. However, we need to give them leg-ups and more help. That would not only give women more opportunities but help to solve the teaching and nursing shortages in constituencies such as mine.

The second area of education that is important to women is English for speakers of other languages. Many women who come to this country operate in their first language all the time. They do not get access to learning English, which cuts them off from access to the economy in many ways. We must ensure that women migrants get an early chance to learn English when they come here. I welcome those elements of the Home Secretary's proposals that will make that more possible, but I urge the Minister for Women to give him more power to his elbow, particularly in relation to women.

On money, the Government have made a big difference for women in our Budgets. For the first time, we know how much better women have done than men from them. I am glad to say that, and it is right. Unless the Budget deals with some of the income inequalities that chronically disadvantage women, they will continue. We are still miles behind on equal pay. Britain is still 12th out of 15 in the EU in the width of the pay gap, and we must make more of a difference. I urge Ministers to lead the way in the public sector by using pay audits and by publicising schemes—having learned from the pay audit about levels of inequality—to tackle it.

As a corollary of what I was saying about teaching assistants and nursing auxiliaries, we also need to provide more opportunities and support for women to get to the top of the professions and the jobs that they do. We all know that in almost every area, the largest number of men are at the top, and the largest number of women are at the bottom of almost any career structure, whether it is university lecturers and vice-chancellors, or, as the hon. Member for Meriden said, nurses at H-grade or the bottom grade. A particular task for the Government is to challenge institutions in the public sector and companies in the private sector not just to promote women but to give them opportunities for training and learning.

The other times when we can make a big difference to the money situation of women is at the youngest age of life and at the oldest. Ensuring that women have access to affordable child care is a high priority. Nursery vouchers were the beginning of a mistake that in some ways the Government have made worse by introducing an earlier start for children's formal schooling. Too many children at just four years of age are going into primary schools. That is not the best place for a four-year-old. The learning that they need when they are rising five and just over three is about how to share their toys, how to queue up, how to listen and how to play nicely. Those things are not best taught in a reception class; they are much better taught in a playgroup or nursery. I worry that in our charge for high standards, we have sometimes forgotten that we start formal education earlier in this country than in any other in the world. There may be a price to pay for that. Research in America on the High/Scope Perry pre-school project found that children who had an early experience of constructive play were more likely to go to university and less likely to go to prison than children who had no pre-school experience or children who had a formal educational experience too early.

The third literacy is that of the body. We urgently need to ensure that women's health is taken more seriously. Until very recently, all drugs were tested on men, and decisions on giving those drugs to women were based on men's test results. Women's bodies are less predictable because our hormone levels change from month to month, so it was thought that we were not such good subjects for testing. Nobody thought that it was not a good idea to assume that our bodies would react in the same way to drugs as men's bodies. Although drug testing is beginning

[Fiona Mactaggart]

to change, the same mindset determines which drugs to test. Therefore, the sorts of drugs being developed to deal with heart attacks and strokes relate to the heart attack patterns of men—who have their heart attacks at 40—and not to the heart attack patterns of women, who have their heart attacks after the menopause. We need to ensure that the Department of Health considers that issue, and that we consider the other issue that affects people's health—housing. In my constituency, women who live in disgusting housing keep telling me about how it is damaging the health of their children.

I shall now deal with civic society and women's role in it. The hon. Member for Meriden said that men in her party recognise that it has been a struggle for women to become Members, so they do not discriminate against them. However, I was in the Lobby with a man from her party the other day who was surprised by the number of women there. He said, "How nice it is to see all these pretty fillies here." I thought to myself, "What century are we living in?" He was certainly living in a different one from me. Women achieve positions of power on merit, even if we are helped by positive action programmes. Let us look at what women who are here through the women-only shortlist process have achieved. Putting women into these positions means that thought is given to the consequences of policy—the school-run rather than just roads and trains, and about how women live their lives. Unless policy addresses things such as the dog poo in the lift or the man exposing himself—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady has had her 12 minutes.

4.29 pm

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): I welcome this debate and hope that it will become an annual event.

It was interesting to hear the Minister reflect on how far we have come in 50 years. It gave me pause to reflect that, even 27 years ago, when I first went to university, all my parents' relatives were saying, "Why are you encouraging her to go to university? Education is wasted on a girl." That was not so long ago. We have taken great strides since.

Helen Jackson: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way; I am sure that she will be given injury time. I want to congratulate her wholeheartedly on her presence in the Chamber for this debate, but does she feel that she could do more to encourage more Liberal Democrat Members to take part? Members of her party occupy positions of responsibility in major cities such as Sheffield. Could she do more to encourage them to put the needs of women with regard to public transport and buses, for example, before the needs of the men who drive the private cars? Liberal Democrats are rapidly gaining a reputation for dismissing that policy area.

Sandra Gidley: I could give a typical male-type answer and bluff, but I will not. I am a female politician and we have a good reputation for honesty. I admit that I am disappointed that not a single other Liberal Democrat Member is present. I am so ashamed of that that I have no qualms about having my disappointment recorded in *Hansard*. I will take up the matter with my hon. Friends, and deliver a kick to the appropriate part of certain colleagues' anatomies.

I must add that some Liberal Democrat Members had constituency engagements—some of them involving women—that prevented them from attending, even though they wanted to. [Hon. Members: "Rubbish".] It is not rubbish. I am not in the habit of making false statements. The evidence speaks for itself, however, and I am disappointed.

I know that one of you is going to stand up and say, "Why didn't your party approve all-women shortlists?" You may well ask that question, as I was disappointed at that. I was on the other side of the argument, the side that lost.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Come and join us.

Sandra Gidley: It is not all about women.

My party has made a huge commitment both financially and in encouraging and mentoring women in ways not entirely dissimilar to the seminars that the Government are arranging around the country to attract more women into public life. Mentoring is important for women, and we are doing a lot of that behind the scenes. My party is doing more than that, however.

My party had 50-50 shortlists in the last European elections. That proved an effective way of ensuring that half our party's representatives in Europe are women. No one can say that those women did not get there on merit. They would probably have got there anyway.

I back the findings of the recent Equal Opportunities Commission survey. It pointed out that, in the absence of proportional representation—a subject that I am sorry to have to bring up—only positive discrimination will get more women into Parliament. That happened for the Labour party in 1997. I was disappointed that you went backwards—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am reluctant to interrupt the hon. Lady, but she must remember to use the correct parliamentary language. She keeps using the word "you", and she must not when she is making her remarks.

Sandra Gidley: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We have to find ways to use the measures that the Government have introduced. We have tried 50-50 shortlists in the past, but they have not always worked. I look forward with interest to finding out what all parties are going to do to deal with what will be a severe problem. Today is exceptional, in that there are more women than men in the Chamber. Normally, the opposite is true, and that is a barrier for women who want to enter the House. Unless the women's agenda is at the forefront of what we do, there will be no change.

I do not want to be completely carping today. The Government have achieved some success. Some Bills, such as the Employment Bill, have significantly enhanced the conditions of working parents. That must be a good thing, and it is a perfect example of putting women at the forefront of any legislation.

We must also try to make it easier for fathers to play an active part in raising their young. When we as a society speak of the women's agenda, we sometimes forget that many men would prefer to take a more active role in child care.

I also warmly welcome the Government's commitment to the national minimum wage and to increasing the number of child care places. The target for the latter is 1.6 million by 2004, but nearly half those places remain to be found in the next two years. When the Minister replies, I hope that we will learn what measures have been put in place to ensure that the target is met.

The Minister mentioned part-time working, and the return of women to work after childbirth. Problems can still arise and, although things are getting better, we must continue to find ways to ensure that we take up the skills that are on offer. We must not offer women what many will consider to be an unacceptable, take-it-or-leave-it option.

I want to spend most of my time talking about women in the public services. Unfortunately, there is much evidence that institutionalised sexism persists in the NHS. Reports of more explicit discrimination at the more traditional level, especially among surgeons, are widespread. For reasons that may include lower career expectations, family breaks and inherent discrimination, reports indicate that women are paid less than men in the same profession.

Men are less likely to have as much academic training or as many qualifications as women, yet they are twice as likely to be boosted into the higher echelons of the NHS. Earlier, we heard figures that showed the discrepancies that exist in the NHS. Work by the Fawcett Society shows that 75 per cent. of NHS staff are women, and that 88 per cent. of nurses are female. However, women doctors on average earn £180 a week less than men, and they are reported to work longer hours. We cannot say that we do not get value for money.

One reason for the persistent pay gap is that women are generally under-represented in senior and management grades. Even in the female-dominated nursing profession, only 77 per cent. of staff at managerial level are women. The Fawcett Society figures show that 63 per cent. of psychiatric nurses are female, but that only 47 per cent. of managers are female.

Women make up just over half the total number of house officers and senior house officers, but, at about 21 per cent. according to the latest figures, they are still under-represented among consultants. Even then, variations persist, with women accounting for 5 per cent. of surgeons, and for fewer than 20 per cent. of consultants in accident and emergency and general medicine. However, women account for a dizzy 37.6 per cent. of paediatricians.

More women than men in the NHS choose to take advantage of flexible working contracts. That option allows workers to enjoy the equivalent of part-time posts, but there are no job shares at consultant level. The Government have made no long-term commitment to providing adequate funding for junior flexible working contracts, although a two-year funding sticking plaster has been applied. I hope that the Government will commit to dealing with some of the more long-term problems.

More women are entering medicine. Many will want a break, for family reasons. We have to accept that women have babies and leave work for a while. That is what we do—not best, but certainly better than men. I hope that the Minister will say what assessment has been made of the extra numbers of doctors who will have to be trained, in addition to what is set out in the NHS plan. A severe gender crisis is quickly coming down the tracks in the NHS, but I have not seen that acknowledged.

In higher education, the pay gap is supposed to have narrowed by 10 per cent. over the past decade, but if one analyses it, one finds that the gap has increased in the past five years and is now about 17 per cent. On average, men earn £113 more a week. The gravest example is in St. George's hospital medical school, where the pay gap is 45 per cent., which we should all be ashamed of.

The Government have some control over the NHS and the education service, but it appears that it is still just jobs for the boys. Will the Government commit to undertaking pay audits in those sectors so that the process is more transparent and we can see more readily whether there is any deliberate, institutional or accidental discrimination?

We have touched on the election, and I shall not dwell on private grief, so I shall turn to public bodies. In 2001, of those serving on public bodies, 34 per cent. were women. That has risen by less than 2 per cent. since 1997. The target seems to have slipped: it was for 50-50 representation, but the latest figure is between 45 and 50 per cent. Will the Minister confirm whether that is the target for all Government bodies, and the date by which it will be achieved? There seems to be confusion about that.

In non-departmental public bodies, only 27 per cent. of women are at executive level, and even fewer, 25 per cent., are at advisory level. In the Prison Service, only 17 per cent. of the members of boards of visitors are women. As has been said, nationalised industries hit the bottom of the scale at 14 per cent. female representation, and only the NHS is approaching respectability at 43 per cent., but that must be set in the context of the overall gender balance of the work force.

I admit that there are problems similar to those faced by political parties. The boys do not want to give up their jobs, and they make it very difficult for women to progress in their careers. For many roles there is a still a man-shaped hole to fill, and we have to get past that. Chairmen, or chairpersons, of the board do not have to be men, and MPs do not have to be men, but if one asks somebody to describe an MP or a chairperson, they will come up with a male figure. We must challenge some of those perceptions and smash those stereotypes.

Mr. Eric Joyce (Falkirk, West): Does the hon. Lady think that it would be a good idea for the Liberal Democrats' spokesperson for women to be a woman, rather than a man?

Sandra Gidley: I am the spokesperson for the Liberal Democrats, and the last time I looked, I was still female.

While preparing for the debate, I accessed the Women's National Commission website. The personal experience section was well meant, but I am not sure that it had the right image. If I had been accessing the site as a woman looking for a job, or a way into a public body, I would have been slightly put off by the fact that at the top of the list was a dame, closely followed by a baroness. What should have been at the top was everyday stories of female folk, so that a woman looking at the site thinks, "Yes, I can do that too. I can take part." The perception that we have even of the women in public life can be somewhat skewed by the images that are portrayed.

[Sandra Gidley]

Women have had the vote for over 70 years, but unfortunately we still have a long way to go before we achieve equality. I hope that all of us here today are committed to working towards that and, as much as possible, to working together.

4.44 pm

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley): Those who are of a certain age—my age or a bit younger—may remember the weekly article that used to be written in a lovely style by Jill Tweedie. It was called "Diary of a Faint-Hearted Feminist". At that time, I regarded myself as being in that category. I have changed a bit, and I am a little less faint-hearted—although I would still not call myself a militant feminist—probably as a result of being in this place for five years and enduring the gentleman's club-like attitudes and atmosphere of the Chamber and the Smoking Rooms.

In addition, I have had to do a great deal of work, which is a great pleasure but upsets me at times, to help my young Asian women and girls. That has pushed me a little towards militant feminism because I do get a bit angry with the attitude of some of the so-called, self-styled Asian leaders in the Bradford area. I think that it is a Bradford thing, and perhaps someone will inform me whether it has spread to other parts.

In February 1999, I secured an Adjournment debate, which I called "Human Rights (Women)", so that it did not seem too controversial. I was petrified of calling it "Forced Marriages", although it was about the forced marriages of Asian women and girls. We have four men here today. On that morning, I think that only one man was present. He was from Bradford, and he nodded in all the right places but he did not participate in the debate, so not a single man spoke from the Labour Benches on that important issue. That was the first time that forced marriages had been mentioned in Parliament, and I regarded the debate with some trepidation. In fact, I was terrified.

The hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan), who has left her seat, was present that day and, to give her credit, she spoke well on the subject. My hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Chris McCafferty) also spoke in the debate. It was a good debate, but it was a pity that we did not have more men participating. I wonder to this day why that was the case. Why do men move away from confronting this particularly terrible situation that so many Asian girls find themselves in? I am not moving away from it; I am sticking with it.

I am delighted with many of the measures that the Government have introduced. This is not a party political broadcast, and I rarely make such comments. The hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) mentioned that 420 young women and girls have been repatriated, some from India and many from Bangladesh and Pakistan. That happened not with the wave of a magic wand but because the Government focused on the matter. Since I raised the subject three years ago, they have been working assiduously to stop that practice. They started with a Home Office working group, and then both the Home Office and the Foreign Office set up action plans. All that sounds terribly trendy, and in some cases it may not mean anything, but in this case it did.

The Foreign Office set up a consular desk simply to look after girls who had been whisked away. As the hon. Lady said, 420 have been repatriated in the last 18 months. The consular division of the Foreign Office also launched a video last Monday, and I do not know whether it is an accident but that seemed to coincide with international women's day. The video explains what marriage is all about. One would not think that it was necessary, but it is. It explains the value of marriage in all sections of the community, including arranged marriage. It stated specifically what an arranged marriage can be, and I would not knock arranged marriages because they can be vastly superior to some of our own methods. The video went on to talk about forced marriages, and three people spoke about their experience of those.

That is excellent stuff, and the Government have done very well. The Home Office has at last recognised the need for English to be spoken. The White Paper suggests that young men and women who come here as husbands and wives ought to be learning English. That is already a vague requirement for citizenship, but the requirement will be more precise, and a good knowledge of English will be needed, as will a knowledge of institutions, rights and responsibilities. All that is very good, and it will improve the lot of many of my Asian women and young girls.

The indigenous community should not be too smug. We are not all that good when it comes to gender equality. If we were, there would be equal numbers of men and women in this place and in many other institutions. There would not be a glass ceiling for executive women in business.

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): I join the hon. Lady in congratulating the Home Office on the excellent work that it has done in promoting marriage among her ethnic minority constituents. Will she join me in regretting the Government's decision this week to withdraw funding from national marriage week?

Mrs. Cryer: I was not aware of that. I am not sure how much difference that will make. I am in favour of marriage, as I think are most of us on the Government Benches. We cannot all get married for various reasons but, by and large, the Government are in favour of marriage. A great deal has been done. The video to which I have referred explains clearly that marriage is a good thing. It does not knock marriage. It deals with the issue of forced marriage.

If we had followed the Scandinavian example, we would by now have equal numbers of men and women in this place and in the other place. That would be good. It would send out a message to the Asian community that we are concerned about gender equality.

Unfortunately, the only way that we could start to move towards gender equality in this place was to have all-women shortlists. That is not a perfect system, and I do not think that any of us consider it to be so. However, I think that it is as good as we shall get. The Scandinavians can have equal numbers because they have list systems, but I do not particularly like such systems because they give too much power to the leadership, and I am opposed to that. I prefer to stick with the first-past-the-post system, so the only way in which we can bring about improvement is to have all-women shortlists. I am pleased that the Conservative party will be adopting that system. I wish that the Liberal Democrats would do so, and all power to the elbow of the hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley).

Shortly after being elected to this place, I joined the Council of Europe and became a member of its equal opportunities committee. International women's day took place recently, and we passed a letter that was to be sent to the Nigerian ambassador in Paris. We meet in Paris. The letter reads:

> "Your Excellency, I hope that this request does not arrive too late. I have just heard that on 12 January last, a young 35-year-old Nigerian woman, Ms Safya Husseini Tungar Fudu, was to be buried alive up to the chest and then lapidated to death for having born a child without being married. The President of the Sharia Court of Appeal of the State of Sokoto has adjourned the case to 18 March."

That is next Tuesday. I am reading the letter so that all Members may make representations to the Nigerian embassy in London. The letter continues:

> "We ask you to take the necessary steps to ensure that this barbaric and unworthy judgment is swiftly set aside in compliance with the principles of international law and the principles governing human dignity."

The case is horrific. I hope that everyone will write to the Nigerian embassy to make it clear that what is happening is entirely unacceptable. Whether it is labelled Sharia or whatever, it is unacceptable.

There is a less than satisfactory state of affairs within the indigenous population. For example, there is the Church of England. I tabled early-day motion 755 about a month ago, which is headed "Gender Equality in the Church of England". I will skip through it quickly. It reads:

> "That this House notes the Church of England is exempted from the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 due to the attitudes and activities of a minority who are in disagreement with the ordination of women; affirms the need to strengthen and forward the movement against discrimination on grounds of gender; trusts the Church will thus be encouraged to catch up speedily with the vast majority of institutions; and believes that the appointment of an Archbishop of Canterbury could provide the perfect opportunity to forge leadership which would unite the Church of England behind justice for women and end the unfortunate and embarrassing need for 'flying' bishops'."

I do not have time to go into what flying bishops are, but I am sure that some Members know what I am talking about.

A young lady went to a selection conference for ordination. She was questioned closely about her child care arrangements. Were the young men at that selection conference questioned equally closely about their child care arrangements? Even if they were, it would be unfair if selection conferences were to come down against young women on that ground. She was not selected, and she felt strongly that those conducting the conference were assuming that she could not cope with child care and being a Church of England vicar.

Many women Members cope well—I am amazed by them—with young children and a job in this place. Some of them are Ministers.

Last week, my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) tabled early-day motion 927, which is headed, "Military Action against Iraq". By and large, wars are waged by men. I know that this is a generality, but wars are suffered mainly by women and their children. I supported the Government on the need for intervention in Afghanistan because I loathed and detested the Taliban because of their attitude to and cruelty to women. However, I would have grave reservations about any attack on Iraq.

Finally—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady has had her 12 minutes.

4.56 pm

Mr. Robert Walter (North Dorset): I am delighted to participate in the debate. I shall deal briefly with two issues that are covered by legislation that the House has been or will be considering this Session. These issues are the selection of election candidates and the situation in private members' clubs.

Currently, Britain has one of the lowest levels of political representation of women in Europe. It has been argued that the best way to counter the trend is for parties to use positive action mechanisms. Encouragement, coercion and shame seem not to have worked. Where positive action has been used it has dramatically increased women's representation.

During the passage of the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill, I highlighted that at the previous election we saw 118 women elected to Parliament, which was a smaller number than in 1997. That represents progress at a rate of about 1.5 women a year in the 82 years since women have been eligible to sit in this place. We seem to have gone into reverse, and only Ireland and France have lower levels of female representation.

Positive action is needed, and not only because women are not able to succeed on merit. It is needed because discrimination in the selection process means that they are rarely given the opportunity to try to become elected. Opaque discrimination is inherent in the selection process of all political parties. I suggested on Second Reading of the Bill relating to election candidates that they are predominantly elderly selectors, and in some Tory constituencies might be looking for a married man who is about 40, with a reasonable career in the City, the law or the Army, with some experience of local government. The real clincher would be the attractive wife, two smashing kids and a labrador. The Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002 is not a patronising measure; it is permissive. Political parties may take advantage of it if they wish, but it does not force any party to adopt all-women shortlists if it does not want to do so. I believe that the measure is essential and will be temporary, although it is very timely.

I turn now to two other measures: the Sex Discrimination (Amendment) Bill, which was introduced in this House in my name and those of several other hon. Members, and the identical Sex Discrimination (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill, which received its Second Reading last night in the House of Lords. The measure is simple: it is about dignity and simply provides that if a club offers membership and facilities to men and women, it must do so on equal terms.

When I introduced a similar Bill three years ago, I did not foresee its far-reaching implications. I had had personal experience of the injustice of a club that offered membership to both men and women, but gave women only second-class membership. I refer to the Carlton club, in respect of which I had been part of campaign to try to

[Mr. Robert Walter]

remedy that injustice. There have now been three separate occasions on which the club has narrowly missed the opportunity to move itself into the modern world. Although others have resigned from the Carlton club both before and after me, the club seems not to want to budge on the issue. I give great credit to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition for being the first leader of the Conservative party in 150 years to decline to become a member of the Carlton club because of this very issue. I also congratulate other Conservative Members who have resigned from it in the past few years. Of course, when I introduced my Bill three years ago, it failed, as do many private Members' Bills.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): While my hon. Friend is on the subject of the Carlton club, it may interest him to know that a few years ago, I became the second woman chairman of the Bow group. I was taken aside by a Carlton club member—we used to hold our meetings there regularly—and told that it would probably be all right, as long as I did not make myself too obvious.

Mr. Walter: I thank my hon. Friend for that helpful and supportive intervention.

In December last year, I reintroduced my original Bill under the ten-minute rule. It is due to be considered on Second Reading tomorrow, but alas, it lies at No. 5 on the Order Paper, and I fear that it is unlikely to make progress. I was therefore delighted when Lord Faulkner of Worcester introduced the identical Bill in the other place. As I said, it received its Second Reading last night almost without opposition; I fear that the only slight hint of opposition came from a Labour Member, Lord Borrie, who felt that the measure was ahead of its time. I am sure that that Bill will make progress; in fact, I know that it will do so. If all goes well, their lordships will complete all stages of consideration in May and then send it down the Corridor to us.

I am extremely grateful for the cross-party support for my Bill and its sister Bill in the other place. I am encouraged by the support from Conservative Members, including Front Benchers. I hope that the actions of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition with regard to the Carlton speak for themselves.

I should also like to express my thanks and admiration to the Minister of State, Cabinet Office, who has made it absolutely clear to me that she now supports the measure. I thank her for that support and for her generosity in meeting me with her officials to discuss how we might take the matter forward. However, I should like unreservedly to apologise to her if the detail of our recent meeting was misrepresented in the press and set the record straight. On the basis that the Government would support the Lords' version of the Bill, she reasonably asked me whether I would withdraw my Bill in this House. I have said—this is a critical indication of the Government's support for the measure—that I shall withdraw my Bill if she can either directly or through the Leader of the House assure me and all the Bill's supporters in this House that Government time will be made available for consideration of the Lords' version when it comes to this place. The Government have to bite the bullet.

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mrs. Barbara Roche): This afternoon, the hon. Gentleman told me on the telephone that the letter in today's edition of *The Daily Telegraph* was wrong. He has not confirmed that in his speech. For clarity, will he now repeat what he told me on the telephone this afternoon?

Mr. Walter: I do not want to delay the House, but I will happily satisfy the hon. Lady. I repeat what I just said. The hon. Lady did not, as the letter in *The Daily Telegraph* said, suggest to me that if I withdrew my Bill, the Government would support the Lord's measure, which I think is the crux of what she asked me to say. What I said, and what I repeated, is that I will withdraw my Bill if the Government make time available in this place. I think that that is reasonable on my part, and I am sure that the hon. Lady would agree.

Mrs. Roche *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Walter: Perhaps we can discuss that on another occasion.

The Government must bite the bullet. Conservative Members may be embarrassed by one club—the Carlton—but Labour clubs have an appalling record on this issue. The Clubs and Institutes Union, to which Labour clubs are affiliated, has 2,700 member institutions, eight of which are single sex, 1,080, 40 per cent., offer full membership rights to women, and 1,612, 60 per cent., give second-class status to women.

Mr. Joyce: Will the hon. Gentleman clarify whether he is referring to Labour party clubs or is using the word labour in a generic form?

Mr. Walter: They are clubs in the CIU, which is the union to which all Labour clubs are affiliated. I think that that is clear. These are Labour social clubs, sometimes called working men's clubs.

Mr. Joyce: They are nothing to do with the Labour party.

Mr. Walter: In the same way, there are Conservative clubs that are associated to the Association of Conservative Clubs.

I have no doubt of hon. Members abhorrence of that situation, even if some are in denial. Right hon. and hon. Members would abhor the practice, and I have no doubt that they support the Sex Discrimination (Amendment) Bill. But I am looking for a clear commitment that time will be made available in the House to deal with this outdated form of sex discrimination. Such a measure is long overdue. What I want to know now is whether the Government have the commitment to tell the House that they too feel that it is long overdue and will make time available for its debate.

5.8 pm

Chris McCafferty (Calder Valley): As chair of the all-party group on population, development and reproductive health, hon. Members will not be surprised that I want to speak about reproductive rights and sexual violence against women and their impact on gender equality.

Gender-based violence has been the subject of considerable discussion with regard to population matters since the concept of reproductive rights gained currency.

The main focus of those discussions has been around domestic violence, honour killings and female genital mutilation. The United Nations declaration on the elimination of violence against women defines violence against women as

"any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women."

Gender-based violence often begins at an early age. Female infanticide has long been practised in societies where male children are still valued, economically and socially, above girls. During childhood, preferential allocation of family resources to male children often impacts negatively on the health of girls.

Domestic violence is the most common form of gender-based violence and, as women enter marriage, often as adolescents and in some instances without their consent, it can become a problem. That is especially true where the husband is considerably older than his wife and where local custom recognises the husband as the dominant partner.

Violence against women occurs in other situations where they are unable to exercise their right to fair treatment. They include the sexual exploitation of women refugees, rape as a weapon of war and trafficking in women for sex work. Trafficking in women has become a global problem and is one of the world's greatest violations of human rights. Up to 1,500 girls and young women are traded into the United Kingdom every year, and those affected are getting younger and younger—many are as young as 15.

To eliminate the trafficking of women into the UK, we must work on three main areas: prosecution, protection and prevention. The crime is cash-rich and traffickers have little to lose. The maximum penalty for human trafficking is only 18 months to two years, so the Government's proposal to increase it is welcome and necessary.

Shelters or refuges for women who are able to escape from traffickers are equally important. Because violence against women is frequently rooted in the unequal balance of power between men and women, the most effective counter-measure over the long term must remain continual progress towards the empowerment of women—equal educational opportunities for girls and, for adult women, greater control over their resources and greater decision-making powers. Those are prerequisites in the drive to eliminate the trafficking of human beings.

The most extreme form of gender-based violence is honour killing, which is used mainly to control women's sexuality and occurs in many countries of western and south Asia. A woman who is raped or voluntarily engages in sex outside marriage is considered to have defiled the family name. In some cases, the woman or girl may be suspected only of shameful or dishonourable behaviour, but the allegation is enough to dishonour her family.

In some countries, the law allows honour killing, but even where it is not explicitly permitted, the crime may not be prosecuted. For example, the penal code of Jordan exempts from any penalty a man who kills, wounds or injures a female relative who has committed adultery. A similar exemption exists in Syrian law. In Pakistan, hundreds of women are killed every year for crimes such as adultery, breaking an arranged marriage or simply attempting to obtain a divorce. A recent study of female homicide in Alexandria, Egypt found that 47 per cent. of all women killed had been murdered by a relative after they had been raped.

Honour killing should and must be tackled. It is an outrage that those who commit such crimes are often openly admired in their communities and subjected only to token prosecution. For too long, some men have been getting away with murder. It is time for Governments and local communities to acknowledge that such actions are crimes and to act decisively. Honour crimes are not confined to developing countries. Whatever they are called, such crimes are committed worldwide. They occur whenever a man regards a woman as his property and seeks to uphold that false assumption by cruel and abusive force.

One of the most complex areas of gender violence is female genital mutilation, or FGM—the name given to several different practices that involve cutting female genitals. Worldwide, an estimated 130 million girls and women have undergone FGM and at least 2 million girls a year are at risk of undergoing some form of the practice. It is usually performed on young girls between the ages of four and 13. The World Health Organisation has stated that FGM doubles the risk of a mother's death in childbirth and increases the risk of her child being born dead by up to three or four times.

Most of the women and girls affected live in Africa, but those who have undergone or who are at risk of FGM are increasingly found in countries of western Europe and other developed countries, primarily among immigrant and refugee communities. Four main justifications are cited for this harmful practice: custom or tradition, religion, social pressure and women's sexuality. It should be remembered that, although FGM is practised by Jews, Christians and Muslims, none of those religions requires it. Although there are such justifications for maintaining the practice, FGM appears to be linked primarily to a desire to subordinate women.

FGM violates the reproductive and human rights of women and girls because it interferes with their right to bodily integrity by removing healthy sexual organs without medical necessity. Although FGM is not undertaken with the intention of inflicting harm, its damaging physical, sexual and psychological effects make it an act of violence against women and girls.

Mrs. Gillan: I agree with the hon. Lady that female genital mutilation is appalling. Does she agree that even legislation does not seem to be the route to banishing this horrible mutilation in certain countries and that only fundamental and continuous education among men and women will lead to good progress being made in outlawing it?

Chris McCafferty: I agree entirely with the hon. Lady. We need a bottom-up education of women, as well as of men and children. An education network would ensure that, as groups, they learned about human rights, so that people from countries where FGM is still common realise that the practice is not helpful and must change. However, countries such as Britain must do more through legislation.

Enabling women to choose to abandon FGM requires an improvement in women's status. Governments need to reform all laws that serve as barriers to women's equality.

[Chris McCafferty]

Women must not stand alone in their demand for social justice; other sectors of society must be involved. Women need allies among politicians, religious leaders and health professionals.

Last year, the all-party group on population, development and reproductive health held hearings on this difficult subject. The aim was to raise awareness of the subject in the UK and abroad, and to generate support for FGM prevention and eradication programmes. The UK has a law on FGM: the Prohibition of Female Circumcision Act 1985, which was introduced by the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe). Despite that Act, there has never been a prosecution in this country, although there is a lot of evidence that FGM is taking place here. An estimated 15,000 girls in the UK are at risk every year, so it is vital that the law is fully implemented.

The hearings panel recommended that the Act be amended to ensure that UK residents who take girls abroad for the purpose of FGM can be prosecuted under UK law when they return, regardless of the legal status of FGM in the country where the mutilation took place. We would also like the name of the Act to be changed to incorporate the term "female genital mutilation". We want health professionals and other relevant authorities to report incidents of FGM so that accurate statistics can be obtained.

Since the UN declaration on the elimination of violence against women in 1993, much progress has been made in establishing reproductive rights. There is, however, a lot more to be accomplished in translating those rights into policies and programmes. Honour killings, human trafficking and female genital mutilation are all gender-based violations that attempt to subordinate women, and it is a fact that gender-based violence causes more disability and deaths in women between the ages of 15 and 44 than cancer, malaria, traffic accidents and war put together.

I am sure that all hon. Members condemn the centuries-old practices of slavery and torture, and racial and ethnic prejudice, and rightly so. We certainly condemn them when they involve people of colour, political dissidents or ethnic groups. The violation of women's human rights must be met by the same pressure in the House and internationally. Discrimination against girls is a persistent barrier to achievement. It is a violation of human rights and a threat to development—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady has had her time. I call Angela Watkinson.

5.21 pm

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): Most inequalities for women spring either directly or indirectly from the fact that women have children and men do not. That fact is never going to change, and we have to face up to it. The holy grail of total equality for women is, therefore, unachievable, but enormous progress has been made over the past decades, and I hope that that will continue.

In the home, both parents now share responsibility for the children in a way that never happened when my children were young. That is not a personal criticism of my husband, I hasten to add. Nowadays, with property prices as they are, most mortgages are two-salary mortgages, so even women who would choose to stay at home and look after their children are unable to do so. The logistics of everyday life in a family—child care, school runs, travel, and going to Brownies, music and swimming lessons—are at least shared by two parents. In my day, women took full responsibility for the running of the entire household and looking after the family, and had a job outside the home only if they could fit it in. Progress has therefore been made in terms of women's ability to choose a career, if they wish to do so.

In the 1950s, all women in the workplace were regarded as temporary employees. It was assumed that, as soon as a woman got married, she would leave fairly shortly afterwards to have children. Even single women who stayed in their jobs all their lives were still regarded as temporary employees, and put on a separate pay scale, on which they were paid less than men for doing exactly the same job. Thank heavens that those days are over. Executive positions for women were extremely rare in those days and, even in 2002, there is a predominance of women in junior posts in most large organisations.

I received a card recently from PCS—the Public and Commercial Services union—about pay in the civil service. I phoned the union, but, unfortunately, it was unable to get back to me to clarify the statistic at the bottom of the card, which states:

> "According to Civil Service Statistics, the median gross salary of women is £14,130 (on a full-time equivalent basis) 72 per cent. that of men."

The civil service is supposed to be an enlightened body, so it is very disappointing to know that that disparity still prevails. I wanted to clarify whether that figure involves there being a rate for the job. I hope that it does not mean that women are doing the same job as men for less money. I am sure that it does not, and that it means that there is a rate for the job. The conclusion, however, is that there is a barrier to women receiving promotion, and that a lot of women are undervalued and under-promoted. One wonders whether that is related to the basic fact that they have family commitments. I hope that the organisation will come back to me on that.

Nowadays, there is much heightened awareness of sexism and sexual harassment, which were almost unheard of years ago. It would be a brave colleague on the Conservative Benches who made comments about a "pretty filly" within my earshot, and I do not know who the gentleman referred to earlier was. However, there have been some notable setbacks involving a few well publicised cases in which false accusations have been made. They have done enormous harm to society as a whole, and its perception of gender equality.

The hon. Member for Keighley (Mrs. Cryer) mentioned Sweden. I visit Sweden regularly, because my son lives there. I was interested by the hon. Lady's comments about the list system used in elections. There are 101 seats on Stockholm city council, 51 of which are occupied by women. On my last visit, I asked what the women had done to achieve that, and they protested that they had done nothing. Sweden probably has a more advanced attitude than us to gender equality.

New legislation will enable our own political parties to do what they think is right and fair to encourage more women and members of ethnic minorities to come to this place. I have grave reservations about all-women lists. I wonder how much credibility will be given to women who arrive here by that means, and what status will be afforded to them if it is thought that they might not have managed it otherwise.

Sandra Gidley: As a new Member, can the hon. Lady tell which female Labour Members are products of all-women lists and which are products of the standard selection procedure? I certainly cannot.

Angela Watkinson: I can do so only because it was well publicised at the time. I assure the hon. Lady that I cannot differentiate between them on performance grounds. What concerns me is the perception among the public that those on all-women lists have gained an unfair advantage. Perhaps it would be better if the names, gender and even ages of women applying to become candidates were obscured on their application forms, so that they would be chosen entirely on the basis of merit and experience.

It is particularly important for women to be treated on equal terms in the armed forces, the police and the fire service, where they must serve alongside men. At present, serving men must be confident that women will provide the same service, and will be able to do the job. Diluting entry qualifications is dangerous if standards of service are to be maintained.

The hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart), who is no longer present, spoke of the importance of education. I remember being given career advice at my co-educational grammar school—in 1958, I must confess. Girls were given separate advice. We were taken into the hall and asked to form two orderly groups, teachers on one side and nurses on the other, because those were seen as the only two respectable occupations for women. We are light years away from that now.

Sandra Gidley: Which group did the hon. Lady choose?

Angela Watkinson: Neither, and I was damned from that moment.

There is, I believe, a correlation between the amount of sex education and sex information in schools and the alarming number of teenage pregnancies. Sex education for girls should be far more robust. A girl needs to be told in no uncertain terms that if she has sex with a young man with no job, no desire to get married, no desire to settle down, no interest in becoming a parent and no intention of taking responsibility for the outcome—a young man who, unlike the girl, is quite able to walk away from the situation—she will, literally, be left holding the baby. She will be dependent on family or benefits not just for nine months but for a very long time indeed, and will be taking on a 24-hour-a-day responsibility for perhaps 20 years.

Life in a council flat alone with a baby is not half as exciting as that woman might think. Her education will be curtailed, her career prospects ruined, at least for the foreseeable future, and she will have many years of lonely struggle while her personal ambitions are shelved. The skills that she learns during those years are highly transferable to the workplace. Unfortunately, they are not recognised as such, and we can do much more to explain to employers that the survival skills that women learn in those years are of enormous benefit to an organisation. The best service that we can do for girls and boys in school is to encourage them to defer sexual activity until they are physically, emotionally and financially mature, and to plan parenthood. That is the single strategy in sex education that will help both genders.

I look forward to when I am looked on not as a woman MP, but simply as an MP who happens to be a woman, and to when that is reflected throughout the employment spectrum and society.

5.31 pm

Sandra Osborne (Ayr): I, too, welcome the debate because I have always regarded international women's day as a time of celebration. Indeed, I used to work for Women's Aid in Scotland, and our celebration lasted a whole week, so I am comfortable with carrying it on as long as possible.

Legislation on equal treatment and the promotion of policies to ensure the participation of all citizens in our society—women and men alike—so that they are represented equally in the economy, in decision making and in social, cultural and civil life as part of their human rights, have made a great deal of progress domestically, at a European level and on an international basis through the United Nations. The Scottish Parliament, although in its infancy, is making significant progress on new ways of working that are more relevant to women in the community.

There is still a gap, however. Not all the progress has been translated on a daily basis to produce equal rights between men and women. Women often do not enjoy equal rights in various spheres. Structural gender inequalities remain in place, fundamentally for the same reasons as always—the issue of power, where it lies, and how it is exercised in society in the private and public sectors.

Many of the struggles for equality that women have pursued, as the Minister said, until recently led to an extension of rights and responsibilities to women as if they were the same as men. Other hon. Members alluded to the fact that that created the burden of the dual role of women being left largely unquestioned and taken for granted. Ironically, that approach recently created the image of the emancipated woman who can work, look after a home and children and participate in the public world all at the same time. Many of us can do that, but is the situation ideal and what pressures does it bring?

The Minister also mentioned the sexual division of labour. She suggested that more progress has been made than I would perhaps recognise. I do not see in my daily life or in the lives of many of my female constituents men doing anything like their fair share of caring or domestic responsibilities. Although things have improved, there is a long way to go.

I welcome gender mainstreaming, an approach by the Government to acknowledge that women's concerns, needs and aspirations are taken into account and assume the same importance as men's concerns in the design and implementation of policies. In parallel with bringing issues that have a direct and indirect impact on the lives of women into the heart of policy making, we also need to take specific actions in favour of women to address the particular problems that the Minister and others mentioned. They include low pay, the national child care strategy, equal pay, women's representation and violence against women. I spent 16 years working in the field of

[Sandra Osborne]

domestic violence before I was elected, and the subject is very close to my heart. Violence against women is at the extreme of a continuum of oppression of women that is world wide and no respecter of class, colour or creed, as the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman), who is not in her place, has said. It has its roots in the male abuse of power.

It is welcome that the Government have played such a prominent part in addressing domestic violence. My hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) highlighted the possibility of keeping women in the home where they had been subjected to domestic violence. From my many years of experience, I believe that there is still a need, which will continue in the long term, for refuge provision as well. We cannot say that we are making real progress until we make sure that every woman and child escaping domestic violence has a refuge space to go to if that is required. We still have a long way to go in that respect.

It is not all down to Government or to mainstream political activity. Meaningful changes in women's lives are also dependent on social movements within civil society. Historically, women have relied on movements such as the women's movement—of which I am proud to regard myself as a member—to make advances and pressurise the Government to make advances for women, and I believe that that is still the case today.

There can be no more stark reminder of the difficulties that women have faced in trying to seek equality than in the lack, historically, of decent, affordable child care. The dearth of child care in this country, which was almost bottom of the European Union league table for many years, was an outrage and a disgrace. Cuts in public services over the years meant that nursery places were like gold and, when my children were young, people could not get a nursery place for love or money. At that stage, like many other women, I did not have the money.

The hon. Member for Meriden did not like to go over the history of her party in this regard, and who can blame her? However, I am old enough to remember the Tories' so-called "back to basics" campaign, which sought to dismantle the welfare state and create a welfare society based on women's unpaid labour. When we think of the effects of that policy on poor women and lone parents during that horrible time in our history, we may be cynical now about the Tories' new-found concerns about public services.

In those days, as the hon. Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) said, many women had to rely on state benefits or on partners who could be unreliable in supporting their partners and children. That is one of the reasons for the introduction of the Child Support Agency, although it turned out to be a disaster for a long time.

Child care has always been key to women's economic independence. That is why I particularly welcome the national child care strategy and the working families tax credit, which have benefited many in my constituency.

On low pay, again we have the worst record in the EU. I recognise that the Government are making progress and have plans to improve the situation. I do not think that a gender gap of 18 per cent. is good enough. There has been tremendous progress, but in this day and age such a gap should not exist.

I support the recommendations of the equal pay taskforce in its report "Just Pay", commissioned by the Equal Opportunities Commission, for legislation to ensure that pay reviews are carried out. We will not get equal pay with voluntary arrangements. All the evidence shows that these things never happen in that way. I ask the Minister to comment on that.

I have strong views about women's representation and very much welcome the legislation that the Government have introduced with all-party support. I hope that, as the Minister stated, we will see real progress and specific measures to improve the situation. I have absolute disdain for the lost opportunity at the 2001 election in Scotland, when many former male Members of this House went to the Scottish Parliament and, with two exceptions, were replaced by men, when there was an ideal opportunity to make places for women.

I get frustrated about the amount of time that we must spend campaigning on this issue. I do not think that every woman wants to be a Member of Parliament. They are concerned about other issues and it would be good if we did not have to spend so much time dealing with it.

In conclusion, I mentioned the superwoman that we are all supposed to be in society now. I will treat the House to a part of my speech to the Scottish Labour group's Burns supper, which concerns the superwoman, whose typical day goes like this:

> "She wakes up to her 2.6 children. They go downstairs and she gives them a nutritional breakfast which they eat, and they go off to school without once forgetting their lunch money. She goes upstairs and gets dressed in her £300 suit and goes off to her £100,000 job, which is both creative and socially useful. After work, she comes home and spends a wonderful hour relating to her children—because after all it's not the quantity but the quality of time that's important. She then prepares a gourmet dinner for her husband. They spend some time working on their meaningful relationship, after which they go upstairs where she has multiple orgasms until midnight."

I did not make that up—it was written by an American woman writer.

I prefer the words of Elaine C. Smith, a famous Scottish actress. Referring to the women curlers' success recently in winning a gold medal, she said:

> "only Scottish women could be expert at brushing round a dead weight."

5.43 pm

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): All I can say after the speech of the hon. Member for Ayr (Sandra Osborne) is, in the words of the film, "I'll have what she's having!"

I am almost uniquely unqualified to take part in this debate on women and equality, according to my wife. She says that she will read the debate in *Hansard*, so I must mind what I say. For years, she has been trying to get me to read "The Female Eunuch" by Germaine Greer, and a book that is apparently called, "Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus". I have read neither of those books, so I cannot argue about what they might contribute to my greater understanding of the problem.

We have heard some interesting things in the debate, although I will temper what I am about to say by pointing out that when men speak on a matter that is so predominantly a woman's issue we can occasionally stray between humbug, cliché, condescension and being politically correct. There has been a fair amount of those in equal measure this afternoon.

I am mindful of the time and that others wish to speak, but must refer to what my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter), who is no longer present, said about his Bill. I understood—it was a misunderstanding—that the legislation would mean that male-only private clubs would have to admit women, and vice versa. I understand now that that is not the case. The Bill deals with clubs that allow in both sexes and would ensure that they were treated equally. That came as something of a disappointment to me, as for quite a while I have been trying to gain access to Sanctuary—the all-women health club and spa. Joking apart, as the new president of the council of western Conservative clubs, which consists of 160 affiliated Conservative clubs in the west country, I assure my hon. Friend—or I would if he were in his place—that I shall ensure that there is equal treatment of both genders in those clubs, if that is within my remit.

Recently, I served with great interest on the Tax Credits Bill Standing Committee. Many of the arguments that we have heard this afternoon were rehearsed during the passage of that Bill—the working families tax credit, the replacement value of women and so on. As we know, many women are trapped at home with their children—as my wife is. The other day a poll showed men's assessment of the replacement value of their wives. It was a pathetically small amount—about £6,000 a year—although we all know that the real amount is well in excess of £60,000. For too long, some men—I hope I am not of their number—have taken for granted the enormous amount of work that women undertake in the home, bringing up children.

The Secretary of State referred to the work-family balance, which will be of increasing importance as we have more leisure time, greater flexibility in the workplace and more job sharing. However, I am concerned that the measures that are slowly being introduced will increase the general burden on small businesses through additional costs. We should bear that in mind.

I shall talk later about retirement and pensions, but I want briefly to refer to women in senior executive positions, where their numbers are woefully inadequate. Women in such positions are held up as the exception when they should be the norm.

I am surprised that we have not spent more time talking about education this afternoon, although if there is inequality in education, it affects males rather than females. Given that a larger proportion of women enter the teaching profession, the educational results are interesting. For example, in their last year of compulsory education, 55 per cent. of girls but only 44 per cent. of boys gain five or more A to C grades, or standard grades 1 to 3 at SCE—Scottish Certificate of Education.

We should debate the shortage of men in the teaching profession. It is argued that males underperform, especially in primary school, owing to the lack of men in the profession. I do not know whether that is true. I prefer the view of Chris Woodhead, the former head of Ofsted:

> "What we need are teachers in primary schools who can teach, which means . . . keeping order. I can remember some women teachers who are remarkably good at keeping order . . . and there are plenty of men who aren't."

I wholeheartedly agree with that: teachers can be good or bad—regardless of sex. We should consider what we can learn from the fact that girls perform better in school.

My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) pointed out that we fail girls as regards sex education in schools. We should teach them about the loneliness of being single mothers—so that they do not end up feeling as lonely as the hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley), who is the lone representative of her party here this afternoon.

As we have heard, women often suffer because they have to dip in and out of work. They need greater flexibility so that they can re-enter the work force after they have children. There is no doubt that, in the past, they were penalised for that. I hope that current and future legislation will recognise that. To some extent it has done so already.

We should also consider the type of work that women actually get. Too often, they are trapped in traditionally low-paid jobs in care homes—that is especially true in my constituency—or as shelf stackers. We have already heard about nurses. Women work as social workers, cleaners and so on. That is a very real problem.

I want to touch on a subject that I know my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) wants to speak about later: the equality of women in the armed forces. I was in the armed forces, and I think that women play an increasingly important role in them. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster that they should be there on their own merit, and there should be no dumbing down. We should certainly have extremely strong reservations about allowing women to operate on the front line in some areas of combat.

Mr. Joyce: It was perhaps a bit daft to use the phrase "dumbing down". When tests were introduced to see whether women were suitable for the new occupations within the armed services, some of the men failed the tests that they would need to pass to join the teams, especially in the Royal Artillery, where they would have to lift heavy equipment. It was the teams, not the individuals that did the tasks. It is not a case of dumbing down or lowering standards.

Mr. Swire: In the interests of gender solidarity, I will accept the hon. Gentleman's criticism. I meant no disrespect to women who are in or who want to join the armed forces. In fact, I said exactly the reverse: that no allowances should be made, because both men's and women's lives can be at risk in combat.

I come from a fairly liberal arts background; I genuinely believe that being a woman has never been a hindrance. In fact, the boss at the last company I worked for was a woman. I will not talk about her now—she is involved in a rather high-profile court case in New York.

It is interesting to see how women are emerging in the arts. Historically, the great classical musicians were men, but now the great pop musicians, who are perhaps replacing them—the girl bands and icons for the young such as Madonna and Kylie Minogue—are women. None of the impressionists and very few portraitists in the 18th and 19th centuries were female, but now there is thriving participation of women and some of our best contemporary artists are female. Women occupy many of the most important posts in arts administration, too.

[Mr. Swire]

In literature, we had the Brontë sisters and Jane Austen, and now we have A. S. Byatt, P. D. James, and of course J. K. Rowling—all icons in their own way to women in the workplace.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): My hon. Friend has not mentioned sport. He may be interested to know that the trainer of the winner of the Cheltenham gold cup this afternoon is a woman, Henrietta Knight, who lives quite near my constituency in Oxfordshire. In many such fields, women are beating men at their own game.

Mr. Swire: I have met that trainer and I hope that my hon. Friend has profited personally from his close association with her this afternoon. Let us not forget the women's curling team who had such success at the recent winter Olympics: shining icons to all women who may want to take up that sport.

Our actresses are, I would suggest, way ahead of our actors. Younger women need role models, but not enough women are at the top of their professions, apart from those I have mentioned.

I mentioned earlier the excellent woman leader of the Conservative group on Devon county council, and Conservative-controlled East Devon council also has an excellent woman leader, but there is no doubt that there are not enough women in politics. I recently entertained two Members of the Youth Parliament, both of whom were girls from Exmouth, and they were pretty unimpressed by what they saw here. They thought that we had very little relevance to their everyday lives, particularly, I suspect, because there were very few women role models on whom they could base their ambitions.

I am against all-women shortlists. I recognise that we have a problem in our society and that we must address it. I know that we will address it, and I welcome that. However, there are ways of achieving that other than all-women shortlists. I very much hope to welcome, after the next general election, at least another 150 female Conservative colleagues.

5.54 pm

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): I am pleased to contribute to our debate; I am glad that it has been restored after a lapse of a few years. It is important to celebrate women's hard work in countries all over the world; international women's day provides an opportunity to do so, and I am pleased that we are having a debate on women and equality.

The Government have made considerable improvements in the position of women. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Women listed many achievements, including the minimum wage, the record rise in child benefit, the extension of maternity leave and the introduction of parental leave. The Government have put the work-life balance on the political agenda for the first time and given it tremendous prominence in their planning; I applaud their achievement. I am particularly glad that they have promoted and encouraged breastfeeding, as it has known health benefits for women and babies, both here and in other countries, where many babies die because they are not breast-fed.

We have made progress in the House and the country at large in recognising the importance of breastfeeding, but there is still a long way to go before it becomes culturally acceptable, both here and among the wider public, and people are open and relaxed about it. That is essential if we are to encourage young women to breastfeed and not discriminate against working women who breastfeed, as European Union and health and safety regulations recommend. I hope that we can have a fuller debate on the subject in future.

My right hon. Friend referred to the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002, the success of which we are all celebrating today. I am sure that it will mean that eventually, on the Labour Benches, there will be equal numbers of men and women MPs. As hon. Members know, the Act is permissive, so it is up to political parties to use the power that it provides. In an intervention, I said that at the Welsh Labour party conference at Llandudno next week, we will vote on whether to introduce all-women shortlists for a number of vacant seats in next year's elections to the Welsh Assembly. My right hon. Friend confirmed that that will be the first action taken by a political party under the Act. I look forward to the conference, where I shall strongly support the motion to introduce all-women shortlists; I am hopeful of its success.

The Assembly has already got a high number of women; 41 per cent. of its Members are women, which is the second highest percentage in European legislatures. It is important to maintain those numbers and the mechanism of all-women shortlists, if approved by the conference, will enable us to do so. I shall therefore support the motion, and the Government should be congratulated on enabling it to be introduced.

It is easy to establish new arrangements in new institutions; when the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly were set up, it was easy to introduce good practices such as twinning mechanisms. Those mechanisms are much more difficult to introduce in an establishment such as the Westminster Parliament, which has been in existence for a long time. The Government of Wales Act 1998 includes a section on equal opportunities, which places a statutory duty on the Welsh Assembly to

> "make appropriate arrangements with a view to securing that its business is conducted with due regard to the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for all people."

I should like to pay tribute again to the hard work of Val Feld, an Assembly Member who died last year; she made an enormous effort to ensure, when director of the Equal Opportunities Commission for Wales, that such a section was in the Act.

In the United Kingdom, that clause has a unique scope, covering all the Assembly's functions, including economic development, planning, education and social services. It also applies to everybody in Wales for whom the Assembly provides a service. It is a very important clause. The Assembly's Standing Committee on Equality of Opportunity was set up to ensure that that duty is adhered to. It publishes a report each year, which also deals with how the Assembly runs its business in relation to equal opportunities.

I call on the Government to consider introducing a statutory equality duty. That would help focus our attention on improving equal opportunities in the services that we as a Government provide. We should also create an equal opportunities Select Committee, which could monitor the work of the different Departments and press for the advancement of equal opportunities issues in the House. The section in the Government of Wales Act to which I referred is unique, and we would benefit by extending such a duty to this House.

It is probably easier for a body such as the Assembly—it is responsible for only 3 million people and has only 60 Members—to work in the cross-cutting way in which one must work to achieve equal opportunities. It is worth putting on the record some of the things that the Assembly has already achieved. It has introduced mandatory equal opportunities training for all its 3,500 staff, which is a big step forward. As a councillor, I found it extremely difficult to introduce such training for all council staff.

As a result of changes in recruitment practice, internal civil service recruitment will be replaced by open public recruitment for advertised posts. Independent research into the Assembly's achievements in its fairly short life has acknowledged the fact that modest progress has been made. Such progress has been attributed to the statutory duty that informs everything that the Assembly does. I ask the Minister to comment on whether such a statutory duty could be introduced in Westminster, along with an equal opportunities Select Committee.

I want to refer briefly to the pay gap, which has been discussed at length today. The Assembly is trying to tackle the pay gap, together with the Equal Opportunities Commission and the TUC. I worked closely with those organisations on equal opportunity in Wales, and I pay tribute to them. In November last year, the EOC commissioned the first in-depth study of the pay gap in Wales. The study, which was carried out by Swansea university, showed that women's hourly earnings in Wales are 13 per cent. lower than men's. The gap is smaller than the corresponding difference in England because men's pay is lower in Wales.

For part-time workers, the situation in Wales is even worse, although the same can be said of other regions. The difference in average hourly pay between a woman working part-time and a man working full-time is 36 per cent., although the figure does vary across Wales. There are many reasons for that difference, and many proposals could be introduced to improve the situation, particularly in relation to child care. We in Wales have made considerable progress on child care. Many more places are available, but we need to consider the expense. Research has shown that those extra places are perhaps not accessible to families who are less well-off.

We must also consider working with organisations to persuade them to examine their practices and the pay gap. Public organisations in particular should review their pay systems, and in that regard the Assembly has taken a lead. It has reviewed its pay systems and established a three-year plan for closing the pay gap. In taking the lead in Wales, it is encouraging other organisations to do the same.

In Wales, enormous progress has been made and distinct and measurable improvements achieved. There is a long way to go, but with this Government working in collaboration with the Assembly in Wales, we will continue to make tremendous progress and give women their rightful place in society.

6.5 pm

Patrick Mercer (Newark): I hope that the hon. Ladies on the Government Benches will forgive the voters of Newark and Retford for taking an equal opportunities approach at the general election and reducing their number by one. I hope that that will not be held against me.

The other day I was in the village of Elkesley, which is one of the more remote villages between Newark and Retford. I spoke to a young lady who was finishing school and about to take her A-levels. I asked her what she intended to go on to do. She said that she was going to university, where she would be sponsored by her employers. That struck me as very sensible and I asked her who they were. She said they were the Royal Navy. I asked what she intended to do in the Royal Navy. She said that she was hoping to go to Dartford to be commissioned and then to become a seaman officer. I thought that that was marvellous. My service experience started at a time when a very different approach was taken to women. I hope that Miss Shani Dyer has a successful and rewarding career on a completely equal footing with the men of the Royal Navy.

I was surprised to read this morning in *The Times* an article entitled "Army gets 'bitch TV' treatment". Hon. Members may not know what bitch television is, but I shall enlighten them. The article states:

> "The team behind both the football drama and *Bad Girls*, set in a women's prison, are working on *Bombshell*, a racy spin on life in uniform . . . Shed Productions . . . has secured the co-operation of the MoD for the series, which will make *Soldier, Soldier* appear staid. *Bombshell* will show women fighting for equality on the front line and recruits who want their share of sex and drugs."

Life has changed. What I saw in the armed forces was very different and I hope and trust that things remain the same.

I was at Sandhurst in 1974 and 1975, with no ladies present at all. They were trained elsewhere—at their own [illegible]llege just up the road. We frequently tried to invade it, without much success. I then joined an infantry battalion on operations in Northern Ireland, again with no women present. By the time I left the Army, female naval ratings were serving at sea on board warships and some 70 per cent. of the jobs in the Army were available to women. The Women's Royal Army Corps had ceased to exist and women were being badged to combat arms, and to all arms of the service, in one of the most sensible, pragmatic and reasonable approaches to equality of employment across the spectrum.

My first introduction to that approach was when I was picked to be my battalion's intelligence officer in Belfast in 1982. I inherited, much to the envy of my colleagues, a platoon of the Women's Royal Navy Service. Much ribald comment was made about those women, but in the difficult, cramped and dangerous conditions of Belfast in the 1980s they proved to be more than equal to the task. I hope that it will not sound patronising—it is not meant to—if I say that those women had a particular gift for picking up intelligence matter, processing it and coming up with conclusions that men would not have the eye for detail to produce. It was also reassuring to be driven in plain clothes in a civilian car by an armed and dangerous Wren, who—I hope—gave the opposition every impression of normal life. I am not sure that that was always the case.

[Patrick Mercer]

Let us consider the example of foreign armies. The Israelis have long had an integrated policy for their women soldiers, sailors and airmen. It has not worked in their combat arms. The Serbs, whom I have seen at close quarters several times in the past few years, had women soldiers in the front line, acting as signallers, drivers and couriers. They often worked behind enemy lines but not actually in the firing line. I suppose that female suicide bombers are an example of total equal opportunities. There is no form of more dangerous combat activity and, mercifully, it is unlikely to happen in this country.

It is interesting to see how women have been absorbed into the Army. Most of the combat arms accept women—the Royal Signallers, the Royal Engineers and the Royal Artillery. I come back to a point made by the hon. and gallant Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Joyce)—that the Royal Artillery has been particularly successful. No soldiers are further forward on the battle line than the Royal Artillery. Women in the Royal Artillery serve right up at the front in forward observation units, but not necessarily on the gun line. I shall return to that in a moment, and some Labour Members may want to comment on that point. Women are also in the Army Air Corps flying combat helicopters.

I draw the House's attention to one category of women who give the lie to many of the armed forces' policies. Although to the best of my knowledge there are no women in the Special Air Service, there are certainly women serving on special duties. Without going into details, those special duties are restricted entirely to operations in Northern Ireland and in similar theatres elsewhere. A very small number of those women, who are committed on a daily basis to combat duties, have been in action and have been decorated for their gallantry by the Queen. However, I emphasise that they are a very small number of women and a very special group. It is therefore probably right that units such as the infantry and the Royal Armoured Corps do not accept women into their ranks.

I was visited by representatives of the Equal Opportunities Commission when I was serving with a Warrior battalion—an armoured personnel carrier-equipped battalion. The commission representatives were allowed to sit in the back of a Warrior during nuclear, biological and chemical warfare training. The vehicle was closed down in total darkness and there was no movement outside the vehicle for as long as the attack lasted. After a couple of hours, two of the lady members of the team said, "We'd like to go to the loo, please." The answer was, "Please carry on." The ladies reached to get out of the vehicle, which, clearly, they could not do in those conditions. They replied, "Sorry, we don't understand." They were then told, "There's a chemical lavatory in the back of the vehicle." There were seven bodies in the back of that vehicle, two of whom were women. One can imagine that seven hairy infantrymen carrying out nature's functions would be unpleasant enough—I dare say that if the whole crew had been female it would have been pleasant enough—but those ladies blanched and never returned to the question of women trying to serve in infantry units. I would make exactly the same points about tank crews and other armoured vehicle crews. There are simple, straightforward limits.

I was involved in gender-free testing while I was still serving, and I think that a Labour Member was also involved. There is a tendency in the Army to be concerned that women will work their wiles and end up in the Parachute Regiment, in the Royal Marines or manning a general purpose machine gun. We heard earlier about the test to lift a Royal Artillery shell for an AS90 self-propelled gun. That test is almost impossible to achieve—possible but difficult—for a very fit and well-trained man. It was designed to keep women away from the gun line.

The Army employs a full colonel on a salary of more than £60,000 a year to make sure that these issues are properly considered and properly treated. My experience—and possibly that of other hon. Members—is that women do not want to serve in those capacities. Very few women wish to be in the infantry, although some do. Very few women want to become paratroopers, although some do. The armed forces are guilty of being terribly narrow minded about an issue that is not an issue.

We have seen women taking their right and proper place in the armed forces—well forward, doing tremendous jobs and bearing the brunt of operations at home and abroad. I suggest that we should honour them for that, treat them with total equality and understand that they serve just as properly and just as gallantly as men.

6.14 pm

Laura Moffatt (Crawley): It always shocks me, Madam Deputy Speaker, to realise that only 252 of the 4,500 Members of Parliament elected since 1918 have been women.

I have listened with interest to the debate and to the comments made by my sisters and colleagues on the Labour Benches, and by other hon. Members. I am never ashamed of using the word "sisters", because that is what we are. We celebrate the fact that we are women taking part in a process that we hope makes a difference for women outside the House.

The hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) said that the Conservative party would support all-women shortlists in an attempt to get more women into Parliament, but I could see the expressions on the faces of her—mostly male—colleagues behind her. I have a strange feeling that some of them will not share my celebrations at the announcement.

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): I think that the hon. Lady may be mistaken. I understood my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) to say that the Conservative party would look carefully at its selection process, to ensure that women have the best possible chances. I do not believe that we have endorsed all-women shortlists.

Laura Moffatt: What a surprise. I think that we will let that statement lie on the Floor of the House.

Last weekend, many hon. Members will, like me, have celebrated international women's day and mothering Sunday with women in their communities. We got into the roots of our communities, and found out the difficulties and needs of women there. I attended my community centre to enjoy the celebrations, to send cards and chocolate, and to talk about what it means to be a women under a Labour Government. The women to whom I spoke were very pleased about much of what has been done. For example, the working families tax credit has transformed my neighbourhood, and the child care element of the credit has done an enormous amount for women in the south-east.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will raise the lower limit to allow more women access to child care. That will get them where they want to be—out in the work place, where they can make their way in the world, while their children get the first-class care that they enjoy so much. Women Members of Parliament must represent women and ensure that women's needs are brought to the fore. I have no doubt that lots of male hon. Members will co-operate and support us.

I have never been ashamed of the fact that I was selected through an all-women shortlist. I am proud of that because men dominate my constituency Labour party, and they were the ones who voted for an all-women shortlist. They wanted to be part of what happened in 1997 in this House, and to be able to say that they had assisted women to increase female representation here. I salute them for that, and for the fact that they stuck by the decision. People must not think that women feel like second-class Members of Parliament, because we certainly do not.

Women continue to face problems, such as with the Child Support Agency. We are beginning to put things right, but the list of difficulties remains long. Many of them have been dealt with well in today's debate, but I want to turn to international matters. It is easy to talk about great international affairs, such as the catastrophe in Afghanistan, but we must remember that, in recent history, women used to be able to be elected to the Parliament there. Such women are supported by women in this Parliament, particularly on this side of the House. It is important that we bring those issues to the fore.

We have talked about a woman in Nigeria who is to undergo a stoning. We hope that the practice is in abeyance, but as an international issue, it is still much to the fore. Women's greatest difficulties arise when there is no news for them, and when things are happening off the radar screen of Members of Parliament. That is why I want to say something about the work of the National Council of the Resistance of Iran. Its women's committee has worked tirelessly, and many hon. Members will have been approached by it. Its work is difficult because there is never anything different to say; they just have to keep ploughing on, trying to get our support and bringing to our attention all the difficulties that women experience in Iran today.

We have talked about one Nigerian woman, and that is bad enough, but since that case, four women in Iran have died from stoning. We have said and done nothing about that. That is why it is so important that the women's committee works tirelessly with us. Today, a very successful event in the House of Commons tried to bring those issues to the fore on the front burner. We must understand that in Iran executions continue in their thousands, as do public floggings, which can be meted out just because a woman is not wearing her head-dress properly or behaving as a good Muslim woman should.

We have been talking about equality. Let us take an example of inequality in Iran. Men who have been condemned to death by stoning are buried up to their waist first, and there is a small chance of them escaping. When women are stoned to death, they are buried up to their armpits so that their breasts are not damaged, but of course they have no chance of escaping that terrible death. These are the issues that we need to bring to the attention of all Parliaments in the world.

Suicide is an enormous issue in Iran. Many women kill themselves because they have few or no opportunities. Many are educated, and some can take advantage of their education, but 64 per cent. of women with a degree cannot use it in any way to assist their country. Ensuring that women can play their part is not simply about soft, equality issues; it is about hard economics, health and educating our children.

This is probably the most important thing that we will ever discuss, and I sincerely hope that we continue to hold this debate in future years. It is important that we are able to raise these issues and take them forward. I am glad that we can celebrate improvements for women and press for further gains. We must make sure that we make life better for women around the world.

6.23 pm

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in the debate, not only on behalf of all my women constituents but, from a personal point of view, because I have three young daughters. I want them to grow up in a world where they have every possible opportunity to fulfil all their potential in whatever way they choose. It is absolutely right that they should have equal opportunities in employment, and it is worrying to learn of the gender gap in pay.

I was particularly struck by the example given by my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) of new graduates entering employment. Even at that early stage, before female graduates have taken on any family responsibilities, there is already a gender pay gap. That is unacceptable. I hope that it will increasingly be phased out as employers realise that it is not acceptable at the start of the 21st century.

I pay tribute to various prominent female members of my community. There are notably three who have an especially distinguished record in local government. Councillor Mary Biswell is the mayor of Dunstable. She has a distinguished record, notably in raising money for charity, for many good causes.

Councillor Pat Staples is the chairman of South Bedfordshire district council. She, too, is an extremely hard-working community councillor, and well loved throughout the district. Finally, there is Councillor Angela Roberts, the deputy leader of Bedfordshire county council. She is an inspiration to all her colleagues on the council. These women are valued and prominent members of my local community who contribute wholeheartedly to local government throughout Bedfordshire.

I listened carefully to the way in which the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry introduced the debate. I am pleased that I largely agreed with many of her points. I listened carefully when she talked about what women wanted. I am pleased that she said that it was not for the Government to dictate to or impose a particular lifestyle on women, or men.

It is important that we have a genuine respect for the choices that women make at different stages of their lives and careers. I want a level playing field, so that there is real choice for women when they consider having children in terms of going to work and returning to work.

[Andrew Selous]

I commend to the House the considerable work of Dr. Catherine Hakim, who is a senior research fellow in sociology at the London school of economics. Her conclusions are that women split into three broad categories, which are roughly as follows.

About 20 per cent. of women prefer to have a largely home-centred lifestyle. That is where they are fulfilled. They choose to do that, and should be supported and encouraged in that important work.

About another 20 per cent. of women wish to have an entirely work-centred lifestyle. They will commit themselves entirely to a career. Often they will stay with one employer for a long time and not enter into responsibilities as a parent.

The vast majority of women—the remaining 60 per cent.—are what Dr. Hakim described as having an "adaptive preference". They will want to go between the worlds of home and work at various stages in their career. It is important that we bear that in mind. We should not think that there is only one model for women in the work force.

These findings from the academic world were born out by a survey in 2001 that was undertaken by the magazine *Top Sante*, which consulted many young women which I shall quote briefly. It found that only 4 per cent. of working women with a baby or young child would choose, if they had the choice, to work full-time. Thirty-one per cent. of respondents said that they would prefer to have a part-time career job share. Twenty-two per cent. said that they would prefer to work from home or set up their own business.

Significantly, 43 per cent. of respondents said that they would like to be full-time mums, if they had the opportunity. Commenting on the survey, Juliette Kellow, the editor of *Top Sante*, said:

> "The Government wants to encourage as many women as possible into full-time work, but this is blatantly not what most women want, especially those with families. Working full time for most women with families is a major problem, physically, emotionally and mentally. This survey shows that it is also extremely damaging to family life and relationships."

I do not think that it is up to Members of Parliament or the Government to be prescriptive about how women choose to balance their responsibilities, but it is important that we bear in mind the vast range of choices and personal preferences.

I have a worry with regard to the European dimension. I am concerned that the European Commission is concentrating only on the full-time employment model in respect of women. There is evidence that Allan Larsson, a former director general of Directorate-General V, has pushed the European Commission in that direction. On a recent visit to Brussels with the Select Committee on Work and Pensions, I was concerned that the overwhelming preference seemed to be to increase women's participation in the work force. Various targets were set out in that regard, but it did not seem that sufficient account was taken of different choices.

Returning to the situation at home, I have a concern about the child care tax credit, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt). Although I welcome the introduction of the tax credit and the Government's underlying intention, two specific concerns have still not been addressed. First, two-parent single-earner families are excluded, so there is an implied reduction of the significance of parents who choose to stay at home and look after their children. Secondly, the credit is awarded only for registered child care outside the home, but we know that vast numbers of people prefer informal child care arrangements. About 44 per cent. of manual workers with children have some grandparent involvement and many others are happy for friends or family—often sisters and aunts—to be involved in looking after their children in their own homes, but such care is outside the scope of the child care tax credit. I ask the Minister to consider again whether something could be done to extend the scope of a measure that is generally good.

Internationally, it is interesting to see how different European countries have handled such measures. For example, Finland has a home care allowance that is paid to some 75 per cent. of women who have children under three, paying up to 40 per cent. of the average wage. The allowance gives women real choice in the early years of their children's lives about whether they want to stay at home to look after them or go out to work. In Norway, the same system is in place for all women with children under two. France has the allocation parental d'education, which is paid after the birth of the second child until that child is three. So three major European industrial countries are taking an approach that is significantly different from that of the UK to the care of children in their early years in terms of giving women a choice.

When we consider the difference between tax systems in Europe, we see that in Germany, there is a much greater emphasis on transferable tax allowances. There is evidence that many women appreciate that approach as it gives them a greater choice when children come along. The additional tax allowances in Germany provide support for families in the early years of children's lives, which is much appreciated. France has income splitting—a recognition of how many mouths one salary has to feed. Evidence from France shows that that scheme is viewed by women as a significant recognition of their right to have a choice.

We have heard much about how child care is important in giving women the ability to enter the work force. I should like women who do not choose to use child care to have the benefit of longer career breaks so that when they return to work after having looked after their children for a number of years they can get back into the stride of their careers. Retraining will obviously be an important part of that. I was particularly pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) introduced the family scholarship scheme in the last Parliament to help with the retraining of women coming back into the labour force after having taken time out to look after children or elderly or dependent relatives.

We have heard that the poorest pensioners are often the oldest ones—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. The hon. Gentleman's time is up.

6.36 pm

Linda Perham (Ilford, North): I realised what a long way women still had to go to achieve equality during the year that I was the first woman Labour mayor of my borough of Redbridge. Not only was it often assumed that I was the mayoress, but at a function arranged by a national charity, the president asked me what a housewife like me was doing being a mayor. I spluttered something about being a professional person, to which he asked what a professional housewife like me was doing being a mayor.

That leads me to the outstanding work of women in their local communities, particularly in local government, which formed part of my route to this place. Women are high achievers on their local councils and good examples in their local communities. I particularly want to pay tribute to Councillor Liz Pearce, who, regrettably, is standing down in May. She was the first woman leader of the Labour group and of the council, at a time when her sons were two and four years old, so she had a lot to cope with. I pay tribute to her tireless work for the people of the borough during her time on the council.

We need more women councillors. My own authority has managed to achieve only a fifth of its membership being female as far back as I can remember and we need to bring more women into local government.

The contribution of women to the wider community through voluntary organisations is also worthy of recognition and celebration. Through work that I did on behalf of the National Childbirth Trust I became a member of the Redbridge community health council, where I met Eileen Gordon, the former Member of Parliament for Romford, who represented her CHC in Havering. She did outstanding work on health issues, which she continued through her work on the Select Committee on Health.

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Linda Perham: I am sorry, but I do not have time.

During my involvement with local community issues I have never ceased to support the work of women locally as magistrates, school governors and chairs of strategic health authorities. They make up about half their appointees, but that is not enough.

I want briefly to mention the Women's library which took over from the Fawcett library. I worked there for many years. It has just moved into splendid premises opened by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport at the end of January. I recommend a visit to see the exhibition "Cooks and Campaigners", which has items selected by prominent women in public life, including Cherie Booth, Kate Adie, Mary Quant and others.

I am pleased that the Government support the aim of 45 to 50 per cent. of public appointments made by central Government being filled by women by the end of 2005.

Others have spoken about the Government's achievements. In particular I pay tribute to the Government for introducing the national minimum wage. I also commend my union, Unison, on its campaign on equal pay for women and its championing of public services. However, I am disappointed that the Government will not introduce the EU directive on equal treatment in employment until 2006. My hon. Friend the Minister knows my views on that, and she has addressed the all-party group on ageing and older people.

I should like briefly to mention Redbridge women's day, which took place last Saturday and was addressed by the Minister for Lifelong Learning. Last year, we were addressed by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. It was an interesting day, with a laughter therapy session and a tea bar run by men, and it was attended by more than 100 women.

I finish where I started—by praising the work of women in local communities. Some want to remain as carers; some want to go on to local, national and international politics. Much work is needed to improve women's lives. The debate is well timed in the week following international women's day, but it is not only on that day, or during this week, that we should acknowledge, celebrate and shout about women's achievements—we should do it every day.

6.40 pm

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): I am glad that the hon. Member for Ilford, North (Linda Perham) was able to speak in this excellent debate, to which 12 Members, apart from the Front-Bench spokesmen, contributed. For the Minister for Women and me the debate is a case of deja vu—certainly, I feel as if I have been here before.

Many good things were said in the debate, but sadly many good things were unsaid because we did not have enough time. I hope that the Minister agrees that next time the debate should take place not only in Government time, but on a day when there are not three statements and we can do justice to the contributions of all hon. Members who wish to take part. I know that that is beyond the right hon. Lady's remit, but she will appreciate that I am making the point on her behalf through the usual channels and to the powers that be that we should, at least on one day of the year, have a decent chance of a proper debate.

The Minister opened the debate extremely well with some fine examples from her constituency. If I had the luxury of more time, I would do the same. She took us on a trip down memory lane to the 1950s. I cannot say that I can join her there, but I knew what she meant.

My hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing), who had to leave the Chamber to look after her child before attending functions tonight, would have wanted, like me, to say that the Minister was uncharitable in failing to acknowledge anything that the Conservative party did for women when it was in government. A Conservative Government introduced equal pay legislation in 1983 and the Sex Discrimination Act 1986, and I am proud that a Conservative Government introduced independent taxation. I hoped that the Minister would be charitable enough to acknowledge that the Conservative party is as eager as she is to attain equality—certainly, equality of opportunity—for women, even if we do not always go about it in the same way.

I am disappointed that in the 45 minutes that the Minister took to make her speech, much of which I agreed with, she spent so much time on the domestic situation and did not deal more with the position of women in other countries. There is a commonality of feeling in the House that although there are furrows to plough as regards equality in this country, true inequality exists in other countries, and we as women must pay attention to that. That is why I was delighted when my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) praised the non-governmental

[Mrs. Cheryl Gillan]

organisations and women's organisations that help us in our work here and assist women throughout the world. She gave a well rounded speech that concentrated on issues in the United Kingdom and the problems of women in the developing world.

My hon. Friend was followed by the hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart), who spoke up well for women auxiliary workers. I agree with her on that subject. She asked for more help from the Government—I hope that the Minister will respond to her request—and made some good points on encouraging companies to give women opportunities for training and promotion. She also made some interesting points on drug testing and women's health. I was surprised to hear what she was saying and I hope that the Minister will have time to comment on it. I shall understand if she does not have time to comment on all the points that have been made, in which case I hope that she will respond in writing.

The hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) gave a solo performance from the Liberal Democrat Front Bench. She was disappointed in the lack of support from her party—as were we. We were not fooled by the stage-managed appearance of a supporting cast throughout her speech.

I am sorry that I left the Chamber momentarily and did not hear the full speech of the hon. Member for Keighley (Mrs. Cryer). I have great admiration for the work that she has done on arranged marriages. Her views on that are shared across the House. I have discussed the matter with my Front-Bench colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden, and if the hon. Lady introduces an early-day motion on the Nigerian case that she mentioned, we would be pleased to look at it and join her in signing it if it is suitable.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter) discussed his Bill and a Bill in another place. He raised the subject of labour clubs, which seem to be a source of annoyance to some Labour Members. The hon. Member for Calder Valley (Chris McCafferty) brought up the heady issue of trafficking of women and children and the sobering facts on violence against women. She looked at the subject of reproductive health in a way that we should not forget affects all of us. Female genital mutilation is still one of the most abhorrent practices in the world.

My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) made a refreshing contribution. She talked realistically and highlighted the fundamental difference between men and women. She had a useful gender-blind suggestion for our problem of all-women shortlists and brought to the forefront the issues on unmarried pregnancies. We share views on that subject across the Chamber, as we all see in our surgeries single mothers who are left literally holding the baby. My hon. Friend talks common sense and echoes the feelings of hon. Members on both sides of the House.

The hon. Member for Ayr (Sandra Osborne) was a brief voice from Scotland in this international women's day debate. She is a superwoman, and she apologised for having to leave for a flight to Scotland. Her speech was followed by that of my hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire). We appreciated his undertakings to look into the operation of the Conservative clubs that are within his bailiwick. He made some interesting points on education and bemoaned the shortage of men in the teaching profession and the underperformance of boys in the education system. That, too, concerns us all.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Julie Morgan) was our voice from Wales. She spoke about the advantages of equal opportunities in Wales. I was interested to hear her suggestion about an equal opportunities Select Committee and I hope that the Minister will have time to touch on that. I am not entirely sure whether I agree with the hon. Lady, but it is certainly an interesting idea which we can explore.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) gave us a brief insight into the benefits of women in the armed services. I have seen at first hand the benefits of women in the armed services, in both Kosovo and Kuwait. When I was in Kuwait looking at our Tornado squadron, it was with great happiness, pride and surprise that I saw that the head of engineering was a blonde—and a blonde woman at that. She had the men firmly under control but, more importantly, she was the best engineer for that job. We can all be proud of that.

I am afraid that the hon. Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt) got the views of Conservative Front-Bench Members wrong, but it was nice to hear her being so supportive of those who elected her. We are all supportive of our constituents who send us here; it is a great privilege to be in this place.

My hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) picked out some distinguished local women and made some key points on taxation. I make no apology for reminding the House that independent taxation was introduced by a Conservative Government.

I really do not have time to go through my speech because I want to give the Minister time to reply. Let me return briefly to our domestic scene. I remind the Government that they have no reason for complacency or satisfaction from any achievements that they may have made to date, because where the public services are letting people down, women are being disproportionately affected.

Women do most of the caring in this country, and when care homes close and the health service underperforms, it is the women who are affected. Today, when the teachers are striking, it will be the women who have had to look after the children. Our police were out on the street yesterday, and it is the women who are worried about the safety of their communities. As women live longer, there is no doubt that the disaster in the pension fund will affect them disproportionately. The failure of this Government on public services will affect us all, and deliver enduring inequality, unless the Government put these things right.

I shall close by agreeing with a Labour Minister, the Minister for Lifelong Learning, who said recently:

> "Voters felt that the quality of their lives was awful and nothing had changed since Labour came to office."

I certainly agree with the hon. Lady when she said that voters—traditional supporters of the Labour party—felt let down and ignored. We agree that we want equal opportunities for women, and that we want to see women succeed. I agree with the Minister for Lifelong Learning that this Labour Government should, and must, do better.

6.51 pm

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mrs. Barbara Roche): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan). We have crossed swords on a number of occasions, and it is good to be opposite her again today. I want to say to her—in the gentlest possible way, of course—that I do not remember there being any debates on these issues in Government time during the Conservative years.

Mrs. Gillan: The hon. Lady is mistaken. I led a debate held on international women's day, in Government time, when I was the Minister for Women.

Mrs. Roche: Very many congratulations to the hon. Lady. Of course, if that is the case, I can only congratulate her on holding such a debate once in 18 years. Absolutely fantastic! What a wonderful achievement.

A number of themes have run through the debate today, and I shall try to deal with them as quickly as I can. I apologise if I do not get to every point that was raised. The gender pay gap was mentioned by a number of hon. Members, including my hon. Friends the Members for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) and for Cardiff, North (Julie Morgan), and the hon. Members for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman), for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) and for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous). As part of my research, I have been looking to the past to see how far back the gender pay gap goes. In fact, I turned to Leviticus—the Old Testament is compulsory reading for me—in which Moses was told that a man of working age was worth 50 silver shekels, while a woman was worth only 30. So the gap goes right back to the beginning.

The hon. Member for Meriden was right to concentrate on the international issues. She put them into context well; it is important to talk about the work that has been undertaken by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development. A number of hon. Members, including the hon. Members for Meriden and for East Devon (Mr. Swire), spoke about the dangers of placing new burdens on employers as a result of the Employment Bill. Our economy needs an increasingly high level of labour participation, involving both men and women. About one third of new mothers do not return to work. If just 10 per cent. of those mothers changed their mind as a result of the provisions in the Employment Bill, the total benefit to employers, through reduced recruitment costs, could be as much as £30 million. Of course, these measures are about social justice, but they are also about productivity and the health of our economy.

The hon. Member for Meriden and my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Chris McCafferty) rightly spoke of the evils of trafficking, particularly trafficking of women and children. I take a great interest in that subject, and the United Kingdom is at the forefront of efforts to tackle the problem. We were one of the first countries to sign the United Nations protocol on the prevention and suppression of trafficking. Indeed, I had the great pleasure of signing it myself. We ought to encourage as many countries as possible to sign, and to act against this evil trade.

The hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham rightly paid tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mrs. Cryer) for all her work in relation to forced marriages. What the Government are now doing reflects the strength of her campaign.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt) spoke of the international dimension, referring to Afghanistan and other countries. We are very encouraged by the involvement of women in the Afghan Interim Administration. Many Members mentioned the past role of women in the highest ranks of Government in Afghanistan, and we should bear that in mind.

My hon. Friend the Member for Slough referred to career opportunities in public service for such people as teaching assistants and auxiliaries. We are committed to considering how we can further such opportunities. My excellent officials in the women and equality unit have produced a document called "Better Services, Better Working Lives", which gives practical advice in that regard.

The hon. Member for Romsey mentioned public appointments, which were also mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, North (Linda Perham). I am conducting a series of regional seminars on the subject. We are working towards 50:50, and we expect women to hold 45 to 50 per cent. of jobs sponsored by most Departments by 2005. We have a great deal of work to do, but the House should be left in no doubt about our commitment to the eventual achievement of 50:50—and I should like to achieve it sooner rather than later.

Mr. Joyce: Do not women from ethnic minority backgrounds suffer from double discrimination? When considering the position of women in public life, should we not take account of both those dimensions?

Mrs. Roche: Absolutely. That is why we have been directing some of our efforts towards black and other ethnic minority women. I have had an excellent meeting with a number of such women, who hold some local public appointments but would like national careers.

Ms Dari Taylor (Stockton, South): Will the Minister say something about blue collar work? Women in blue collar employment, including middle class women, often feel very excluded.

Mrs. Roche: I agree. We should ensure that there is a cross-section.

I accept the apology given by the hon. Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter), but may I correct him in one respect? I did not ask him to withdraw his Bill. We discussed together how it might be handled, as he had said that a member of his party might object to it. We support the Bill in principle, and I was delighted that the House of Lords gave the legislation a Second Reading. I am sure that the business managers will have noted the strength of feeling.

We have had a very good debate covering a number of issues. I strongly believe that equality is not merely an add-on. It is time for it to become mainstream, as was said by the hon. Member for Romsey. Effective legislation to prevent discrimination on grounds of race, age, sexual orientation or belief is absolutely necessary, and we will therefore be implementing directives on race and employment.

5

[Mrs. Roche]

If we want a modern Britain that is inclusive, we must have diversity. That is why equality is so important for social justice and productivity.

It being Seven o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Fair Trade

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

7 pm

Ann McKechin (Glasgow, Maryhill): I welcome the opportunity to speak about international fair trade, especially as last week I had the honour to host the launch in the House of the annual Fairtrade fortnight. Although the concept of fair trade has been around for some time—and Fairtrade products are a familiar sight in the catering facilities of the House of Commons—it is recognised as crucial to the long sought aim of eradicating world poverty.

Let me give two quotations to support that argument. Mario Perez, a coffee grower from a Nicaraguan farmers' co-operative, said:

> "Three years ago, we practically had to give away our harvest, we were losing money. We were in debt. But, under Fairtrade, we've paid off all our debts and we are proud".

Iddi Simba, Tanzania's Trade Minister commented at the World Trade Organisation talks last November on the unfair trading system that allows Governments in the north to continue subsidising their farmers while countries in the south have been forced to dismantle protective measures and open up their markets to cheap northern imports. He said:

> "The wrong policy on agriculture might lose elections in France, but it loses lives in Africa".

Fairtrade started as a concept 13 years ago with coffee and has developed to include tea, cocoa, sugar, honey, chocolate, mangoes, orange juice and bananas. By re-connecting consumers with producers, it ensures that farmers get a fair price for their crops and the chance of a sustainable future. It provides dignity, not desperation; fair trade rather than exploitation. From humble beginnings in charity shops, it has now entered the mainstream retail trade with a sales growth of 40 per cent. in the last financial year. Fairtrade ground coffee has more than 7 per cent. of the United Kingdom ground coffee market, and the sale of Fairtrade products in the UK benefits at least 120,000 farmers and workers throughout the third world. The staff, business associates and volunteers who support the movement deserve enormous credit for successfully expanding within a competitive market and for providing hope for so many.

As yet Fairtrade is unfortunately only a small part of the answer, but it highlights the growing gulf between the rich and poor in our international trade systems. For many developing countries, coffee is the second most valuable commodity after oil and the most valuable agricultural commodity in world trade. The final price of a cup of cappuccino in a London coffee shop absorbs the costs of insurance, taxes, transportation, processing, packaging, marketing, storage and much more. However, of the £1.75 that might be charged, the grower will be lucky to receive the equivalent of just 5p.

Hidden behind that long and complicated journey is the collapse of coffee prices on the world market and the impact of that on both ends of the trade. Between 1994 and the end of 2001, the price of robusta coffee beans, which are used mainly in instant coffee, plummeted from around 180 cents a pound to just 17 cents, a 30-year low. Although it is estimated that the world coffee trade generates $60 billion in revenue, which is double the amount in the 1980s, the producing countries have retained only 10 per cent. of that compared with 30 per cent. in the 1980s. When the world price falls, it is the growers who suffer an immediate reduction in income, yet there has been no noticeable reduction in supermarket prices for coffee in the UK.

A recent Nestlé report confirmed the sunny trading situation by stating:

> "profits increased . . . and margins improved thanks to favourable commodity prices".

For many farmers, however, the collapse in prices means that they have failed to recover their production costs for several years running. That has had a devastating impact on an already precarious existence. Some have abandoned their land, and for those who opt to stay at home the lack of labour for crop maintenance reduces the quality and value of the coffee product, further depressing returns. So the vicious circle is complete.

The price is mainly set in the international coffee exchanges in New York and London, where future contracts are traded. Although the futures market is an important tool to protect traders from price changes and currency movements, the increasing importance of speculation means that the tail now wags the dog. Paper deals make up about 90 per cent. of the coffee trade, while only 10 per cent. is based on the sale of physical coffee.

The increasing concentration of the market means fewer bigger actors are now able strongly to influence the market. In short, the benefits of the market accrue to the traders in the north, while the costs fall in the main on the producers in the south.

For small farmers in the third world, the price of beans on our markets is only one of the factors undermining their ability to make a reasonable living. Whereas farmers in the European Union, Japan or north America are beneficiaries of Government subsidy schemes worth around $300 billion a year, developing countries have been forced to dismantle state-controlled agricultural support programmes as conditions of loans from financial and international institutions. To add to that huge imbalance, agricultural imports from the richer countries are often cheaper, because of these subsidies, than the same product grown locally. At one stroke, farmers in developing countries are deprived of the ability to compete effectively in their home or foreign markets.

Without the means to process or transport the crop to market, limited knowledge of the frequently changing world price and a debt-driven necessity to sell the coffee the moment it is ripe—when prices are at their lowest—small independent farmers find themselves in a very weak negotiating position. With only one major harvest a year, farmers are desperate for cash by the time the crop is ripe, and they are keen to sell at any price they can get.

Over the past 20 years, more coffee has been grown as countries have been advised to expand production, clear their debts and increase export returns. Private and World Bank incentives exist for new or expanded production, yet existing farmers need better prices or, at the very least, some stability so that they can plan. Alternatively, they could diversify into other crops, but growers are understandably averse to investing in crops for which no clear market exists, especially when it can take several years to generate an income. Coffee, for all its faults, is widely traded, and the local infrastructure exists to market the crop. Most other options are fraught with greater risks for very poor farmers.

In the past 15 years, the global coffee trade has been radically reshaped. The tearing up of international quota agreements and the advent of Vietnam as a major producer has led to a market awash with coffee. In the face of oversupply, the buyer became king and prices plummeted. Among the manufacturers in the UK, Nestlé and Kraft Jacobs dominate the instant coffee market, taking 50 per cent. and 21 per cent. respectively, with the supermarkets' own brands coming a close third.

Three key developments have created that situation. First, following pressure from the United States Administration to liberalise trade, the international coffee agreement was abandoned in 1989. The pact between the coffee producing and consuming nations had in the past regulated the supply of beans via a quota system to the market, keeping prices relatively stable. Since then, it has been every man and woman for themselves, a situation that penalises the weakest. With little or no resources, poor producers need to sell their crop as soon as possible, just when the price is lowest. All efforts to re-establish price control have failed.

Secondly, the unprecedented rise of Vietnam as a coffee producer in the world market has turned a difficult situation into a crisis. Government investment and World Bank loans enabled it to triple its output between 1995 and 2000 to become the world's biggest producer of low-quality robusta beans, second only in overall volume to Brazil. Vietnam now accounts for 10 per cent. of total global coffee output.

Thirdly, encouraged by the World Bank and partner institutions to restructure their economies, producer nations disbanded national coffee policy organisations which had helped to plan production and acted as intermediaries between small farmers and the market. Subsidies for coffee production and agricultural services were reduced and private exporters took on the main role in a trading market. In many instances, taxes on coffee exports were cut. Initially, some farmers received more of the export price for their beans, but such gains soon disappeared as market prices collapsed. Coffee growers, large and small, were left exposed to the vagaries of the international market and its sudden price fluctuations.

Coffee has appeared to offer hard-pressed Governments a relatively easy means of generating hard currency, but over the past decade production has increased at twice the rate of consumption. Coffee faces competition from other drinks and, despite the recent successes of coffee shops in the United Kingdom, Europe and north America, demand looks unlikely to increase substantially.

Ultimately, large corporate consumers are the only ones to benefit from that oversupply. Since the 1980s, fewer players have taken a larger share of the business. Four multinational companies that account for 40 per cent. of worldwide retail sales dominate the sales. Similarly, six multinational export firms control 40 per cent. of the world's coffee market.

Lack of access to credit has become one of the key factors undermining the position of small farmers. Without loans at a low rate of interest, it is impossible for farmers to ensure adequate care of their crops, or to look after their families before the harvest. After harvest, the need to clear punitive debts leads them to sell their crop

[Ann McKechin]

quickly and prices are at their lowest. Lack of market knowledge and finance conspire to reduce the quantity and quality of the crop. As the biggest traders recognise, without a market that delivers a decent life to producers, they cannot deliver a quality product to the market.

For farmers to benefit consistently from the sale of coffee, the buyer needs to pay a price that covers the cost of production and allows for investment. For a commercial roaster on the world market trying to compete with other companies paying low prices, offering a higher price is only possible if the consumer is prepared to pay more. So, the idea of a consumer label was born. If consumers wanted to be sure that farmers had received a fair deal for their coffee, they were invited to buy coffee—and later other products—that was guaranteed to meet criteria for terms of trade and price. The Fairtrade mark has been that guarantee.

Sadly, coffee farmers have now experienced several years of real suffering and hardship. Many are fighting for their survival. The vast majority are peasants in some of the world's poorest countries.

I take this opportunity to congratulate the Government on their commitment in recent years to consider the social impact of business in developing countries and their own substantial backing for Fairtrade. The Prime Minister's recent visit to Ghana and his statements supporting Fairtrade were an important signal of that.

Fairtrade is now calling on local authorities throughout the UK to promote its products in their departments and within local communities. A growing list of towns and cities is participating in the project. I hope that the Government will also use their resources to strengthen their support by promoting the concept among their Departments and in their contacts with our society. I am pleased to note that the Minister's Department has arranged a conference later this month to discuss the development of Fairtrade products in the Caribbean islands and the export potential.

Clearly, it is vital that the Government should also use their influence in multilateral organisations—the European Union, the World Trade Organisation, the International Coffee Organisation, the United Nations conference on trade and development—to promote solutions that involve all the parties.

It is essential to stress the priority of eradicating poverty in line with the recognised international targets. It is also very important that the impact of the decisions and policies of those organisations is properly assessed to ensure that they act in such a manner as to reduce the gap between the richest and poorest in our world.

The role of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in policy making needs to be reviewed to ensure that it does not run counter to our development objectives. Too often, the implementation of structural adjustment and promotion of new coffee production in producer countries has been pursued without consideration of the costs in-country or elsewhere in the developing world. In particular, where analysis shows that it would exacerbate global oversupply, the Government should challenge investment in new coffee production, whether that originates from the World Bank, international development organisations or multinational companies.

I ask the Government to encourage the few companies that dominate the trade to take a far more active role in recognising their social responsibilities and to formulate a sustainable response to the problems within the industry. Seeking to stabilise the market and improve returns for farmers is in their own interests, not only as good corporate citizens, but also to ensure the future of good quality supplies. Producer countries also need to work to increase domestic and regional consumption, decreasing their dependency on export sales.

The ICO, Oxfam and other organisations support plans to restore the balance in supply and demand, including the destruction of 5 per cent. of low quality coffee stocks. That badly needed short-term strategy would need to go hand in hand with compensation payments to farmers and assistance in developing alternative income-generating activities. That could be financed by the World Bank and multinational coffee companies. However, such programmes would require agreement between, and political commitment from, producer countries to ensure the maintenance of supply-control measures.

I urge the Government in their negotiations with the EU and the WTO to end immediately the escalating tariff systems that allow green coffee beans to enter Europe duty free, but slap tariffs on processed coffee. That prevents major players from adding value to their coffee, leaving them with little choice but to increase exports to balance their trade. Without tariff escalators, coffee producing countries could develop their processing industries. For too long, the countries of the north have hidden behind a wall of protectionism, and their undertakings to tackle that at the WTO conference last year were hardly watertight or reassuring to the countries of the south.

The Fairtrade Foundation has set a good example to our society of how we should work for a world in which every person, through their work, can sustain their family and community with dignity. The challenge is for the world's nations and the multinational companies to support this cause—not just with words but with action.

7.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Denis MacShane): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Ann McKechin) on initiating the debate and on making a speech of passion and care about such an important issue. Fair trade is an idea whose time has come and it is an area where the individual can make an important difference. My hon. Friend helped to launch the Fairtrade fortnight in the House and she is passionately committed to fair trade products back home in Glasgow.

It is good that the House takes the issue seriously. The Under-Secretary of State for International Development gave an eloquent reply in a similar Adjournment debate initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy).

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development visited my constituency at Christmas three or four years ago. Clare and I—that is the only time that I shall refer to her by name, as I know she should be given her ministerial title—donned Santa Claus hats and filled a handsome shopping basket with fair trade goods at Tesco. That brought us local publicity and encouraged south Yorkshire shoppers to follow my right hon. Friend's example.

My private office at the Foreign Office and the cafeterias and stores of the Foreign Office, the House and other public bodies try to buy fair trade products—as many of us do personally. Consumers can make a huge impact.

As my ministerial responsibilities include many poor parts of the world, however, it is right for me to offer one or two cautionary words. My friends in the United States steel industry—members of the United Steel Workers of America—insist that all they are fighting for at present is fair trade. That means that exports from steel plants in my constituency could drop by as much as half, if the full tariffs are applied. Fair trade for one person may mean the loss of a job for another.

Supporters of the common agricultural policy in France, associated with the ATTAC organisation, say loudly that they support fair trade. However, the subsidies given to farmers in the north—both in Europe and the United States—amount to more than the total combined gross domestic product of sub-Saharan Africa. Their idea of fair trade would not be that of the African or Latin American peasant, producer or small farmer who wants access to our food markets in Europe or the United States.

My hon. Friend referred to the problem of coffee, but before I deal with that we need to consider some definitions. People talk about fair trade; they refer to ethical trade, or what Anita Roddick calls "community trade". The Body Shop has perhaps done more than any other franchised chain in the world to put fair trade into practice, with a continuing relationship with producers. The phrase "community trade" comes from Miss Roddick's introduction to a little book called "The No-Nonsense Guide to Fair Trade", published by Verso, which I commend to the House even if I do not agree with all its analysis. It is a further example of how the movement is growing, and we should give as much support and energy to fair trade as we can.

My hon. Friend spoke about coffee. I have visited Chiapas in Mexico, a traditional coffee-growing area, and spoken to the people who have suffered from the collapse in coffee prices, which has been one of the contributory factors to the Zapatista movement. Again, in Colombia, the absence of good coffee-production mechanisms, defined through good prices, has encouraged peasants to produce other, far more noxious, substances. In Brazil, President Cardoso is concerned about United States protectionism preventing Brazilian agricultural produce from reaching the US market.

It is not just wicked multinationals or a rigged market that have caused the collapse in coffee prices that is at the real root of the problem. As my hon. Friend said, Vietnam has massively entered the world coffee market in the past decade by growing coffee for export. Vietnam is a very poor country, and it is not for me to say that its peasants do not have the right to enter the world market for coffee, even if that drives down prices for producers in Latin America.

I am not sure that it can be right for white politicians in the north to tell one group of workers or peasants anywhere in the south—Latin America, Africa or Asia—that they do not have the right to produce for sale, including export, what they feel best able to produce. I would not be happy, and I do not think that my hon. Friend would, if some external body said that international investment could not come to our constituencies, on the grounds that the products or services proposed to be made or offered for sale were already being made or exported from somewhere else. As a constituency Member, representing, like my hon. Friend, a poor part of our nation, I want my constituents to have the jingle of as much money as possible in their pockets, and that means, for them, the lowest possible prices.

Of course we accept that trade can have cruel side-effects, but the past quarter century of increasingly open trade has produced remarkable results. In 1970, 35 per cent. of all the people in developing countries were considered to be starving. In 1996, the figure had fallen to 18 per cent., and the United Nations expects it to have fallen to 12 per cent. by 2010. That is not far enough or fast enough, and the millennium development goal of halving world poverty by 2015 is an important one, but if we compare where we were 30 years ago with where we are now, we can see that trade has helped to make the world richer.

Between 1990 and 1999, adult illiteracy rates in low-income countries, for males aged 15 and above, decreased from 35 to 29 per cent., and the percentage for females aged 15 and above decreased from 56 to 48. Again, that is not far enough or fast enough, but without the material benefits that come with open trade, not even those reductions would have been possible.

In 1970, only 30 per cent. of people in the developing world had access to clean drinking water. Today, about 80 per cent. do. That is why we need to make the case for open trade. Yes, we need fairer trade, but we must not give the final say to the protectionists, the anti-globalisers and those who would restrict trade to the profit of existing groups only. That would only make our world poorer. It is also why the world trade agreement at Doha was important. The new three-year trade round launched at Doha now has a development agenda at its core. If we can succeed, as Doha suggested, in opening up trade in agricultural products and removing subsidies, defeating protectionism, developing countries stand to gain substantial commercial benefits under the negotiating mandate.

Today, rich countries pay out $1 billion a day to their farmers in agricultural subsidies. Annually, the figure is more than four times all the development assistance that goes to poor nations. Our Government are at the forefront of advocating the need for change; the Prime Minister has spoken eloquently in Latin America and at the Dispatch Box about the need to defeat protectionism and open up trade in different countries. Markets will be opened up, as was said at Doha,

> "with a view to phasing all forms of export subsidies"

and trade-distorting domestic farm support.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill spoke about the increasing trade in processed foods; it is not raw materials which arrive here, but processed foods, which have been value-added in developing countries. She is right, which is why the Government are taking the lead in every international forum in seeking to remove those tariffs. I invite her to persuade the anti-globalisation campaigners that open trade—the lifting of tariff barriers—is the right way forward.

We have been at the forefront of pushing the European Union to to agree the "everything but arms" initiative for duty-free and quota-free market access for the least developed countries; there are now phase-in periods for

[Mr. Denis MacShane]

rice, sugar and bananas. I would like those phase-in periods to be shorter, but I must take on, intellectually and politically, colleagues on the left in France and Germany, and many people in this country, who oppose the removal of protectionist tariffs and the fight for free and open trade. Government support for fair trade therefore has to be seen in the context of their wider commitment to reforming national and international trade to benefit the poor. Examples of that commitment include Traidcraft Exchange; the Government support business agencies and individual enterprises in developing countries with exporting, wholesaling and importing facilities, linking them to commercial buyers in Europe. Countries that the Government are helping through that initiative include Malawi, Zambia, Tanzania, India, and the Philippines.

We are supporting the start-up costs of the Day Chocolate Company in Ghana; manufacturers and markets which trade fairly get access to markets in the United Kingdom. We are seeking to help southern producer groups to meet changing market demand and assist with sustainable improvements to their livelihoods. We want capacity-building programmes for business service providers in developing countries which link producer groups with domestic and international markets. We want to support marketing campaigns to promote the principles of fair trade, and we want to support further the fair trade labelling system. Labelling a product, whether a T-shirt or a packet of coffee, to show that it was produced in accordance with the values of fair or ethical trade is one of the best ways of making progress. We want independent auditing of the fair trade label to ensure the validity of its guarantee to consumers and to prevent it from being suborned by some of the companies to which my hon. Friend referred. Shoppers in Britain should be sure that when they pay a little extra, it will get to the producers.

I am therefore particularly proud that, in the past five years, the UK, alone of the G8 or the major EU countries, has increased its share of gross domestic product devoted to aid; it has increased by 45 per cent. That, if nothing else, is an achievement of which every Labour MP and the Labour Government can be truly proud.

The fair trade debate will continue. The House has my pledge and, I am sure, the pledge of all Ministers, that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development will co-operate closely and continue to promote fair trade in the context of open trade, so that all the world can grow and we can finally defeat the scourge of poverty which, as the Prime Minister said of Africa, is a scar on the conscience on the world.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Seven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 15 March 2002

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Orders of the Day

Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill

As amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

New Clause 1

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

' In the exercise of any function under this Act a person or body must have regard to the desirability of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development.'.—*[Mr. Meacher.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

9.35 am

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

It genuinely gives me great pleasure to be present for the Report stage of this Bill, promoted by the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall). I offer him my congratulations—as I did on Second Reading and in Committee—on bringing the Bill so far.

As I outlined in Committee, legislation for the marine environment is a complex matter. In addition to the important issues of conserving nationally important species and habitats, a wide range of other interests need to be taken into account in any legislation. The amendments proposed by the Government strike the right balance; they will protect the marine environment while taking into account other legitimate interests and users of the sea.

It is thus appropriate that the new clause concerns the application of the principles of sustainable development. The provision sets out a responsibility for the nature conservation bodies, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the National Assembly for Wales and any other bodies exercising functions under the Bill to take proper account of the need to achieve sustainable development.

The need for sustainable development is central to all Government policy. In May 1999, the Government published "A better quality of life: a strategy for sustainable development for the United Kingdom", which brought the environment, social progress and the economy alongside each other at the heart of policy making.

Achieving sustainable development is all about recognising, evaluating and taking into account the costs and benefits of actions on the economy, the environment and people's livelihoods. The application can sometimes be fraught, but that is the principle. The new clause would ensure that such a balance was struck when any bodies exercising functions under the Bill made decisions that could affect nationally important species and habitats.

Many activities, such as shipping, fishing, offshore minerals exploitation, sustainable energy and coastal zone development make use of our seas and shores. The new clause would ensure that, where those activities affect protected sites, Departments and other bodies carrying out their functions under the Bill—such as establishing management schemes or confirming site notifications—will have regard to the benefits of permitting sustainable use of marine resources and other social and economic uses of the site, as well as securing the conservation of the marine environment.

The new clause would help to ensure that protected sites will not lead to a series of no-go areas for development. In the confirmation of sites, in giving advice to competent marine authorities about potentially damaging operations, in making byelaws and in establishing management schemes, it is important to act proportionately. I realise that not every measure to protect marine sites will be justifiable when all sustainable development objectives are taken into account. However, in the marine environment we are dealing with risks in areas where our knowledge of the likelihood of impact is limited or where there is continuing scientific uncertainty. Therefore, we will need to adopt a precautionary approach that is consistent and in line with the Nice European Council resolution on the precautionary principle. That is very important.

We believe that the inclusion of the clause would introduce a degree of consistency between the process of selection for sites under the Bill and that for sites of special scientific interest on land. I shall repeat those words several times this morning, if I catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. For the confirmation of sites on land, the conservation agency is placed under a duty by section 37 of the Countryside Act 1968 to have

"due regard to the needs of agriculture and forestry and to the economic and social interests of rural areas."

The clause would ensure that similar concerns relating to the marine environment are taken into account.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): I thank the Minister and his Department for the constructive way in which they have examined the Bill and tabled helpful amendments and new clauses. However, I require confirmation of a few matters relating to one or two of them. On the new clause, can the Minister confirm that the proposed duty to have regard to the desirability of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development would not lead to nature conservation interests' being overridden by other interests? Secondly, if a marine site of special interest was notified and a development issue subsequently arose on that site, would the proposed development influence the decision whether to confirm the marine site of special interest?

If the Minister would satisfy me on those two points, I should be happy to accept the new clause.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): I, too, welcome the new clause because, as the Minister says, it

[Mr. Gareth R. Thomas]

places on all competent marine authorities, when carrying out any function under the Bill, a duty to have regard to the desirability of achieving sustainable development.

I have a long-standing interest in the potential of the renewable energy industries to contribute to our nation's efforts to achieve sustainable development. I have had some concerns about the Bill's potential for creating an extra hoop for the wind industry to jump through. I believe that the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) recognised the concerns of the wind energy industry and I know that since Second Reading he has met the British Wind Energy Association to seek to provide additional reassurance, but I believe that the clause will assist, in that it will help to ensure that genuine, sensible economic development can still take place in the right circumstances, in suitably protected marine sites of special interest.

I did not hear the Minister make any specific reference to the offshore wind industry and I hope that when he replies to the debate he might allude in a little more detail to how the clause would provide additional protection against further delays in considering consents for offshore wind farms to go ahead. I say that against a backdrop of some concern in our country about whether we shall meet our CO_2 reduction targets for 2010.

I know that the Minister has heard of the survey by Cambridge Econometrics, published on 4 February, which implied that if current trends from 2000-01 were to continue, by 2010 CO_2 emissions would be only about 6.5 per cent. below 1990 levels. There is a concern that if the sustainable energy industry, such as offshore wind generation, is not helped to grow, our wider CO_2 emission targets might not be achieved. I am sure that the whole House would recognise that that would be a tragedy. The potential for the Bill to place that extra hoop—that extra delay—on the consents process for offshore wind sites is a concern of the industry and should be addressed.

9.45 am

Will the Minister be able to guarantee that when the sites are being designated there will be a consultation process with the offshore wind industry? When sites of special scientific interest—the land-based equivalent of MSSIs—are designated, the selected area must contain more than 1 per cent. of the British population of a specific species. On Second Reading I flagged up the concern of the British Wind Energy Association that many of the identified 18 offshore wind farm sites—the list was compiled just before the last general election—fall within areas that could conceivably be designated as marine sites of scientific interest. Members of the wind energy industry will have to collect data on much of the marine environment before a bid for an offshore farm can be granted and they are concerned that, because of the lack of data about the wider marine environment, a site might be deemed to be a very important marine site of scientific interest and therefore an application for a offshore wind farm would be denied.

Can the Minister tell me what the clause could do to help on carbon capture and sequestration? He will know from his involvement in the recently published energy review that there is growing industrial interest in removing carbon dioxide from fossil fuels before they are released into the atmosphere—sequestering the carbon in deep repositories so that it is locked up and is not released into the atmosphere. That process offers a series of benefits to the coal industry and other fossil fuel industries, enabling them to continue to produce and to provide jobs for this country while not continuing to damage the environment.

Two necessary steps have been identified for carbon capture and sequestration. First, the carbon dioxide must be captured; then it must be transported to a geologically appropriate repository. I raise that issue at this stage because the United Kingdom has many potential CO_2 repositories under the bed of the North sea, so there is a concern that the Bill might, down the line, stop sensible development of carbon capture and sequestration. I realise that there is a need for research and investigation in other forums on whether carbon capture and sequestration can genuinely help the achievement of our carbon dioxide targets, but I hope that the Minister can give some reassurance that the Bill will not build that additional delay into the system. That would cause problems.

I welcome the new clause; it is a sensible addition to the Bill. I believe that much further work is necessary by the Minister's Department and the Department of Trade and Industry to reduce the time that the planning system requires for consideration of wind energy sites both on land and offshore, and I seek an assurance that, just as we have begun to shorten the likely time scales for granting an application, the consents process for offshore wind energy sites will not suddenly be extended by the Bill. I believe that the clause may help in that regard but I seek reassurance from the Minister to that effect.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): I seek reassurance from the Minister about what I perceive to be some of the nuances implicit in the new clause. For example, the right hon. Gentleman mentioned the legislative provisions that pertain to SSSIs and national parks. He will be aware that his Department is dealing with the order to designate a large part of my constituency as a national park. He quoted the law pertaining to that, which says that due regard has to be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry, economic and social interests of the area. In the new clause, the maritime equivalent of that provision is that account should be taken of sustainable development.

Will the Minister confirm that he includes in sustainable development the maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth? That concept comes from "Achieving a better quality of life: Review of progress towards sustainable development" in the Government's annual report 2000, and it seems to involve a rather stronger requirement than that used in the legislation that relates to land.

There is another significant difference between the Countryside Act 1968, to which the Minister referred, and the new clause. That Act, as amended by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, states:

> "it shall be the duty of every Minister, and of the Agency, the Council, English Nature and the local authorities to have due regard to certain things."

The right hon. Gentleman's new clause would merely require them to "have regard to". The word "due" implies the need for a balance; leaving it out implies an imperative. Am I seeing a conspiracy where none exists? Am I placing too much emphasis on the word "due"? I ask for the Minister's reassurance.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I come new to the Bill, not having had the opportunity to serve on the Standing Committee, but, as the Minister knows, I do not come new to the subject, having debated it at length during the passage of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and having promoted thoughts similar to those of the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall), whom I congratulate on having brought his Bill this far. I also congratulate the Minister on the amendments that he has tabled, which clearly show a constructive attitude to the Bill. I do not intend speak at length today because I want to ensure that we consider the various amendments before us so that the Bill can make further progress.

I understand some of the rationale behind the new clause; it is roughly analogous to the equivalent provisions in the arrangements for the notification of SSSIs on land. I share the view of the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) that the principal objective must surely relate to sustainable energy production at sea, and I should be grateful to the Minister if he would confirm that in relation not only to producing energy from offshore wind, but to the other means of producing energy at sea that may exist.

Clearly, a balance often has to be found between competing environmental protection measures, irrespective of whether we are talking about species protection—which is, in essence, what we discussing in the Bill—or about other environmental protection issues and encouraging sustainability.

We shall return to this issue later, but I hope that clear guidance will be given on how this new clause and others should be interpreted by the competent marine authorities, the Secretary of State or the National Assembly for Wales. For example, I should be interested to know how the Bill will apply to artificial reefs, which may also be considered in this respect. So long as we do not lose the spirit of species conservation that is inherent in the Bill and the protection of SSSIs in the interests of general development, which should take place only if there is a clear environmental advantage and that balance has been properly assessed by the competent authorities, there seems to be no reason why we should not accept the new clause.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): I shall speak for just a few moments. I welcome the new clause, with the caveat mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall). I understand all too readily the need and the importance of meeting a high proportion of our electricity generation requirements from renewable energy sources, including wind energy.

As chairman of the sustainable development committee of the 43-country Council of Europe, I know that it is carefully considering the problems of ensuring sustainable development, which is vital to the future of our planet. There can be sustainable development arguments on both sides of any environmental issue. Therefore, to echo the words of the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath), close consultation and careful analysis are vital before resolving such matters one way or the other.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: I had not known of the hon. Gentleman's role in the Council of Europe. Is he aware that the Minister for Industry and Energy, when speaking at a parliamentary renewable and sustainable energy seminar just 10 days ago, highlighted the fact that two thirds of onshore wind energy projects granted funding under the non-fossil fuel obligation have not gone ahead because the planning applications have been rejected? Should not that provide a powerful caution for us when considering the implications for offshore wind or wave and tidal power, to which the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) alluded?

Sir Sydney Chapman: Unfortunately, I was unable to attend that meeting and I was not aware that two thirds of planning applications for onshore projects had been rejected. We will need to provide every possible encouragement to renewable forms of energy if we are to meet the target, to which the Government are committed, of 10 per cent. of our electricity needs coming from renewable sources by 2010. The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point.

I conclude by simply reiterating that sustainable development policies are essential. Sometimes, there are good reasons on both sides of an argument when assessing the environmental needs, and we must be very careful and intelligent, and adopt a joined-up approach to the decisions that we will have to take.

Mr. Meacher: There is general agreement on both sides of the House about the importance of sustainable development. I was asked how exactly that concept will be applied, which is not an easy matter to consider, but I shall try to provide the assurances that were requested.

The hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) asked whether the nature conservation interests would be overridden if a development issue arose on a site before the notification was confirmed. The answer is that the notification of the site will have identified features of special interest and that the confirmation of the notification will have regard to the wider interests of sustainable development.

The important point is that the scientific value that the conservation body has identified will be of particular importance in that decision. Obviously, such decisions will have to be taken on a case-by-case basis, but I hope that that provides appropriate assurance. The identification of such a development interest will certainly not readily or automatically override the conservation interest. However, as in so many of these matters, it is all a question of making a judgment about the balance.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) raised some pertinent issues about offshore wind energy. Such issues are precisely why the new clause was introduced. Of course we recognise the importance of renewable energy considerations, which are of themselves of considerable environmental benefit, as the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman) said. The need for offshore wind energy will be a major factor in deciding whether it is necessary to build wind farms in a marine site of special interest.

10 am

I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West that there will be full consultation on the criteria for site selection, including with offshore wind energy bodies. I can confirm that in achieving our Kyoto targets, the

[Mr. Meacher]

development of renewables—in particular, both offshore and onshore wind energy—is important. The target is 10 per cent. by 2010. As we have achieved only 3 or 4 per cent. of that, we have a long way to go and wind is clearly an important factor.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: My right hon. Friend is obviously aware that the energy review recommends adopting a 20 per cent. target, which I hope will be accepted. Does he understand that the wind energy community is sensitive about the issue, partly because it recognises that we need to move away from the shallower sites that have been designated for wind energy farm development thus far to deeper waters, on which we have less marine data? That sensitivity is exacerbated by the fact that the Ministry of Defence has understandably ruled out areas that could be suitable for wind farm development because of the implications for radar.

Although the wind energy community welcomes the new clause, will my right hon. Friend reassure it further that there will be detailed consultation on future development—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. That is an extremely long intervention. I think the Minister has got the drift.

Mr. Meacher: I certainly have and I will try to make my answer shorter than the question.

I am just as concerned about the development of offshore wind energy as I am about the conservation of genuine sites of national conservation interest. The question is how we achieve that, which is what the clause is all about. We acknowledge the sensitivities of the wind energy community, especially with regard to moving sites further offshore and to the decision by the Ministry of Defence. However, I believe that it is possible to reconcile the different interests, and we must try to do that. It is not a case of one interest overriding the other. We have a strong interest in wind energy in the United Kingdom. We have, I think, about 35 per cent. of potential wind energy generation within the European Union and we have exploited only a tiny proportion of that. It is in the interests of the Government and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs that that is developed further.

Tony Cunningham (Workington): In support of what my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) said, will the Minister bear in mind the problem caused by delaying the process? In the areas around my constituency, it is only possible to build a wind farm in the summer. A planning delay could put a scheme back 12 months because construction might not start until the following year. That is a serious issue.

Mr. Meacher: I understand that, but it depends on when notification was made in the first place. I can give my hon. Friend the strong reassurance that the Government and the confirming authority—the Secretary of State—have no intention or desire to delay the process to secure procrastination. That is not in our mind at all.

My response to the point raised by the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) is that we need to achieve a balance, a word that he used. Of course sustainable development includes high and stable levels of economic growth, but they should not be to the detriment of nature conservation. The key consideration is that we strike the correct balance. I recognise that it is easy to say that in the abstract. In those cases in which it is difficult to reconcile different interests, we have to make the best judgment possible. That is not intended to interfere with or deter in any way the achievement of high levels of economic growth, and that includes those that can be achieved in the marine environment. That is what sustainable development is all about.

I also assure the hon. Gentleman that "have regard to" is appropriate to the new clause. I do not see a difference between that and "due regard". The hon. Gentleman was generous enough to say that he was perhaps a little over-concerned, and I think he was right.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) also referred to the importance of offshore wind. I accept that we should try to give as clear and detailed guidance as possible on the interpretation of the general principle behind the new clause. We are trying to do that in other ways, not just in the marine environment. I take his point about artificial reefs. With regard to the notification of a site, that is obviously one factor to which the conservation agencies will draw the attention of the confirming authority.

The hon. Member for Chipping Barnet re-emphasised the importance of renewable energy. From an environmental point of view, conservation is not our only consideration; we are also extremely anxious to develop renewable sources of energy. With those reassurances, I hope that the House will accept the new clause.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 2

INSTALLATION OF BOUNDARY MARKERS

'(1) The appropriate nature conservation body may install markers indicating the boundaries of a marine site of special interest.

(2) Markers may be installed at any time after a notification has effect.

(3) If a notification ceases to have effect, or has effect as modified, the appropriate nature conservation body must if necessary and as soon as reasonably practicable remove or alter markers installed under this section.

(4) Before doing anything under this section, the appropriate nature conservation body must obtain the consent of the owner of the land or sea bed on which a marker is to be installed.

(5) Nothing in this section exempts the appropriate nature conservation body from a statutory requirement to obtain any other consent (in particular any consent which may be required under section 34 of the Coast Protection Act 1949 (c. 74) or section 1 of the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973 (c. 33)).'.—*[Mr. Meacher.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Meacher: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Government new clause 4—*Meaning of "marine area" and "marine site of special interest".*

Government new clause 5—*General interpretation.*

Government new clause 6—*Notification of marine sites.*

Government new clause 7—*Further provisions about notification.*

Government new clause 8—*Modification or denotification.*

Government new clause 9—*Denotification in relation to European marine sites.*

Government amendment No. 30.

Amendment No. 41, in clause 1, page 1, line 13, after "kind", insert—

'or person or body who customarily carries on a trade, occupation or business'.

Amendment No. 42, in page 1, line 18, leave out "one month" and insert "three months".

Amendment No. 44, in page 1, line 20, after "consider", insert "in public".

Amendment No. 45, in page 2, line 5, at end insert—

', after taking due account of international best practice'.

Amendment No. 46, in page 2, line 10, after "features", insert—

'and the management structure and its financing'.

Amendment No. 47, in page 2, line 13, leave out "six" and insert "three".

Amendment No. 50, in page 2, line 23, leave out "six" and insert "three".

Amendment No. 51, in page 3, line 1, after "body", insert—

', after consultation with the persons mentioned in subsection (1)'.

Amendment No. 52, in page 3, line 13, at end insert—

'(11A) Any notice issued under subsection (10) or (11) shall be accompanied by a statement of reasons for that variation or denotification as the case may be.'.

Amendment No. 55, in clause 3, page 3, line 24, at end insert—

'and taking account of international best practice'.

Amendment No. 56, in page 3, line 33, after "body", insert—

'(ia) take account of international best practice;'.

Government amendment No. 38.

Amendment No. 67, in clause 7, page 5, line 19, at end insert—

'or

(c) any river estuary'.

Mr. Meacher: This group of new clauses and amendments goes to the heart of the mechanisms by which the Bill will be implemented. I apologise in advance for the length of my remarks, but it is necessary to spell out as clearly and succinctly as possible exactly how it will work in practice.

The purpose of the new clauses and amendments is to clarify the procedures and definitions for the selection, notification and confirmation of marine sites of special interest. They may look complicated, but I assure hon. Members that their purpose is simple. New Clause 4 aims to identify areas within which an MSSI can be notified. The Bill will allow an MSSI to be notified in any area that is covered by tidal waters between mean low water mark to the limit of territorial waters. A notification may include the water column and the sea bed. In order to cover any burrowing species, it can extend to 30 m below the sea bed. That depth is consistent with the depth to which byelaws under clause 6 can be made.

New notifications should not duplicate similar designations under different legislation. New clause 4(3) would ensure that an MSSI could not be notified in an area in which an SSSI existed, and subsection (4) would ensure that an SSSI—a terrestrial one—could not be notified within an area already covered by an MSSI.

Apart from SSSIs, the other major relevant nature conservation designations in the marine environment are European marine sites. The new clause would ensure that an MSSI could not be notified in an area containing an EMS for the same reasons for which the EMS had been designated. However, although the list of species and habitats covered by an EMS will be of international importance, on occasion other species or habitats of national importance may occur within an EMS. In those circumstances, an MSSI can be notified within an area covered by an EMS. On occasion, the designation of an EMS may occur after an MSSI has been notified. Subsection (5) would ensure that the MSSI was denotified if an EMS were designated in the same area for the same reasons.

Clause 1 lays the groundwork for notification, the effects of which must be clear and unambiguous. Amendment No. 30 would delete the whole of clause 1 and replace it with new clause 6, which is designed to clarify the procedures for notifying MSSIs. Subsection (1) would provide that the appropriate nature conservation agency may notify a marine area as an MSSI by reason of its flora, fauna, or geographical or physiographical features. That would provide the conservation agencies with a power, rather than a duty, to notify sites.

I said in Committee that I believed a power to be more appropriate because it would give nature conservation agencies greater flexibility in exercising that function, and more time to plan and programme the work required for the identification and notification of sites. It would allow time to gather scientific information and to undertake work on the criteria. The House will know that we are currently in the process of implementing regulations that transpose the habitats directive in respect of marine sites. That is crucial work in which the conservation agencies are heavily involved, which is why it is relevant to the question of time. I cannot guarantee at this stage when that work will be completed, although we want to complete it as soon as possible.

The interim report of the review of marine nature conservation identifies

"a need to draw together the identification of those habitats, sites and species which are nationally important and which justify conservation action".

Given that the Joint Nature Conservation Committee will be looking at criteria for the identification of nationally important marine habitats and species as part of the review, I propose that the Bill's provisions should not be implemented—at least in respect of England—until the review has concluded its work. That is not designed to create delay, but is a common-sense procedure in the circumstances. The work of the review will assist in the drawing up of selection criteria and the identification of

[Mr. Meacher]

sites under the Bill, and will help to influence the size and scope of suitable areas. The Bill will form an intrinsic part of a strategic approach to marine nature conservation.

Mr. Swayne: Will the Minister elaborate on the nature of the criteria being developed: for example, will he confirm that they will be based purely on the site's scientific interest?

10.15 am

Mr. Meacher: That is so, and I will say more soon. The hon. Gentleman is on to an important point and I am able to give assurances in that respect.

While the work of the review is ongoing, I would nevertheless expect English Nature to start looking more closely at the mechanisms for site notification, identifying the costs involved and mapping out new procedures that can be put in place in advance of the outcome of the review. I assure the House that the Government regard protection of the marine environment as a priority: we will give it due consideration in the appropriate allocation of resources to English Nature. I expect English Nature to give the implementation of the Bill's provisions similar emphasis in its corporate plan, and to use its power to notify sites wherever it has identified areas that fully comply with the criteria. I hope that that demonstrates the extent to which we are putting Government resources wholly behind implementation of the Bill.

New clause 6(2) deals with the publication of criteria for site selection by the confirming authority, after consultation with the appropriate conservation agency. New Clause 5 would provide that the confirming authority would be the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in England, and the National Assembly for Wales in Wales. I think it wise to introduce criteria to ensure that sites are notified on a sound and consistent basis, and that they add value and do not duplicate existing designations.

To answer the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne), I confirm that the criteria will be scientific and will not take account of socioeconomic considerations. I expect the site selection criteria for England to be based on the JNCC's work under the review. There will be full consultation with the appropriate nature conservation agencies, enabling us to work together to understand the features that merit notification and the likely size of sites. There will be public consultation on the criteria, and before publishing them the Secretary of State will take full account of the views of colleagues. Subsection (3) would allow revision of the criteria after further consultation.

Subsections (4) to (6) deal with the practicalities of notifying a site, clarifying whom the conservation agencies should advise of a site notification and where the notification should be published. The use in subsection (4)(b) of the phrase

"so far as reasonably practicable"

acknowledges the difficulties the agency might have in identifying all competent marine authorities who have or could have functions within the area. It is not meant to suggest that the agency will not take account of the views of all those that are known, or do its best to reach them all, merely that certainty is not always possible.

Subsection (5) stipulates the effective date of a notification under the new clause. Protection applies from the date the notification is first published. A similar provision applies to land-based SSSIs. The purpose is to prevent any deliberate action to destroy the special interest while representations are being considered.

The provisions of new clause 7 would replace those in clause 1(3) to (8) and deal with the options open to the confirming authority in considering a notification made by the conservation agency. The notification should specify the features by reason of which the site is of special interest, and contain a statement that sets out both the conservation agency's objectives for the conservation of those features and its views about the management necessary to secure those objectives. Subsection (1) proposes a period of three months, not one, for the submission of representations, and subsection (3) states that the confirming authority should make a decision on the notification within nine months of the notification having first been published. That is a longer period than the one proposed in the Bill, but it matches the timetable for the consideration of a site of special scientific interest on land under the 1981 Act. To ensure that there is a full opportunity for representations to be made, the longer period based on that precedent is right. I give an assurance to the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall). As a notification takes effect as soon as it is advertised, the longer period allows better decision making but poses no threat to the conservation of the proposed site. I hope that we can get the best of both worlds.

The statement of views about management of the site is likely to include an indication of the operations which, in the agency's view, would be likely to cause damage to the special features. Representations may be made about this statement, including the listed operations. The statement is likely to prove extremely helpful in, for example, taking decisions under clause 3 in relation to the carrying out of or consenting to operations. It will be important that the competent authority is fully aware, in advance, of the operations that the conservation agency considers are likely to damage the site, and takes full account of these in making its own careful and informed assessment.

Subsection (3) would provide that the powers of the confirming authority extended to modifying the notification, as well as to confirming it as made, or withdrawing it. I should make it clear that the modification may only reduce—not increase—the size of the site, so it may not cover a new and previously not notified area; and it may only remove, not add, features of interest. It may also amend the conservation objectives. If it is not satisfied that the case has been made, the confirming authority may withdraw a notification. However, there must be a notice giving a clear statement of the reasons for the decision.

In considering a notification, the most important issue is the special interest, and whether the conservation agency has demonstrated its existence. Representations may question the scientific basis, but in exercising its functions the confirming authority will also be under the duty, set out in new clause 1, to have regard to the desirability of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development. Environmental sustainability requires the highest level of protection for irreplaceable natural assets, but this cannot be addressed in isolation from proper consideration of economic and social needs, and the wider environmental agenda. We shall consider these issues on a case-by-case basis, carefully balancing all the benefits and costs. That is the only way forward.

New clause 8—the House will be glad to know that I am gradually coming to the end of my remarks—addresses circumstances in which the conservation agency wishes to vary the confirmed notification, perhaps because of increased scientific knowledge about the special features or changes in the marine environment.

Notification of a marine site of special interest includes a number of different features. It marks a boundary within which the marine area is of special interest, identifies features of special interest, and includes conservation objectives and a statement of views about how the site should be managed to conserve the features. The provision allows any of these components to be modified and, at subsection (2), power for the conservation body to propose the cancellation of the MSSI, but only if it believes that the area is no longer of special interest. The procedure for varying a notification is the same as that which applies when a site is first notified. There are restrictions on the confirming authority's capacity to modify in subsections (8) and (9).

These provisions are modelled on those that already apply to notification of SSSIs under section 28 of the 1981 Act, as amended by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. They provide a necessary degree of flexibility so that the conservation agencies can ensure that notifications remain accurate and take account of new information and knowledge.

Where the conservation body proposes to cancel a notification it may do so only if it is satisfied that the area is no longer of special interest. The site will continue to be protected until such a notification is confirmed, and the confirming authority will consider the arguments, and any representations made, extremely carefully. I believe that I should mention that for the sake of completeness and thoroughness. In my view, the procedure will be used only exceptionally. If we are to provide a means of identifying and protecting nationally important sites, it would be inappropriate to include sites which we recognised were not, or no longer, of special interest.

Amendment No. 38 deletes clause 7, and new clause 5 would replace it with provisions that clarified the definitions used in the Bill. They are technical in nature and place the definitions in alphabetical order, for ease of reference.

As the only function of relevant marine authorities is the establishment of management schemes, the list of authorities permitted to establish management schemes is proposed in amendment No. 2. The definition of "relevant marine authority" is therefore deleted as this term is no longer used.

The definition of a "European marine site" has been clarified to ensure that it has the same meaning as the 1994 habitats regulations. The definition of "competent marine authority" is now much closer to the definition of "competent authority" in the habitats regulations. I am sure that that has been done to make things simpler and easier to understand and administer. As with the habitats regulations, bodies such as the Crown Estate Commissioners and sea fisheries committees are competent marine authorities.

Subsections (2) and (3) would enable the Secretary of State or the National Assembly for Wales, as appropriate, to amend the definition of "competent marine authority" by statutory instrument in respect of sites that have been notified by English Nature or the Countryside Council for Wales.

New clause 2 replaces clause 1(9). It merely clarifies procedures on the installation of markers indicating the boundaries of MSSIs. The nature conservation agencies must seek the permission of the owner of the land or sea bed on which the markers are to be placed, and must remove markers if the site is denotified. We expect English Nature to forward a copy of site boundaries to the Hydrographic Office, which will consider whether to mark these on Admiralty charts.

I apologise to the House for the extreme detail and the length of my remarks. However, it is extremely important that there should be no dubiety about the operation of the Bill. I hope that my remarks have been positive towards that end. On that basis, I commend the new clauses and the amendments to the House.

10.30 am

Mr. Randall: I thank the Minister for his detailed remarks. He need make no apology for clarification. I think that some of my questions have been answered already, but some of them are so important that it may be appropriate to repeat them. That is the only apology that I make.

As the Minister said, the duty in clause 1 has been reduced to a power in new clause 6. The Minister flagged that up in Committee. In some respects, it will make the Bill slightly weaker. However, that may be necessary for the reasons outlined by the Minister. Will the Minister confirm that if the new clause is accepted and the duty to notify is reduced to a power, English Nature and the Countryside Council for Wales will still be given the resources to enable them to establish effectively a network of nationally important marine areas throughout territorial waters within a reasonable period of the Bill's enactment? Will he confirm that when a site clearly merits designation as a nationally important MSSI, English Nature or the CCW will be expected to notify the Secretary of State or the National Assembly for Wales of that fact?

I was grateful for the Minister's clarification of new clause 6, and his explanation to my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) that the criteria to be agreed will be scientific and will require sites to be notified on the grounds of their scientific interest alone. What consistency will there be between the criteria developed for England and for Wales? Will interested parties other than the statutory nature conservation bodies be consulted during the development of criteria? Will the Secretary of State or the Welsh Assembly be able to set aside the advice of English Nature or the CCW on criteria for site selection?

New clause 7 deals with further provisions about notification. Given the widely recognised difficulties that have dogged the designation of marine nature reserves because of the need to achieve complete consensus, is there an intention to require 100 per cent. agreement by all interested parties before notification of an MSSI is confirmed? Will the Minister confirm that, as long as English Nature and the CCW take reasonably practicable steps to secure consensus, the Secretary of State or the

[Mr. Randall]

Welsh Assembly will confirm notification of an MSSI despite outstanding objections, providing the science clearly justifies notification?

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: May I echo the hon. Gentleman's concern about the need for 100 per cent. consensus before an MSSI is designated, and flag up a parallel concern about inland waters of which the British canoeing fraternity is only too well aware? Riparian owners can exclude canoeists from their waters, even when there would be no impact whatever on the environment or their land. There is a danger, as the hon. Gentleman said, that the 100 per cent consensus may stop sensible action.

Mr. Randall: I am afraid that I am not an expert on canoeing, but I accept the hon. Gentleman's point. As the House knows, it is almost impossible to achieve 100 per cent. consensus; it would be a great shame if the requirement meant that one small voice could stop something as important as notification going ahead.

Mr. Swayne: Is not the key point that we are seeking reassurance from the Minister that we are not going to give legal effect to the guidance which has stalled the marine nature reserve programme?

Mr. Randall: My hon. Friend is astute.

Mr. Swayne: My hon. Friend is very kind.

Mr. Randall: My hon. Friend deserves it.

Will the Minister confirm that operations likely to cause damage can be included in the conservation statement in new clause 7 and will constitute part of the statutory notification? I am pretty certain that he said the Crown Estate is considered a competent marine authority under clause 3 on the duties of competent marine authorities. Clause 4, on management schemes, would be amended by Government amendment No. 2, which we shall debate later. Will the Minister confirm that the Crown Estate could be added to the proposed list of authorities able to establish management schemes for MSSIs by virtue of Government amendment No. 14?

On that note, I shall conclude, and await the Minister's response.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): I congratulate the Minister on many of the Government's amendments. Some of the amendments that I have tabled have been overtaken by the Government amendments, but I should like to push others for the sake of clarification.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: Before my hon. Friend launches into his speech, will he join me in seeking clarification from the Minister about whether new clause 2(4) is needed? To return to my intervention on the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall), there are 10,800 miles of rapidly moving water or other waters suitable for canoeists in this country. However, because the consent of the owner of the land is required, canoeists have access to only 1 per cent. of those waters. Subsection (4) would surely prevent the sensible development of MSSIs, and would provide a bitter parallel with the circumstances of canoeists in this country.

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend makes an interesting intervention. I shall shortly address the need for consent in the context of notifications. However, the point that I am about to make may be of more interest to my hon. Friend. I assume that he is primarily talking about canoeing on rivers which, of course, the Bill does not address. My amendment No. 67 seeks to extend its provisions to river estuaries. It is a probing amendment; I am not sure of the extent to which river estuaries are already protected under arrangements for sites of special scientific interest.

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): As my hon. Friend will be aware, my constituency is bounded by the River Humber, which has one of the largest river estuaries in the country. Many SSSIs among the mudflats at the edge of the river are already protected.

Mr. Dismore: I am grateful to my hon. Friend; I was going to use the Humber as an example. As she knows, I grew up in east Yorkshire in the seaside town of Bridlington, and I was going to refer to one or two of my experiences. However, I wish to refer specifically to tidal rivers.

In introducing the Government amendments, my right hon. Friend the Minister referred to the definitions of high and low water marks. Many years ago, in my professional life, I had to interpret the high water mark in relation to the Fire Services Act 1947 to determine when the fire brigade's duty began and ended. I know from that complicated legislation that determining such marks can be difficult, which is why I have flagged up the issue of river estuaries and tidal rivers. I should be grateful if my right hon. Friend would deal with that in his reply and assure us that we are covering all the bases, either through existing legislation or the Bill, if it is enacted.

I am grateful for the Government amendments which clarify the timetable. My amendments Nos. 42, 47 and 50 attempt to do the same, but far less scientifically; I defer to my right hon. Friend, and shall not seek to press them. However, I echo some of the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Uxbridge in response to my right hon. Friend's substituting a power for a duty in new clause 6. I, too, am worried about that, although I recognise that there are resource implications, so I understand his reasons. I shall return to the question of resources.

With regard to notification, there are three options. I assume that my right hon. Friend's amendment will prevail. The first option as to who should be notified is in the original Bill. In amendment No. 41, I set out an addition to that, and my right hon. Friend dealt with it in new clause 6. My main aim is to make sure that the people who are likely to be affected by the designation of a marine site are properly notified and consulted.

Clause 1 states that

> "as far as is reasonably practicable, every holder of a property right or statutory right of any kind in relation to any of that marine area"

should receive notification. My right hon. Friend's new clause 6(4) states:

> "If a body decides to make a notification under subsection (1), it must notify . . . any other person who the body is directed by the confirming authority to notify"—

the confirming authority in this context being the Minister. Similar provisions apply in Wales. My aim is to make it clear who will be the subject of that direction from the Minister. Many, many people will be affected. My amendment No. 41 would have incorporated into the original wording a provision that anybody who carried out a trade, occupation or business that could be affected by the introduction of a marine site should be notified. If we are not careful about the wording, people may fall through the net.

New clause 6 makes provision for advertisement of the notification in a local newspaper, but that may not reach everybody. For example, fishermen who are out at sea for several weeks may not see the local paper. That must be taken into account. On Second Reading—I think—my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Lawrie Quinn) dealt with the problems that the fishing industry could face as a result of the Bill, and with how it could benefit as well. My hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) nods; there is still something of a deep sea fleet based around the Humber. We must make sure that the fishing industry is consulted—both the inshore fishing industry, which is based in towns like my old home town, Bridlington, and the offshore fleet.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: If my hon. Friend's amendment No. 67 is successful, river estuaries will be incorporated into the terms of the Bill. I echo his concerns about the need for clearer specification of who should be consulted. The relevant authorities are pretty good at consulting the fishing industry and fishing interests in general, but the British Canoe Union might be a suitable addition to my hon. Friend's list of consultees.

Mr. Dismore: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I intend to deal with some of the recreational uses of our waters. I know that he is a great advocate of the canoeing fraternity. I used to do a little canoeing in my youth, until I did an eskimo roll once and came up on the other side without my glasses, which somewhat put me off the sport.

We must consider not only the commercial fisheries but recreational fishing, which is indirectly quite an important trade or business to the day-trip boats that go out of harbours such as Bridlington. I am surprised that the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight) is not present to speak up for his constituents in that regard.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West has drawn the attention of the House to recreational uses. Apart from canoeing, there is a great deal of sailing and yachting activity. Yacht clubs are important not just as recreational organisations but as businesses. The diving fraternity will be affected, as will pleasure boats. I know that the pleasure boats that go out towards Flamborough Head and up and down that part of the east coast are important businesses which could be affected by the introduction of a marine site in that area.

10.45 am

Mr. Randall: I assume that, knowing the area so well, the hon. Gentleman also recognises that it is a good feeding ground for all the sea birds that breed along that coast, particularly at Bempton cliffs.

Mr. Dismore: That is my next point. I have been a regular visitor to Bempton cliffs and I still am, when I occasionally go home to see my mother in Yorkshire. I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman that the cliffs are a spectacular site. The boats stay well away from that area.

New recreational industries are growing—for example, whale watching.

Shona McIsaac: And seal watching.

Mr. Dismore: Indeed. I see from the report entitled "Whale Watching 2001", which was prepared by the International Fund for Animal Welfare, that that is a growth industry. In 1991, some 400 people in the UK were engaged in that activity, spending $43,000 directly and $330,000 indirectly, but in 1998 there were more than 121,000 whale watchers, who spent almost $1.9 million in direct expenditure and more than $8 million in indirect expenditure. So, it is an important industry.

Much of that activity, I expect, would take place in the sort of area that we are talking about protecting. Such industries also need to be protected. According to the same report, 28 per cent. of visitors to the Moray firth said that the presence of dolphins had been the sole reason for their visit. Through my amendment, I am trying to ensure that all those whose livelihood is likely to be affected—sometimes positively as well as negatively—are properly consulted.

New clause 7 introduces the concept of management, to which my amendment No. 46 refers. New clause 7(2)(b) provides that the notification statement must include details of how the site should be managed. Several of my amendments, in this group as well as later groups, refer to the importance of the management regime for the site. Without a good management regime, many problems could occur.

Amendment No. 46 goes beyond that and deals with how the management regime is to be financed. It is important to recognise that if we do the job properly, there will be costs. The question is where the money will come from. It is all well and good for us to talk about introducing marine sites of scientific interest and looking after them, but if the resources are not put in to achieve that, whether from charitable trusts, the Government, nature protection bodies or Europe, we will not accomplish a great deal.

I return to new clause 7 and the representation procedure, and my amendments Nos. 44 and 51. With regard to the people who should be consulted about a marine site, the new clause refers to the need for representations and consideration of those representations, but it makes no provision on how those representations should be made. For example, should they be produced in writing, or would a picket of angry fishermen suffice?

We need to be a little more specific about how representations should be made. For example, there is no power to make regulations that would specify in subordinate legislation how representations should be made, a timetable for their consideration and so on. That is a feature of similar legislation, but it is lacking from this Bill. When he replies to the debate, perhaps my right hon. Friend will tell us how he sees such representations being received.

In its briefing for this debate, English Nature states that it

> "wishes to see the Bill tightened in some areas, particularly in relation to how competent authorities are expected to take account of English Nature's advice when deciding what might constitute a damaging operation."

[Mr. Dismore]

Consultation is an important theme that should run throughout the Bill, and although such considerations do not necessarily form part of that aspect of consultation, they need to be addressed in our approach to implementing the legislation.

Having discussed how representations should be made, we should next ask how they will be considered. New clause 7 refers to the "confirming authority"—in other words, the Minister—

"having regard to any representations or objections".

The Opposition expressed criticism about the issue. Does "having regard" mean having due regard, having full regard, or simply looking at such representations and throwing them in the bin? I am sure that my right hon. Friend would not throw them in the bin, but the provision needs a bit more substance.

My right hon. Friend doubtless would not accept the procedure outlined in my amendment No. 44. Nevertheless, it goes to the heart of what we are trying to achieve: the consideration of representations "in public". If the process is to work, we must build consensus among all who are affected—be they those engaged in trade, such as fishermen, or nature conservation enthusiasts and bodies. The best way to achieve that is to consider openly and in public all the views that are expressed. I believe in open government, and such a procedure would make a very important contribution to it. The amendments are important, and I shall be interested to hear my right hon. Friend's comments on the way in which representations should be made and considered, and decisions confirmed.

I welcome new clause 7(3), which states that if the original notification is withdrawn or modified, notice given by the confirming authority

"must include a statement of reasons".

That chimes with my amendment No. 52. It would be appalling if, after hearing various representations, a blue pen was simply struck through various parts of the original notification decision, and no thought was given to explaining why the change was made. Without representations, certain decisions taken under this legislation could give rise to heated views on both sides.

Amendments Nos. 45, 55 and 56—relating to the need to take account of international best practice—constitute my main contribution to this group, and I was pleased to note that they were indeed selected. Although the concept of protecting our marine wildlife through this kind of legislation is relatively new, such protection has been offered throughout the rest of the world for some time. We can learn a lot from what has happened elsewhere, and perhaps I might illustrate the point with two or three brief examples.

The first two examples concern Greece, a country that I know well and have visited widely. The national marine park of the northern Sporades, on the island of Alonissos—which incorporates six smaller islands—was founded on 28 May 1992, so the Greeks have considerable experience of such matters. It is a very isolated area in which there is only limited human interference, so there was already a good natural environment for making the land and sea areas of the park an ideal habitat for many of the Aegean's threatened species of plants and animals. Severe restrictions are imposed on commercial activities such as fishing and tourism. They could have a serious impact on the people of the northern Sporades, who earn their living from those two industries. In fact, there is little else for them to do. The marine park deals not only with fish but with certain rare sea birds and, perhaps most importantly, the Mediterranean monk seal, which is under threat. It is an ancient animal that has been represented throughout history, including on ancient Greek coins. It is one of the largest seals in the world, but its rate of reproduction is very slow.

Until recently, the monk seal was hunted intensively for its fur and skin, and fishermen who worried about its stealing food from their nets also used to bump it off. It is important to note that, since the marine park's introduction, virtually no such incidents have occurred. The marine park has actively engaged the region's fishermen and the fishing co-operative of Alonissos in its protection efforts, which has contributed greatly to stopping the killing of those seals.

When one arrives in Alonissos, a little presentation—it is almost a museum—takes place on the dockside, explaining what the Government of Greece are trying to achieve in promoting the marine park. It engages tourists in the concept of the marine park, and perhaps encourages them to proselytise elsewhere. On visiting it, my eyes were certainly opened to the benefits of protecting marine wildlife in that way. An interesting documentary by a friend of mine, Mrs. Lydia Carras, recently won the Europa Nostra award for the best European nature documentary. It is called "The Song of the Monk Seal", and I am happy to lend my videotape copy to anyone who wants to watch it.

One downside of the Alonissos marine park is that protection is voluntary. Although the inhabitants of Alonissos and the neighbouring island of Skopelos were united in pressing the Government of Greece to establish the marine park, and although there is a biological station, a formal management system has yet to be put in place. That can be contrasted with the island of Zakynthos, which is famous throughout the world for its turtle beaches. Such a management regime has been established in Zakynthos for a couple of years. However, unlike in Alonissos—where people want, but have yet to get, the protection afforded by a management scheme—sections of the Zakynthos population are against such a scheme. A management scheme is perhaps more important in Zakynthos, given the hostility of local businesses to such measures.

The Zakynthos marine park also integrates protection of the territorial zones on land—the nesting grounds of the loggerhead turtles—with protection of nearby affected sea areas. It has achieved a great deal, despite being unable to bring the local community along with it. Greece therefore offers a couple of good examples of how international practice can inform the way in which we develop our own arrangements.

My final example is from Australia. A few years ago, I was fortunate enough to visit the great barrier reef, which is the largest world heritage area. Some 1,500 species of fish, more than 300 species of reef-building corals, 4,000 molluscs and 400 species of sponges have so far been identified there. Australia probably has more experience of such matters than anywhere else. In 1976, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority—a joint federal Government and Queensland state government body—assumed responsibility for the conservation and management of one of the world's largest and most unusual parks: the great barrier reef underwater park. On visiting the reef, [illegible]as impressed by the way in which the company that took us there by boat applied strict rules and regulations governing the conduct of visitors. For example, people who were snorkelling or diving were not allowed to stand on the coral, and the authorities made sure that they did not. That is an extremely important area, and it is part of Australia's national oceans policy.

We could learn a great deal from the way in which the Australians established their authority, which undertakes a variety of tasks, including management plans, research, monitoring and interpreting data, and providing educational services and management advice. The day-to-day management is carried out by the Queensland agencies, subject to the authority's mandate, and they issue permits and give advice and assistance, nationally and internationally. I am sure that they would be prepared to help us to make our own arrangements.

Will my right hon. Friend look beyond our own shores to international best practice to see how we can learn from what is good and bad overseas? Will he also take account of the need to ensure that those who will be most affected by the designation of a marine site will be properly consulted and involved in the process? Only by doing that can we achieve the success that the Bill very much deserves.

11 am

Mr. Heath: I certainly concur with the point made by the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) about the need to look at international best practice. There is considerable experience elsewhere in the world of operating marine reserves, and we should learn from that.

These are important new clauses and amendments, and I do not dissent from the broad sweep of their intent, but I want to raise several important issues. The compass of new clause 5(1) underlines the extraordinary complexity of current coastal zone management and we need to address that. On a general point, it is absurd that we have so many bodies with different powers and responsibilities, often overlapping and sometimes in conflict. It is right to review that, and I note what the Minister said about the intention to implement the Bill, if it is passed, after the review of marine conservation. Some, including major UK ports, have said that the entire Bill should have been delayed until after that review; I do not agree. We need to get the Bill on to the statute book as well as to review our arrangements for coastal zone management.

It is perhaps for that reason that subsection (1)(g) refers to

> "any other public body of any description",

which is the catch-all phrase for all the bodies that the Minister either does not wish to list or fears that he may have omitted earlier in the subsection. I should have liked the sea fisheries committees to be explicitly included. They are essential to the Bill, and after all they are hardly a new invention, having been around since 1888. They deserve to be listed, not least because of the resource implications for them of implementing the Bill—something to which I am sure we shall return. The Minister said that the intention was to include them as a competent marine authority, but it would be better if they were listed in the new clause.

If sea fisheries committees were named in new clause 5, it would be clear that, under new clause 6, they had to be notified when an area was to be designated a site of special interest. It would be remiss of any body that was, within the meaning of the Bill, a competent marine authority not to notify the appropriate sea fisheries committee when it intended to designate an area. On that point, the Bill differs from the equivalent legislation relating to land, in which there are requirements to consult relevant agricultural interests and landowners. It is unfortunate that the equivalent parts of the fisheries economy are not included in the Bill.

Shona McIsaac: It is a little unfair of the hon. Gentleman to say that sea fisheries committees are not mentioned. Government amendment No. 2 refers to

> "any local fisheries committee provided for under section 1 of the Sea Fisheries Regulation Act 1966".

So the committees are in fact mentioned in amendments that we will discuss today.

Mr. Heath: Those are amendments that we will discuss later, and I would be out of order if I responded to a point about amendment No. 2. There may a reference to the committees, but they are not named as a competent marine authority, which would put them at the heart of the Bill, where they ought to be.

I have another slight problem with new clause 6. Subsection (2) says that criteria will be published. As we have heard, those are the scientific criteria that will be used to judge whether a marine SSI should be established. However, there is no requirement in the Government's proposals to publish any form of statutory advice. The hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) made that point in Committee when he tabled amendments of his own. The Minister said that he would consider the matter carefully and determine how advice should be given. That advice is not mentioned in the amendments that we are discussing today.

It would be extremely helpful if a code of statutory guidance were to be published by Ministers for the assistance not only of the marine authorities responsible for designation and notification but of everybody else concerned. Everyone would know exactly where they stood, and they would know which points to consider, not least so that they could make objections. Hon. Members will recall that we debated that matter at great length during proceedings on the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. The more grounds for objection one can eliminate, the more focused any objections will be, and the easier it will be to deal with proper objections. That is important, so I would be grateful if the Minister told the House whether he intends to publish such guidance, statutory or otherwise.

I want to make two points that may appear fatuous, although I hope they do not. One has to consider what may go wrong when the Bill is implemented. Under the designation and notification procedures, the appropriate nature conservation bodies are defined as English Nature and the Countryside Council for Wales. What will happen when the area concerned is in the jurisdiction of both bodies, in the Bristol channel? There is no provision for them to act jointly.

It is not inconceivable that the problem will arise. The water borders between England and Wales, off Somerset, are quite odd. Because of local authority boundaries, a

[Mr. Heath]

spit of English water goes down the middle of the Bristol channel; Steep Holme is in one country and Flatholm is in the other. My point is not therefore completely ridiculous: can the two nature conservation bodies act together?

My second point may seem even sillier, but I must ask the Minister to consider it. It concerns the definition of a marine SSI. The sea bed and land below the sea bed is mentioned, as well as the water column. In the legislation dealing with land sites of special scientific interest there is a clear legal understanding that the column of air above the land is also included. Will the Minister assure me that that is also the case in this Bill, which refers to the water column but not the air above it? Clearly, one of the nature conservation interests may be sea birds, and disturbance of sea birds above the surface of the sea could be detrimental to the reasons for designation. I would hate to find that that was not included in the definition in legislation because of a misunderstanding or a misconstruction of the terms used.

Mr. Randall: The hon. Gentleman raises an interesting point. However, it is most likely that the birds affected would be sea duck, whose feeding area is on the surface, and not necessarily birds that are in flight above it. However, it is an interesting point and I would be grateful to the Minister if he were to clarify it.

Mr. Heath: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He is right. Sea birds, with the exception of the albatross, do not tend to stay airborne for long periods. However, as we have discussed previously with regard to SSSIs, disturbance to the birds rather than destruction of the habitat is included. One can imagine a construction that causes no damage to the sea or the sea bed but that, nevertheless, irreparably damages the sea bird interest of a particular area. If a clever lawyer working for a corporation somewhere were able to say that that was not part of the marine site of special interest because it was above the water column, it would be a great shame. Perhaps the Minister will consider that point or take advice on it. I hope that I am barking up the wrong tree about that, and that my argument is a complete waste of time, but let us be sure.

Shona McIsaac: First, I apologise to the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) and the Minister for not being in the Chamber earlier to hear their opening remarks.

As I said earlier, my constituency is bounded by the River Humber, one of the biggest estuaries in this country. Indeed, it is an important breeding ground for migratory sea birds, and many of the mud flats above the low water mark are already designated as sites of special scientific interest. Those areas are covered by what we might call land-based legislation, whereas I understand that this Bill relates to areas below the mean low water mark. When the tide goes out in the Humber, it goes out an awful long way. On some days, one feels that one can walk to the Netherlands or Denmark, such is the expanse of mud flats. However, when the tide comes in, it comes in fast, which causes a problem when people get stranded on sand banks.

I support the Bill, but I would like clarification from the Minister on a couple of points. The Bill makes it clear that designation of a marine site of special interest will be based on scientific evidence of its flora and fauna or on geological or physiographical criteria. Earlier this week, the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman) managed to get a private Member's Bill on marine archaeology through Committee. That Bill mainly gave responsibility for marine archaeology to English Heritage, which had not occurred before, and it had all-party support. What is the interplay between that Bill and this Bill? Under this Bill, geological and physiographical aspects will be taken into account, and submerged landscapes are of scientific interest in marine archaeology.

11.15 am

Mr. Randall: I was on the Committee that considered the National Heritage Bill to which the hon. Lady refers, although, unfortunately, I was only briefly present for its proceedings. That Bill has the support of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, and is seen as part of a wider picture. It might cover wrecks that would be marine sites of special interest because of the important biodiversity found there. The Bills are compatible rather than being in competition.

Shona McIsaac: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that clarification, because I wanted to establish whether the two Bills would be compatible. The hon. Gentleman is right that many archaeological remains such as wrecks of ships and even aircraft become important marine habitats, which create great biodiversity. We must therefore strike the right balance in that regard. I hope that the Minister will shed light on the interplay between marine archaeology and this Bill, and on submerged landscapes that are the result of changed sea levels.

Mr. Randall: The hon. Lady may also be interested to know that the National Heritage Bill was introduced in the other place by my noble Friend Baroness Anelay, who has said that if we were lucky enough to obtain the passage of this Bill to the other place, she would help to support it. That emphasises the compatibility of the two Bills.

Shona McIsaac: Again, I thank the hon. Gentleman for that clarification. My fondness for this Bill is growing by the minute.

Fishing and the fishing industry is a slightly more controversial subject. My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) mentioned that there was still a distant water fleet based mainly in Grimsby and Hull. Some—not all—fishermen are concerned about this Bill. Those concerns revolve first around notification. Many distant water trawlermen are away for long periods of time, and I hope that they are notified in some way. Fishermen are saying that the introduction of these special sites will exclude them from important fishing grounds. Because of the slim margins that exist today in the fishing industry, some fishermen are fearful that the Bill may affect their livelihoods. Given that quotas can be draconian, I hope that the Minister will appreciate the concern expressed by some trawlermen in my constituency. I have explained to trawlermen that the introduction of these sites will create important breeding grounds for fish species, and that excluding commercial fisheries from those sites could be beneficial to the fishing industry.

The other point that I want to mention on behalf of the fishing community is the level of fines imposed for damage—£20,000, I understand. Again, concern has been expressed that that is a high level. Will there be any way for fishermen to appeal against fines imposed on them? Trawl nets are very large and can create damage. Marine biologists have expressed concern about the damage done to coral reefs off Britain.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon said, coral reefs are not just found in Australia, and concern has been expressed about the effect that trawl nets and fishing equipment might have on the reefs. Given the size of the nets, we must be very careful where we place markers in such areas. Trawl nets might damage the reef even though the boat itself was well outside the area. We must consider how we can deal with that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon referred to whale and dolphin watching and I was surprised that my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) did not suggest that we could watch whales from canoes. That would have given him another opportunity to mention canoeing in the debate. However, I wanted to refer briefly to grey and common seals, because the United Kingdom has about 40 per cent. of the world's population of these species.

Some members of the fishing industry suggest that some of those seals should be culled because of the amount of fish they eat. However, the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley)—he has responsibility for fisheries—has made it clear that there is no scientific evidence that would justify the culling of the species. In fact, the scientific evidence shows that dolphins eat more fish than seals ever do. However, seals are more visible to fisherman, who then blame the seals and want to cull their numbers.

My family is from an area on the coast of Scotland and I know that many seals breed near the islands there. Will the Bill offer more protection to colonies of seals? I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will be able to confirm that there is no scientific basis for culling seals. In fact, the seal population in this country is much lower than it was before the distemper outbreak took place in the 1980s. We must also consider this aspect of marine conservation.

I support the Bill and wish it well. However, I hope that my right hon. Friend will clarify some of the issues that I have raised.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac), who spoke eloquently about her constituency interest in the matter. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) on his persistence and skill in bringing the Bill this far. I hope that he will be successful in getting it on to the statute book. He has a good chance of doing that because of the constructive and helpful approach that the Government have taken. I congratulate the Minister on his contribution.

I do not intend to delay the House for long, but I hope that the debate on this group of new clauses and amendments—in particular that on new clause 4, which relates to the identification and notification of MSSIs—is the appropriate one on which to discuss fishing interests. We now better understand the dynamic nature of the marine environment.

Although I did not serve on the Committee considering the Bill—that is my loss—and although I am only a humble Back Bencher, I wish to consider two constituency interests: conservation and the inshore fishing industry. Those interests are complementary to each other. Furthermore, my constituency lies in and on the Thames estuary; Canvey island and part of Two Tree island are in the Thames.

The National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations has a valid interest in the Bill. Commercial fishermen depend on the marine environment to sustain and replenish fish stocks, so I hope that the Minister will tell us whether the NFFO's concerns have been fully taken on board. I was interested to hear the remarks of the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) on the subject—he spoke quite wisely—so will the Minister place on record how the Bill will affect, if indeed, it will, the imminent and much-needed reform of the common fisheries policy? Although my views are well known in the House—I believe that we should get out of the policy and have nothing to do with it—clarification on that point would be appreciated.

I wish the Bill well. I will not detain the House any further other than to congratulate again my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and the Minister on their approach.

Mr. Meacher: I felt the need to apologise for the length of my opening remarks, and I now have to apologise for the length of my closing remarks. This is the main group of amendments and a range of important and highly pertinent questions have been asked by Members on both sides. I shall try to deal with them as quickly and as succinctly as I can.

The hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) asked about the effect of the duty to notify being reduced to a power and wondered whether English Nature and the Countryside Council for Wales will still be given the resources to enable them effectively to establish a network of important marine areas. I said—I hope that he accepts this—that a power may be appropriate on the ground that it would offer greater flexibility and provide more time given the work that the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and conservation agencies are doing on other issues. The change will allow for scientific information to be gathered and for work on the criteria to be carried out. As I have said, the nature conservation agencies already have priorities for marine work.

On the point about resources, I said that we intend to provide the extra resources that will enable English Nature properly to implement the provisions in the Bill. In Wales, it will be a matter for the National Assembly, but the Government are putting their resources behind the Bill.

When a site clearly merits designation as an MSSI, the hon. Gentleman asked whether English Nature and the Countryside Council for Wales will be expected to notify the Secretary of State or the National Assembly for Wales of that fact. The answer is yes. I assure him that, where a site merits designation as an MSSI against the criteria published by the confirming authority, I certainly expect English Nature to notify that fact, and I am quite sure that it will. Notification in Wales is, of course, a matter for the National Assembly.

When English Nature and the Countryside Council for Wales go as far is reasonably practical to secure consensus between interested parties, the hon. Gentleman

[Mr. Meacher]

asked me whether I could confirm that when English Nature and the Countryside Council for Wales have gone as far as reasonably practicable to secure consensus between interested parties, the Secretary of State and the National Assembly for Wales will confirm notification of an MSSI despite outstanding objections. Is absolute consensus required? The answer is that the confirming authority is quite properly obliged to consider all the representations made to him or her in deciding whether to confirm a site. However, I give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that it will not be necessary to obtain 100 per cent. consensus of opinion before the authority confirms the site.

11.30 am

The hon. Gentleman asked whether interested parties other than the statutory nature conservation bodies will be consulted during development of the criteria and, again, the answer is yes. As I said, I would expect the site selection criteria for England to be based on the work that is being carried out by the JNCC under the auspices of the review, and there will be full consultation with the appropriate nature conservation agencies, but we intend to have public consultation on the criteria. As I said, before publishing them, the Secretary of State will also take full account of the views of colleagues or other bodies making representations.

On the question of consistency between the criteria developed for England and those developed for Wales, this is a devolved issue and there is the potential for discrepancy, although I think that there is a recognition on both sides that, if possible, it is best avoided. I would expect the criteria for England to be based on the work on nationally important site selection carried out by the JNCC as part of the review of marine nature conservation. That will have a Great Britain perspective and it will be the responsibility of the Secretary of State, in consultation with English Nature, to ensure that the criteria are suitable for England. I repeat, because it is the formal position, that the criteria for Wales are a matter for the National Assembly for Wales, but there will certainly be discussion between us to ensure that we obtain a common view if possible.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether the Secretary of State or the National Assembly for Wales would be able to set aside the advice of English Nature or the Countryside Council for Wales on criteria for site selection, and the answer is that in considering a notification the most important issue is—

Tony Cunningham: This might sound strange, but where we have, as we have in my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac), huge areas of sand once the tide goes out and we are establishing an MSSI according to various criteria, can we bear in mind the criteria for the SSSIs on land? If the low water mark is the benchmark, sea birds could be protected on a certain amount of sand once the tide goes out, but not when it comes in, and there could be two different criteria. Will my right hon. Friend bear in mind the criteria for SSSIs when establishing the criteria for their marine equivalent?

Mr. Meacher: I had intended to deal with that when I replied to my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac), but in the light of that intervention I shall do so now.

In deciding the boundaries between SSSIs and MSSIs we shall seek to avoid there being a point at which there is a discontinuity. The mean low water mark has been chosen as the upper landward limit of an MSSI, as that generally corresponds to the lower seaward limit under which SSSIs are designated under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, so the problem about which my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham) is concerned should not arise.

I return to the point raised by the hon. Member for Uxbridge about setting aside the advice of the nature conservation agencies. I repeat that in considering a notification the most important issue is the special interest and whether the conservation agency has demonstrated its existence. That is the heart of the process. Representations may choose to question the scientific basis of the proposed notification, but in exercising its functions, the confirming authority will also, as I said, be under the duty set out in new clause 1 to have regard to the desirability of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development.

We will consider those issues on a case-by-case basis and the aim is to balance them carefully. I cannot give an assurance that either those who have particular concerns for development interests or those who have particular concerns for conservation interests will automatically override the other. Sustainable development is designed to try to obtain a balance in which neither automatically overrides the other, but in a particular case the aim is to reconcile them.

The hon. Gentleman also asked me to confirm that operations likely to damage can be included in the conservation statement issued under new clause 7, and that where they are included they will constitute part of a statutory notification. The statement of views about the management of the site is likely to include an indication of the operations which, in the agency's view, would be likely to cause damage to the special features. That is an essential part of the statement. Representations may be made about the statement, including a list of operations. The statement is likely to be helpful, particularly, as I said, in taking decisions under clause 3 in relation to the carrying out of or consenting to operations.

The hon. Gentleman also asked me, for the purposes of clause 3, which relates to competent marine authorities' duties, whether the Crown Estate Commissioners are considered a competent marine authority. Under new clause 5, the definition of competent marine authority is now a great deal closer to the definition of competent authority in the habitats regulations and, as with those regulations, bodies such as the Crown Estate Commissioners are competent marine authorities.

I come now to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) in the course of an intervention on new clause 2(4). The majority of the sea bed covered by the Bill is owned by the Crown and new clause 2 is about the placement of markers to mark the site. If markers are to be placed, it is only right that the landowner's permission is sought. The refusal of permission to place a marker does not mean that a site cannot be fixed, but it is certainly right that that permission should be sought and I imagine that in the overwhelming majority of cases it would be given.

I come now to several points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) and the many amendments that we have considered carefully. First, with regard to whether river estuaries are included, the answer is that they are if they are intertidal. As I said earlier, an MSSI can be notified in any area covered by tidal waters between the mean low water mark out to the limit of territorial waters.

My hon. Friend asked about notification and advertisements and I can assure him that the appropriate nature conservation authority will, as a matter of best practice, try to involve all relevant persons about a notification. During the work on the review, I would expect English Nature to start looking more closely at the mechanisms for site notification. I have taken on board my hon. Friend's comments and I shall convey the organisations that he has listed to English Nature for consideration. Of course, the Secretary of State will and, I think, must, retain the power to direct conservation agencies if he or she feels that any relevant bodies have been missed.

My hon. Friend mentioned advertisements. The Secretary of State retains a power to direct, but I am sure that the conservation body will consider placing appropriate advertisements in journals covering the industry, such as *Fishing News*, as well as using electronic means of communication, which could be especially important in respect of fishing fleets that go out to sea for considerable periods. My hon. Friend also asked about giving notice. That means notice in writing, but includes notice given by electronic means; we certainly do not want to shut our eyes to new technology.

My hon. Friend referred to international best practice and mentioned Zakynthos and the Great Barrier reef. Obviously, the Government are advised on conservation issues by conservation agencies and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. I assure him that those bodies are fully involved in the international scientific community and will take account of international best practice—that is obviously what we want to do—including site management that takes account of tourism interests.

My hon. Friend also asked how competent marine authorities would take account of advice on what constitutes a potentially damaging operation and how representations would be considered. When deciding whether an operation is likely to damage the features for which a site has been designated, we would expect the competent marine authority to have regard to any list of potentially damaging operations that may be contained in the conservation statement for that site. I repeat the term "have regard to", which means taking the issues seriously, and considering them carefully and fully—it does not mean looking at them and discarding them—and is used in statute. In line with other considerations to which the competent marine authority must have regard when taking decisions, I must accept that the need for the operation may outweigh the pure nature conservation consideration. That is the essence of sustainable development.

Finally, my hon. Friend asked me how representations would be considered. Of course, representations about notifications will be considered fully. Where possible, we will encourage a dialogue with English Nature to see whether the concerns can be resolved. That is the best way of proceeding, as it is best to achieve the least confrontational approach possible. Currently, we see no need for the confirming authority to consider those representations in public before reaching a decision, but we will obviously consider very carefully the procedures that we propose to adopt, taking account of what hon. Members have said, before the Bill is implemented. We will certainly ensure a full and fair process.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) asked about the production of guidance. I repeat that it is our intention that guidance on the provisions will be published before the Bill takes effect. That makes sense; it ensures as far as possible that everyone fully understands exactly what is required. I can certainly give a full commitment on that point, but I do not see a need for statutory guidance. Indeed, it is much easier to change such guidance where appropriate if it is not statutory.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome is correct that sea fisheries committees will be important in terms of the Bill's implementation. The list of competent marine authorities is drawn from a similar list for SSSIs on land. I can assure him that sea fisheries committees are competent marine authorities and are mentioned as one of the bodies capable of making management schemes. He asked about cross-border sites and made an ingenious suggestion about the Bristol channel. The general rule is that sites in England will be notified by English Nature, while in Wales they will be notified by the Countryside Council for Wales. There will be no cross-border sites, but sites can be notified to each other. Where sites abut, I expect their management to be carried out with a high degree of co-operation. In terms of the middle of the Bristol channel, those involved will have to talk fully with one another.

11.45 am

I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes asked about whether archaeological sites such as wrecks were covered by the Bill. If fauna and flora in or near wrecks merit notification under the specified criteria, we expect such sites to be notified on that basis.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome referred to protection of the air above the water. The Bill is primarily a site-protection mechanism. I understand that the protection afforded to species such as birds while airborne is covered by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. The arrangement is similar to SSSIs on land, which protect the habitat, but not the air above it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes also referred to seals, which are protected by the Conservation of Seals Act 1970. In the UK, four seal colonies are protected by European designation. Whether seal colonies will be covered by the Bill will be down to the criteria that may result from the work of the review of marine nature conservation.

I think that I have dealt with all the points that have been raised, apart from those made by the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink), who asked whether the Bill would affect fisheries. Of course, sea fisheries committees already have powers to make byelaws that regulate

[Mr. Meacher]

fisheries for marine environment purposes, including the conservation of flora and fauna. Powers to control fishing already exist separately. The Bill will clarify the position of nationally important sites of marine interest and provide a mechanism through management schemes whereby appropriate operations may continue.

I think that my very last point relates to what the hon. Gentleman asked me about the common fisheries policy. *[Laughter.]* Much as one might like this private Member's Bill, I do not think that it is an instrument for changing the common fisheries policy. Conclusions from the review of the policy may have implications for the operation and management of inshore fisheries, but we will have to await the outcome of the review before those implications can be assessed. I understand that the Commission's proposals are likely to emerge shortly and decisions are needed by the end of the year.

I hope that in light of the assurances that I have given, the House will accept the new clause.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 3

DAMAGE OR DESTRUCTION IN A MARINE SITE

'(1) A person is guilty of an offence if he—

(a) intentionally or recklessly damages or destroys any of the flora, fauna, or geological or physiographical features by reason of which a marine area is a marine site of special interest; and

(b) knew that what he damaged or destroyed was within a marine site of special interest.

(2) Subsection (1) does not have effect in relation to a competent marine authority acting in the exercise of its functions.

(3) It is a defence for a person charged with an offence under subsection (1) to prove that the damage or destruction was the incidental result of a lawful operation and could not reasonably have been avoided.

(4) A person guilty of an offence under this section is liable—

(a) on summary conviction, to a fine not exceeding £20,000;

(b) on conviction on indictment, to a fine.

(5) In determining the amount of any fine to be imposed on a person convicted of an offence under this section, the court must in particular have regard to any financial benefit which has accrued or appears likely to accrue to that person in consequence of the offence.

(6) Where an offence under this section committed by a body corporate is proved to have been committed with the consent or connivance of, or to be attributable to any neglect on the part of—

(a) any director, manager, secretary or other similar officer of the body corporate; or

(b) any person who was purporting to act in any such capacity,

he, as well, as the body corporate, is guilty of the offence and is liable to be proceeded against and punished accordingly.

(7) Where the affairs of a body corporate are managed by its members, subsection (1) applies in relation to the acts and defaults of a member in connection with his functions of management as if he were a director of the body corporate.

(8) An offence under this section is for the purposes of conferring jurisdiction to be deemed to have been committed in any place where the offender is found or to which he is first brought after the commission of the offence.'.—*[Mr. Meacher.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Meacher: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 26 to 29.

Mr. Meacher: The Bill provides for no offences and the Government felt that that was an important omission. New clause 3 introduces a new offence of intentionally damaging or destroying the flora, fauna or geological or physiographical features of a marine site of special interest that make it of special interest, or being reckless as to whether the special interest would be destroyed or damaged. An offence is committed only if a person or body other than the competent marine authority damages or destroys the special feature, knowing that it is within an MSSI. The matter was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) during the previous debate. We have fixed the fine at the level of £20,000. I did not say then that this is a new offence of intentionally damaging or destroying or being reckless. That is important. An offence would not be committed in other circumstances.

Examples of offences under the provision would include intentional reckless damage to or destruction of the special feature of an MSSI through the collection of material or direct impact by divers, the digging up of sea grass beds to put down moorings or breaking off and removing sea fans where the person knew that what he damaged or destroyed was within an MSSI. I hope that that reassures those who think that they may unwittingly and inadvertently fall foul of the Bill. We are talking about deliberate, reckless action.

Mr. Swayne: I take the Minister's point and congratulate him on the new clause, but I remind him that the provision includes a defence. What is the reason for that?

Mr. Meacher: That is a good point. I shall come to that thread of my speech a little later—in fact, now.

Subsection (3) of the new clause would provide a defence where the person can show that the activity that caused the damage was

> "the incidental result of a lawful operation and could not reasonably have been avoided."

The defence is intended to protect someone who acts without malice or recklessness and is carrying out a lawful operation, but as a result may incidentally cause the relevant effects.

Mr. Swayne: If the offence is reckless or with intent, how can it be a defence to say that it was not carried out with malice?

Mr. Meacher: If it is intentional action to damage or destroy flora or fauna, or if it is reckless, the defence will not apply. It is intended to protect people who do not fall into that category.

There is nothing new in the provision. It is consistent with the defence contained in section 4(2)(c) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981—passed by a Conservative Government, whom we support in that respect—relating to the protection of birds and section 10(3)(c), which concerns the protection of schedule 5 wild animals.

The penalties in subsection (4) are consistent with the SSSI provisions. Other parts of the new clause are more technical. For instance, it explains what happens where an offence is committed by a corporate body with the consent, or owing to the neglect, of an officer of the body, and confers jurisdiction on the courts in the place where an offender is found or first brought to after the offence has been committed.

The precedent that we had in mind for the offence was section 28P(6) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 concerning SSSIs. That section was framed primarily to discourage actions, mainly by persons other than owners or occupiers of land, which were causing damage. A similar disincentive is required for marine sites.

I am aware of concerns that activities carried out in pursuit of the public rights of navigation and fishing would be assessed against the provisions of the new offence. However, I stress that the offence is committed only where a person intends to damage or recklessly damages the protected features of an MSSI. The person must have known that what he damaged was in an MSSI. The defence that I described applies where a member of the public is carrying out a lawful activity such as navigation, and damage to an MSSI-protected feature is the incidental result. However, he could not avail himself of the defence had there been reasonable steps that he could have taken to avoid the damage, but he did not take them. Ultimately, the court must make a judgment on the matter.

Mr. Randall: When we start talking about legal niceties it is as well for me to keep out of it, but I presume that if someone was warned that their action would be reckless and they carried on, there would be no defence.

Mr. Meacher: Yes. That would be regarded as an intent recklessly to damage, having been warned that such an action would be contrary to the provisions.

I should emphasise that the main purpose of the offence is to act as a deterrent. A fine of £20,000 should be a significant deterrent to individual acts of irresponsibility that result in deliberate or reckless damage or destruction.

I shall deal with the enforcement of the provision. I appreciate that the enforcement of nature conservation legislation in the marine environment is a difficult issue, especially as no one body is responsible for it. It is clear that the enforcement of marine offences requires clarification. That is why the Partnership for Action against Wildlife Crime, sometimes known as PAW, which is co-chaired by my Department, is setting up a sub-group to consider how marine enforcement can be improved. The Bill is not an appropriate vehicle to address that wider issue, and I take the point made by the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall).

In its interim report published last year, the review of marine nature conservation recommended that the Government should commission an exercise to identify best practice in marine enforcement both here and abroad. That will examine available methods of enforcement and common approaches concerning the relationship between regulators and sea users. The results of the review will be taken into account when looking more closely at the enforcement of the Bill's provisions.

Amendments Nos. 26 to 29 are principally designed to clarify the byelaw-making procedures in clause 6. Amendment No. 26 provides that the consent of the Secretary of State, or the National Assembly for Wales in respect of Wales, is needed for a nature conservation agency to make byelaws for the protection of MSSIs. That is consistent with section 37(1) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. The power to make byelaws will be a useful tool for agencies to use in trying to modify behaviour where it is causing damage to features of acknowledged importance. It will draw on the examination of enforcement in the marine environment to which I referred.

We thought it would be helpful to rectify this omission in the Bill. I commend the new clause and amendments to the House.

Mr. Randall: I thank the Minister for including the new clause. It would not have been appropriate for me to include measures such as fines in a private Member's Bill. I am grateful to the Government for dealing with that, because without proper deterrence such legislation is not necessarily worth the paper it is written on.

12 noon

Mr. Swayne: I merely want to dwell on the content of my intervention. I acknowledge that the Minister has done a service to the Bill by introducing the new clause, but I am concerned about the defence. I accept that my concern might be due to my limitations in understanding such legal matters, but it is worth reinforcing the point.

The offence is clear—it is intentionally or recklessly to damage or destroy flora or fauna if the defendant knows that what he has damaged or destroyed is within a marine site of special interest. It follows logically from that that the defence would be that the defendant did not know he was within a designated area or that he was not intentionally reckless in his activities. However, to include a defence that that might be an incidental consequence of an otherwise lawful activity undermines the nature of the offence.

Given that my experience of the sort of activities that we are talking about is limited and my expertise does not extend to maritime matters, it would be helpful if the Minister could provide examples to which the defence might apply. Perhaps he could give some examples of the activities that might destroy the maritime flora and fauna, but would otherwise be lawful and provide an adequate defence under the Bill. The new clause seems to let people off the hook.

People are annoyed and frustrated about damage to SSSIs on land when they see designation of those sites being completely ignored by developers or landowners and there is insufficient penalty to provide a disincentive. In framing the new clause, the Minister has dealt with that: he has provided an adequate disincentive through a fine. I should hate to see that undermined by this defence. I think that my argument has force, and I note from the body language of Labour Members with greater legal experience than I have that that view is not confined to me. I would certainly welcome greater clarification from the Minister.

Mr. Dismore: I should like to follow the points made by the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne), because I suspect that my right hon. Friend the Minister has his mens rea jumbled up in this new clause.

[Mr. Dismore]

Subsection (1) of the new clause sets out a clear offence of intentionally or recklessly causing damage, but I am concerned about the defence, which seems more appropriate to damage caused negligently. The new clause provides an unnecessary defence. Let us suppose, for example, that a ship was in distress at sea in a storm and the ship's captain dropped anchor. I presume that that would be a lawful operation. If it caused damage, it could be said that the damage could not reasonably have been avoided. When the ship's captain dropped anchor, he was not intentionally trying to destroy the flora or fauna under the sea bed, but was trying to save the lives of the people on the ship; nor was he acting recklessly.

It is difficult to imagine circumstances in which someone intentionally or recklessly damages the sea bed or anything appertaining to it, yet at the same time is engaging in a lawful operation that could not reasonably have been avoided.

Further to the point made by the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall), a warning would be wholly irrelevant. One could issue a warning that what someone was about to do would intentionally or recklessly cause damage and that person could knowingly go ahead and do it, but he would still have a defence under new clause 3(3). Thus any warning becomes otiose. My right hon. Friend the Minister should consider whether subsection (3) is needed. I believe that it would be needed only if the offence were intentionally, recklessly or negligently to damage the sea bed. In those circumstances, I see a need for the defence, but as matters stand it drives a potential coach and horses through the offence.

I refer now to the corporate liability. I am pleased to see that we are lifting the corporate veil and going to the directors, managers and secretaries of a company if they are behind the game. As the Minister knows, I have been keen on this concept in respect of corporate killing, on which I have yet to win the argument. However, it is important. I am concerned about the reference to neglect on the part of the director, manager, secretary or so forth, because we have the mens rea of neglect while the offence itself has the mens rea of intention or reckless behaviour. That seems to be contradictory. If a manager intentionally or recklessly consents to or connives in the offence being committed, so be it, but why should a negligent director face a greater risk of penalty than the person causing the offence?

We must have another look at this provision and either make the offence one that includes negligence with knowledge, which it would be easy to do, in which case the defence would stand, or remove the defence and redraft the director's liability to bring it more in line with the offence.

There is a series of different interlocking issues which do not quite add up and which I regret to say would probably provide a field day for my professional colleagues, were I still practising as a solicitor. I still have a practising certificate, but I am pleased to say that I am not taking cases now. I have more important things to do.

Mr. Heath: The hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) has covered some of the ground that I intended to cover. There are internal contradictions in the offences laid out in new clause 3. I welcome the fact that the Government have introduced the new clause, but it needs a little revision, because it is hard to reconcile the offence in subsection (1) with the defence in subsection (3).

I suppose that it is conceivable that somebody might find himself with a snagged net and believe that to retrieve the net he must cause intentional damage, which might however be held to be incidental to a legal operation.

Mr. Dismore *rose—*

Mr. Heath: I am about to be interrupted by a member of the legal profession, who will tell me why I am wrong.

Mr. Dismore: In those circumstances, the motivating factor behind the act would be not to cause damage but to release the net. One could not say, therefore, that the intent would be to cause damage. It would also be difficult to bring the action within the definition of recklessness, so I am not entirely with the hon. Gentleman on that point.

Mr. Heath: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who has more experience of such matters than I have. I was merely suggesting that I could conceive of a circumstance in which that might apply. I agree with the hon. Gentleman's basic hypothesis that, given that the offence is termed intentional or reckless damage, the prosecuting authority must establish that the damage was intentional or reckless in order to achieve a prosecution. Clearly, any action that is accidental or incidental does not fall within that category.

My concern is almost the reverse: the provision under subsection (1)(b) and the need for the prosecuting authority to establish that the defendant knew that the damage or destruction was within a marine site of special interest. That is difficult to prove to the satisfaction of a court. Unless a specific notification has been given, it is hard to prove that the person at that time knew that he was in an MSSI.

We have had similar debates in other capacities, and I have always preferred the absolute offence against mitigating factors, rather than the requirement that the burden of proof be put on the prosecuting authorities to establish not only that the damage was intentional or reckless but that the person knew about it. Had the provision been phrased in such a way that the person might reasonably have been expected to know that he or she was in an MSSI, that would be a different matter, because there would not be an absolute need to prove that the person was in possession of that fact when the offence was committed.

The issue of whether the wording is right is a minor quibble, although it will need to be tested at some stage, and may be tested in another place. I broadly agree with the Minister's proposals.

I also agree with the point made by the hon. Member for Hendon about negligence by a body corporate. If such a body has simply not given clear enough instructions to its staff, why should it necessarily be guilty of an offence? If an instruction has not been issued, that does not constitute a deliberate act of intentional or reckless damage or destruction.

Some guidance on byelaws would be of assistance. I strongly support a legal framework for the protection of MSSIs, but it must be fair to all those who might be affected. Prior consultation on the substance of the byelaws with particular regard for the interests of those who use the seas for various purposes is important. We should consider not only the needs of the fishing industry at large—which are important—but the way that byelaws might affect low-impact fishing methods: for example, the mackerel handliners, bass longliners, cove shell fishermen or even the few remaining mudhorse fishermen on the mudflats of Bridgwater bay.

Those activities would not have a significant effect on conservation areas but could be caught by byelaws that were unintentionally framed too widely. I hope that proper regard will be paid to those interests in the drawing up and confirming of byelaws.

Mrs. Helen Clark (Peterborough): My remarks will cover some familiar issues, but as it is important that these views are fully recorded, I beg the indulgence of the House if some of my points have already been made.

I am pleased to be able to contribute to the debate on this important Bill. I spoke in favour of it on Second Reading and had the honour of serving as a member of the Standing Committee that considered it. It is clear from the many new clauses and amendments that have been tabled that my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall)—the Bill's promoter—have worked extremely closely together since those proceedings, and I congratulate them on their constructive approach.

I also want to highlight the wide support for the Bill throughout the country. Anyone who thinks that this is a side issue is not living in the real world. Many Members on both sides of the House have received letters from constituents, whether our constituencies are land or sea-bound—Peterborough is certainly not sea-bound—asking us to support the Bill. That demonstrates once again the deep concern for the marine environment.

I was pleased to receive a letter from the Wildlife and Countryside Link—its representatives might be in the House today—which is an umbrella organisation for environmental groups that express support for the successful consideration of the Bill.

Government new clause 3 is a very welcome addition, as we have stressed. It will mean that anyone found intentionally or recklessly damaging or destroying any of the interests of an MSSI, when they knew that what they had damaged or destroyed lay within such a site, could be guilty of an offence. However, I hope that my right hon. Friend will be able to clarify a few issues in relation to the new offence.

In making my first point, I am traversing familiar ground. The Government propose to add a defence, but, like the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne), I am concerned about that. The provision states that, where the damage or disturbance was the incidental result of an otherwise lawful activity, the person causing the damage would not be guilty of an offence. The SSSI protection measures provided under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981—to which my right hon. Friend referred—do not provide that defence because fishing is a lawful activity. There is a public right to fish and we should protect it. It is unclear why such a defence is needed for marine SSIs or how it will work in practice in the marine environment.

12.15 pm

The marine environment is subject to the exercise of public rights—more so than on land. One example is the public right to fish. It is possible that the exercise of such rights could result in intentional or reckless damage to a marine SSI; for example, weighing anchor within a lophelia coral reef—although I have never tried that. Will my right hon. Friend clarify whether damage from the exercise of such public rights would be considered an incidental result of an otherwise lawful activity, even if the person carrying out the activity had been informed that it was damaging a site? Will he also confirm whether someone who exercised a public right, but had been informed that in doing so they were damaging, or would damage, a marine SSI, could not then rely on the

"incidental result of a lawful operation"

defence to escape censure?

I shall now cover some new ground. The second difference between the offence in the 1981 Act and new clause 3 is that the Act refers not only to intentional and reckless damage or destruction but also to disturbance of notified fauna. The issue of reckless disturbance of marine wildlife is close to my heart, as hon. Members on both sides of the House are aware. In February 2000, I introduced the Marine Wildlife Protection Bill—with the able support of the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society and other non-governmental organisations—to tackle the problems of harassment of, and disturbance to, marine wildlife by motorised marine leisure vessels and jet-skis.

My Bill would not only have enabled local authorities to protect marine wildlife and promote safety by prohibiting the use of motorised marine leisure vessels in coastal areas, but would have made it an offence to disturb marine wildlife recklessly or intentionally. Since then, the Government have passed the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, with which I was proud to be involved. The Act was a significant and welcome step forward for nature conservation. As a result of it, there is an offence of intentional or reckless disturbance of whales, dolphins, porpoises and basking sharks—something which my Bill also sought to address. That was an important change, on which the Government can build in this Bill by extending that provision to other wildlife.

One of my major concerns when I introduced my Bill was the level of hidden disturbance, and indeed persecution, of marine wildlife. I had hoped that this Bill would face up to those problems and tackle them head on. Therefore, I respectfully ask the Minister to clarify why, as a departure from the offence in the Wildlife and Countryside Act, disturbance of fauna is not included in the offence proposed by new clause 3.

Mr. Meacher: There are some concerns about the new clause, although I hope to allay them and obviously we shall consider further what has been said. First, the hon. Member for Oxbridge—*[Laughter.]* That was a Freudian slip. The hon. Member for Uxbridge said that he was grateful for the Government's avidity; I thank him for that.

The hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) discussed further the concerns that he adumbrated earlier and asked for examples of where the defence might apply and why it was necessary. During preparation of the Bill, various persons and organisations have asked us what its

[Mr. Meacher]

impact would be in terms of the commission of offences. The most obvious examples are the fisheries industry and the public engaging in recreational navigation. We believe that it is useful for a defence to be made explicit in the Bill because it assures those persons and organisations of its parameters.

I entirely understand the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) that it would be otiose to make the defence explicit. The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) said that either an offence is committed under subsection (1) or it is not, and asked why, if it is not, we need a defence, because the defence would be that no offence had been committed under subsection (1). I also understand that argument. However, the fact that we were approached by the fisheries industry and some others for assurance persuaded us that the inclusion of the defence was justified.

I explained how the defence would operate. Perhaps I should add that if a person were charged, they would certainly need to prove that the defence was available to them in those circumstances, but I repeat that the clause is consistent with provisions in other nature conservation legislation, which, as far as I am aware, operates without problems. However, I am sure that further clarification of the provisions of the clause will be made in the guidance that we intend to introduce; I am glad to give the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome an assurance on that point.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon raised the issue of corporate liability and the negligence of directors. Directors are liable alongside the corporation only when, in the management of the corporation, they have consented to the offence, connived in committing the offence or been neglectful about whether the corporation committed the offence. The negligence of directors can lead to their becoming criminally liable along with the corporation, where it leads to the corporation's committing a criminal offence. I believe that I heard the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome say that he wanted us to consider again whether we should include negligence with knowledge. Perhaps I should discuss the matter further with him afterwards. I am quite prepared to consider the matter in the light of what he says.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mrs. Clark) for introducing a Bill on a similar subject and for her long-term commitment to the marine environment. She asked whether the right of anchorage of vessels would be removed by the clause. The customary right of anchoring would of course be subject to the provisions of the clause in the same way as the public rights of fishing and navigation would. I do not see why a person who drops anchor knowing that he or she is in an MSSI and intentionally or recklessly damages a special feature by reason of which it has been notified—such as a coral reef, which she mentioned—should be immune from prosecution. Of course the defence in subsection (3) would be available, where the criteria for the defence were met, but I would obviously expect the defence to apply where it was necessary for a vessel to drop anchor because of force majeure, as was stated in the debate, or because it was in distress, or for the purpose of rendering assistance to persons or ships in danger or distress.

My hon. Friend also asked whether we could extend the provisions to include the disturbance of wildlife, which was the thrust of her Bill. Of course, this is a private Member's Bill, not a Government Bill. Although the disturbance of wildlife is a relevant and interesting phenomenon, it raises further, considerable issues, such as how it should be defined, and I do not think that the Bill represents the channel to deal with them.

Finally, my hon. Friend asked why disturbance of fauna is not included in the offence under the Bill. I should point out, as I have already, that the Bill is promoted by the hon. Member for Uxbridge. Given the amount of Government involvement, hon. Members might think that it has become a quasi-Government Bill, but it is a private Member's Bill.

As I said earlier, the Government feel strongly that a criminal offence of intentional or reckless damage should be incorporated to strengthen the protection offered by the Bill, and that that offence should be relevant and proportionate to the marine environment. Similar provisions were introduced in the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and apply when a specific threat is posed by disturbance of certain species. Disturbance of marine species is more relevant to species-protection legislation rather than to site-based mechanisms in the Bill. My hon. Friend correctly drew attention to a gap that remains, but I do not think that we can resolve the issue in considering the Bill. Again, on that basis, I hope that, although there are doubts about the operation of the defence, those legal provisions will be acceptable to the House. They seem to have general support.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 4

MEANING OF "MARINE AREA" AND "MARINE SITE OF SPECIAL INTEREST"

'(1) For the purposes of this Act—

a "marine area" is any part of the sea in or adjacent to England or Wales, or any land covered (continuously or intermittently) by tidal waters in or adjacent to England or Wales;

a "marine site of special interest" is a marine area in respect of which a notification has effect under this Act.

(2) A marine area notified as a marine site of special interest—

(a) may extend from the mean low water mark up to the seaward limit of territorial waters;

(b) may include the sea bed, the soil under the sea bed to a depth of 30 metres, and the water column.

(3) A marine site of special interest must not include—

(a) any part of an area of land which has been notified under section 28(1) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (c. 69) (sites of special scientific interest);

(b) any part of a European marine site, unless the reason for which that part of the marine area is a marine site of special interest is a reason other than that for which it is a European marine site.

(4) In section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (c. 69) (sites of special scientific interest), after subsection (10) insert—

"(11) An area notified under this section must not include any part of an area of land which has been notified as a marine site of special interest under the Marine Wildlife Conservation Act 2002 (c. 00).".

(5) If any part of a marine site of special interest is, after it has been notified as such, included in a European marine site, that part ceases to be a marine site of special interest, unless the reason for which that part is a marine site of special interest is a reason other than that for which it is a European marine site.

(6) References in this Act to the reasons for which a marine area is a European marine site are references to—

(a) the natural habitat types in Annex I to the Habitats Directive hosted by the site;

(b) the native species in Annex II to the Habitats Directive hosted by the site; or

(c) the bird species for which the site is classified pursuant to Article 4(1) or (2) of the Wild Birds Directive.'.—*[Mr. Meacher.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 5

GENERAL INTERPRETATION

'(1) In this Act—

"the appropriate nature conservation body" means—

(a) in relation to the sea in or adjacent to England, or land covered by tidal waters in or adjacent to England, English Nature;

(b) in relation to the sea in or adjacent to Wales, or land covered by tidal waters in or adjacent to Wales, the Countryside Council for Wales;

"the confirming authority" means—

(a) the Secretary of State, as respects a notification or byelaws made by English Nature;

(b) the National Assembly for Wales, as respects a notification or byelaws made by the Countryside Council for Wales;

"competent marine authority" means—

(a) a Minister of the Crown (within the meaning of the Ministers of the Crown Act 1975 (c. 26)) or a Government department;

(b) the National Assembly for Wales;

(c) in England, a county, district or London borough council, or the Common Council of the City of London;

(d) in Wales, a county council or county borough council;

(e) a person holding an office—

(i) under the Crown,

(ii) created or continued in existence by a public general Act of Parliament, or

(iii) the remuneration in respect of which is paid out of money provided by Parliament;

(f) statutory undertaker (meaning the persons referred to in section 262(1), (3) and (6) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (c. 8)); and

(g) any other public body of any description;

"European marine site" means a European marine site which is included in the European sites register maintained by the Secretary of State or the National Assembly for Wales under the Natural Habitats Regulations;

"the Habitats Directive" means Council Directive 92/43/EC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora, as amended from time to time;

"the Natural Habitats Regulations" means the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations 1994 (S.I. 1994/2716), as they have effect from time to time;

"the sea adjacent to Wales" is to be construed in accordance with Article 6 of the National Assembly for Wales (Transfer of Functions) Order 1999 (S.I. 1999/672), as that Article may be amended or replaced from time to time by Order under the Government of Wales Act 1998 (c. 38);

"the Wild Birds Directive" means Council Directive 79/409/EEC on the conservation of wild birds, as amended from time to time.'

(2) The Secretary of State may by order made by statutory instrument amend the definition of "competent marine authority" in relation to marine sites of special interest which are the subject of a notification by English Nature.

(3) The National Assembly for Wales may by order made by statutory instrument amend the definition of "competent marine authority" in relation to marine sites of special interest which are the subject of a notification by the Countryside Council for Wales.

(4) A statutory instrument containing an order under subsection (2) is subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.'.—*[Mr. Meacher.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 6

NOTIFICATION OF MARINE SITES

'(1) If the appropriate nature conservation body is of the opinion that a marine area is a marine site of special interest by reason of any of its flora, fauna, or geological or physiographical features, it may notify that fact.

(2) The confirming authority must, after consulting the appropriate nature conservation body, publish criteria in accordance with which the bodies are to determine whether a marine area is a marine site of special interest for the purposes of this Act.

(3) The confirming authority may, after consulting the appropriate nature conservation bodies, revise criteria published under subsection (2).

(4) If a body decides to make a notification under subsection (1), it must notify—

(a) the confirming authority;

(b) so far as reasonably practicable, each competent marine authority which exercises functions in relation to the marine area;

(c) any other competent marine authority which in the opinion of the body should be notified;

(d) any other person who the body is directed by the confirming authority to notify.

(5) The body must also publish the notification, on as many occasions as the confirming authority may direct, in—

(a) the London Gazette;

(b) at least one local newspaper circulating in an area near to the marine area; and

(c) such other publications as the confirming authority may direct.

(6) A notification under this section has effect from the date on which it is first published in the London Gazette.'.—*[Mr. Meacher.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 7

FURTHER PROVISIONS ABOUT NOTIFICATION

'(1) A notification under section 1 must specify the time (not being less than three months from the date of the giving of the notification) within which representations or objections with respect to it may be made to the confirming authority.

(2) A notification must also—

(a) specify the flora, fauna, or geological or physiographical features by reason of which the marine area is a marine site of special interest;

(b) contain a statement of the appropriate nature conservation body's objectives in relation to the conservation of that flora or fauna, or those features ("the conservation objectives") and the body's views about how the site should be managed for the purpose of achieving those objectives.

[Mr. Meacher]

(3) The confirming authority, having regard to any representations or objections made under subsection (1), may before the end of the period of nine months beginning with the date on which the notification is first published in the London Gazette, give notice to the appropriate nature conservation body that the notification is—

(a) confirmed;

(b) withdrawn; or

(c) modified;

and the notice must include a statement of reasons for a withdrawal or modification.

(4) The notification may be modified by the confirming authority only by—

(a) reducing the size of the marine site of special interest (but so that the site remains within the boundaries of the site in respect of which the notification was made);

(b) removing the specification of one or more of the species of flora or fauna, or one or more of the geological or physiographical features;

(c) amending the statement relating to the conservation objectives.

(5) A notification ceases to have effect—

(a) at the end of the period of 28 days beginning with the day on which notice is given to the appropriate nature conservation body that the notification is withdrawn;

(b) if no notice is given under subsection (3), at the end of the period of nine months beginning with the date on which the notification is first published in the London Gazette.

(6) A notification has effect as modified by a notice under subsection (3) at the end of the period of 28 days beginning with the day on which notice of the modification is given to the appropriate nature conservation body.

(7) The appropriate nature conservation body must so far as reasonably practicable notify each person who was notified under section 1(4)(b) to (d)—

(a) of a notice of confirmation, withdrawal or modification under subsection (3); or

(b) that no notice has been given under subsection (3) before the end of the period of nine months mentioned in subsection (5)(b).'.—*[Mr. Meacher.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 8

MODIFICATION OR DENOTIFICATION

'(1) The appropriate nature conservation body may notify a modification of a notification—

(a) at any time after notice confirming the notification is given; or

(b) if the notification is modified by the confirming authority, at any time after the notification has effect as modified.

(2) If the appropriate nature conservation body is of the opinion that a marine area is no longer a marine site of special interest by reason of any of the matters specified in section 1(1), a modification under subsection (1) may cancel the notification in respect of the area.

(3) If the body decides to make a notification under subsection (1), it must notify—

(a) the confirming authority;

(b) so far as reasonably practicable, each competent marine authority which exercises functions in relation to the marine area;

(c) any other competent marine authority which in the opinion of the body should be notified;

(d) any other person who the body is directed by the confirming authority to notify.

(4) The body must also publish the notification, on as many occasions as the confirming authority may direct, in—

(a) the London Gazette;

(b) at least one local newspaper circulating in or near to the marine area; and

(c) such other publications as the confirming authority may direct.

(5) A notification under subsection (1), other than a notification which is a cancellation as mentioned in subsection (2), has effect from the date on which it is first published in the London Gazette.

(6) A notification under subsection (1) must specify the time (not being less than three months from the date of the giving of the notification) within which representations or objections with respect to it may be made to the confirming authority.

(7) The confirming authority, having regard to any representations or objections made under subsection (6), may before the end of the period of nine months beginning with the date on which the notification is first published in the London Gazette, give notice to the appropriate nature conservation body that the notification is—

(a) confirmed;

(b) withdrawn; or

(c) modified;

and the notice must include a statement of the reasons for a withdrawal or modification.

(8) If a notification under subsection (1) would reduce the size of the site or cancel the notification, the confirming authority may modify that part of the notification only by increasing the size of the marine site (but so that the site remains within the boundaries of the site in respect of which the notification which is proposed to be modified was made).

(9) Apart from that, the confirming authority may modify the notification only by—

(a) removing or reinstating the specification of one or more of the species of flora or fauna, or one or more of the geological or physiographical features;

(b) amending the statement relating to the conservation objectives.

(10) A notification under subsection (1) which is a cancellation as mentioned in subsection (2)—

(a) has effect, or has effect as modified, at the end of the period of 28 days beginning with the day on which notice is given under subsection (7) to the appropriate nature conservation body that the notification is confirmed or modified;

(b) if no such notice is given or notice is given that the notification is withdrawn, does not have effect.

(11) A notification under subsection (1), other than a notification which is a cancellation as mentioned in subsection (2), ceases to have effect—

(a) at the end of the period of 28 days beginning with the day on which notice is given to the appropriate nature conservation body that the notification is withdrawn;

(b) if no notice is given under subsection (7), at the end of the period of nine months beginning with the date on which the notification is first published in the London Gazette.

(12) A notification under subsection (1), other than a notification which is a cancellation as mentioned in subsection (2), has effect as modified by a notice under subsection (7) at the end of the period of 28 days beginning with the day on which notice of the modification is given to the appropriate nature conservation body.

(13) The appropriate nature conservation body must so far as reasonably practicable notify each person who was notified under subsection (3)(b) to (d)—

(a) of a notice of confirmation, withdrawal or modification under subsection (7); or

(b) that no notice has been given under subsection (7) before the end of the period of nine months mentioned in subsection (11)(b).'.—*[Mr. Meacher.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 9

DENOTIFICATION IN RELATION TO EUROPEAN MARINE SITES

'(1) If any part of a marine site of special interest ceases to be included in such a site because it is included in a European marine site, the appropriate nature conservation body must notify—

(a) the confirming authority;

(b) so far as reasonably practicable, each competent marine authority which exercises functions in relation to the site;

(c) any other competent marine authority which in the opinion of the body should be notified;

(d) any other person who the body is directed by the confirming authority to notify.

(2) The body must also publish the notification, on as many occasions as the confirming authority may direct, in—

(a) the London Gazette;

(b) at least one local newspaper circulating in an area near to the site; and

(c) such other publication as the confirming authority may direct.

(3) A notification under this section has effect from the date on which it is published in the London Gazette.'.—*[Mr. Meacher.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 10

APPLICATION TO CROWN

'(1) This Act binds the Crown, except that nothing in this Act affects Her Majesty in her private capacity.

(2) Byelaws made under section 6 may apply to Crown land only if the appropriate authority (within the meaning of section 101(11) of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act (1949 c. 97)) consents.

(3) Crown land means land an interest in which—

(a) belongs to Her Majesty in the right of the Crown or the Duchy of Lancaster;

(b) belongs to the Duchy of Cornwall;

(c) belongs to a government department; or

(d) is held in trust for Her Majesty for the purposes of a government department.

(4) The Crown is not criminally liable as a result of any provision made by or under this Act.

(5) Subsection (4) does not affect the application of any provision made by or under this Act in relation to persons in the public service of the Crown.'.—*[Mr. Meacher.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

12.30 pm

Mr. Meacher: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

It is customary for a Bill to be specific about the extent to which it applies to the Crown, and the new clause provides the necessary explanation. It indicates that the Bill shall bind the Crown but that the Crown should not be criminally liable, and that includes liability under byelaws, which may only be made on Crown land with the consent of the appropriate authority. It defines what constitutes Crown land, using a definition akin to that in section 67 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. The new clause deals with an important aspect of the Bill because most of the sea bed in territorial waters belongs to the Crown, and both Departments and persons holding office under the Crown are defined as competent marine authorities in the amended Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

Clause 1

MARINE SITES OF SPECIAL INTEREST

Amendment made: No. 30, in page 1, line 1, leave out Clause 1.—*[Mr. Meacher.]*

Clause 2

DUTY TO COMPILE AND MAINTAIN A REGISTER OF MARINE SITES OF SPECIAL INTEREST

Mr. Meacher: I beg to move amendment No. 31, in page 3, line 18, leave out from beginning to "available" in line 20 and insert—

'(1) Each appropriate nature conservation body must maintain, in such form as it thinks fit, a register of marine sites of special interest.

(2) The register under subsection (1) must include the co-ordinates of each marine site of special interest and a chart illustrating its boundaries.

(3) A copy of the register maintained under subsection (1) must be'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 53, in page 3, line 21, at end insert—

'in a land-based location as conveniently near as is reasonably practicable to the marine site of special interest.'.

Mr. Meacher: The purpose of the amendment is to make drafting improvements to clause 2, which relates to the duty of the nature conservation bodies to compile and maintain a register of marine sites of special interest. It also adds the need for the register to include the co-ordinates of each site and a chart illustrating site boundaries to ensure that they are clearly identifiable.

A copy of the register must be available for public inspection. It is reasonable to expect the appropriate nature conservation body to keep a copy at each of its local offices that cover the area relating to the MSSI. With that assurance, I ask my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) not to press amendment No. 53 to a vote, because it is not necessary.

Mr. Randall: I am a little confused about how people who are unaware of the presence of an MSSI will be made

[Mr. Randall]

aware of its existence if the information is not held by the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office or included on maritime charts. They might not know that they should visit the offices of English Nature or whatever. I am not suggesting that the information should be included immediately. I am not sure of the system, but perhaps it can be added when the charts are revised. In addition, why is there no duty on English Nature or the Countryside Council for Wales to notify the Hydrographic Office of the boundaries of MSSIs?

Mr. Dismore: It is important, perhaps for the same reasons as the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) adumbrated, that people know where the boundaries of the marine sites are located. Having the maps in the headquarters of a nature conservation body in London is not much use if a site is off Cornwall or Yorkshire. It should not be beyond the wit of man to make the charts available in the local headquarters and on the internet so that people can look them up even if they are a long distance away.

It is important that we make every effort possible to ensure that everyone who lives, works or participates in recreational activities in an area knows where the boundaries lie. The best way to do that is to give the sites as much publicity as possible locally.

Mr. Swayne: The point is simply that such measures are desirable. We have just discussed the provisions of new clause 3 in relation to offences. An offence of damaging an MSSI is not committed if the person who does the damage does not know that the site is part of an MSSI. To provide that the information has to appear on all the available charts is elementary. There should be a duty to notify the information to the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office so that it can be put on the charts.

Mr. Meacher: The debate has centred on ensuring that people have access locally to information on the existence and boundaries of the MSSI. I fully accept the points made.

The hon. Member for Uxbridge asked whether a copy of site boundaries would be shown in the Hydrographic Office, and whether that information would be placed on maritime charts. We certainly expect English Nature to forward a copy of site boundaries to the Hydrographic Office, although whether to mark the boundaries on Admiralty charts would be a matter for the Hydrographic Office. It would be helpful if that were done, but I do not think that it should be a statutory requirement.

I entirely agree that such information should be available locally. In my opening remarks I said that I certainly expect the appropriate nature conservation body to keep a copy at each of its local offices covering the area relating to the MSSI. Such provision would give persons in the vicinity who are likely to use the relevant waters a perfectly adequate opportunity to acquaint themselves fully with the fact that an MSSI is present locally and with its precise boundaries. I do not disagree with amendment No. 53, but its provisions are already covered by the Government's proposals.

Mr. Swayne: The question is simple. Would it be a defence for someone in a leisure craft who had damaged an MSSI by some operation, for example, by weighing anchor, to argue that there was no offence because he did not know that the area was part of an MSSI because the Admiralty chart he was using did not contain the information?

Mr. Meacher: My belief is that that would not constitute a defence because the person in question had not taken all reasonable steps to acquaint himself with the information he needed. One cannot rely with certainty on the contents of Admiralty charts, although as I said it would be helpful if the information were included. I would expect such a person to contact other bodies that could provide a guarantee and certain clarification. On that basis, I hope that Government amendment No. 31 is acceptable to the House.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 3

COMPETENT MARINE AUTHORITIES: DUTIES

Mr. Dismore: I beg to move amendment No. 54, in page 3, line 24, after "take", insert "all".

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Government amendments Nos. 32 to 34.

Amendment No. 58, in page 3, line 38, leave out "(where one exists)".

Amendment No. 59, in page 3, line 38, leave out "a" and insert "the".

Amendment No. 60, in page 3, line 39, at end insert "concerned".

Government amendments Nos. 35 to 37.

Mr. Dismore: To a large extent my amendments have been overtaken by the Government amendments. My intention was to ensure that the marine authority did not merely take any old reasonable steps but took all the reasonable steps it could take to exercise its functions, and to deal with the fact that there is no point having an MSSI if there is no management scheme. That harks back to remarks I made previously. Subject to the Minister's comments on the Government amendments, I do not intend to press mine.

Mr. Randall: Government amendment No. 32 would amend clause 3. It provides that a competent marine authority

"must notify the appropriate nature conservation body"

before carrying out or consenting to others carrying out operations which in its opinion—those words are important—are likely to damage a site.

There are some concerns. When a competent marine authority wishes to carry out, or to give its consent for others to carry out, operations that are likely to damage in the context of the conservation statement, it will be required under clause 3, as amended by amendment No. 32, to consult the relevant nature conservation agency. That is unless subsection (9) of amendment No. 36 applies.

I am also interested in who will set benchmarks on which operations constitute damage to the interest of a marine site of special interest, so as to guide competent authorities in identifying damaging activities under clause 3.

I am concerned that there is no requirement to review existing consents. Perhaps the Minister will clarify what arrangements exist for English Nature and the Countryside Council for Wales to request competent marine authorities to review existing consent activities to assess their compatibility with an MSSI. What will happen if a competent marine authority fails to review an existing consent activity, having been asked to do so, if that results in continued or further damage to a marine site of special scientific interest?

Government amendment No. 37 removes the duty on English Nature and the Countryside Council for Wales to report on implementation of the Bill. Will the Minister confirm that English Nature and the Countryside Council for Wales will be expected to monitor the status and health of the MSSIs, and to report on implementation of the Bill? Will the Minister confirm that the two bodies will be provided with adequate resources to enable them to carry out the necessary monitoring and reporting? If they cannot carry out those duties, there is not so much import.

Mr. Mark Simmonds (Boston and Skegness): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) on all the hard work that he has put in to his excellent Bill so far. I thank the Minister, because I know that he has been working hard on the Bill.

I shall make some brief comments about the sea fisheries committees. I am glad that they are now included under the heading of "competent marine authority". The committees are intrinsically inshore fishing management bodies. Fishermen in Boston are deeply unhappy with the current arrangements and workings of the local committee. Better funding is needed for these bodies, and I hope that extra funding will be given. The committees will have to implement new powers, which are set out in the Bill.

The committees are struggling to meet existing responsibilities, both in general terms and environmentally, especially under the European Union habitats and birds directives. That is due specifically to a lack of funds.

The committees are funded by local authority levies, and there needs to be a review. The committees need to be funded by a mixture of local authority levies and central Government funding. That would enable them to have financial security. At the same time, they would maintain local responsibility and a certain amount of local control. This view was supported by the Select Committee, which suggested that

> "the funding arrangements for the SFCs be re-examined to establish a secure, permanent, financial framework within which they can plan and perform their duties."

It may be appropriate to take the opportunity look at the structure and lack of success of SFCs, which are not working.

12.45 pm

Mr. Swayne: Briefly, my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) has drawn to my attention a key point in amendment No. 54 which I had not spotted. The actions that the competent marine authority proposes to carry out or to which it proposes to give its consent are new actions, not pre-existing ones. Having re-read the amendment carefully, I believe that that is implicit rather than explicit. Will the Minister confirm whether that is the case, or will the amendment apply to actions currently under way? The position on the actions which the competent authority proposes to take is clearer than that on any consents that it may give. Any action that it may take will be taken anew every time, but any consent already given does not necessarily have to be renewed and reviewed.

Mr. Meacher: I am grateful for the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) and his acceptance of the broad thrust of the Government amendments, which meet the requirements expressed in his amendments.

I shall briefly spell out the intention of the Government amendments, some of which have been questioned. Their purpose is to clarify the way in which competent marine authorities should act when proposing to carry out operations or authorise any activity likely to damage an MSSI. They also outline the procedures to be undertaken if the site has a management scheme, the context for which is the duty in clause 3(1). In exercising its functions, a competent marine authority should take reasonable steps, consistent with the proper exercise of its functions, to further the conservation of the features for which the site has been notified, which is consistent with provisions relating to SSSIs on land. Amendment No. 54, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, does not add value to the clause's provisions, and I am grateful that he accepts that.

Government amendment No. 32 ensures that, before deciding to undertake or give a consent to an operation which is likely to damage an MSSI, the competent marine authority informs the appropriate nature conservation body. When deciding whether an operation or a consent is likely to damage the features for which a site has been designated, we expect the competent marine authority to have regard to any list of potentially damaging operations which may be contained in the conservation statement for that site.

The nature conservation body has 28 days in which to comment on the proposal. Any comments received from the appropriate nature conservation body within that period must be considered by the competent marine authority before it reaches its decision. The procedure is similar to that required for operations on SSSIs. In line with the other considerations to which a competent marine authority must have regard when taking decisions, the need for the operation or consent may outweigh pure nature conservation considerations. I repeat that that is the essence of sustainable development. The competent marine authority must inform the conservation agency how, if at all, it has taken account of its advice. That is an important protection; the authority cannot simply issue a statement that it has taken the advice into account, but must produce a much fuller statement on its treatment of that advice. Again, similar to the procedures for SSSIs, the operation should be carried out or authorised in such a manner as to give rise to as little damage as possible to the protected site.

It is likely that a number of marine sites of special interest will be the subject of management schemes set up under clause 4. That is a subject in which my hon. Friend

[Mr. Meacher]

the Member for Hendon has taken a special interest. Amendments Nos. 33 to 35 provide for such schemes to be taken into account by competent marine authorities. Where management schemes are set up, competent marine authorities will be required to take reasonable steps to carry out their functions in accordance with the scheme.

However, I do not accept that it would be necessary for every MSSI to have a management scheme. A management scheme should be established only if there is a need, and then pursued through agreement. Amendments Nos. 58 to 60 tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, which would require every site to have a management scheme, go too far.

The main purpose of management schemes is to co-ordinate the activities of those operating in the MSSI to ensure the conservation of the site. Within a scheme it will be possible to allow certain damaging activities to take place which do not affect the overall conservation of the site or detract from achieving the conservation objectives for the site. Obviously, that is a fine judgment to make. If those activities are in line with a management scheme, the competent marine authority will not be obliged to go through the procedures set out in amendment No. 32.

Amendment No. 36 provides for the Secretary of State to exempt from the provisions of clause 3 activities carried out in the interests of national security. I do not expect this power to be widely used, but the clause is loosely based on similar provisions in the Environment Act 1995.

Amendment No. 37 removes subsection (4) of clause 3. The Government consider that this provision is not necessary. Paragraph 20(1)(b) of schedule 6 to the Environmental Protection Act 1990 requires the nature conservation body to make a report on the exercise and performance of its functions every year, and there is nothing to suggest that that is confined to functions under that Act. We would therefore expect the appropriate conservation body, in any report made under that provision, to include details about how it has carried out its functions and duties in relation to the Bill, so that there will be regular reporting of functions carried out under the Bill.

It might be convenient now for me to answer some of the points that have been raised. The hon. Member for Uxbridge asked me to confirm that English Nature and the Countryside Council for Wales will be expected to monitor MSSIs and to report on the implementation of the Bill. I have already answered that.

The hon. Gentleman also asked me to confirm that English Nature and CCW will be provided with adequate resources to enable them to carry out the necessary monitoring and reporting. I have made it clear that we intend to provide appropriate resources for English Nature, and that it would consequently be expected to make changes to its corporate plan to ensure that the requirements under the Bill and the matters to which the hon. Gentleman referred can be properly carried through.

The hon. Member for Uxbridge and the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) asked me to clarify what arrangements exist to request competent marine authorities to review existing consented activities to assess their compatibility with a marine site of special interest. The answer is that there is nothing in the Bill to prevent the appropriate nature conservation agency from reviewing existing consents—we would expect the agency to do so—and indicating a view on those activities to the relevant competent marine authority, which I would expect to take note of that advice and to make decisions accordingly.

The hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Mr. Simmonds) raised issues relating to sea fisheries committees. We had an earlier discussion on that matter, for which he was unable to be present, so perhaps he could refer to it in *Hansard*. His main concerns were funding and the adequacy of sea fisheries committees in achieving their desired role. Those are certainly important points, but I am afraid that they fall somewhat outside the Bill's parameters. However, I can say that no decisions will be taken on whether to address funding issues, or on the form of any review of sea fisheries committees, before the common fisheries policy review is complete.

As the hon. Gentleman said, funding issues are currently a matter for local government, because sea fishery committees are local authority bodies wholly funded by levy on their constituent local councils—perhaps excluding certain EC grants for fisheries enforcement. This is a relevant issue to which he has rightly drawn attention, and I am sure that he will find other opportunities to pursue it. However, I cannot take it further in the context of the Bill.

Mr. Dismore: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 3

COMPETENT MARINE AUTHORITIES: DUTIES

Amendments made: No. 32, in page 3, line 27, leave out from beginning to end of line 36 and insert—

'(2) This subsection applies to any operation—

(a) which a competent marine authority proposes to undertake; or

(b) to which a competent marine authority proposes to give its consent,

if in the opinion of the competent marine authority the operation is likely to damage any of the flora, fauna or geological or physiographical features by reason of which a marine area is a marine site of special interest.

(3) If subsection (2) applies, the competent marine authority must before deciding to undertake the operation or give consent to the operation give notice to the appropriate nature conservation body.

(4) The competent marine authority must not decide to undertake the operation or give consent to it before whichever is the earliest of—

(a) the end of the period of 28 days beginning with the day on which notice is given under subsection (3); or

(b) the receipt of representations from the appropriate nature conservation body.

(5) In deciding whether to undertake the operation or give consent to it the competent marine authority must consider any representations made by the appropriate nature conservation body and must notify the appropriate nature conservation body of how (if at all) it has taken into account the representations.

(6) To the extent that the competent marine authority does not take into account the representations of the appropriate nature conservation body it must, in undertaking or giving consent to the

operation, do so in such a way as to give rise to as little damage as is reasonably practicable in all the circumstances to the flora, fauna or geological or physiographical features by reason of which the site is of special interest.

(7) Subsection (2) does not apply to an operation which in the opinion of the competent marine authority is an emergency operation, but in that case the competent marine authority must within 7 days of undertaking or consenting to the emergency operation notify the appropriate nature conservation body of the operation.'.

No. 33, in page 3, line 37, at beginning insert—

'(8) A competent marine authority must'.

No. 34, in page 3, line 38, leave out from "scheme" to end of line 41.

No. 35, in page 3, line 42, at end insert—

'(9) Subsection (2) does not apply to an operation the undertaking of which in the opinion of the competent marine authority concerned is in accordance with—

(a) a management scheme established under section 4; or

(b) a management scheme established under the Natural Habitats Regulations (management schemes for European marine sites).'.

No. 36, in page 3, line 42, at end insert—

'(10) Nothing in this section has effect in relation to the exercise of a function or the undertaking of an operation to the extent that the Secretary of State certifies that it is requisite or expedient in the interests of national security that it should not have effect in relation to the exercise of the function or the undertaking of the operation.'.

No. 37, in page 4, line 1, leave out subsection (4).—*[Mr. Meacher.]*

Clause 4

MANAGEMENT SCHEMES

Mr. Meacher: I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 4, line 7, leave out from beginning to "for" in line 8 and insert—

'(1) Any one or more of the bodies mentioned in subsection (2) may establish a management scheme'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Amendment No. 61, in page 4, line 7, leave out "may" and insert "shall".

Government amendments Nos. 2 to 6.

Amendment No. 62, in page 4, line 18, leave out "from time to time" and insert—

'at least every five years'.

Government amendments Nos. 7 to 12.

Amendment No. 63, in page 4, line 21, at end insert—

'and to those subject to notification under section 1(1)'.

Government amendments Nos. 13 and 14.

Amendment No. 64, in page 4, line 21, at end insert—

'(6) Notwithstanding the provisions of section 1, no notification establishing a marine site of special interest shall take effect until a management scheme has been established.

(7) In establishing a management scheme, the competent marine authority shall have due regard to—

(a) any directions of the Secretary of State (as regards England) and the National Assembly for Wales (as regards Wales) issued under section 5;

(b) the likely cost of establishing and maintaining the management scheme and the availability of sustainable funding to continue to meet that cost;

(c) the views of the appropriate nature conservation body;

(d) the views of those subject to notification under section 1(1); and

(e) international best practice.'.

Government amendments Nos. 15 to 17.

Amendment No. 65, in clause 5, page 4, line 26, at end insert—

', after due consultation with those subject to notification under section 1(1) and the appropriate nature conservation body'.

Government amendment No. 18.

Amendment No. 66, in page 4, line 27, after "Directions", insert—

'shall comply with international best practice and'.

Government amendments Nos. 19 to 25.

Mr. Meacher: The establishment, where appropriate, of management schemes for MSSIs will set the framework in which activities will be managed so as to secure a site's conservation objectives. The amendments are therefore important, and once again I recognise the important contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) in enabling us to reconsider several of these points.

Amendments Nos. 1 and 2 outline which bodies may be involved in the creation of a management scheme. By way of background, I should point out that regulation 34 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994—known as the habitats regulations—allows for the creation of management schemes for European marine sites to fulfil our obligations under the EC directives on wild birds and on habitats. Having regard to the list of species and habitats included in those directives, such sites are of international importance. A statutory basis already exists, therefore, for management schemes for European marine sites, and through pilots for those sites we are already developing schemes on the ground. It would be appropriate therefore if the bodies able to make management schemes under the Bill were, as far as possible, the same as those bodies permitted to make schemes under the habitats regulations. The bodies listed in amendment No. 2 have been chosen explicitly to ensure that there is a large degree of consistency.

1 pm

Amendment No. 14 provides the power for the Secretary of State, in respect of England, and the National Assembly for Wales, in respect of Wales, to alter, if necessary, the list proposed by amendment No. 2 by means of statutory instrument. For England, that will be subject to the negative resolution procedure. The procedures for a statutory instrument as regards Wales require approval by the National Assembly for Wales in accordance with its Standing Orders.

Any one or more of the prescribed bodies may establish a management scheme, but it is important that, as far as possible, all the organisations or people who carry out activities within an MSSI are consulted about its establishment. Amendment No. 4 will give those bodies an opportunity to engage fully in the consultation process that develops a management scheme, and ensure that their interests are taken into account. That is especially important for those competent marine authorities not directly involved in the setting up of management schemes, which nevertheless under clause 3(2)(b) will have to take reasonable steps to carry our their functions in accordance with such schemes.

[Mr. Meacher]

Amendment No. 3 will ensure that the bodies that make the scheme exercise their functions to secure the conservation objectives. That, coupled with the duty in clause 3 on all competent marine authorities to take reasonable steps to ensure that they exercise their functions in accordance with a management scheme, should ensure that the schemes make a positive contribution to the conservation of sites.

There may be situations where an MSSI is notified within a marine area in which a European marine site has already been established or a European marine site is established which overlaps an existing MSSI. I referred to this matter earlier, and I shall say a little more about it now. New clause 4 will remove the possibility of an MSSI and a European marine site overlapping if they are designated for identical reasons.

There are, however, likely to be occasions when an MSSI overlaps a European marine site but the MSSI has been notified to protect features different from those covered by the European site. In those cases MSSIs and European sites may overlap. That may happen in cases where the criteria for notifying an MSSI identifies a nationally important species not listed in the directives within a European site designated for a different species or habitat. I am sorry that this is rather complex, but I hope that the sense of it is clear. It is important that the management of overlapping sites is co-ordinated with the minimum of additional bureaucracy, and the amendments are designed to achieve that.

For that reason amendment No. 5 ensures that where an MSSI and a European site overlap, there cannot be more than one management scheme. Where a European site overlaps an MSSI either partially or fully, the management scheme for the European site can take into account the conservation objectives of the MSSI, as long as those are compatible with management of the features for which the European site was designated. If the European site has no management scheme, then a management scheme may still be made for the MSSI.

Amendments Nos. 6 and 8 to 12 are intended to improve and clarify the text relating to when and how a management scheme should be amended and published. It is important that when a scheme is established, it is kept under review to ensure that it takes account of relevant activities that may affect the site. To ensure that the reviews are regular, amendment No. 7 requires that they are carried out at least once every five years.

As currently drafted, the Bill makes no provision for identifying a date when a management scheme comes into force. That is important, because the activities of competent marine authorities in relation to an MSSI are affected by the establishment of a management scheme. Amendment No. 13 provides such a date by linking the establishment date to the publication of the scheme.

There may be occasions when, for a number of reasons, a management scheme for an MSSI has not been developed. Clause 5 provides the opportunity for the Secretary of State, with regard to England, or the National Assembly for Wales for sites in Wales, to direct those bodies capable of establishing a management scheme to do so, if they feel that a management scheme is required.

Amendment No. 15 clarifies that the direction to establish a management scheme can only be made if no scheme is in place for that MSSI. The amendment is necessary because, as outlined in clause 4, each MSSI can only have one management scheme. Amendments Nos. 20 and 21 bring the provisions of this clause closer into line with those in regulation 35 of the 1994 habitats regulations. The amendments give the confirming authority power to stipulate in a direction that the approval of the confirming authority needs to be obtained before a management scheme is made. The amendments ensure that the directing authority is also able to obtain such information as it requires concerning the establishment and operation of the scheme.

Amendments Nos. 16 to 19 are textual amendments to clause 5 to ensure consistency in terminology between this clause and other clauses in the Bill. Amendments Nos. 22 to 24 provide similar changes to clause 5. Those changes will allow the confirming authority to make directions to amend management schemes that are already in existence. Experience suggests that plans prepared by local bodies and suited to local circumstances are more effective than those imposed from outside. However, there may be circumstances in which schemes that have been established do not, for one reason or another, function effectively. The direction to amend management schemes may be used if it becomes clear that local liaison, co-ordination or consultation has proved inadequate to achieve the site's conservation objectives. However, I want to stress that our preferred option is to allow those bodies that operate and know the site area to prepare and manage a scheme.

I commend the Government amendments to the House. In the light of my detailed explanation, I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon—to whose concerns we have given careful consideration—will not feel that it is necessary to press his amendment.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I apologise to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to the House, because I was not able to attend the early stages of this debate. I was dealing with a watery problem of a different nature as an amateur plumber's mate.

I take this opportunity to congratulate the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) for presenting this important Bill to the House. I congratulate him particularly because I cannot imagine that he has a constituency interest in the matter. It can hardly be a parochial concern for him—far from it. However, I am delighted to be able to participate briefly in this debate, not only because of my constituency interest but because when I was elected again to the House in 1992 I chaired an all-party group on coastal concerns, and one of our anxieties related precisely to the subject of this Bill.

These amendments are extremely important. If we do not have an effective management structure, I fear that the good will that has been invested in this Bill—on all sides, but particularly by the hon. Member for Uxbridge—may not be fulfilled. I want to emphasise to the Minister—should he need a reminder—that effective management will have cost implications, particularly in the early stages. That was referred to earlier in the context of the sea fisheries committees, but other official and voluntary bodies will clearly have difficulty in meeting their obligations under the Bill.

I know that, in Committee and in this debate, the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) has laid great stress on the management process. We should be under no illusions that, particularly in the early days, local communities' views on the way in which the Bill has been rolled out will depend on sensitive management. That will apply whether to my fishing communities in North Cornwall, to the handliners that my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) mentioned or to the conservation bodies that have great expectations of the Bill.

The sea fisheries committees are already under great strain—they are not alone—in terms of the resources made available to them. Surely the time has come to review the way in which they are able to fund their activities. At present, as we all know, the burden falls on local government and some local authorities already have great difficulty in coping with it. The teething problems that the Bill will inevitably create will be costly to deal with, so the Government should take the opportunity to review the way in which funding takes place.

The Minister will recall that, when the then Select Committee on Agriculture reported on sea fishing, it recommended that

> "the funding arrangements for SFCs be re-examined in order to establish a secure, permanent, financial framework within which they can plan and perform their duties."

These Government amendments will clearly lay a responsibility on a number of bodies, including the sea fisheries committees, and we must be concerned to ensure that those bodies are able to fulfil their responsibilities. We do not want them to let us all down and to leave Parliament in a difficult position because of the inadequacy of their financial arrangements.

It is already the experience of the sea fisheries committees that a special area of conservation or a site of special scientific interest with a significant marine interest can cost about £10,000 to £20,000 to monitor and to manage responsibly. In those circumstances, we must be sure that the funding will be made available. The Minister referred to funding, and I would like to be sure that these Government amendments will not place new financial responsibilities and new financial penalties on bodies that are already hard-pressed.

Mr. Dismore: The nub of the disagreement between me and my right hon. Friend the Minister relates to amendment No. 60, which I tabled, and Government amendment No. 1. I do not understand how we can make the Bill effective without a management scheme for each of the areas selected. When the right hon Gentleman replies, perhaps he will cite examples of the areas that he thinks would not require a management scheme. That might help to put my mind at rest.

Earlier, I gave examples of sites overseas where there were or were not management schemes. The marine park of Alonissos and northern Sporades has been a great success but, in the absence of a management scheme, all the local interests involved feel very vulnerable about their ability to continue to maintain the park effectively. Co-operation has enabled the park to work well, but it might be vulnerable to predators from outside who might come into the park to fish. At the other end of the scale, the Great Barrier reef has shown how a management scheme can work effectively. Although the Bill does not make provision for sites of that size, I hope that my right hon. Friend will tell us the sort of areas where a management scheme would be appropriate and those where it would not. If he does that, I will be able to withdraw my amendment.

I am glad that we have taken on board the need to consult. Many of my amendments were geared towards creating the need to consult all those involved, and I do not intend to say any more about that. Perhaps great minds think alike, because I am pleased that my right hon. Friend has come up with the same formula for the review of the management scheme as I did. A period of five years is sensible in terms of allowing the marine site to settle down and of keeping matters under review.

1.15 pm

The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) asked about the costs involved, an issue that I raised when we debated the second group of amendments and which is mentioned in my amendment No. 64. In setting up management schemes it is important to identify where the funding will come from. As I said earlier, the marine park at Zakynthos is funded through a variety of sources, including local businesses, central and local government in Greece, and major conservation bodies, producing an effective funding partnership even without a management scheme. However, it is important to recognise that a cost is involved and to identify where the money will come from, whether from the Government or otherwise. I hope that when my right hon. Friend the Minister replies, he will give us some guidance on that.

My other amendments refer primarily to remarks that I made earlier, which I shall not repeat, but they make valid points in terms of consultation and international best practice.

Mr. Meacher: I am grateful for the short debate and, again, I shall try to respond briefly to the points that have been made.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) raised two perfectly relevant and important issues, and my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) has just reiterated one of them. All Bills that will have a significant effect—this Bill will have an important effect in enabling a national system of marine sites of special interest to be established—require adequate resourcing, and we have fully taken account of that.

As I said earlier, we shall increase resources to English Nature to take account of the Bill's requirements and we expect English Nature to make equivalent amendments to its corporate plan to ensure that it is properly resourced. We have examined the costs of monitoring and managing sites, but the full implications of that will only be certain in time. However, we have made what we believe to be adequate provision.

As I said in the previous debate, the Government recognise that the adequacy of the role and, in particular, the funding of the sea fisheries committees is under review, and that a review of their funding will have to await the review of the common fisheries policy, but I would expect any funding review to consider the implications of their environmental duties.

Mr. Tyler: Whenever a Minister refers to waiting for the review of the common fisheries policy, or, indeed, the common agricultural policy, my heart sinks, because that usually means many years of discussion, and there will be an intervening period when the sea fisheries committees will be under severe financial strain.

Mr. Meacher: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but I can only repeat that the Government are extremely keen to see the review of the common fisheries policy undertaken and completed. Until that review is complete, it would not make sense to consider the funding of the sea fisheries committees. That is not because we hope that that review will drag on for years, so that we need make no provision with regard to the sea fisheries committees. There is a logic in this and, I repeat, it is the Government's view that we will have to wait for the completion of that review. The hon. Gentleman may want to pursue the matter with some of my colleagues who are more closely associated with it than me.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon asked in what instances a management scheme would not be needed. I agree that a management scheme would be a helpful tool in the vast majority of cases, and we will encourage the development of such schemes. However, there may be cases in which no operations are taking place but a scheme is necessary. I think that that must be assessed as sites are identified and notified, and as experience develops, including in relation to the pilot schemes that are now being undertaken in certain European marine sites.

I am glad that my hon. Friend and I take the same view on the review period. All that I can say with regard to his final point—as I said, I do not think that management schemes are needed in every case—is that I would be reluctant to include provisions that prevented the notification of sites and the recognition and protection that it provides before a management scheme has been established. Such an arrangement would be the wrong way round, so I hope that he will not press the matter.

With those assurances, I hope that the House will accept the amendment.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 2, in page 4, line 9, leave out from "interest" to end of line 11 and insert—

'(2) The bodies are—

(a) an appropriate nature conservation body;

(b) the Environment Agency;

(c) in England, a county, district or London borough council, or the Common Council of the City of London;

(d) in Wales, a county council or county borough council;

(e) any water undertaker or sewerage undertaker;

(f) any navigation authority, within the meaning of section 221(1) of the Water Resources Act 1991 (c. 57);

(g) any harbour authority within the meaning of section 57 of the Harbours Act 1964 (c. 40);

(h) the general lighthouse authority, or a local lighthouse authority, within the meaning of section 193 of the Merchant Shipping Act 1995 (c. 21);

(i) any local fisheries committee provided for under section 1 of the Sea Fisheries Regulation Act 1966 (c. 38).'.

No. 3, in page 4, line 11, at end insert—

'(3) A management scheme must set out how the functions of the body or bodies making the scheme (including, in the case of an appropriate nature conservation body, the function of making byelaws with respect to the site) are to be exercised so as to secure the achievement of the conservation objectives.'.

No. 4, in page 4, line 13, at end insert—

'(5) Before making a management scheme under subsection (1), the body or bodies making it must consult—

(a) the confirming authority;

(b) so far as reasonably practicable, each competent marine authority which exercises functions in relation to the site;

(c) any other competent marine authority which in the opinion of the body or bodies should be consulted;

(d) any other person who in the opinion of the body or bodies is likely to be affected by the management scheme.'.

No. 5, in page 4, line 14, leave out from beginning to end of line 16 and insert—

'(6) If any part of a marine site of special interest falls within a European marine site and a management scheme is established for the European marine site under the Natural Habitats Regulations—

(a) no management scheme may be established under this section for the marine site of special interest; and

(b) a management scheme which is already established under this section ceases to have effect.

(7) A management scheme established for a European marine site may take into account the conservation objectives for a marine site of special interest, but only to the extent that securing those objectives is compatible with securing compliance with the Habitats Directive as required by the Natural Habitats Regulations.'.

No. 6, in page 4, line 17, leave out—

'relating to a marine site of special interest shall'

and insert "is to".

No. 7, in page 4, line 18, leave out "if necessary amended" and insert—

'at least once in every five years.'.

No. 8, in page 4, line 18, at end insert—

'(9) A management scheme may be amended at any time.'.

No. 9, in page 4, line 19, at beginning insert—

'Unless an appropriate nature conservation body is the body, or one of the bodies, which establishes a management scheme,'.

No. 10, in page 4, line 19, leave out "management".

No. 11, in page 4, line 20, leave out "shall" and insert "must".

No. 12, in page 4, line 20, leave out—

'relevant marine authority or authorities'

and insert "body or bodies".

No. 13, in page 4, line 21, at end insert—

'(10) The appropriate nature conservation body must publish a management scheme—

(a) established or amended by it under this section; or

(b) a copy of which is sent to it as established or amended under this section.

(11) A management scheme has effect, or has effect as amended, from the date on which it is first published under subsection (10).'.

No. 14, in page 4, line 21, at end insert—

'(12) The Secretary of State may by order made by statutory instrument amend subsection (2) in relation to marine sites of special interest which are the subject of a notification by English Nature.

(13) The National Assembly for Wales may by order made by statutory instrument amend subsection (2) in relation to marine sites of special interest which are the subject of a notification by the Countryside Council for Wales.

(14) A statutory instrument containing an order under subsection (12) is subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.'.—*[Mr. Meacher.]*

Clause 5

DIRECTIONS IN RELATION TO MANAGEMENT SCHEME

Amendments made: No. 15, in page 4, line 23, leave out from beginning to "may" in line 24 and insert—

'(1) If no management scheme has been established for a marine site of special interest, the confirming authority'.

No. 16, in page 4, line 24, leave out—

'the relevant marine authorities, or any of them,'

and insert—

'any one or more of the bodies mentioned in section 4(2)'.

No. 17, in page 4, line 26, leave out—

'for a marine site of special interest'.

No. 18, in page 4, line 27, after "Directions", insert "under subsection (1)".

No. 19, in page 4, line 30, leave out "relevant marine authorities" and insert—

'bodies to which the direction is given'.

No. 20, in page 4, line 32, at end insert—

';

( ) provide that the approval of the confirming authority is required before the scheme is established.'.

No. 21, in page 4, line 32, at end insert—

';

( ) require the body or bodies to which the direction is given to supply to the confirming authority such information concerning the establishment or operation of the scheme as may be specified in the direction.'.

No. 22, in page 4, line 33, leave out from beginning to "may" in line 34 and insert "The confirming authority".

No. 23, in page 4, line 34, leave out—

'relevant marine authorities, or any of them,'

and insert—

'body or bodies which established a management scheme'.

No. 24, in page 4, line 35, leave out—

'a management scheme for a marine site of special interest'

and insert "the scheme".

No. 25, in page 4, line 37, leave out "shall" and insert "must".—*[Mr. Meacher.]*

Clause 6

BYELAWS FOR PROTECTION OF MARINE SITES OF SPECIAL INTEREST

Amendments made: No. 26, in page 5, line 2, after "may", insert—

', with the consent of the confirming authority,'.

No. 27, in page 5, line 3, leave out "under" and insert—

'(2) Subsections (2) to (4), and (10) and (11) of'.

No. 28, in page 5, line 4, after "reserves)", insert—

'have effect in relation to byelaws made under this section as respects a marine site of special interest as they have effect in relation to byelaws made under that section as respects a marine nature reserve.'.

No. 29, in page 5, line 5, leave out from beginning to end of line 7 and insert—

'(3) Sections 236 to 238 of the Local Government Act 1972 (c. 70) (which relate to the procedure for making byelaws, authorise byelaws to impose fines and provide for the proof of byelaws in legal proceedings) have effect in relation to byelaws made under this section as if the appropriate nature conservation body were a local authority within the meaning of that Act.

(4) In relation to byelaws made under this section, those sections apply subject to any modifications made by the confirming authority by regulations made by statutory instrument (including modifications increasing the maximum fines which the byelaws may impose).

(5) A statutory instrument containing regulations made by the Secretary of State under subsection (4) is subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.

(6) The confirming authority may, after consultation with the appropriate nature conservation body, direct the body—

(a) to revoke any byelaws previously made under this section; or

(b) to make such amendments of byelaws so made as may be specified in the direction.

(7) The appropriate nature conservation body has power to enforce byelaws made under this section.

(8) Except with the consent of the Director of Public Prosecutions, proceedings for an offence under byelaws made under this section may not be taken other than by the appropriate nature conservation body.'.—*[Mr. Meacher.]*

Clause 7

INTERPRETATION

Amendment made: No. 38, in page 5, line 12, leave out Clause 7.—*[Mr. Meacher.]*

Order for Third Reading read:—[Queen's Consent, on behalf of the Crown, and Prince of Wales's Consent, on behalf of the Duchy of Cornwall, signified.]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

1.22 pm

Mr. Randall: I am delighted that this morning's proceedings have been taken in the same good spirit from all parts of the House that has characterised all stages of the Bill's passage. I am also pleased that Third Reading will, it is to be hoped, be short enough to allow hon. Members to consider on Second Reading another very important Bill, which I hope hon. Members in all parts of the House will again support.

I want to acknowledge in this debate the excellent support for the Bill that has come from so many individuals and organisations. I made special mention of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds on Second Reading, and I should like to pay tribute once again to its hard work and ongoing support of my Bill. In particular, I want to mention Duncan Huggett, Ben Stafford and Sharon Thompson. As you will appreciate, Madam Deputy Speaker, my duties in the House mean that I do not always concentrate full-time on the Bill. Sometimes I have to do my job in following the Government rather like a great skua harrying a flock of terns. I hope to resume that role quite soon.

I should like also to express my thanks for the hard work of the wider environmental NGO movement, especially through the wildlife and countryside links and the wildlife trusts. It would not be right for me not to thank all those many members of environmental organisations and of the public who have lent their support to the Bill. I know that many colleagues will bear testimony to the extent of that support, as they have expressed to me their delight at receiving so many letters

[Mr. Randall]

on the subject—of course, that is because it gives them more work to do. I have to admit that that is the result of the hard work of the NGOs, not my personal chivvying of people in their constituencies.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Peterborough (Mrs. Clark) for her hard work. As she said, there is a genuine and deep desire to protect our marine environment. An early-day motion on the Bill was signed by 114 Members. Although I am not a great fan of early-day motions, that support shows that the views of the electorate are mirrored by hon. Members.

I am delighted to have met representatives of what could be described as the marine industries, including fisheries, ports, shipping, offshore oil and gas, and wind energy as well as those with leisure interests in the marine environment. Our discussions have been, in the popular parlance, frank and open, and I hope that most of their outstanding concerns have been tackled.

I repeatedly said in those meetings that, as someone who comes from business, I am the last person to propose regulation for its own sake. However, it is right to take new measures if they are required to protect nationally important wildlife. I thank the Minister and the Department for their hard work on the measure. Although it is not technically a hybrid Bill, it is getting less private by the minute.

On Second Reading, there were rumours that the Bill was being holed below the water line. Again, I pay tribute to the Minister and the Department for their excellent salvage job, and I thank senior members of all parties. As a member of the Opposition Whips Office, I pay tribute to the Government Whips Office, and especially to the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty). I am pleased that he is not in his place, otherwise he would be deeply embarrassed. *[Interruption.]* I do not readily praise Harrow, East, but I am happy to do that on this occasion.

I welcome the fact that most of my aims remain in the Bill despite some amendments. The Bill will allow the notification of marine sites of special interest throughout the territorial waters of England and Wales and give clear conservation objectives and guidance on what management is required. The strong duty on all "competent marine authorities" to further conservation of MSSIs remains, and English Nature and the Countryside Council for Wales can exercise new byelaw-making powers when no other authority has the necessary management powers. Those are only some of the fundamental points that continue to underpin the Bill.

I congratulate the Government on tabling amendments to strengthen the measure. For example, they have provided for a new offence of intentional reckless damage to or destruction of MSSIs. As has been said, the fly in the ointment is the weakening of the provision through a defence of incidental damage. We have discussed that and we may return to the matter if the Bill passes to the other place.

I welcome the clarification that the Crown is considered a competent marine authority, and the requirement on such authorities, when setting aside the advice of English Nature or the CCW, to carry out or allow others to carry out operations in a way that causes as little damage as possible.

It would be naive to suggest that the Bill has not occasionally had to weather choppy waters. At the outset, I should perhaps have preferred not to make some of the compromises that were agreed to keep it afloat. As we have mentioned them in our discussions today, I shall not dwell on them any longer.

I continue to have reservations about the Government's decision to reduce to a power the duty on English Nature and the CCW to notify MSSIs. I believe that it will make marine sites less likely to receive the protection and management that they deserve. I am also worried about the intentions behind the duty to "have regard" to the desirability of contributing to achieving sustainable development. That may seem like motherhood and apple pie, but I fear it may mean that other interests continue to ride roughshod over nature conservation. However, we must wait and see.

The procedures for reviewing the compatibility of existing activities with the conservation objectives of MSSIs are unclear. What happens if English Nature or the Countryside Council for Wales requests that an activity be reviewed, but the competent marine authority chooses to do nothing about it? Can the activity be judicially reviewed, as originally intended in the Bill?

Despite the fact that the Bill originally contained a requirement to have notifications confirmed by the Secretary of State or the National Assembly for Wales, I fear that the addition of a sustainable development requirement may mean that sites are never confirmed because complete agreement about a designation will never be achieved, although I received a great deal of assurance on that matter on Report.

I am sure that the marine environment will be debated further in another place and may be the subject of future legislation. I understand that, if the Bill succeeds, it will be only the first step on a long road—the first tentative dip of a toe in the water. However, I would not want to end my speech on a sour note, given the good spirit not only of today's debate but of the discussions that we have had throughout the Bill's passage through the House, and given the hard work that has been put in on all sides. I thank the Minister and his Department again.

I think that this is a good Bill. It has moved the marine environment up the political agenda, where it is just beginning to reflect the importance that it should have. I hope that the Bill will continue to enjoy broad and generous support and I look forward to watching deliberations on it in another place if we achieve Third Reading today.

1.32 pm

Mr. Tyler: May I be the first to congratulate the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) on steering this boat to what I hope proves to be a safe harbour? I hope that it has a successful journey to the other place and beyond. I had never heard a tribute to the usual channels in this Chamber before and I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on breaking with precedent. I cannot think of a suitable marine or nautical equivalent to congratulate the usual channels.

Unlike the hon. Gentleman, I have a strong constituency interest in the success of this legislation, particularly in achieving unanimous support at a community level. My constituency has one of the longest coastlines in the United Kingdom and a great number of communities that depend on the sea in some way.

The hon. Gentleman rightly said that the Bill is ground breaking. To an extent, it is also a shot in the dark, because it moves into new territory. In those circumstances, there will be sensitivities. Clearly, the ecological balance is extremely sensitive, but so too is the economic balance of many of the coastal communities that I and many other hon. Members represent. It is extremely important that we take people with us in this process. Teething problems are inevitable because there are potential conflicts, as has been evident from the Committee proceedings and even this morning. It is important that sensitivity at the local level matches sensitivity to those potential conflicts, not least between the fishing community and the different types of fishing. The less intrusive fishing methods to which my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) referred will be especially sensitive to potential problems. That sensitivity is not exclusive to them, but it will be important. Similarly, some of the smaller ports will be anxious about the problems that may arise.

The successful settlement of those problems can be achieved only with appropriate resources—we have had exchanges on that matter already today—and with local commitment. I hope that as soon as the Bill receives Royal Assent, there will be careful consultation with local authority bodies and others on whom we shall rely greatly for the Bill's successful implementation. With good will, I am sure that the legislation will play an important role in maintaining the marine environment around the shores of this country.

The Minister said earlier that Her Majesty the Queen and the Prince of Wales had given their assent. I think that that is the right expression; I have never been good at parliamentary expressions, which sometimes seem anachronistic. I suspect that the Prince of Wales is also giving consent in his capacity as Duke of Cornwall which, as we all know, is a much older title than either Prince of Wales or heir to the throne. In that context, I emphasise that many parts of Cornwall would benefit greatly from the measure. As a Cornish MP, I congratulate the hon. Member for Uxbridge and thank him for the persistent hard work that will, I hope, lead to the successful conclusion of the Bill's proceedings.

1.35 pm

Mr. Dismore: I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) on steering his Bill this far. His Third Reading speech was somewhat disparaging, but he has nothing to be ashamed of and much of which to be proud. When I was preparing for today's debate, I looked at the notes for my Second Reading speech. The hon. Gentleman was perhaps lucky not to have had the benefit—or otherwise—of that speech as it had a lot to say about the Bill, as he might have expected. I am pleased that I have rather less to say today, as the Bill has been improved.

Few Members manage to take a private Member's Bill this far, so the hon. Gentleman should also be proud of that. I hope to be able to repeat that trick in two or three weeks—perhaps with the assistance of the usual channels on his side.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): That might be arranged.

Mr. Dismore: Obviously, the hon. Member for Uxbridge has the thanks of all the people involved in the environmental world, and I echo their gratitude. However, he would also be thanked by many who cannot speak for themselves—the dolphins and seals which will live to a ripe old age and the other marine wildlife which will benefit from what he has achieved on their behalf.

While we are talking about people who cannot speak for themselves, I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks to my parliamentary neighbour and hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas), who has also done a good job in helping to pilot the Bill. As the hon. Gentleman might know, I have had several discussions with my hon. Friend about the Bill and I am glad that the House has reached a consensus about taking it forward.

1.36 pm

Mr. Swayne: I briefly add my tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall). The measure is a not insignificant step in addressing a large gap in our environmental policy—so much biodiversity is threatened in the maritime environment. It is an enormous task to bring the protection of the maritime environment up to the standards for which we have been working in respect of the land.

My hon. Friend has carried out a tremendous task. He has been ably assisted by the hard work of the Minister for the Environment and his officials in improving the Bill. It is a good Bill and we wish it every success.

1.37 pm

Tony Cunningham: I, too, add my congratulations. Normally, I go home on Thursdays but I attended today's debates because of the sheer volume of letters from my constituents asking me to support the Bill.

I offer the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) my congratulations and those of my constituents.

1.38 pm

Mr. Meacher: The hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) must be feeling weighed down with congratulations, but I am only too glad to echo what other Members have said. The hon. Gentleman has steered the Bill positively and constructively through choppy waters. Given my classical upbringing, the analogy that came to mind was that of Scylla and Charybdis. Several times, I thought that the measure might hit one or the other—or even both at once. The hon. Gentleman has done extremely well. The Bill is very worth while.

The House spends far too much time on confrontational activity, although we broadly agree on many issues. It is refreshing that we have achieved consensus on a matter of considerable importance to us all. The hon. Gentleman can take credit for engendering that spirit.

The measure has also shown us a new and significant role for private Members' Bills. Although they are often enacted, they are sometimes confined to a relatively small role. I would never describe their role as insignificant, but it could be more important. This is unquestionably an important Bill. I consider that private Members' Bills should have a wider coverage and role—as long as the Government are able to ensure that their policy prevails in the end, of course. I believe that that is well understood. I shall be brief because other Bills follow, which are also of considerable importance.

[Mr. Meacher]

The Bill is important for three reasons. First, we have protected land-based SSSIs pretty effectively with the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 but marine sites have much less protection, and yet a high proportion of Britain's biodiversity is in the seas around us.

Secondly, the marine environment is an important part of promoting the policy of sustainable development. It is a very difficult policy. Everyone will pay lip service to it but its effective and balanced application is a work of art. Reconciling development and conservation under the Bill will not be easy. The hon. Member for Uxbridge said delicately that compromises had been made that he would have preferred not to have been made, and he spoke about other interests riding roughshod over conservation. I really do not believe that that will happen. Mechanisms have been put in place to ensure a balance.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) is right to say that we must take people with us. We want a broad consensus, not only in the House but "out there", that our fishing communities should be able to thrive but that marine biodiversity in our marine sites should be preserved wherever possible.

Thirdly, the Bill is important because, although we have European Union protection of international sites—European marine sites—there has been a gap in the legislation in terms of national sites of marine importance. The Bill plugs that gap. As legislative slots are not easy to obtain, I am very grateful, speaking for the Government, that we have had the opportunity to take the first step in our major review of marine conservation, and to channel it through the Bill. Next week I shall travel to Bergen to discuss with the Scandinavian and other Ospar countries the issue of marine conservation in the north-east Atlantic; these matters must be pursued internationally and nationally.

For all those reasons, the Bill is very important. I congratulate the hon. Member for Uxbridge once again. I thank all those who have collaborated on the Bill and I strongly commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Copyright (Visually Impaired Persons) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

1.43 pm

Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I begin by declaring the assistance that I have received from the Royal National Institute for the Blind. Its help and expertise has been magnificent and I pay a particular tribute to Caroline Ellis, David Mann, Marilyn Oldershaw and the team that has supported them. I also pay tribute to the many hon. Members from all parties in the House who have been eager to give their full support to the Bill.

May I give particular recognition to the partnership that has ensured that the Bill has been given the time today for its Second Reading? I add further to their embarrassment by giving special recognition to, dare I say it, the two musketeers: the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) and my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty), who I know have been very keen to give the Bill their support. I thank those who have expressed their support in the other place. I also thank the Government, especially the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for her support.

Many organisations and bodies outside the House support the Bill. They include the Disability Rights Commission, the Library Association, the National Library for the Blind, the Calibre Cassette Library, the Scottish Braille Press, the Talking Newspaper Association of the United Kingdom, the Torch Trust for the Blind, the UK Association of Braille Producers, the Confederation of Transcribed Information Services, the National Federation of the Blind, the National League of the Blind and Disabled, Scope, Sense, and Deafblind UK.

A considerable number of authors have expressed their support, including Philip Pullman, Jilly Cooper, Joanna Trollope, Harold Pinter and Nick Hornby.

The purpose of the Bill is to remove the barriers created by copyright law to visually impaired people's access to books and other reading materials, while safeguarding the rights of authors and publishers. In so doing, it will greatly enhance not just visually impaired people's access to our written culture, but, crucially, the educational and employment opportunities open to such a hugely disadvantaged group.

Copyright is, in itself, a valid and valuable concept. Writers and other creators are entitled to have their work recognised and respected and to earn a fair return for their intellectual and artistic endeavours. However, visually impaired people face unacceptable delays in gaining access to books and articles in accessible formats or are denied the right to read certain books altogether because of current copyright law.

Visually impaired people cannot simply walk into their nearest bookshop and choose a book in large print or braille. With the exception of a few commercial publishers of large-print and audio books, most publishers find it uneconomic to make accessible copies of works available to visually impaired people. Research commissioned in 1999 revealed that only 5 per cent. of the 100,000-plus titles published in the United Kingdom in 1998 were available in formats accessible to the

2 million visually impaired people a year later. That shows the extent of the limited choice of reading material available.

The majority of accessible copies are produced by voluntary organisations or teachers of visually impaired students, yet the ability of schools and voluntary organisations to make books, magazines and other materials accessible and readily available to visually impaired people is massively constrained by current copyright restrictions.

Every time the explicit permission of the rights-holder is required, it is usually granted, but, typically, there are significant delays and, occasionally, outright refusals. At best it takes a month for permission to come through, but the wait is often much longer. Frequently, six months pass before it is possible to produce an alternative-format version. Sometimes, the wait is as long as two years. When permission is delayed, visually impaired people are unable to participate in our society on the same terms as sighted people. Voluntary organisations find that they waste precious time and money chasing publishers and authors' agents for permission—time and resources that they would prefer to devote to producing more material in accessible formats.

There is compelling evidence of the disadvantage caused by copyright barriers to blind and partially sighted learners in particular. The largest ever survey of blind and partially sighted young people, the results of which were published last year, revealed that nearly half—47 per cent.—of students in university or higher education do not usually get books in their preferred formats and that 33 per cent. of visually impaired children do not always get their textbooks in an accessible format when they need them.

Let me give two examples of the problem. The first is of a visually impaired student who asked her university library to enlarge on a photocopier a book that she needed for her studies. It told her that it could copy only one chapter and that she should be grateful for that. How will that student get through her reading list and complete her studies when the copyright law makes it so difficult for her to gain access to books? Will she, sadly, become one of those students who give up their studies as a result? The second example relates to the recent attempts by the RNIB to persuade the agents of two very famous children's authors to give it permission to transcribe their works, which would enrich the lives of visually impaired children. Permission was refused point blank. Is such a denial of access justified simply because children are visually impaired?

There have been positive developments in voluntary agreements between right-holders and visual impairment organisations, but that does not negate the need for legislation. On the contrary, at the present rate of progress, the RNIB contends that it will take 20 years to get most works covered by such schemes—and many copyright owners will still not join.

I welcomed the launch last October of the joint industry guidelines on copyright and visually impaired people which stated that it would usually be acceptable for a visually impaired person to make a single copy of a work for personal use, subject to various conditions, without seeking permission. However, publishers reserve the right to opt out, and I understand that many schools and libraries remain wary of transcribing works into accessible formats because the guidelines do not have the force of law.

The advent of the information society has rendered the copyright problem more acute than ever. It could offer tremendous advantages to visually impaired people. However, the development of digital rights management schemes has added a new technological barrier to the copyright equation. Most of those schemes are incompatible with the screen-reading technology that blind and partially sighted people use to gain access to material displayed on a computer screen.

Let me deal briefly with how the Bill proposes to address the barriers thrown up by copyright law. It would amend the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 to create two exceptions in copyright law for the benefit of visually impaired people. Clause 1 provides for single accessible copies to be made for work purposes for the personal use of a visually impaired person without infringement of copyright, subject to a few conditions including that the work must be lawfully obtained, that there is significant acknowledgement of the author, and that the work must not already be published in a form that the person concerned can access. There would be no need to ask the rights-holder for permission in such circumstances.

The clause also makes provision for multiple-access copies to be made for and distributed to visually impaired people without asking permission, but with numerous safeguards for the moral rights of the author and without interfering with the legitimate exploitation of the work. Only educational establishments or bodies that operate on a not-for-profit basis could rely on that exception, and they would have to notify the copyright owner within a reasonable time that they had made accessible copies of the work.

In the unlikely event of serious infringements of copyright arising from the activities of bodies under the exception, the Secretary of State would have the power in extremis to prohibit the body or bodies involved from acting under the exception. The exception also provides for circumstances in which a large number of copies in an alternative format might be needed: for example, if a novel has to be studied as part of a school subject and children in many schools therefore need the same material to be made accessible, or if an organisation such as the RNIB is building up stock for its renowned talking books service.

Clause 1 also defines the meaning of an accessible copy and the group to whom the exceptions apply. The accessible copy is one that offers a visually impaired person access to the work equivalent to that of a person who is not visually impaired. It will include formats such as braille, large print, audio cassette or disk.

Visually impaired people access information in a variety of ways. Among other factors, the age of onset of disability, the amount of rehabilitation received and the facilities at the individual's disposal influence the way in which people are able to read. The Bill's definition of visually impaired persons embraces not only those who are blind or partially sighted, or have uncorrectable sight loss, but anyone who has a physical disability that means that they cannot pick up or manipulate a book, such as those with rheumatoid arthritis. That is the definition used by the publishing industry in the context of copyright issues.

[Rachel Squire]

Clause 2 specifies that the legislation will apply throughout the UK, given that copyright is a reserved matter. The exceptions cover literary, dramatic, musical or artistic works as defined in the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act. However, given that the owners of copyright in music are highly dependent on royalties for the making of sound recordings of the music, and that a visually impaired person can enjoy such a sound recording without any reformatting, the Bill specifically excludes the making of an accessible copy of a musical work that involves recording a performance.

The Bill's provisions are heavily influenced by the original Patent Office consultation. They are also the result of lengthy dialogue and consultation with organisations representing visually impaired people and rights-holder organisations. Toward the end of last year I was pleased to meet representatives of the Publishers Licensing Society, the Authors Licensing and Collecting Society, the Publishers Association and the Writers Guild of Great Britain. I am grateful to them for their helpful suggestions, which have influenced the drafting of the Bill.

Throughout my life, I have been fortunate enough to meet and have contact with both children and adults with visual impairment. They stand out from the crowd not because of their disability, but because of their abilities and achievements in overcoming the many obstacles that they face. I hope that the House will support the Bill today and give visually impaired people opportunities to fulfil their potential—to read, to learn, to work and to participate fully in our society.

1.59 pm

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne):I congratulate the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire) on doing well in the ballot. I know from my own experience that a Member who comes high in the private Members' ballot is never lonely. We are besieged by good causes that wish a Member to take up their banner. There are difficult choices to make, but if I may say so, the hon. Lady has made a good choice in bringing the Bill forward.

I am aware of the immense amount of work that is involved in bringing a private Member's Bill together and trying to carry Members of all parts of the House in roughly the same direction at roughly the same speed.

The Bill has the support of the official Opposition. Until the Royal National Institute for the Blind began to lobby Members about the problem, I was unaware of the technical, legal problems that were being caused to many blind and partially sighted people. I join the hon. Lady in congratulating the team that has been involved in the excellent work that has been done at the RNIB in putting everything together, in considering the realities and the safeguards that are needed, and on its most effective lobbying of all hon. Members in setting out the merits of the proposed legislation.

As always, there are points of detail on which some of us may have differing views, but that is why there is consideration in Committee. Such points are not for today's debate. This is a good Bill and a necessary Bill. It seeks to address a clear case of discrimination against blind and partially sighted people. It would be a travesty if it did not receive Second Reading today.

As the hon. Lady has so eloquently described, the problem is in the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, which wholly overlooks the needs of visually impaired people. As she has told the House, a survey carried out a couple of years ago revealed that only 5 per cent. of titles—I gather that about 100,000 are published every year in the United Kingdom—were available in formats that were accessible to people with visual impairment within a year of their publication. That is a damning statistic.

Another statistic is that nearly half—47 per cent.—of blind and partially-sighted students in universities and higher education do not usually obtain books in their preferred formats. We all know that it is difficult enough studying a course at university in the first place, without having additional difficulty because one suffers from visual impairment.

As the RNIB pointed out to me, there are about 3,000 or more voters in my constituency who are shut off from accessible reading material because of the copyright restrictions that the Bill is aimed to deal with. I am sure that the matter has been drawn to the attention of other right hon. and hon. Members.

We have heard from both the RNIB and the hon. Lady about blind and partially sighted learners having to give up in despair. They throw up their hands and walk away from courses because they cannot secure access to relevant study materials in a format that is accessible to them.

In a sense, the irony is that the various formats are invariably produced—not on a profit-making basis—by voluntary and charitable organisations. They have limited resources but they are extremely successful in producing the formats that are required.

It is right to emphasise, as the hon. Lady has done, that no one is setting out to threaten copyright and the legitimate interests of authors, publishers and distributors. I am pleased that only just up the road from my constituency is the national recording centre of the Talking Newspaper Association, which is at Heathfield. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Mr. Hendry), who has given me some details from the centre. It does a tremendous job, both locally and nationally. It transcribes on to tape the contents of 1,100 of the 1,400 regional and local newspapers that are produced. That is an amazing achievement in itself. It runs also a national service that records more than 200 newspapers and magazines on to cassettes and transcribes about 75 titles into electronic format.

In a sense, it is a sort of sister organisation to talking books, and every bit as important for blind and partially sighted people. I can certainly say that from meeting them in my constituency. Talking to members of the Eastbourne Blind Society, I am always struck by how reliant they are on both talking books and talking newspapers. Their products are "read" by 230,000—nearly 0.25 million—blind and partially sighted people in the country. It is not just current affairs that they read, although hopefully they will all read avidly the reports of our debate that will no doubt appear in the national media. People with particular hobbies or interests can access specialist magazines through the service; people can also examine classified ads and pursue job opportunities of which they may otherwise be unaware.

The Talking Newspaper Association of the United Kingdom makes a fair point about the fact that it gets no Government funding; it is a voluntary and charitable organisation. It says that it can only operate effectively with the co-operation of local and national newspapers, and is in the happy position of having agreements with all the local newspaper editors and publishers, as well as national titles. However, it says that there have been a couple of occasions when reservations have been expressed about the provision of the state-of-the-art electronic service. It says that

> "earlier this year, one publisher did suspend the provision of source material necessitating the temporary suspension of a number of titles."

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West is trying to tackle that problem, which is more widespread in other areas, in her Bill. The Talking Newspaper Association puts it graphically:

> "Were the Government to propose, for example, that all Jews and gays needed to obtain a licence in order to access books and information, there would—rightly so—be an outcry."

I do not think that that analogy is over the top. Unbeknown to many people, nearly 0.25 million of our fellow citizens are effectively discriminated against, as I have described. I therefore commend the work of the Talking Newspaper Association.

I shall say only a brief word about safeguards, as it is more appropriate to discuss them in Committee. The hon. Lady recognised that it is important to protect intellectual property of all types. The UK leads the world in many respects in intellectual property, and the Opposition support attempts to strengthen copyright and patent protection. The Bill addresses the problem of providing such protection; I shall not go into too much detail, but the one-for-one exception in clause 1 makes it clear that a conventional copy of a publication has to be obtained in parallel with the production of a version accessible to blind or partially sighted people. There are also detailed safeguards on multiple accessible copies for educational establishments with a legitimate interest in producing formats for visually impaired students; those establishments are not in the business of making a profit or trying to skim off profits from the publishers or authors.

I am pleased that the Bill includes other safeguards. Had they not been included, we would have pressed for them. There may be scope for debate about their extent and whether they go too far but, again, that is a matter for Committee. We have heard stories from the RNIB and the hon. Lady about students who simply cannot obtain a complete book; they may be wrestling with a weekly reading list, but cannot get more than one chapter of a book at a time, which must be an extraordinary disincentive to pursuing a course in any subject. We have also heard about an advisory teacher for visually impaired children who simply could not get enough books in the right format to teach the children properly, which must be against the spirit of the original copyright legislation that the Bill seeks to amend.

In conclusion, I reiterate our support for the Bill; we look forward to it reaching its next stage. Blind and partially sighted people have enough obstacles to overcome in life; let us at least remove this one.

2.9 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): I congratulate the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire) on introducing what I consider to be a model private Member's Bill. It is focused on a particular problem; it is relatively and properly limited in scope; it is, we now know, uncontroversial; and it implies effectively no additional burden on public expenditure. Those are all admirable qualities in a private Member's Bill. The fact that the Bill seeks to correct something which is so patently wrong and does that in a businesslike way is an additional virtue.

I also welcome the fact that we have today had a brief but important opportunity to debate the Bill. That is of the essence of the parliamentary process, as it allows hon. Members and the House to indicate the extent of support—or, in some cases, the extent of opposition—to a Bill. The hon. Lady generously acknowledged that she had been assisted by hon. Members in all parts of the House. We now have the opportunity to debate the Bill, indicate our support for it and perhaps flag up one or two specifics, as my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) has just done, which may need attention in Committee. Again, that is admirable.

I confess that I am generally rather uneasy about legislation. In my previous incarnation, I made a modest career out of trying to protect the public at large from what I saw as unnecessary or even disadvantageous legislation, but in a case such as this, I believe that legislation is entirely justified, particularly where it seeks to assist any group in society whose members are disadvantaged through no fault of their own. That is an aim to which the House should pay more attention and on which it should spend more time than it does.

The hon. Lady's speech reflected the fact that in cases such as this, there is nearly always a balance to be struck between the advantage properly being sought, and any risk of disadvantage to any other group that may have a legitimate claim. I acknowledge that the Bill seeks carefully to do that. As far as I know, none of the legitimate interest groups that could be affected has argued that the Bill should not proceed. The Committee stage will give an opportunity for such reservations to be made clear, if there are any. That is not necessarily a topic for Second Reading, but the Committee will be able to deal with it.

May I register one or two slight reservations, and perhaps put down a marker for the Committee? I am always nervous when I see a reference to the powers of the Secretary of State, such as that in clause 1, with its rather odd format, under section 31B(12) on page 4, which seeks to give the Secretary of State powers by order to prohibit or to disapply. It goes on to state that any body would therefore not be entitled to a licence, and continues:

> "The Secretary of State shall only exercise the powers . . . if he is satisfied".

I am not totally reassured by that, as I see nowhere in the Bill any provision for appeal.

Unless I am misreading the Bill, it strikes me that all the powers go in only one direction—that is, that the Secretary of State can prohibit. The fact that the Bill states that the Secretary of State shall exercise the powers only if he is satisfied does not make me feel any easier. I would prefer to see some further mechanism for appeal or redress under the same section.

[Mr. Eric Forth]

Subsection (14) goes on to state that regulations or orders shall be subject to annulment. I would rather see the positive process, not the negative one, but that is a detail, however important.

In the explanatory notes to the Bill, paragraph 44 states rather optimistically:

> "It is not expected that the provisions of this Bill will have any impact on public finance or manpower requirements. There may be minor workload implications for the Patent Office".

Well, I hope that that will be the case. Having said that, however, simply because I wanted to draw attention to the point, this may be one of those fairly rare occasions when, even if there were more than minor work load implications, the cause is so worthy and admirable that we might all readily agree that expenditure should be undertaken.

With those few words, I add my support to the Bill and wish it well in its further stages.

2.15 pm

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): May I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire) on her good fortune? She has an opportunity that I, in my 14 years here, have never yet had. I am told that these experiences can be either frustrating or rewarding, and I very much hope that she will find her experience rewarding. It is sensible that we also congratulate the RNIB, which I am sure has done a great deal of work on the Bill. It does a huge amount of good in the community at large.

Some private Members' Bills are exotic and some affect only a few people. I am clear, as I am sure other Members are, that this Bill is not exotic but very sensible, and it will affect the best part of 2 million people, who could most certainly benefit from its provisions. They are the sort of people who need whatever help we can give them. Help for those people currently depends on voluntary agreements, and clearly we should be grateful to those who have entered into those agreements. Having said that, although I, like my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), am a reluctant legislator, on this occasion it seems sensible to consolidate those voluntary agreements in law.

It would be foolish to suggest that there are no difficulties ahead for the Bill. There are some very technical matters to be dealt with, and there are legal issues that will exercise minds far greater and more powerful than mine. It is important to make sure that when the Bill goes into Committee, as I hope it will, the concessions that we want to make are not abused. I am sure that that point will be addressed in Committee. It is essential that we do not lose sight of the need to protect copyright owners in the general run of things, and I am sure that the need for safeguards will be borne in mind. Those are issues of detail, and it would be entirely wrong to debate them today.

There really is a need for the Bill. The only figures for a complete year that I have seen suggest that about 5 per cent. of books published in a year become available to people who need such help. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West pointed out that there are those, particularly in schools, who are reluctant to act ahead of legislation. I accept the need for the Bill. It is a sensible Bill, and it appears to have the support of those who own copyrights. My mailbag has been silent on these matters, and I take that to mean that no real opposition has been stirred up. The Bill seems to be non-controversial. I congratulate the hon. Lady on her good fortune, and I wish her Bill well.

2.18 pm

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): May I congratulate the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire) both on securing this opportunity and on introducing a Bill of such evident value? I also congratulate the RNIB, which I know has helped her in preparing the Bill.

I speak on this matter in three capacities. First, in a personal capacity, I know what a difference the Bill will make to many people. Secondly, I speak in a professional capacity because, as some hon. Members will know, I practised as an optician for some years, so I recognise the difficulties that many partially sighted people face in everyday life. Thirdly, I speak in my capacity as the chairman of the recently constituted all-party group on eye care, which is a worthwhile venture. It would be incorrect of me to purport to speak for the group as a whole, but we have briefly discussed the Bill in our meetings, and I got a sense of very strong support for it from the membership and a wish for it to proceed.

Blind and partially sighted people do not have a terribly good deal in this country, for all sorts of reasons. We do not pay adequate attention to the need for primary care in the first instance, and we do not pay sufficient attention to the acute phase in loss of sight and the possible interventions that can take place at hospital level. We certainly do not provide enough support in terms of the rehabilitation and equipment that partially sighted and blind people need in order to maintain their life following what is a very difficult event.

Access to written material is a constant frustration, and is something that Members of Parliament probably do not address properly in our communications with our electorate. This Bill will go a long way to deal with one aspect of that. The difficulties of students in school and in college have already been mentioned. That is a real problem that is made worse by the otherwise wholly beneficial process of integration into mainstream schools and colleges, which do not, to the same extent, have specialist staff who know their way around the system and how to access it.

This Bill will make a significant contribution to the well-being of blind and partially sighted people. I hope that the Government will be able to respond positively to it, and I hope that our contribution will be to make sure that it passes through the House without further delay.

2.21 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Miss Melanie Johnson): I am delighted to be here today to contribute to this valuable debate about the problems encountered by visually impaired people when they cannot read material that is protected by copyright in the format in which it has been published.

The Government recognise that this issue needs to be addressed; indeed, we consulted on a possible way forward only last year. We recognised then that a solution to these problems lies at least in part in a change to copyright law. Copyright gives rights to creators, which allow them to control the use of their copyright material, including by making copies. The material that we are talking about is wide-ranging, as several hon. Members have said. It could be a book of fiction, a newspaper, a school textbook or an instruction manual for household equipment. It could even be a map or information about a job. I recently received a letter from the National Centre for Tactile Diagrams, which is based at the University of Hertfordshire in my constituency, which helped me to appreciate the wide range of copyright material that visually impaired people may currently be unable to use because it is presented in a format that is inaccessible to them. In addition, that lack of access plays a part in the exclusion of blind and partially sighted people from the cultural, social and educational life of the country.

In general, when copyright material has only been produced in a format that a visually impaired person cannot read or see, the copyright owner's permission must be sought before it can be put into an accessible format such as large print, Braille, audio tape or—when it is graphic material—a tactile representation. Many copyright owners give that permission, but there can be delays in getting it—sometimes very long delays—as my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire) said. That is why we started looking at a new exception to copyright that would allow these alternative formats to be produced in some circumstances without infringing copyright, and therefore without the need to seek permission.

An inability to access copyright material can give rise to problems for visually impaired people in many situations—in school, in the home and at work. My hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West gave several telling examples of the problems that disabled people currently face. As I have already mentioned, visual impairment could be one of the factors leading to social exclusion. A visually impaired person may not be able to study the necessary material to gain a qualification or to read the information that they need to take a full part in ordinary life, including in the workplace. I therefore congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West on choosing this worthy subject for her private Member's Bill. I appreciate that it is the culmination of much hard work by her and by the Royal National Institute for the Blind. It also has a formidable degree of support outside the House, as she has detailed.

Copyright law already contains a number of exceptions to copyright covering situations in which it would not always be reasonable or feasible to get copyright clearance. The balance in copyright law between the interests of the users of copyright material and of those who create it is extremely important, as several hon. Members have recognised in their contributions to this debate. Those—including visually impaired people—who cannot always do what they would like with copyright material can and do argue for exceptions to copyright. That is what we are considering in this debate. However, we must ensure that exceptions are fair to copyright owners as well as to users, so it is important to understand why we have copyright protection.

In general, copyright underpins and enhances our creative industries, which play a key role in bringing us the information and the resources that we need to participate in and benefit from the knowledge economy. The Government, therefore, welcome the very positive contribution made by the creative industries to the economy and value very highly the individual contributions of many authors and composers. Copyright provides the mechanisms for these industries and creators to protect—and be rewarded for—their skill and investment in bringing us new products. Protecting creativity and providing the mechanisms for creativity to be rewarded are vital if the creative industries and authors are to continue being successful in producing high-quality material for the benefit of us all.

Copyright protection remains crucial, and that is especially true where the very success of the information society has led to many people believing that the material that others have created can be copied freely. Such issues go well beyond the subject of this debate, but it is important to stress those points because some people here may think that there are easier solutions to the problems faced by visually impaired people than those contained in the Bill. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West emphasised, the Bill quite rightly takes into account the very real needs and rights of copyright owners too.

Moreover, I want to acknowledge the considerable efforts that have recently been made by the publishing sector and authors to listen and respond to the needs of visually impaired people. I know that some copyright owners believe that voluntary solutions to copyright problems could continue to develop to provide all the solutions that visually impaired people need. I want to encourage the dialogue to continue, but I do not believe that voluntary solutions will provide all that is needed to overcome difficulties with copyright clearances. That is why the Government were still working towards new exceptions to copyright in this area before this Bill was proposed.

I am pleased, therefore, that my hon. Friend has brought this Bill before the House. Its intention is to deliver two distinct but complementary exceptions to copyright that, in principle, we can support. It provides a fair balance between the needs of visually impaired people and the interests of copyright owners. Visually impaired people and organisations working on their behalf will be able to act under the exceptions to provide alternative formats of copyright material that are needed to allow visually impaired people to read copyright material. However, copyright owners will have the ability to monitor what is happening to their material and obtain copyright royalties for this in circumstances where their interests might otherwise be prejudiced. That is an important balance and I know that it is one that the House will wish to maintain.

I am delighted to confirm, therefore, that this worthwhile Bill has the Government's support. I am happy to learn that the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) and other hon. Members support the Bill. As the hon. Gentleman said, amendments might be necessary and the Committee will have to consider the detail of the exceptions that may be required at a later stage. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West said, the Bill is about access and opportunity for many visually impaired people and about

[Miss Melanie Johnson]

enabling them to have the opportunities that many of us take for granted. I therefore look forward to the Bill being debated in detail at later stages.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills).

FOOD LABELLING BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [2 November], That the Bill be now read a Second time.

2.29 pm

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): A few moments ago, a piece of paper was shoved in my face and I was told that I appeared to be the Member on the Front Bench responsible for saying something about the Bill. That was not something that I had expected. In 14 years, no one has let me anywhere near the Dispatch Box. The circumstances in which I suddenly find myself are fascinating. If I had the time, there is a great deal that I could usefully say about the Bill, but the difficulty in which I find myself—

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 12 April.

FIREARMS (REPLICA WEAPONS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be read a Second time on Friday 21 June.

SEX DISCRIMINATION (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Friday 21 June.

CONTROL OF FIREWORKS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Friday 21 June.

London Underground

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Stringer.]*

2.31 pm

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): In this short debate I want to review the current consultation on the public-private partnership for London Underground. I want to show that that consultation is inadequate and that that inadequacy will mean that London Underground will have to allow a second consultation period in due course.

Moreover, I want to show that it was the incompetence of the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions that led to that bungling. I believe that this latest example of the Minister's incompetence is yet another reason for him to resign. If a Transport Secretary cannot even organise a consultation process competently, what faith can the House have in his competence to turn round Britain's failing transport system?

If time allows, I also want to bring new evidence to the House that, contrary to statements by the Secretary of State for Transport that this deal does not represent the privatisation of London Underground, it is now clear from detailed analysis of the legal documents linked to PPP that London Underground's key assets are indeed being transferred to the private sector in all meaningful senses. Therefore, on a key policy objective the Government have gone back on their commitments to the House.

We are only just beginning to learn the full horror of the tube deal with which the Government wish to saddle Londoners; a deal that will not bring the transport improvements that we all so desperately want, and a deal that is so self-evidently such bad value for money for the taxpayer that the Government are afraid of publishing information to enable everyone to become aware of that fact.

I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to your colleagues, for the opportunity to debate this key issue for Londoners and for the country. The Government have sought to deny Parliament the debate. The Transport Committee, in its recent report published on 7 March, concluded:

> "It is essential that the Government allows Members a debate and vote in the House of Commons on a substantive motion on the future of the London Underground and the PPP."

However, the Government have refused such a debate. The all-party early-day motion 914 also calls for a debate on the consultation on PPP, yet the Government still refuse. What are they afraid of? I am particularly grateful to the Chair for allowing this debate, and only sad that it is merely an Adjournment debate on a Friday afternoon.

What is happening in the consultation process? Under the Greater London Authority Act 1999, London Underground Ltd. has a legal duty to consult the Mayor and Transport for London, apparently for 20 days. The Secretary of State for Transport said that that consultation period began on 7 February when he made his statement to the House. What has happened since then?

Lawyers from Transport for London, the legal team of Ken Livingstone and Bob Kiley, have since then been encamped in the so-called bid room based on the 11th floor of the Albany house offices of London Underground. Under the strictest rules of confidentiality, that team has crawled all over the legal agreements so far negotiated between London Underground and the Government and the three final bidders, the private sector infracos.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) and I paid a visit to that bid room yesterday. We were prevented from reading most of the documentation, but we were able to take a look at the key agreement, schedule 1.9, more of which later. We were also able to talk to a key London Underground negotiator, Martin Callaghan, and the head of TFL's legal team, Stephen Powell. It is on the basis of information so gleaned, plus the excellent reports by the Transport Committee that I can make my case today.

The first part of my case is that the current consultation process does not meet the legal obligations of London Underground to consult Transport for London. Why? The documents that TFL is being shown are incomplete; some of them contain serious omissions. Moreover, TFL's legal team is still waiting for documents that it has requested but which London Underground has so far failed to provide. The original consultation period was due to have been completed by 8 March, but when TFL threatened London Underground with legal action because it had failed to meet so many of its requests for documents, London Underground was forced to extend the consultation period to 22 March.

Yet even now, only five business days away from the end of consultation, TFL is still awaiting documents. Are they crucial documents? Is TFL asking for unnecessary things? Who knows? However, as TFL is the body that this House has charged with the job of oversight of the final documents, surely it should be given the benefit of the doubt and receive enough time to look at them. That is the interpretation that I would expect a court to make. Unless and until TFL has completed full oversight of final documents, the statutory consultation process cannot be considered finished.

If the Minister questions my interpretation, he should contact London Underground. I understand that it has already accepted in principle that a further round of consultation will have to take place, for the very reason that I allege: the documents currently being scrutinised by TFL are not complete. That begs a key question for this debate: why did the Transport Secretary trigger consultation on 7 February when the documents were clearly not ready for statutory consultation? Did he effectively mislead Parliament by triggering the consultation, or was it incompetence on his part?

There is another piece of crucial evidence to consider: the letter from Sir Malcolm Bates, chairman of London Underground, to the Secretary of State, dated 6 February—the day before consultation was triggered. Yesterday, I saw for myself a copy of the letter in the bid room. I was not allowed to bring the letter out of the bid room, but I did manage to transcribe it word for word. I will shortly read the House relevant extracts from my notes. However, the key message of the Bates letter to the Secretary of State is this: "You are acting too hastily; wait—we are not ready." Yet the Secretary of State, who had already started spinning his intention to make a statement to the press, decided to go ahead, against the advice of the boss of London Underground, who was responsible for the negotiations.

Sir Malcolm Bates's letter is entitled "Value for Money Assessment of the PPP". He writes that

> "the bid prices are not contractually committed"

and goes on to state:

> "There are a number of areas where we know they will reduce, as a result of technical adjustments. There is also drafting to be finally settled, especially in periodic review."

Anyone who knows anything about the agreement knows that the periodic review is crucial. The letter continues:

> "The only competitive leverage left at this stage is that the bidders do not know their individual positions against the Public Sector Comparator.
>
> For this reason, London Underground had decided that the published version of the Assessment Report should show the financial comparators in aggregate, not in detail. We would have intended to release the full figures only once the agreements were signed, towards the end of March,"

The letter also states:

> "I have been informed by your officials that you intend to publish the Ernst and Young Report in full, which will include the comparators for the individual competitions, despite my strong representations. I have told your officials that we think this will damage the public sector's interest during the remainder of the competition."

The letter says that it is felt that there is little alternative but to publish alongside the Ernst and Young report a full version of London Underground's report. Sir Malcolm says that he wanted the Secretary of State to be aware of the risks that follow. He concludes by saying:

> "Obviously we will do our best to mitigate any damage."

Why did the Secretary of State jeopardise the negotiating position of the public sector? Why did he ignore those "strong representations"?

We have on record some explanation given by the Secretary of State himself when he was questioned in the Select Committee on 6 March. I refer to the uncorrected evidence of the hearing, which is available on the internet. He said:

> "I was very clear, and I think I gave a commitment to this Committee, that I would publish the Ernst and Young report. I took the view that there was nothing in the Ernst and Young report that would compromise the negotiations that Sir Malcolm Bates was involved in."

We should note that that is in direct and complete contrast to what Sir Malcolm wrote. The Secretary of State then tried to suggest that the lack of finality in the contracts was due to the consultation process. That is a tempting argument, but of course he would say that because the documents were being consulted on. In any case, it is again in direct contrast to what Sir Malcolm wrote. His letter makes it clear that there were several issues in the contracts yet to be determined and completely unconnected with the consultation process.

The Secretary of State's final defence in the Committee was that he had a duty to the House to report the Ernst and Young analysis. But in so doing, did he have to prejudice the competition in the PPP, which is designed to get better value for money? Did he have to trigger consultation on incomplete documents, so rendering it inadequate and incomplete, and thereby falling short of the statutory requirement?

I contend that the Secretary of State's judgment was seriously flawed. Far from speeding up the process of the PPP and pushing ahead with the Government's plans for London Underground, he has, by his inactions, caused even

[Mr. Edward Davey]

more delays and confusion. The whole consultation process will have to be undertaken again. I have no confidence in a Minister who cannot even get such simple, basic judgments right. In my opinion he should go.

Before I conclude on the consultation process, I want to share with the House and the public at large some of the more disturbing findings that have emerged from the work of the TFL legal team, especially in a document called schedule 1.9, which is part of a whole mountain of documents dealing with the PPP arbitrator—the regulator, as it were, for the PPP deal. In 1999, when the then Minister responsible, the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson), introduced in Standing Committee the concept of the PPP arbitrator, I told her that it would cause trouble, and it has. The negotiators have put into schedule 1.9 all the difficult issues that they could not resolve in the rest of the documentation, including equity rates of return, the extent of risk transfer and the process for terminating the contracts.

Most significantly, much of schedule 1.9 has yet to be agreed. In other words, key parameters of the whole deal have yet to be finalised. How can Ernst and Young, London Underground or the Secretary of State have made any assessment of value for money when such key issues have not been finalised? It beggars belief. Worse still, what has been negotiated of the half-negotiated schedule 1.9 is extremely disturbing. We find that the risks of cost overruns have not been properly transferred to the infracos—they have been capped—so the public sector is not properly protected from them. Furthermore, the ability of the public sector to terminate contracts at a reasonable price is extremely limited. In normal circumstances, they will be almost impossible for TFL to get out of.

The Select Committee picked up on that in paragraph 10 of its report, which bears rereading. It states:

> "We are also concerned that there is no Public Interest Termination clause in the contracts. Ernst and Young stated in their review for the Secretary of State that:
>
> 'In our view, it would be a lower risk option for London Underground to have an express right to seek voluntary termination with an agreed mechanism in line with the Treasury Taskforce Guidance. In particular, the obligation on the PPP contractor to act reasonably and mitigate costs would improve the value for money of the termination and enhance London Underground's negotiating leverage throughout the contract.'"

The Committee concludes:

> "The decision to proceed with an experimental contract structure without the inclusion of a Public Interest Termination clause is difficult to justify, does not follow Treasury Taskforce Guidance and seems likely to compromise further value for money."

That is a damning indictment. The contracts will tie the hands of future democratically elected Governments; they will not be able to say, "This deal is bad value for money. It is not delivering what we want, and we want to end it in the public interest." That goes completely against the lessons learned from PPP and PFI elsewhere. It hands all the negotiating power to the infracos.

I want to issue a challenge to the Minister. As London Underground yesterday felt able to allow my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington and me to read schedule 1.9 without signing a confidentiality agreement, will he publish the document to allow for public scrutiny, and if not, why not?

There are even more serious reasons why the Government should do that. If the Minister will not publish the documents, I shall ask London Underground to let me enter that room and transcribe them, and we shall see how the public react to that.

The Government are trying to avoid debate on this issue and to avoid publishing the documents because the PPP does not meet one of their key political objectives: not to privatise London Underground. The PPP as currently negotiated and under consultation—albeit inadequate consultation—amounts to the privatisation of London Underground's major assets. Despite Ministers' claims and protestations, which we shall no doubt hear repeated today, London's tube is being flogged off. One need only consider the definition of privatisation used by PricewaterhouseCoopers, the company retained by London Underground as its principal adviser on PPP:

> "The transfer of services and/or assets, either on a permanent or finite basis from state to private sector operation and/or ownership".

This is how the Health and Safety Executive, an independent body, describes version 3.1 of the PPP on its website:

> "Under the terms of the PPP, London Underground's infrastructure, rolling stock and stations will be owned and improved by three PPP infrastructure companies."

Those were not my words or those of the Select Committee.

We find a further definition in the contract details. In the April 2000 asset transfer scheme, a legal agreement that sets out how the assets of the tube will go to the infracos, there is an important definition:

> "Where therefore an asset is referred to as being allocated to an Infraco, this means that the relevant Infraco is regarded as having ownership of the relevant asset under the terms of the PPP contract."

Other parts of the contract show clearly that the private infracos will have ownership of all the assets for 30 years. Details of any handback to public sector ownership are sketchy, to say the least. The public sector's right to reacquire those assets is as yet theoretical. It is another Government objective gone wrong.

This whole sorry saga is the most depressing I have had to watch unfold since I was first elected. It reminds me of the poll tax, in that political decisions at the very top of Government are being kept to in spite of all the evidence that they are wrong and all the experts demanding a total rethink, and despite analysis after analysis warning that this will be bad value for money and will create huge problems for London's underground system in the future.

The current consultation period will in law have to be restarted before any final decision can be taken. I therefore implore the Government to stop this madness before they consign London to 30 years of an expensive, painful and crazy experiment.

2.47 pm

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Nick Raynsford): The Government very much welcome the opportunity to debate the future of London Underground. We would have preferred the debate to be conducted on a more rational and better-informed basis, but unfortunately the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) has revealed only too clearly in his comments that he does not understand the process and has not fully understood the information to which he has had access.

Mr. Edward Davey *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman. He will wait for a while and I may consider giving way later. Having made an extremely intemperate and, in my view, mean-spirited attack, he should listen for a while to the Government's response.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned his visit to the bid room. At no point did he acknowledge the fact that I personally arranged for that visit after he expressed concern that he had not had that opportunity.

Mr. Davey *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: I have already told the hon. Gentleman that I will give way in due course. I ask him to contain himself for a little while. He has made some extremely ill-judged and ill-tempered remarks and he should listen carefully to my factual response.

I arranged for the hon. Gentleman to have access to the information and to visit the bid room. It was an exceptional arrangement and I should have thought he might at least acknowledge that.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the consultation process. He clearly does not understand that it is entirely in line with the procedures spelled out in the Greater London Authority Act 1999. If I recall correctly, he served on the Standing Committee that considered that Bill and should therefore be familiar with it. Our actions are entirely consistent with the requirements of that Act. There is no question of the consultation being conducted in any way other than in strict conformity with the requirements of the legislation.

The hon. Gentleman quoted a letter from Malcolm Bates, totally misunderstanding it and presenting it as an argument for delaying the process. It was nothing of the sort. In that letter, Malcolm Bates reasonably expressed concern that public disclosure of certain information, as part of the consultation exercise, might make it more difficult for London Underground to secure the best possible deal in the public sector's interest.

The Secretary of State—because he believed strongly that public consultation was paramount and that it was right that full public consultation should take place—insisted that the full Ernst and Young report should be made available. Did the hon. Gentleman, who has criticised the Government for not ensuring adequate consultation, give the slightest credit to my right hon. Friend for that decision? On the contrary, the hon. Gentleman tried to turn things around, in an extraordinary distortion of the facts, to criticise the Secretary of State for personally seeking to ensure the widest possible consultation.

The hon. Gentleman's argument that the process is a privatisation is based on a complete misrepresentation of the facts. He is fully aware that London Underground continues to remain wholly responsible for running the underground. As I shall explain in the course of my remarks, the maintenance of the infrastructure will be conducted by the three infrastructure companies, under the partnership. To enable that to happen, they must have a lease on those assets for a period of time, but that is part of a partnership that will generate the huge investment necessary to transform the underground. That is very different from privatisation—it is public-private partnership.

The arguments have gone on too long. Londoners are increasingly impatient with politicians—often ill-informed politicians—talking about the underground but not actually delivering results. Londoners want to see action. The plans that London Transport has developed, and on which it is consulting the Mayor and Transport for London, are designed to deliver the improvements that we all want to see. They are designed to deliver a safe, reliable, modern, clean and integrated system—and to do so more quickly than any alternative.

The debate about the PPP has sadly been characterised by a huge amount of misinformation—much more than the hon. Gentleman has given us this afternoon. It is nonsense to suggest that there would be no real improvements for 10 or 12 years—as we have frequently heard during the past few weeks. There is no basis for that claim. No alternative plan would deliver so much so soon. For example, work would start straight away to end the speed restrictions currently causing delays to passengers on the Jubilee and Piccadilly lines. Work would start straight away to tackle the maintenance backlog and improve the reliability of the system. Work would also start straight away on a massive capital investment programme to modernise the infrastructure, covering signalling systems, new trains and increased capacity.

At the end of the third review period, that investment would result in a wholly transformed system and one of which Londoners would be justly proud. However, we need to be sure that the plans for the transformation of the underground are the right ones. No final decisions have yet been taken, but in making those decisions we must consider the issues very carefully. That includes considering the opinions of others. That is why a consultation process is under way.

The Mayor and Transport for London have had access to all the information that they need. The suggestion that they have been denied access to information is not justified. London Transport has extended the consultation period in response to TFL's requests, yet rather than giving credit for that, the hon. Gentleman only makes political capital from it—a typical example of the misinformation and distortion that he has brought to this debate.

London Transport has provided staff not only to help TFL and its advisers assimilate and understand all the information, but to help the hon. Gentleman and others who have visited the bid room. His remarks about the unhelpful attitude of London Underground are not justified.

When the Mayor and TFL respond to the consultation, London Transport will consider their comments very carefully. Only then will a final decision be made. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said that he would also welcome a public debate on the proposals. That is why everyone who is interested can see the financial reports that will inform his decisions. As I said, the Ernst and Young report has already been published, and London Underground has published its evaluation report in full. We are being as open as possible.

[Mr. Raynsford]

The contracts are not yet finalised—of course, they cannot be until all the consultation responses have been considered. However, the Secretary of State has made it clear that if the contracts were to alter materially in a way that means they no longer represent good value for money, the plans will not proceed.

There is some information that cannot be made public until this process has concluded, as we need to protect the public sector's ability to gain the best possible value for money. However, if the final decision is to proceed, the contracts would then be published in full and information would be fully available. Work to deliver a better tube could then begin by the summer.

The plans would bring in new investment and expertise from the private sector, based on long-term commitments not just to provide the infrastructure but to maintain it and so guarantee an agreed standard of service. The contracts provide for the infrastructure companies to be paid according to those results, with incentives to optimise performance and penalties if standards fall as a result of the contractor's failure or inefficiency. That is in line with modern best-practice procurement—designed to ensure that we get value for money and that we get away from the sad experience of underground infrastructure contracts ending up late and seriously over budget time and again.

I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman has not appreciated that the people of London fully understand the difference between the history of past investment—such as the Jubilee line, two years late with a 67 per cent. cost overrun—and the experience of public-private partnerships such as the docklands light railway extension to Lewisham, which was on budget, delivered early and highly successful. This issue is not about dogma; it is about what works. I saw a partnership of that kind work on the DLR and I believe that it would work on the tube.

That is why the Government have made an unprecedented offer of substantial and sustained investment in the tube—£1 billion in each of the first eight years of the contracts—compared with an average of £320 million a year over the last decade. That is another point that was conveniently ignored by the hon. Gentleman in his tendentious speech. We make this offer because we are confident that these plans would deliver the results that passengers want—modern, reliable, attractive, clean and affordable tube travel.

I am sure that the consultations will be worth while, but once they are complete, Londoners will expect us to stop arguing and start delivering a better underground for London.

Mr. Davey *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): The Minister has sat down.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at three minutes to Three o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 5 March 2002

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

National Institute for Clinical Excellence

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

9.30 am

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): I am grateful for this opportunity to discuss an important subject that touches the lives of many different people: patients, their families, health professionals and managers and those in the pharmaceutical industry. The setting up of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence as a central body for the investigation, appraisal and recommendation of drugs, treatments and technologies was well intentioned and welcome. It offers an opportunity to obtain value for money in research through economies of scale and to make the best use of scarce national health service resources. Health authorities and primary care trusts can rely on the efficacy, safety and quality of NICE-appraised drugs and ensure that they are available to the patients who need them and who will benefit from them.

However, it is unclear who decides on the priorities for investigation and how much influence cost-effectiveness has on the institute's decisions. There is a general lack of openness and transparency about the process, methodology and criteria that are used to determine whether a treatment is effective. Realistically, the cost of the treatment should be set against the benefits of an individual restored to good health and able to work and lead a normal life. For example, it is estimated that rheumatoid arthritis costs the country £1.2 billion a year in benefits and lost income. Similarly, multiple sclerosis sufferers could be helped to lead a healthy life if beta interferon were available to them. Appraisal teams rarely include specialist clinicians in the particular field under investigation, yet such investigation would surely benefit from their detailed knowledge and experience. Perhaps the Minister would be kind enough to comment on those points in her summing up.

In theory, NICE should lead to faster take-up of clinically effective and cost-effective new treatments. There have already been many benefits. Since the institute was established less than three years ago, it has published clear and authoritative guidance on the use of more than 30 treatments, including new cancer drugs and treatments for coronary heart disease, asthma in children, diabetes and dementia. The duty of health authorities to implement NICE guidance within three months and make new treatments available should, in theory, eliminate the postcode lottery and make access more equitable. Regrettably, in practice, the variation in patient care that is so counter to the fundamental principles of the NHS persists, for two main reasons.

The first reason is funding. Funding for new treatments is not ring-fenced but is simply included in health authorities' global budgets. Health authorities must plan ahead, and if a NICE-appraised drug is unexpectedly introduced halfway through a budgetary year, they have serious difficulties in making funds available for the treatment. The absence of ring-fencing can lead to robbing Peter to pay Paul, with no net gain for patients. It is also difficult for large organisations that serve many commissioners, such as my own Barking, Havering and Redbridge Hospitals NHS trust, to ensure that all populations have equal access.

The second reason is delays. The process of appraisal is far too slow, and some health authorities are using NICE delays as a reason for not prescribing desperately needed treatments. That has become known as NICE blight. For example, following an appraisal process that started in August 2000, NICE has still not published guidance on the use of campto and other treatments for colorectal cancer. Negative NICE guidance would leave patients in Britain with no freedom of use of drug therapies. They would be in a similar position to those in Korea, Russia, Poland and the Czech Republic.

The United Kingdom lags behind many other countries in the uptake of innovative medicines, a situation exacerbated by a paucity of NHS drug funding. The NHS drugs budget allocation in 2000 for all anti-cancer drugs, for all cancers, was only 6.7 per cent. Only one in five eligible patients currently receives campto. The appraisal on its use in the first-line treatment of advanced colorectal cancer has taken far too long, which has serious implications for those already ill.

The condition is reaching epidemic proportions. The results of a second appeal against NICE refusal of campto—a drug of proven efficacy—bring into question the influence of cost on NICE decisions. There is similar concern over the availability of the breast cancer treatment herceptin, often the last resort for patients for whom other treatments have failed. Too many patients die while crucial decisions are awaited.

Implementation issues are causing difficulty with some areas of NICE guidance. Guidance on drugs for Alzheimer's published in January 2001 recommended that only specialists such as old-age psychiatrists and neurologists initiate and establish the maintenance dose for treatment. In many localities, there is a shortage of available specialists. A larger role for general practitioners who have specialist knowledge of not only the patient but the caring spouse would facilitate the wider availability of those treatments.

I recently received an answer from the Minister to a question about NICE guidance on fertility treatment. That is of concern to a group in my constituency, Couples Having Infertility Problems Solved—or CHIPS—which is eagerly awaiting the outcome of the NICE investigation. The Minister said:

> "NICE has not yet published a timetable for development of these guidelines."

Although not a life-endangering condition, infertility causes extreme distress to couples. The delay has particular relevance because the biological clocks of the women concerned are ticking away; for some, it will be too late. Without the necessary treatment, those women could remain childless, with devastating results on their future emotional well-being.

The Department of Health placed 240 target areas for improvement on my local health authority last year, which was very challenging. Those used up the lion's

[Angela Watkinson]

share of the authority's budget, leaving only £6 million for the many non-target areas, including fertility treatment. There were £20 million-worth of bids for that £6 million, so the amount available for fertility treatment was, necessarily, extremely small. I urge the Minister to ask NICE to give greater priority to that important area of health care.

Over the years, a plethora of health-related bodies has grown up, including NICE, the Commission for Health Improvement, the National Clinical Assessment Authority and the National Patient Safety Agency. On 10 January this year, the chief medical officer announced a new committee, the National Infection Control and Health Protection Agency. We await the establishment of a new council for quality health care. All those organisations have to work closely with the social services inspectorate, the National Care Standards Commission and the Audit Commission. We seem to be overburdened with bureaucratic bodies. There is an urgent need for greater co-ordination and the avoidance of duplication of effort in the provision of quality public health services in the NHS.

A formal review of NICE has been expected for some time and there has been much debate about how and by whom it should be carried out. It is essential that that review is not concerned only with issues important to the pharmaceutical industry, which contributes so much to medical research in the United Kingdom and to the Government. It must also take into account the views and experiences of a wide range of health professionals, patients and patient groups on how treatments are used and how they work in day-to-day circumstances. More emphasis should be placed on the cost-effectiveness of medicines in terms of outcomes for patients and the implications for other elements of Government spending.

The impact of medicines on patients' quality of life is frequently overlooked, and it is more difficult to measure than cost. Reassurance is needed that NICE is not a cost-containment body. Who makes decisions on the affordability as opposed to the cost effectiveness of treatment is paramount. The success of NICE depends on how its guidance is implemented. Evidence of continued, or eradicated, postcode prescribing following NICE guidance needs to be collated with evidence of health authority and GP compliance with NICE recommendations. Unacceptable variations in care could then be challenged and all patients, regardless of their geographical location, would have equal access to treatment that best meets their needs.

9.40 am

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) on a fine presentation of the case against NICE, and on securing a debate on a topic that has concerned many hon. Members, and many of our constituents, over a number of years. I saw the Minister make a face, and I hope that that will not be reflected in her response because I come to this debate with some constructive suggestions from the Multiple Sclerosis Society.

I should like to talk about the operation of NICE in conjunction with the investigation into beta interferon. Back in 1998, following investigations on behalf of some of my constituents who suffer from multiple sclerosis, I received some correspondence from a company called Schering, which had been trialling beta interferon. It stated that the

> "effect of Betaferon on the condition"—

of secondary progressive multiple sclerosis—

> "was so strikingly good that the Committee of International Trialists stopped this trial and offered Betaferon to those who were still on placebo."

In June 1998, the eighth meeting of the European Neurological Society in France concluded from an abstract of the trial that the study provided convincing evidence that treatment with the drug delays sustained neurological deterioration in patients with secondary progressive multiple sclerosis, which was reflected in the delay in their becoming wheelchair-bound.

To set the NICE investigation into beta interferon in context, I let the Minister know that I was receiving such papers in my office in 1998 and was passing them on to my constituents with multiple sclerosis. We started an investigation into the drug, and the Department of Health and the National Assembly for Wales asked NICE to appraise beta interferon on 6 August 1999. That appraisal did not happen in 2000, and it did not happen in 2001; it was not until 4 February 2002 that a final result came from NICE. That is an unacceptable length of time for anybody to wait for an investigation into a drug that has received the sort of reports that I have mentioned. Unfortunately, as the Minister knows, NICE was not able to recommend the drug.

At the same time that the Department of Health came out against the drug on the ground of cost-effectiveness, it leapt in to come up with a scheme to make the drug available to our constituents. I do not want to be curmudgeonly about that: we are extremely pleased that the scheme has been introduced, and many people are delighted to be included in it. However, it seems nonsensical that although NICE, which was set up by the Department of Health, opposed the use of the drug, the Department is spending its time finding ways around such decisions.

I agree with the Multiple Sclerosis Society, which has been absolutely fantastic throughout the debacle, supporting its members and providing information to Members of Parliament and other interested parties. The MSS wrote to me saying that it welcomes the Department's proposal but regrets

> "that NICE itself has not been able to show the imagination necessary to resolve the issue. NICE has effectively said that because it cannot be sure about the long-term cost-effectiveness of the drugs people with MS should not receive them. The Department, by contrast, has said that the drugs should be prescribed in a manner which will allow this long-term cost-effectiveness to be properly assessed. The Department's approach turns on its head NICE's presumption of guilt until innocence is proven."

I want to reflect the concerns of the Multiple Sclerosis Society, which was involved in the appraisal of the disease-modifying drugs for MS for more than two years—twice the standard length of technology appraisals.

There is no doubt that the appraisal of the drugs was a challenge for the institute. The appraisal of drugs for MS, which is a long-term and complex condition, has certainly tested the robustness of the institute's approach to drug appraisals, but it has thrown into sharp relief several issues that need to be addressed if the institute is to meet the agenda set for it as a first-class service.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): Does my hon. Friend agree that NICE faces the problem of deciding cost-effectiveness according to available resources? The Treasury decides how much money is available, and what is clinically excellent or cost-effective is decided in that context. NICE is not really considering matters with a blank piece of paper; it is forced to look at things from the Treasury viewpoint.

Mrs. Gillan: My hon. Friend is right, and he makes a good point. There is a straitjacket enforced on NICE that is not good for its investigations and operations. I have had constituents who were put on the drug and continued to work and contribute to society. The NICE appraisal does not consider the whole economic picture of how people continue their lives and are productive in society.

There is a gap between the institute's rhetoric about openness, transparency and the patient's perspective, and the actual nature of its structures and practices. That gap undermines the credibility of guidance from the institute among patients and patient representative organisations. The institute's approach is dominated by health economics and is characterised by a heavy reliance on results from randomised control trials. Such trials are necessarily short-term and cannot provide concrete evidence for the drugs, which will be used in the long term. The institute has not yet developed a suitable methodology for assessing the cost-effectiveness of long-term interventions.

I should like to put to the Minister a series of recommendations from the Multiple Sclerosis Society. I hope that when she responds she will do me, and the society, the courtesy of addressing those points. The society believes that a cultural shift is needed so that the critical nature of the institute's decisions and the resulting need to command the respect of the public are reflected in its structures, processes, and the way in which it conducts its day-to-day business. The society thinks that appointments to the institute's partners council board and appraisals committee should be advertised and subject to open recruitment processes. It thinks that the deliberations of the appraisals committee should be opened up by allowing patient representative organisations to observe discussions and by posting detailed notes of the committee's meetings on the institute's website. Those are not difficult recommendations for the Minister to consider. The appeal panel should be replaced with a lawfully constituted, independent body. I do not expect a knee-jerk reaction from the Minister, but I hope that she will give that recommendation long-term consideration and tell me, perhaps in a letter, how it is received.

There should be a public review of the institute's approach to the use of health economics which should examine, for example, the threshold of cost-effectiveness that has been set by the institute, the value of relying on the evidence of randomised, controlled trials, the costs and savings taken into account in appraisals, and the difficulties of assessing cost-effectiveness in the long term. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) will accept from a humble Back Bencher that I hope that that should be supported across the board in our party. The institute should more actively support input from patient representative organisations and make the perspective of users who are affected by its decisions central to its decision-making process.

In conclusion, many of my constituents have gone to hell and back over the appraisal. They have had their hopes raised; they have had their hopes dashed. Some have amazingly poignant stories of people who have been unable to afford the drug and whose friends have gathered to raise the money for it and seen results. The Minister will have seen in the newspapers at the weekend the wonderful story of the lady who was able to become a fitness instructor following a successful course of the drug. I hope that the Minister will take the recommendations from the Multiple Sclerosis Society seriously. There has been a lot of pain in the operation of NICE and I hope that she will now learn the lessons from the mistakes and give us the assurance about the institute that my constituents and the MS Society deserve.

9.51 am

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) on securing this debate and opening it in such good style. NICE causes my constituents great concern in the prescribing of certain drugs and, in her opening comments, my hon. Friend referred to its lack of transparency. I want to illustrate that with two examples that I found on the NICE website.

One of the interesting features of the technology appraisal on NICE's website is that it states when the first, second and other appraisals committee meetings were held and the decisions reached, but it does not state when the appraisal process started. It states that assessment of the rheumatoid arthritis drugs etanercept and infliximab started before 6 February 2001, but not the firm date on which it started. It also states that the expected date of issue will be March 2002. One year seems a long time in which to appraise drugs that have already been assessed for effectiveness and safety and been approved and licensed. That is not the worst example of delays in the appraisal of drugs by NICE.

Asthma inhalers for older children are being assessed, and again no start date is published on the website, although those using the devices will be pleased to know that in March 2003, they will know which asthma inhalers are both cost and clinically effective. There has been a huge delay in reaching proper conclusions on drugs that have already been licensed as effective and safe. NICE's original remit was to speed up the availability of drugs and to assess clinical effectiveness, but the two examples that I cited fly in the face of that.

The area that causes me most concern is the change to NICE's remit in August 1999 to assess the cost-effectiveness of drugs within the Treasury's available resources. That sends a message to people awaiting evaluation of those drugs that once NICE has agreed that they are clinically and cost-effective, they will be available to those who need them. However, that is clearly not so, as an answer from the Department of Health suggested a few months ago. It stated that the Government will, in due course, announce plans to

[Mr. Mark Hoban]

implement their manifesto commitment to ensure that local health authorities, primary care groups and primary care trusts are directed to prescribe those drugs. That hits at the crux of the problem that I have experienced in my constituency.

I would like to mention a case, but do not expect the Minister to reply to my comments on it, as I am using it purely as an illustration. One of my constituents, Michael Cooper, is hoping to be prescribed etanercept, a drug that relieves rheumatoid arthritis. That drug is being assessed by NICE. Fareham and Gosport primary care groups sent me a letter to say that, even if NICE decides that the drug is effective, there is also a local process, led by clinicians, for evaluating the safety and effectiveness of new drugs. There is also a third layer of assessment, which takes advice issued by NICE into account. That is another delay in making the drug available to those in my constituency.

A further letter about Mr. Cooper's case was sent to me, and it raises the issue of what happens when NICE approves a drug, and how to fund the prescribing of it within the drug budget available to the local primary care group. I also have a letter from a consultant who works for Portsmouth City primary care trust, which says that we will have to consider carefully not just the benefits to patients from the drug, but what the rest of the population will have to do without in order to fund it—the drug is very expensive. Mr. Cooper hopes that it will deal with his condition effectively, but primary care groups say that they do not have the budget to enable the drug to be prescribed. That is remarkable, given that the Treasury laid down the basis on which the cost-effectiveness of the drug was to be assessed.

I worry about Mr. Cooper's condition. He has had many operations to replace joints and has taken a series of drugs, all of which have been rejected by his body. I spoke to him last night. He has been on morphine, and as his body did not accept the drug that he has tried most recently, he will have to go back on morphine. Etanercept has been licensed for use and is effective and safe, so why cannot his GP or consultant prescribe it privately while the NICE process is under way? That would be a sensible step. The drug must be safe and effective, as it has passed its licensing hurdles.

Mr. Cooper has generated a huge amount of correspondence on the subject, and makes some pertinent points. One letter to him contains the comment:

> "You asked for guidance on the issuing of private prescriptions. A hospital consultant can not issue a private prescription and continue to see the patient under the NHS—it must be totally private."

A consultant in secondary care cannot prescribe the drug unless Mr. Cooper goes private. That is an odd state of affairs for someone who cannot have a drug funded from the local drug budget. Why cannot Mr. Cooper use his resources to meet the cost of etanercept? The letter goes on to say:

> "Similarly, a GP would breach his or her terms and conditions of service if they issued a private prescription for a drug that they could theoretically prescribe on the NHS."

The word "theoretically" intrigues me. A GP cannot prescribe an approved drug if it is theoretically available on the NHS, even though the local primary care trust cannot prescribe it because it has not gone through the full local clinical effectiveness tests or the NICE tests. That puts us in difficult circumstances whereby drugs that are available theoretically, but not in reality, cannot even be prescribed privately for the relief of a very painful condition.

We are in an odd situation. We have drugs that are licensed as safe and effective. They are being appraised by NICE and by a local PCG. It is not guaranteed that they will be made available to patients because of the limitations on the drugs budget. At the same time, NHS rules prevent the consultant or the general practitioner from providing those drugs.

That is the crux of the problem. The system adds layer upon layer of control on the prescription of drugs. NICE is acting as a gatekeeper for cost-effectiveness within available resources, but it is still the PCG's responsibility to determine whether it is able, from its restricted drugs budget, to prescribe what can be very expensive drugs. Members of the PCG in my area—it is soon to become a primary care trust—will have to decide which drugs should be removed from the list and what changes in prescribing habits should be made in order to fund the availability of expensive drugs that have gone through the NICE process, which is intended to speed up the access and availability of drugs and to remove the postcode lottery.

10 am

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): I am grateful to be called to speak in this debate. It is astonishing that there is no Labour Member present beside the Minister. The Government's establishment of NICE has been attended by so much hope and expectation, and I cannot believe that they have received so little backing from their Back Benchers. My hon. Friends are nodding at that remark from our Back Bench, which is full because the Conservative party recognises the seriousness of the subject under discussion. We wish to highlight some of the problems that we have encountered with NICE. I will not beat the Minister over the head about it—my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) has used the word curmudgeonly—but several serious issues must be raised.

NICE was introduced to appraise new therapies so that it can provide the NHS with information to help it to achieve optimum clinical and cost-effectiveness from medicines and other treatments. Therefore, the concept of NICE is positive; it is important that research is carried out into different treatment options to determine whether they should be provided by the NHS.

However, we have heard about the problems of beta interferon and renal cancers, and I want to highlight one of the glaring omissions of NICE's work at present: it has missed the plot with regard to integrated health care. There is a growing movement in favour of embracing what used to be thought of as complementary therapies, and of offering a wide range of them. Sadly, the majority of the technologies that NICE has examined are what might be termed conventional medicine. Little or no time and resources are spent on examining other treatment options, such as complementary medicine.

That is strange given the current public demand for complementary medicine. About 5 million people use complementary therapies. Therefore, it is a serious shortcoming that NICE has not initiated any high-quality research into them. I hope that the Minister will address that point: I mentioned it to her before the debate, so I have given her a bit—a tiny bit—of notice.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): The hon. Gentleman has mentioned the shortage of high-quality research into some of the treatments that he is talking about, and he has stated that NICE is responsible for funding that, but I am unsure whether that is the case. I acknowledge that there is a call for such research. What role does he think the producers, manufacturers and prescribers of such treatments should play in providing the research base that is so urgently needed in that area of medicine?

Mr. Tredinnick: The hon. Gentleman has made a helpful contribution, as it is important to establish who will provide that research. We face a conundrum, because unless there is adequate research into a medicine, doctors such as the hon. Gentleman are not keen to prescribe it. I hope that I do not do him a disservice by saying that. Until we have a wide database of research, the medical profession will be somewhat sceptical. The Government must take the lead. I agree with him that there is an onus on the industry—those who produce pills and potions—to help, but the Department of Health has an overriding duty to provide information, which should be made available through NICE.

The issue must be examined in context. There are approximately 50,000 complementary practitioners in the United Kingdom. The Department of Health will not solve the health problems in the UK, with the exponential growth of demand on services that is in some part due to an ageing population, unless it brings in some of those 50,000 therapists.

The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) may correct me, but I believe that there are approximately 30,000 health care professionals in the UK—depending on how they are added up—and 50,000 complementary practitioners, most of whom work in the private sector, although some acupuncturists work in the health service. Until the Minister and her colleagues instigate wider use of complementary therapies in the health service, the supply of practitioners will be insufficient to deal with the demand for services. That is a fundamental point.

Complementary therapies are often a fraction of the cost of expensive drugs. I do not suggest that such drugs are unnecessary, but we should not ignore less expensive remedies—a point that I will develop with regard to beta interferon.

Mr. Heald: Does my hon. Friend agree that in the treatment of mental health, a combination of treatments, such as the use of modern drugs with sport, reflexology massage or other such alternatives, provides the best way forward? Is he aware of MIND's "My Choice" campaign, which highlights the importance of the availability of a range of therapies to those with mental illness?

Mr. Tredinnick: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. He was at the recent King's Fund launch of that campaign and I pay tribute to him for the immense amount of work that he has done, as well as the personal time taken and dedication shown, to help those afflicted with mental health problems. He is right; it has been found most effective to embrace a range of treatments including acupuncture, homeopathy, higher vibrational energies such as Bach flower remedies, bush or North American flower essences and channelled energy.

When the House was not sitting the week before last, I visited a high-security prison in Hollesley bay, Ipswich, where I saw how a range of therapies are used on prisoners who have received life sentences—I met one whose sentence was 20 years. Reiki, the Japanese system of using symbols to stimulate people to channel energy, is effective. Whether one believes that energy to be from God or the universe or whatever, some people can channel energy through their hands. I met 10 prisoners, and every single one said of their own volition that they had benefited from such treatment and that, when they were locked up in their cells at night, it was the one thing that they could practise themselves.

The use of Reiki is an example of what my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) mentioned. It is effective for the treatment of mental health, especially in prisons. Most prisons in the midlands use a range of therapies to help reduce tension. Acupuncture is a key treatment. Indeed, I spoke to the deputy chair of the Hinckley magistrates bench on Friday about its effectiveness in prisons.

I remind the Minister that in mainstream complementary care there are approximately 2,000 acupuncturists, 7,000 aromatherapists, 16,000 healers, 800 herbal medicine practitioners, 2,000 homeopaths, 3,000 hypnotherapists, 8,000 massage specialists, 1,000 naturotherapists and nutritionists, 13,000 reflexologists, and 2,000 yoga practitioners. Will the Minister ask the management of NICE to investigate thoroughly such disciplines, which have existed for a long time? Traditional Chinese medicine and acupuncture have been around for 3,000 years.

In a Westminster Hall debate the other day, I pointed out that there are 60,000 hospitals in the People's Republic of China using Chinese medicine. We are told that we need more evidence to support such medicine, but it has existed for 3,000 years. Who are we kidding? The evidence is there, but the problem is that we have not looked for it. Much evidence that is published is often ignored. Masses of evidence exist about therapeutic touch and healing. Matthew Manning and others have written books and conducted surveys that are not considered. The Minister must consider such material.

Dr. Harris: I always listen to the hon. Gentleman with interest; sometimes he provokes me, although he does not mean to. Does he think that books on therapeutic touch and healing, which he described as research, meet the standards of research that pharmaceutical drugs must satisfy? Those drugs are tested by randomised, double-blind, placebo-based and long-term trials, in which many people are involved. Does he recognise that several of those qualities are required for research to be understandable, reproducible and valid?

Mr. Tredinnick: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman is trying to help my re-election in a few years'

[Mr. Tredinnick]

time, but he has been helpful on this occasion. We are engaged in an important debate because a key issue is that one cannot use a traditional double-blind and placebo concept with many of these therapies. We must develop other concepts that take general well-being into account. We discussed that before the debate in connection with recent trials on homeopathy. A placebo trial may be more than that due to the energy of the person who is giving the placebo treatment. If that person is merely around another, that may increase the other's well-being. Additionally, complementary therapists can generally spend longer with their patients. The five-minute visit to the GP does not occur in the complementary world, in which a person would expect a first consultation to last for an hour.

The way in which the trials are set up is important and a matter on which the Government should expend time and energy. NICE may be able to interface with the database that was complied by the Research Council for Complementary Medicine. There are 75,000 research references for complementary and alternative medicine. I do not have the papers in front of me, but I am sure that I have written to the Minister, the Secretary of State or another Minister in the Department about the need for funding of that database. I have spoken in Parliament on behalf of the integrated health care movement for 15 years. The sums of money that would be required are small: £10,000 here and £100,000 there.

The Minister must address the regulation of complementary therapies—NICE may wish to take that on board. Osteopathy and chiropractic are in mainstream medicine. There was a big worry about the cost of regulation to the practitioners. That worry is approaching for traditional Chinese medicine and western herbal medicine—phytotherapy. Professor Pittillo is on the new committee that the Department of Health set up to sort this thing out. The Minister should talk to him because his life will be much easier if the Government find £1 million to help people pay for the regulation.

If any of my colleagues think that I am taking up too much time, I hope that they will interrupt me, but I understand that I have a little leeway this morning. That is unusual because one is usually under considerable pressure in this Chamber.

The Minister's life would be easier if she considered the wheels of regulation, which doctors such as the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon are keen on because they like regulated complementary practices. If the Minister wants to reach that point, she must help people through the hoops by providing a few pounds to lubricate the wheels. I am not talking about multi-million pound trials, but £10,000 here and £100,000 there. We must bear that in mind in the context of the massive budgets of the Department of Health.

Mrs. Gillan: I am listening carefully to my hon. Friend. His argument comes down to the input to appraisals of voluntary organisations that represent a substantial transfer of funds from the charitable to the statutory sector, and that should be recognised by the Department. The institute should possibly extend to voluntary organisations that are involved in technology appraisals the practical support that it intends to offer to organisations participating, for example, in its guidelines-development process. Thereby, funds would not go from the charitable sector to the statutory sector on such a profligate basis.

Mr. Tredinnick: My hon. Friend has done tremendous work on multiple sclerosis with the Multiple Sclerosis Society. She speaks with eloquence and has great knowledge of the subject. She is right to look at other aspects. We are in a new health paradigm. People are going to doctors, such as the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon, saying, "Doctor, I want to try homeopathy." It is no good doctors saying that, although they do not know anything about that treatment, it will probably not do any harm. Patients now demand that doctors know about different therapies. My hon. Friend's point about the transfer of responsibility for such practices from voluntary organisations to the Government again illustrates the need for the Government to take the whole range of services very seriously. We are talking about service providers coming into the health service.

The Government need to focus on the fact that a vast number of doctors do not have much idea of how to refer patients to other practitioners such as those that my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hertfordshire mentioned when he spoke about mental health. They must take on board the fact that many treatments are multi-treatments. Most of the people working in complementary, integrated medicine, which I understand best, are multi-discipline practitioners. Homeopaths are often experts in Bach flower remedies, which work at a mental level. They tend to help people with depression or those who have difficulties in managing their lives. For example, oak or olive may be taken to give strength to someone who is run down. The high levels of the bush and American flower essences are all valuable tools. However, far too few, if any, medical colleges offer courses for doctors so that they can understand how to interface with this world.

Many years ago, I did a masters degree in business administration, which some think makes people a master of absolutely nothing and an understander of little. I can see hon. Members smiling at that description. Hopefully, I gained some understanding from such studies. Having spent a few weeks studying a range of subjects, I did not necessarily become a great expert. However, that does not matter. What people need to know is where to look when they need help. I shall never be an expert on economics. I do not speak in the House about economics, but I know when to contact an economist.

Doctors need to be able to say, "We cannot fix this skin problem. We have tried steroids, but the patient has not responded." That certainly happens at the George Eliot hospital, a massive national health service hospital in Warwickshire. It has brought in a homeopath, who specialises in skin conditions. He is not getting the easy patients, but those whom no one else can treat. There are worries about steroid creams, but homeopathy and traditional Chinese medicine, in particular, deal effectively with skin conditions. I could give the Minister chapter and verse about such matters.

We need to consider a new health paradigm in this country. That is the strategic thrust of my argument. We must take patient experience into consideration much more. That is something NICE could do: it could collate patient experience and anecdotal evidence. We are told that anecdotal evidence is not enough, but if one collates enough anecdotal evidence, it is pretty powerful. If 25 people came into the Minister's advice surgery in the run-up to the next general election and told her that they were unhappy about the ring road around Salford, I bet that she would not say that that was just anecdotal evidence, and that a double-blind, consumer-driven trial was needed. When people come to see me about the Earl Shilton bypass in Hinckley, I do not say that their comments are not representative because they are not statistically sound. Instead, I say that I am going to listen like blazes, and ask them to sit down and tell me about the problem because my job is to represent them.

We must not get fogged by the terminology. We have intuition, which derives from the right side of the brain. The left side of the brain deals with thinking clearly. We have lost much of our right-side intuition, which can be observed in animals sensing fear. A very effective way of preventing deer from eating roses, if anyone ever has that problem, is to put lion dung in the beds. Deer, who have not seen lions in England for 1,000 years, know if they smell a lion that they have to get away. That is intuitive and instinctive. We have lost that and we need to return to it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham, who has carried out so much work on multiple sclerosis, referred to beta interferon, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson). NICE's decision on beta interferon is very controversial. What is just as controversial is the failure to investigate the effectiveness of acupuncture in relieving the condition. That is not some crazy moon therapy of which no one has heard. The therapy has been around for 3,000 years and is practised in 60,000 hospitals in a country that comprises a fifth of the world's population. We are not considering it, and we must.

We have referred to costs, which are crucial to the national health service. We have already been told that new Labour has blown it on its existing budget, and is returning to tax and spend. That is now Labour's policy. It cannot fix the health service. It has tried to, but will have to spend more of people's money. The Minister would not have to spend quite so much if she considered other treatments. Acupuncture treatment is incredibly cheap. All one needs is a set of 14 to 20 needles per patient. They are terribly cheap; one uses them once and then throws them away. The expense lies in training the practitioners, although even that is cheaper. NICE should consider that.

The cost-effectiveness of medicines and the outcomes for patients, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster referred, represents another straw in the wind. The Government must consider the cost. I am minded to table questions to the Chancellor of the Exchequer asking whether he has investigated the cost comparisons of the different medicines. Perhaps the Public Accounts Committee should consider that. I may ask my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis), who chairs that Committee, to consider it. The costs are completely different, and out of line. We ignore that and we should consider it: it is terribly important.

Last week, we launched the parliamentary group on integrated and complementary health care, which replaces the one on complementary and alternative medicine that was set up in the 1970s by my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) with the former hon. Member for Erewash, Peter Rost, in order to create awareness. People are now very aware. A vast amount of the population is using such therapies and the Government are lagging. They need to wake up because we are undergoing a seismic change in health care in Britain as primary care trusts take over from the old health authorities. Many of the novel therapies offered under the old system have been done away with as the new system tries to bed in. More information provided through NICE and a greater number of inquiries would go a long way towards alleviating such problems.

It is rare that one gets a chance to say more than one hoped to in a debate. I hope that I have not monopolised the available time too much. I am grateful for the indulgence that my hon. Friends and hon. Members have shown in listening to me for so long.

10.24 am

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): It is a privilege to be here to discuss such an important issue. I see that the Minister is on her own on the Labour Benches, but she makes up for her isolation with her enthusiasm, and we look forward to her contribution.

It should be pointed out that the Select Committee on Health is, or has recently been, abroad. That is why many people who might otherwise be present, including Government Members, are not. My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) would almost certainly have been here and might have been speaking were it not for the Select Committee's travels. It is particularly appropriate that we have in the Chair a distinguished former Chairman of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton). He can see that we are discussing things that that Committee has discussed over many years.

It is appropriate to put on record that I am an Industry and Parliament Trust fellow with what is now GlaxoSmithKline—it has gone back and forth through several name changes. I also went on a national health service study trip, funded by the company then called Rhône-Poulenc Rorer, to the American Society of Clinical Oncologists some years ago, to examine rationing of health care treatments.

We have had a fascinating debate. The number of treatments spoken about demonstrates the pressure on NHS budgets. We have heard calls for more spending on and funding for treatments for rheumatoid arthritis, multiple sclerosis, infertility and cancer, to name but a few. Those calls are all appropriate, but involve saying that greater priority should be given to those conditions. Politicians must realise that, when there is a limited budget, a call for priority to be given to certain treatments or alternative treatments is by definition also a call for less priority to be given to something else. We must be careful about falling into that trap.

Mr. Heald: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is necessary to look far more widely at the cost savings made by the implementation of guidance? For example,

[Mr. Heald]

in the mental health field, if modern drugs were made available, the effects would be felt not only in the Department of Health but in a range of Departments. Mental health is a condition that affects not only health but the issues covered by other Departments.

Dr. Harris: Of course I accept the hon. Gentleman's point and shall deal with those issues when I discuss how to measure cost-effectiveness. However, it would be difficult, and a dangerous policy, to rely on increased spending on effective treatment and on the identifiable release of funds in order not to put pressure on the budget when more spending in one area is called for. The corollary of that would be that we could only spend more on certain drugs when they could be shown to release funds, although there might be arguments to spend more on treatments and drug therapies when that did not release funding elsewhere. Meeting unmet need is something that we do not do well. I suspect that much Government policy is designed to ensure that we do not identify unmet need in case that requires funding for which savings cannot be made from existing treatments because there are none.

Mr. Heald: Has the hon. Gentleman read the interim Wanless report? That makes the point that there could be

> "a 5 per cent. reduction in the societal cost of mental illness, for example through lost days at work or the loss of employment",

and even a reduction in the cost of crime, if modern treatments for mental health were available.

Dr. Harris: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point that investing in modern treatments and early intervention can cause long-term savings. I do not dispute that. However, if he is saying that we should give extra resources only to areas, such as the one that he mentioned, where that might cause the release of funding not just in the health service but elsewhere, he is on tricky ground. It is often hard to prove that that release of funding will happen, and one should not have to go as far as that hurdle. I hope that he will recognise my point that increased priority for treatment for certain conditions within existing budgets will create pressure because health authorities cannot grab Home Office or Department for Work and Pensions budgets and the savings therein.

The other temptation that we must avoid is engaging in NICE bashing. A number of public submissions to the Health Committee inquiry into NICE said that it is a reasonably well run organisation, and those submissions came from people who might have had an axe to grind. I am certainly not going to indulge in NICE bashing; politicians' behaviour, and particularly Ministers' policies in that area, makes them far more eligible for bashing.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) on her speech introducing the debate, and I thank her for bringing the issue before us. If she does not mind my saying so, she should be congratulated on identifying many key issues that we have to—and want to—discuss, such as who appraises what goes forward, the lack of transparency on cost-effectiveness, how we can measure cost-effectiveness more widely than at present, and the lack of ring-fenced funding to implement NICE guidance. She also mentioned so-called NICE blight, which was discussed by other hon. Members.

The hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan), who is no longer in her place, has done sterling work with the Multiple Sclerosis Society, to which I also pay tribute. It is a fantastic campaigning organisation which has kept the issue of the appraisal of beta interferon in the public domain to a greater extent, in terms at least of numbers, than might otherwise have been so, given competing priorities for media attention. That has put pressure on the Government, who responded with a quasi-trial, a quasi-subsidy and a quasi get-out arrangement—a sort of sale or return scheme.

I should be grateful if the Minister answered the following question, and I should like an undertaking from her that she will do so either in her response or in correspondence. She announced a proposal to make beta interferon available, where it had been shown to be effective, on a reimbursement scheme. What negotiations had she had with the drugs companies that would supply the drugs, and had they reached a conclusion when she made that announcement just before the Friday on which the NICE verdict on beta interferon was announced? I question whether she was able to gain maximum value for money in subsequent negotiations if she had committed the Government to that policy.

I am glad to see the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham back in her place. I was just appraising her contribution and asking whether the Minister can be sure that she got maximum value for money from the drugs suppliers given that she announced the scheme before it had been agreed with the pharmaceutical industry. Was the Minister not over a barrel having made that announcement—which I suspect was made in order to pre-empt what she might have considered to be bad news on the NICE finding?

The hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) gave a perfect example of NICE blight in the field of access to anti-rheumatoid arthritis drugs. That such drugs were under appraisal gave greater cover for those who look after tight budgets in resisting their wider prescription. Furthermore, because those treatments are available to the better off who can buy them privately if they have their whole treatment privately—a distinction that the hon. Gentleman was careful to make—and given that NICE has ruled that some drugs should not be available on the NHS or there is a policy not to prescribe such drugs until the information is available, there are issues of equity to consider.

The Government entitled—I think satirically—the White Paper in which they introduced the concept of NICE, "Faster Access to Modern Treatment". Whether it is a good thing or a bad thing—I say that it is a bad thing—most people in the field recognise that, effectively, the Government have delivered slower access to modern and effective treatments, which they must recognise as a tool of rationing.

As usual, we had a welcome contribution from the hon. Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick), who ought to be treated with greater seriousness by hon.

Members when he asks questions in the House of Commons. Ministers should, and probably do, recognise that he speaks for many people in making the case for alternative therapies. I know that he does not mind, but I regret the fact that people are amused that he makes the same point in an effective if different way time and time again. The key point about his contribution is the question of evidence. Even though I am sceptical about some of the alternative therapies that he promotes, I am not of the view that there is not a powerful effect from such treatments. However, I question whether such effects are greater than the placebo effect that he mentioned.

As I have said before, the placebo effect is important in medicine and worth buying. Indeed, much of what the NHS provides through what may be called the white-coat effect is a placebo. However, there are ethical difficulties in saying that something has a pseudo-scientific mode of working when all that one is generating is, in fact, a strong placebo effect. If one explains that the treatment is a placebo, one undermines its effectiveness but at least one is being honest. There is a difficulty with treatments that have an effect but for which the mode of working is, clearly, scientifically nonsensical. A balance must be found between achieving the effect that one wants and being honest with the patient, particularly if one is taking their money at rates that presumably support the industry. At some point, the hon. Gentleman must recognise and address the need for that balance. One could say much more on the subject; undoubtedly, we will return to it in future debates.

I should like to use my remaining limited time to discuss three issues: effectiveness, cost-effectiveness and affordability. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence was set up to consider the effectiveness of treatments. I do not question whether that is appropriate. It was also set up to consider cost effectiveness, which is a question of rationing. I am aware that the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) is concerned about the time. I will finish soon, although I have taken several interventions, including his.

I do not think that there is any doubt that NICE should consider cost-effectiveness, as long as it looks at it in the round and not narrowly in terms of health budgets only. We must get a handle on some of the long-term measures of cost-effectiveness that the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham mentioned, and drug companies have a duty to ensure that their trials consider long-term effects on health economics.

However, I disagree with the Government's imposition of an affordability test on NICE. I first raised the matter in 1999, when the Government snuck through an amendment during the recess to the statutory instrument that set up NICE. They argued that NICE had to take affordability into account. However, it is not for NICE but for politicians who raise taxes for and from the health service to say what is affordable. Unless the Government recognise that they are, effectively, approving a way of rationing, they cannot escape the charge of blame shifting, especially if they urge and force health authorities to fund treatments approved by NICE without providing sufficient funds. They are robbing Peter to pay Paul.

In getting rid of what the hon. Member for Upminster called a postcode lottery, we may end up, in the words of Dr. Mike Dixon,

"replacing it with something worse".

We may end up with a tyranny of the appraised, in which medicines and other treatments that have been appraised by NICE get all the funding at the expense of other effective and important treatments. Those are the key issues that we must address when discussing NICE. I look forward not only to the Minister's response but to what I expect will be the even more balanced approach of the Select Committee.

10.38 am

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): I agree with the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) that describing the work of NICE using the words "faster access to modern treatment" is ironic at best.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) on securing this important debate. She launched it by referring to her constituents' concerns about the delays in introducing infertility treatment and colorectal cancer drugs. We have been waiting more than a year for determination of the appeals.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan), who has a particular interest in multiple sclerosis and beta interferon, said that some of her constituents had been "to hell and back" over the issue.

My hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) spoke about his constituent, Mr. Cooper, who has rheumatoid arthritis. He described the operations to replace joints that his constituent has had while waiting for drugs that should be available but are not because of NICE procedures. His constituent is frustrated that he cannot even pay privately to receive the treatment that would ease his condition.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) described in his important contribution the benefits of integrated health care. Although it does not relate solely to NICE's work, it is important to note that in the treatment of mental health, as with other conditions, one treatment may not be the answer and a range of treatments may be necessary. A choice should be available. I make no apology for again mentioning the MIND campaign, "My Choice", which is making the very point that, in dealing with mental health, modern drugs coupled with sport and other treatments such as massage, reflexology and so on often make the difference for patients.

The starting point for our debate must be to examine why as the most innovative country in modern medicine in Europe—we invent the most medicines—we are the slowest to allow patients to receive the benefits of those medicines. It is appalling that a country as innovative as Great Britain should be in that position.

We all agree that it is good to have a body that can describe excellence and that cost effectiveness should be part of that equation. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham said, when the Government decided that cost-effectiveness must be judged within available resources, as they did in August 1999, the pass

[Mr. Oliver Heald]

was sold and from then on it was a question of what the Treasury was prepared to hand out instead of what excellence demanded.

I agree with the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon that NICE's work should be praised. The Royal College of Psychiatrists described it as a well managed organisation with capable officials—I agree with that—and talented staff. It referred to it as an

> "organisation that exudes a sense of unity, cohesion and commonality of purpose"

and stated that it is good that it commissions work from other bodies and encourages excellence. None of us disputes that, but the fact that it is a rationing body is the nub of our criticism.

The Government have stated recently, in the light of the Bristol royal infirmary report, that guidance will be issued without Secretary of State approval. That is supposed to suggest a new independence for NICE, but the fact remains that it decides what is clinically excellent on the basis of how much money the Chancellor will allow to be spent. It is a corruption of clinical excellence to require decisions to be made on the basis of Treasury-led concerns.

My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster referred to beta interferon, which NICE was forced to conclude was not a treatment that should be made available. During the trials in Europe, it became so obvious that it should be made available that the trial was stopped and the drug was given to those who had been receiving the placebo. In the face of such evidence, NICE was forced to state that that important therapy should not be available here because the Chancellor had not allowed enough money to make it available. Only when the Government were desperate owing to the publicity—that is what matters to this Government—did they manage to cobble together a compromise that, if the drug companies would treat its use as a trial and risk could be shared, they would allow beta interferon to be made available for a limited period to see whether it worked. The Government were hoist with their own petard. They had insisted that NICE be a rationing body, and when it did the rationing, they were so shocked by the effect that they had to scrabble around to find a solution through the back door to enable people to receive the drug to which they were entitled. It is all very well and good talking about guidance issued without the Secretary of State's approval, but that depends on what the Treasury can afford.

It has been said that there will be a statutory obligation to make funds available. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster pointed out, a mid-year determination can create a difficulty for the health bodies. Much criticism has been made of whether the NICE guidance, even if coupled with a statutory obligation to make funds available, will be followed, because there are competing bodies in the area. The NHS centre for reviews and dissemination and the "Drug and Therapeutics Bulletin" are in the public sector and are capable of giving different advice on drug therapies—and they do just that. For example, they gave different advice on relenza. Ultimately, the buck stops with the clinician. The law is clear that it is up to the clinician to decide which drug to prescribe and, if he considers that the advice of NICE is wrong or that some other advice or opinion should be accepted, that is what he does. It is not simply a matter of NICE handing out its guidance and the money being available.

Many health authorities or trusts have no procedure whereby they can monitor the implementation of the guidance. Recently, CancerBACUP undertook a study that showed that only 47.5 per cent. of health authorities—as they then were—and primary care trusts have monitoring policy. Does the Minister accept that there is a need for a serious review of NICE? When I asked a parliamentary question about it in December, the answer was that the review that was promised in March 2001 would be considered in the light of the Bristol royal infirmary and Select Committee reports that were being undertaken. Will there be a full and proper review? If so, when?

Will the Minister confirm that the review will cover some of the important issues that have been outlined today? Will it deal with how cost effectiveness is quantified and measured? There is no doubt that, as the interim Wanless report made clear, a much wider assessment is required than that which is carried out by NICE at present. On mental health, the Wanless report estimates the cost of modern, world-class mental health services at £3.2 billion. It makes it clear that it is not unreasonable to set against that the

> "5 per cent. reduction in the societal costs of mental illness"

that would be achieved as a result. Wanless highlights lost days of work, loss of employment, costs of crime and other issues. The report talks of an across-Government assessment.

Will the Minister confirm that NICE simply considers the drugs budget and the quality of life for the individual patient on the basis of QALYs—quality adjusted life years? If we can achieve from a treatment at a cost of less than £30,000 a quality adjusted life year, it passes the test. If it costs more than £30,000 a year, that is tough luck. Will she establish that that is how the system works at present and that it is as crude as that?

Will the review cover NICE blight and whether it should be merged with other bodies? Will it deal with the timing of appraisals? Who will decide when technologies will be up for appraisal? No one seems to know who makes such decisions. Will she comment on why her Department has published a report called "Faster Access to Modern Treatment" and has established NICE with the result, as I said at the start of my remarks, that patients in the most innovative country in Europe have the slowest access to modern medicines?

10.49 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I shall do my best to respond to all the issues that hon. Members have raised in the time available to me. If I do not manage to respond to some of the important and interesting detailed issues raised, I undertake to do so in correspondence.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) on securing the debate. All those who spoke raised important and complex—not to say difficult—issues to be resolved. I am pleased that the debate is taking place in the context of the inquiry into the operation of NICE by the Select Committee on Health, because I believe that the debate and the inquiry address some of the same issues.

The hon. Lady said at the outset that the setting up of NICE was well intentioned and welcome. I was a little sceptical of the remark made by the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) that the hon. Member for Upminster had outlined the case against NICE; clearly, she had not. She voiced some reservations and concerns, but welcomed the establishment of NICE, and her comments were echoed by many other hon. Members who mentioned the way that NICE is run, the high quality of the people involved, and the way in which they are grappling with difficult issues.

The hon. Lady asked who decides the priorities and whether there are any specialists on the appraisal panels, before going on to discuss funding issues. The NICE process provides for expert views to be taken into account in many ways. The royal colleges and specialist associations make submissions to the NICE appraisal committee; those submissions provide the process with expert views. The appraisal committee also invites experts in technology to attend its meetings and give evidence. It is crucial that the best evidence is available to the appraisal committee during its consideration of such matters.

In the early days of NICE, concern was expressed about who decides the priorities and about the transparency of the selection process. That is one of the reasons for the launch tomorrow of a consultation paper on the process—how technologies are selected for appraisal, how they are considered, and who considers them. I urge the hon. Members who asked questions about the operation of the process to respond in detail to that consultation.

Mr. Heald: I am pleased to hear that, but will the Minister confirm that as well as the consultation exercise, there will be a full review of NICE and its operation?

Ms Blears: My understanding is that that review, which was originally referred to in January last year, was proposed in the context of the pharmaceutical industry competitiveness taskforce. The industry had voiced concern about the way in which procedures were selected and about the process for appraising them. The consultation to be launched tomorrow will pick up many of those issues.

The Bristol royal infirmary report raised different issues. It dealt not with competitiveness or the way in which technologies were selected, but with the independence of NICE and the way in which it interacted with the rest of the health service. Those issues, too, have been raised by hon. Members today, and they are picked up in the response to the Kennedy report. The review will be about the selection process, how the topics are considered and the sorts of evidence submitted.

The hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham raised a series of Multiple Sclerosis Society recommendations on cultural shift, the membership of NICE and, in particular, the involvement of patients' representatives and the perspective of users on the process. Those are extremely important issues, and I am sure that some of them are appropriate to the consultation process, but I undertake to raise them myself. It is important, not only for the Multiple Sclerosis Society but for the whole range of patient bodies, that the perspectives of users and patients are as much a part of the process as anybody else's perspective. If there is to be broad consensus about NICE's decisions, the whole community must have confidence in the process.

The hon. Member for Upminster expressed her worries about funding, and several hon. Members mentioned the possibility of mid-year determinations that could cause difficulty for primary care trusts and strategic health authorities when planning ahead within their allocations. Increases in the general allocations for health authorities and primary care trusts are occurring at a rate faster than any we have known before. Since 1997, health spending has increased by a third in real terms, and by 50 per cent. in cash terms. It is right that primary care trusts and health authorities that represent local communities are the bodies that plan ahead and decide how to meet the funding requirements for new treatments and technologies that emerge from the NICE process.

It is fair to say that mid-year determinations and items coming out of the blue will be very rare. The processes are generally long term, involving research, licensing and the development of ideas. Most people involved in health will receive pretty good notice of what is to come on stream, and they should plan how to fund that with their partners.

Several hon. Members mentioned so-called NICE blight. I assure them and the public that funding authorities are expected to use their existing prescribing arrangements and examine evidence of clinical effectiveness when considering the funding of any treatment being appraised by NICE, or of a treatment for which no appraisal has been commissioned. NICE should not be used as an excuse not to provide treatments. Health expenditure is rising significantly and procedures should be determined using the clinical views of GPs and those who are involved with their patients.

The hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham raised the issue of beta interferon. I am glad that she has welcomed the scheme that was set up to allow thousands of people to access beta interferon. The scheme is about creativity, imagination and taking an innovative and novel approach. That is in the best interests of patients in this country.

Turning to the comments made by the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris), I understand that negotiations with companies did not commence until after NICE had made its determination. That clearly answers the points that he raised.

The hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) expressed concern about the three-month statutory period for the implementation of the decision set out in our manifesto to ensure that the system has teeth and that if NICE makes a decision, health authorities and primary health care trusts are obliged to implement it. I am delighted that that is now the subject of a direction

[Ms Blears]

and that there is a statutory responsibility for procedures to be funded within the overall increase in expenditure of primary care trusts' budgets.

Generally, I tell hon. Members that deciding what can be afforded and assessing the cost-effectiveness and clinical effectiveness of procedures are complicated matters for mature discussion among all parties. We live in the real world in which there are some financial constraints on health expenditure, but I am happy to say that under the current Government those constraints are much smaller than they were.

I come now to the points made by the hon. Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick). In principle, NICE may consider complementary therapies, provided they satisfy the criteria. The technology advisory group considers proposals, and anybody may submit ideas to that group: if the hon. Gentleman or those he represents wish to submit projects for appraisal, they can do so. We want the consultation process that will be launched tomorrow to make the selection process more transparent and open, to allow more people in different fields to submit ideas to NICE. The hon. Gentleman said that just being around some people increases our sense of well-being. Unfortunately, the opposite is sometimes true—but not of him.

The hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) asked about rationing and the budget. He must acknowledge that under the Labour Government health expenditure is increasing faster than ever before. Unless his party is prepared to match our health expenditure, it is pretty contradictory and an example of wanting it both ways to say that everything should be implemented with no limit on expenditure.

I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman welcomes NICE. It is not about reducing expenditure, because approximately an extra £300 million will be spent this year as a result of implementing NICE guidelines: for example, 9,000 women will get drugs for breast and ovarian cancer, 10,000 people will get drugs for cancer, 77,000 patients will get drugs for coronary heart disease, and 72,000 will get drugs for diabetes—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nicholas Winterton): Order. I regret that the Minister's time is up. We thank her very much for her reply to that important debate.

Political Participation (Young People)

11 am

Vernon Coaker (Gedling): Today's debate is on one of the most important subjects for Parliament. The health of our democracy should be, and is, a real source of pride to us all. Hard-won freedoms such as freedom of speech and association, free movement, religious freedom and the right to vote are important principles, and they have all helped to create our democracy. However, there is a real sense of unease—a sense that all is not well and that something must be done. There is a feeling that alienation from the formal political process is growing, and nowhere is that alienation more acute than among our young people.

We must confront the context in which the debate takes place. The turnout in the 2001 election was appalling. Involvement in politics is not just about voting, but the record level of apathy, especially among young people, is a challenge to us all. Only 59 per cent. of people voted in the 2001 election compared with the 71 per cent. who voted in 1997, but that was 10 per cent. lower than at any election since universal suffrage was introduced in 1928. One cannot help comparing that figure with the number of people who voted in the "Pop Idol" competition. That may seem a trivial point, but it shows what can happen when people are motivated and interested. When it is easy to vote, people become more involved. I do not want to be a part of a democracy in which a minority vote in a Government; that is unhealthy for democracy.

What do some of those young people say? In a book published by Demos in 1999 called "The Real Deal", some disaffected young people gave their views. I shall quote some of them. A 21-year-old white British man said:

> "I've got no plans to vote on any elections or anything. I don't feel that it makes much difference. I haven't noticed any difference in my life in the change of government. The only change of government that's been while I've been alive, I've not noticed any difference. I don't think that there would be any difference."

A black British woman said:

> "No. Not really. I'm just not a political person. I don't really care one way or the other. Although some people get really upset when you say that, they think, 'Oh you should care, it's your world, your country too' but you know, I never think what I think is going to make any difference at the end of the day, I'd rather use my energies thinking about something else that matters for me."

We need to listen to what young people are saying. I reject emphatically the argument that young people are not interested in politics, that they are selfish and are therefore unconcerned about what is going on.

The word "apathetic" implies laziness. I believe that we, as politicians, need to ask why it is happening; we should ask whether we are to blame rather than trying to externalise the problem. We need to consider how we should respond to young people's disaffection. I believe that they are concerned and interested, but they want to feel that their voice, their vote, their view, can make a real difference to the decisions that are made. They want to feel that their involvement can change things.

We should consider the passion with which young people involve themselves in single issues. When we visit schools or youth clubs, young people tackle us about issues such as the environment, rights at work, poverty at home and abroad, animal welfare and drugs. They challenge us on the issues of fairness, equality and ethnicity—the whole range of social issues that confront us. Those young people have a real point to make about those issues, and we should listen to them.

The MORI poll cited in the "The Real Deal" states that 84 per cent. of young people consulted by MORI said that they did not trust politicians, and 70 per cent. said they had never been consulted about their needs by politicians. I tend to feel defensive when I read such statistics; my immediate reaction is, "Well, I do this and that, and I try to do my best"—but we should confront the issue and recognise that a real challenge lies before us. To overcome that apathy, disaffection and mistrust, we need much more direct contact between politicians and young people and more direct consultation on the issues. We need to break down the barriers. The media have a fundamental role in that, not only by holding us to account and but by concentrating on the real issues.

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough): My hon. Friend may be surprised to hear that when I consulted young people under 24 before the last election, I had a far better response rate from them than from the rest of the population. More than 33 per cent. of those who were asked questions responded, which shows that young people are interested in the issues. However, the most significant point that emerged was that they did not have enough information to make key decisions on the issues that we were trying to consult them about.

Vernon Coaker: My hon. Friend makes a valid point, and confirms my belief that when one has direct contact with young people, they have opinions to express. Young people simply want the opportunity to express their opinions.

My hon. Friend referred to the need for information, and I shall deal with the question of citizenship education later. It is important to ensure that people have information, but the key point of my argument is that young people's view of the political process and of politicians changes for the better whenever we consult and involve them directly, and make them feel that their voice is not only listened to but acted on, and that they are informing the decisions that are made.

The media have a role to play. A debate is currently taking place about the dumbing down of the media, which is an important issue. We would not want that to happen, but we should bear it in mind that the media play an important role in representing politics and providing a connection between politicians and the general public—not least with young people. The media's attempts to find new ways of programming, rather than defeating the desire of politicians to inform people, may have the opposite effect if they are successful in helping to engage young people. Although no one wants there to be any dumbing down, we need to consider how programming might help, especially with respect to young people. The BBC, independent television, radio and the newspapers are considering that issue.

To reinforce the importance of direct consultation, I shall quote the views of a young person who attended a consultation event in Cardiff. Some hold the view that we are not real people—to the extent that when we go out shopping in the supermarket, people say, "What are you doing here?" and we have to explain, "Actually, I'm shopping." Some people seem to think that we do not do normal things such as shopping. The young person in Cardiff said,

> "Yeah. We've got this thing about politicians being all prim and proper, no family problems and when we was at one of the meetings we were saying, like we had to go round in circles saying something about ourselves and like who our idol was. And we had to say about our mothers and one politician turned round and said it would have to be my sister because she's a single parent mother and all her kids done really well in school and it made me realise it isn't two parent families and stuff like that. Which was good to realise."

That is an important point about a part of the process that somehow, when we talk about our democracy, we have to generate. We have to ensure that people realise that politicians are also human beings who live in society and the community, and use the hospitals and schools, as others do. Direct contact and consultation can help break down those barriers. However, young people will say that consultation must lead to action and change, and not merely be a talking shop.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Mr. Reed) mentioned, the introduction of citizenship education in our schools is crucial. It should not teach facts alone, although facts are important and people have to understand how Parliament works, how Members of Parliament are elected, what a council does and how councillors are elected. Young people must also be given a feeling of how the system can be used to try to change things. In their schools, they must be involved in decision making, so that they have real experience of democracy in action as well as factual knowledge about how it is supposed to work. Alongside citizenship education, the capacity of schools to change in response to what their young people say is important, as is the development of school councils and other such bodies.

The Government are to be congratulated on some of their actions to give young people a more effective voice locally and nationally, and the Minister will no doubt build on that point. For example, the UK Youth Parliament is an exciting initiative aimed at bringing young people into the heart of Government. I hope that we can build on it, and I shall speak more about it later. Youth councils are being established locally, and regional assemblies are linking up with the UK Youth Parliament. Sue Mansell, a citizenship co-ordinator, is working extremely hard to establish youth councils throughout my county of Nottinghamshire.

The children and young people's unit has been established and is encouraging Departments to consult and involve young people. Recently, the Department for Education and Skills held a consultation event with young people from all over the country. They spoke to the Government about what they thought should be in the Education Bill, what they thought was wrong with it, how they felt that it should be improved, and what differences they would make if they took the decisions. Those young people were invited to another meeting a week ago, and were met not only by Members of the House, including me, but by Members of the other House. We talked to them about some of the changes to be made in response to their comments. More such involvement is important. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has organised many open days

[Vernon Coaker]

for young people, to encourage them to see it as an important part of Government and to encourage a wider diversity of applicants for jobs there. Across Government, changes are being made.

I recently visited the Monty Hind centre in Nottingham, which is the Nottinghamshire base for the National Association of Clubs for Young People. We need to ensure that all the changes that the Government make, whether in terms of resources or of policy consultation, reach down to the grass roots and the children at the sharp end.

You will know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as will many of my hon. Friends and other hon. Members, that many MPs are trying new and exciting ideas to involve more young people in their constituencies. They are meeting young people and setting up websites and e-mail addresses, among other things, to try to engender links. However, we also have to recognise that the disengagement from the formal political process is real, and that there is a growing demand by young people for quicker decision making, faster change and more direct access to the process.

It was interesting to note that a poll conducted by Charter 88 in conjunction with the YMCA in August 2001 stated that a significant number of 16 and 17-year-olds—47 per cent.—said that voting could have a lot of influence, but that the figure for 20 to 22-year-olds dropped to 35 per cent. I do not think that 47 per cent. or 35 per cent. are necessarily significant figures for those who say that voting can make a difference. They do show, however, that we have an awful lot to do, and that an awful lot of change needs to take place.

There are a couple of issues that we need to consider. We must continue to think about the modernisation of Parliament. In the 21st century, we are still bound by tradition and forced to use antiquated language and procedures, which many young people see as irrelevant. I do not want change for change's sake, but Parliament must modernise itself if it is to be more relevant to the young people whom we represent.

Another important point is that Parliament should not be unnecessarily confrontational. The introduction of debates in Westminster Hall has resulted in an important change: some of the unnecessary party politicking has been taken out of our debates, which have sometimes been of a much higher quality as a result. Young people, in particular, are turned off by party political points being made just for the sake of it, rather than to advance a good argument. People understand that there are sometimes difficult issues, but Members of Parliament should seek solutions, not score party political points for no apparent reason.

We should also examine electronic means to enable young people to express their views directly to Parliament more easily. I am no great wizard with such things, but we should consider introducing interactive websites and chatrooms. We should explore the whole range of opportunities.

We must consult young people more widely on policy initiatives. We have heard practical ideas about how to make voting easier, and that will be important. I have said before that we need a debate about the age at which people are entitled to vote. We should change the suffrage, and the voting age should be reduced to 16. The age at which people may be elected should be reduced to 18, and the Electoral Reform Society and children's organisations such as Save the Children have supported a campaign to achieve that. Hon. Members will have heard it argued that although 16-year-olds can do a variety of things, such as joining the armed forces, marrying, and paying tax and national insurance, they cannot vote. We should deal with that anomaly.

We should also consider giving the UK Youth Parliament a budget. We can argue about the amount, but why not tell the young people involved, "We will consult you, and you will have a budget to spend." Why not give them £10 million and say that they can spend it as they deem appropriate? Why not give the Parliament's youth committees a budget to spend? Why not make councils establish youth committees and give them budgets that they must spend? There would be real decision making, real responsibility and real money to spend. Of course, those involved will waste money, but we ourselves cannot honestly put our hands on our hearts and say that we have never spent a few pounds that, in retrospect, we know could have been spent more wisely.

We should see young people not as a problem, but as a solution to many of the problems that we face. We have problems with crime on the street, drugs and poor behaviour in schools; indeed, there are a host of problems right across society. Why do we not involve young people by asking them, "What solutions can you suggest?"? If our young people were more involved in developing policies to deal with problems, we would make better policy changes.

There can be no greater challenge confronting individual Members of Parliament, or Parliament itself, than to rejuvenate and regenerate our democracy; it is crucial to re-engage the many young people who have lost confidence in the formal political process. The question is whether we are brave enough to make the decisions that need to be made.

11.20 am

Mr. Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford): I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker). I have shared an office with him for nearly five years—although I have not been shopping with him—but this is the first time that I have taken part in a debate alongside him. Many hon. Members will know that he has been consistent in speaking and listening to young people, both in the House and outside. He has taken part in a number of initiatives, to which he has referred, and he and I are well acquainted with Save the Children.

What motivates people most strongly to participate? It is when they feel that they are going to lose something, or are going to have something imposed on them—that is a psychological motivator. Leon Festinger talked about the cognitive dissonance theory: if we feel that a force is threatening our balanced view of the world and what we perceive to be right, we will act. However, if we feel that our participation will have no effect, it is likely that we will not engage. An example of that would be compulsory voting. If any political party said that if it were elected it would impose compulsory voting, turnout would rise; people would not want to have that imposed on them and any political party that suggested it would be either voted out of office or not elected.

Many hon. Members see that involvement at local level, particularly over controversial planning applications—mobile phone masts are topical for all of us. The community comes alive when people, young, old and middle-aged, want to resist something. They work hard for their communities and put in a lot of time and effort because they feel that they can affect something that matters to them. If we try to galvanise the same level of support, volunteering and community action for an environmental project, people are not so forthcoming or eager.

Consider the 1992 general election, when participation was higher than in the subsequent two elections. People felt that there was a real competition, and that there was something to lose if they did not vote. In 1997 and in 2001, particularly 2001, the press told us that the result was a foregone conclusion. How many doors did we all knock on to be told, "They're going to win anyway," even if we eagerly spoke of our majority and urged people to go out and vote? That is part of the equation.

I agree with what my hon. Friend said about the press dumbing down. We also heard at the last election that it was fashionable not to vote; people said, "Don't bother." That does not necessarily have an impact on which party people support, but it does affect whether they participate. People have argued about whether there was a golden age of participation and turnout, and from the 1920s until 1997, the percentage turnout was in the mid-70s, so the golden age, if there was one, ended in 2001.

The issue is important for my constituency, which is the youngest in Kent in terms both of its creation and of its population. It might surprise hon. Members to know that it also has the youngest Member of Parliament in Kent. Time has not been that kind to me, but even more depressing than my hairline is the fact that my constituency also had the lowest turnout in Kent. Although it is not the most affluent area in the country, it is far from being the kind of deprived inner-city area normally associated with low turnout.

All the political parties try to portray themselves as youthful organisations. Tune in to the party conferences and the leaders come on, the camera pans round, and—funnily enough—the two or three front rows are full of young people. The average age at the Labour party conference seems to be about 19 or even younger—although at the Tory party conference it is about 90. We have tried text messaging, birthday cards and first-time voter cards, but those measures have not had much effect.

Although young people's voting participation has gone down, as has that of the rest of the population, it is a question of more than just apathy and disillusionment. We need to recognise the potential seriousness of the situation, as my hon. Friend said. However, the news is not all bad—there have been advances in involving young people in politics, which will not necessarily increase participation, but will lead to the better formulation of policy.

Before my election to the House I was a social worker working with young people leaving care. For me, one of the proudest achievements of the Labour Government is the assistance that we have given young people through the quality protects programme. That programme involved a huge and worthwhile consultation process right across the country, which culminated in the Children (Leaving Care) Bill. There was a great campaign among young people and interested non-governmental organisations to raise the statutory age for leaving care to 21. That was implemented, and the Government went further, ensuring that if young people were in education or training, they could stay on until the age of 24.

That was an example of cause and effect. Young people were involved in consultation, had their say and affected the outcome. Directness is the key. If there is a clear relationship between cause and effect, young people will engage—as will the rest of the population.

The youth parliaments are an excellent example of the involvement of young people in politics. My hon. Friend referred to his, and I am bound to refer to my own in the Medway towns. The Ofsted report on the local education authority in my constituency reported that

> "The youth parliament is an impressive organisation for involving young people directly in good citizenship. It is rapidly gaining respect for its contributions to the social debate. It includes representatives of all the schools and other organisations for young people".

Patrick Gearey, the public relations member of the cabinet drawn from the youth parliament, sent me that passage from the report. He seems to be getting his act together very well. The council has provided the parliament with £20,000, and it takes care of its own administrative costs with that money.

As my hon. Friend said, if we want young people to be involved, we should make it real by giving them money to make decisions about. They should have to tackle the sort of tough decision that we wring our hands about, such as those we have to make when trying to find solutions to the problems presented by young people.

The citizens curriculum is long overdue. School life has been dominated by academic performance, and although that is important, it has not assisted young people to cultivate ideas about the community and the wider society. We need thinkers as well as people who can pass examinations.

I took part in an exercise with sixth formers, talking about the events of 11 September. Half of the group took the part of George Bush and the other half played the role of our Prime Minister. They elected spokespeople and I presented them with budgetary issues. A £1 million extension was being built at the school and I suggested that they should give that money to our armed forces instead. "We don't want that," they said. By giving people finance, rather than merely making them discuss abstract issues, we make the situation more real.

Focusing on academic performance alone has led to the sanitisation of education. I have great hopes for the teaching of citizenship. I left school in the 1980s. My hon. Friend the Member for Gedling has referred to pop idols, and in the 1980s, pop bands were singing about unemployment: "I am the one in 10." I will not rehearse all the lyrics, but pop bands were talking about social issues and there was a rawness, which, like my hairline, has receded, so we must find new solutions.

I endorse the point about giving 16-year-olds the opportunity to vote. My hon. Friend referred to several things that people can do at 16 and 17. We are giving out

[Mr. Jonathan Shaw]

mixed messages and we must be bold. My hon. Friend talked about entering the armed forces and getting married, but at 16 a young person can also enter and live in a brothel—I did not know that until I did some research. We allow people of that age to take considerable risks, and surely if we would allow them to live in a brothel, casting a vote for a Member of Parliament will not be beyond them.

It would be wrong to introduce such a measure without having a national debate. Young people's participation almost needs electric shock treatment. I suggest that we should have a referendum, which would bring alive young people's issues as never before. Unless we reverse the apathy we shall have minority elections, as my hon. Friend said. None of us wants that. For the sake of the institutions that make up our democracy, which we cherish, we must find bold solutions. I congratulate my hon. Friend on raising the issue today.

11.32 am

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) on initiating the debate. I know that he has a long-standing interest in issues that affect young people. Much of what I want to say will illustrate the points that he has made.

During the recent parliamentary recess, I visited two schools in my constituency, Easthill and Newfield. I met groups of about 12 young people between the ages of 14 and 16 of varying abilities and, no doubt, varying interest in political issues. The issues that they raised were of great interest to me. They ranged from the role of a Member of Parliament—one young person asked, "What time do you finish work at night?"—to general questions about fundamental issues. I was asked, "What are taxes for?" and "Why can I get my glasses free until the age of 18 but have to pay for them after that?"

Some of those young people were beginning to link up the elements of what it means to be an adult, such as paying taxes and receiving services, with issues such as why young people get certain things free while others do not. They were also interested to know what the Government were doing about the theft of mobile phones. There was a lovely moment in the discussion when the teacher in the group confessed that he did not quite understand what the young people were talking about, because he was not familiar with the things that were important to them, such as SIM cards. That was an opportunity to ask young people for their ideas about how to reduce the problems that they face every day after school and when they are out with friends.

The young people also raised many current issues that we debate here and on the Floor of the House, such as the MMR injection. They wanted to understand why the Prime Minister took the stance that he did about his family. There was an interesting debate about the change of classification of cannabis, with people saying, "I won't get into trouble if I've got cannabis. I can't sell it or acquire it from anyone, but if I'm carrying it, I'm only going to get told off." The participants were trying to work their way around those ideas and to raise some of the issues that affect young people today.

It will not be a surprise that student grants were discussed. So was the royal family and my views about it—and why, given those views, I was not prepared to do something about them. Foxhunting was of course discussed. The issues raised were those that were on our own agenda last week and will be there for months to come.

I was impressed by the fact that each group had been well prepared for the event. They had been well prepared by their teachers, but they had also prepared themselves. One group had spent the previous afternoon using the internet to research statistics, using them effectively and investigating the background of issues. They talked from a position of strength, having marshalled their facts. Some of them could give Jeremy Paxman a run for his money. If I am ever invited on "Newsnight" I shall definitely ask those young people to put me through my paces beforehand, because I am sure that his questions would be no tougher than theirs.

As part of my campaigning as a politician, I enjoy running street stalls, even in cold weather. People often say, "I'm not interested in politics," which is not the sort of thing that politicians want to hear. However, by that people often mean that they are not interested in us or what we do, and do not feel connected to it. They are not interested in what is written about in the newspapers, and strangely, they—unlike us—do not want to spend large parts of their lives attending meetings and sitting around talking about issues or leafleting. It may seem odd to us, but that is not the life that most people choose.

People are, however, interested in the stuff of their own lives. Just like young people in schools, they are interested in issues that affect them, such as their children's schooling. We have all experienced the phenomenon mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Mr. Shaw): when something is about to be taken away from people, they turn out to meetings. There is no doubt that a proposal to close or merge a school will result in a room full of parents—and sometimes a room full of children and young people. People are interested in everyday issues, such as who is collecting the rubbish, but they also care about other issues, such as the wider environment, cruelty to animals, war and poverty.

It is up to us to engage with people about the issues that we care about—but we, and the institutions of politics, are often seen as not relevant or not accessible. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling that politicians are not seen as real people. It makes a real difference if a Member of Parliament has the opportunity to meet people and tell them, for example, "I used to come and play hockey at this school when I was your age," and to explain that their backgrounds are perhaps not dissimilar—perhaps there may be a connection with parents, or some other connection.

People feel disempowered and unable to influence policies or decisions. Changing those feelings is not easy. If we had the answer, we would be busy providing it already, but today we have heard good examples of what can be done. Real opportunities exist now to start work with young people. Citizenship education is being introduced. However, I also agree with my hon. Friend that it is crucial that young people should be involved from an early age in influencing their own lives and that they should be consulted about what affects them.

Where better for that to happen than in school? We have heard examples of school councils, and other mechanisms are available too.

Meersbrook Bank primary school in my constituency has a school council. I recently worked with several schools, inviting them to collect old European coins that were no longer of any value, and give them to Save the Children. We raised several hundred pounds from that. When I went to the school to pick up the coins, I found out that the issue had been put to the school council. I was relieved to learn that the council had voted that it was a good thing to do; the children had decided that they wanted to take part. Children as young as five, six and seven were making decisions. Four members of the school council gave the coins to me and I asked what they talked about in the school council. They told me that it was problems that were experienced in the school—whether with teachers, with the tuck shop, or with running in the corridor. Young people were involved at an early age in helping to resolve issues, and I thought that that was an excellent example.

We have to make the issues relevant. We should make an effort to meet young people from an early age and should encourage our colleagues in local councils to go out and do the same. Young people might not have the vote, but they are still citizens and members of the community in our constituencies. We should encourage schools to involve pupils in appropriate decisions within their schools so that they learn about discussion and compromise, about the art of the possible—as we should perhaps call politics—and about democratic processes.

There are real opportunities in councils and there are good examples around the country of councils that involve young people in best value reviews and in looking at the development of local plans. That practice should be spread. The UK Youth Parliament is a good place for young people to pass information among themselves. They might say, "We are doing this in our area, why not get in touch with your council and ask to be involved as well?"

We should involve them, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling has said, in consultation on legislation and Government guidance that affects them. Politics is about people's daily lives; they need to know how to have their say—it can and does make a difference. One way for us to help with that is to engage with children and young people outside the voting system as well as encouraging them to take part in that system when they reach 18.

11.42 am

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): It is a pleasure to take part in what has not yet become a debate—the excellent contributions from my three esteemed colleagues have been along largely the same lines. However, this is a vital issue and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) on securing the debate. He will remember—neither of us will ever forget it—our trip to Angola in September. In the desperate circumstances of one of the most difficult places on earth for children to grow up in, some of the most powerful messages that reached us came directly from young people—astoundingly, from members of the Angolan youth parliament. That country, which has had one election in the past quarter of a century, manages to sustain a youth parliament, and I received an e-mail from one of those young people the other day.

I had an excellent evening on Saturday. I was put through my paces at a regional meeting at Charnock Richard of all the newly elected members of the Youth Parliament from the north-west, from Cheshire to Cumbria. Their contributions were polite, extremely articulate, well formed, challenging and to the point, and came from a perspective that no one in this Room has. They talked knowledgeably and passionately about the problems of education, access to public transport and young people living in rural areas. We discussed a range of issues and one speech was about care.

I am delighted to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Mr. Shaw), as he and I have shared many moments in this Parliament of good discussion with young people on the all-party group on children and young people in care. Any Member can join the group and come along, generally on the third Wednesday of the month at 6 pm, to be challenged by young people whom many in the House and the country would, to be frank, patronise.

Those young people have missed out on educational opportunities and had dreadful life experiences. Regrettably, their peers often end up homeless, in prison or in other bad circumstances. Those who come along to meet young people in care, who often make journeys of hundreds of miles to reach this place, find that they know the subjects that they are talking about better than we do. We know that from debates with all young people. They are strong, powerful, articulate, intelligent, have important points to make and want action from Members of Parliament.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gedling was right when he described how we should try to attend to issues about which our young people are passionately concerned. We should afford them the opportunities to use discrete and realistic budgets, and have the confidence to allow them to make the mistakes that everyone makes in handling money and other such matters.

The Youth Parliament is extremely important, but we should avoid any sense of tokenism. It is in the hands of every Member of Parliament to build good links with their local Youth Member of Parliament. If my local YMP wants to be part of my constituency team and share office resources in order to carry out his work, there is no reason why he cannot do so. He could shadow me as I engage with local issues and, as a quid pro quo, he could help me enormously in engaging with the local youth forum and local young people on the issues that matter to them. The contribution of YMPs and young people in general can enrich the work of MPs and the way in which the House operates in terms of the interests not only of children and young people, but of our whole society.

I do not completely buy into the argument that we should have voting at 16, as it could be tokenistic. We must enrich and deepen our political culture so that the engagement and participation of children and young people is much more fully developed. Why should we talk only about 16-year-olds? I vividly recall a visit to a local primary school on which a boy aged nine—chronologically, at least—looked over the top of his

[Mr. Hilton Dawson]

spectacles and solemnly asked precisely what were my party's recycling policies. Let us not be ageist; many children have important points to make.

Before we change voting ages, we must appoint a children's rights commissioner. He would be known to children and be appointed and involved at the highest levels of government. He would embody and promote a culture in which children's voices were heard in every Corridor in this place, in every corridor in Whitehall and in local government. It is important that a commissioner is appointed along the same lines as in Wales, and I sincerely hope that there will be commissioners in Northern Ireland and Scotland, too.

I commend the Government's work on children in care and helping children and young people to participate: the children and young people's unit is doing exciting work; the Department of Health has played a vital role by bringing in young people to work on issues such as the quality protects programme and the new standards for children in care; and the Government have set up the children-led organisation, A National Voice. That is another major development, but we must extend such initiatives and build on the efforts to which my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling referred.

I refer hon. Members to the work of the all-party group on children, which I chair jointly with my noble Friend Baroness Massey. We are working with the Youth Parliament on ways to enable a discrete group of trained and supported YMPs to take a full part in all our meetings. Again, I recommend that hon. Members come along, because those young people have important points to make, know a great deal and are extremely challenging. The whole process is very enjoyable.

The participation of children and young people in the work of government is the next big idea, and this country must take it on board. Only when we fully listen to and engage with young people and act on their needs and wishes, and only when they see developments taking place, policies being promoted and resources going into the aspects of life that they regard as important, will we start to build the strongly participative culture that our democracy needs.

11.54 am

Ms Claire Ward (Watford): First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) on securing a debate on this important issue, which politicians must tackle. One of the greatest difficulties for politicians is that many young people see us as on the outside and not connected to the issues that concern them in their everyday lives. I refer to a recent Centrepoint survey in which young people were asked why they see no reason to vote. Some said that it is because they are not registered to vote. Others did not know how to register and were not registered at their current address—the mobility of young people causes problems with voting. Young people also felt that their vote was irrelevant and would make no difference to what happened. That is one of our biggest problems. We need to tackle it in terms of the whole community, but especially in terms of young people.

How do we make the connection between young people casting their vote and what is delivered and makes a difference to their lives? We could all name initiatives that we know to have made a major difference in our communities, but our problem is that we do not get that message across enough. That is not a question of party politics and whether Labour or another party is in power; it is about ensuring that people feel a real connection and know who is responsible for what. That is why citizenship studies are crucial.

We have lost a generation of young people who have little interest in the political process. I do not say that they have little interest in politics—the real issues that affect their everyday lives—but they are not interested in party barracking, whether a Minister is in trouble or whether someone has resigned. They want to know what we are doing that will affect their everyday lives. We need to examine how Parliament and the Government can devise a process of education that empowers young people.

Young people do not want to express their opinions, whether in debate or through voting in elections, because they do not understand what difference it will make. They do not understand who is responsible for what. How many times have Members of Parliament been confused with local councillors? How many of us deal with issues that are the responsibility of local councillors? The difference between those responsibilities is misunderstood not just by young people, but by the population in general. We need to get more information about the system across, so that people feel empowered to make their voices heard.

We also send out confusing messages about young people. We say that we want them to participate in the political process, but we also see them as the problem. When we talk about crime, we often refer to young people, but in the vast majority of cases they are the victims. They are more likely to be attacked, whether in a mobile phone theft or an assault, than people from any other section of the community, but we see them as the problem because some hang around estates in the evenings and are considered a threat. We need to engage to find out what we can do to help them to gain some control over their lives.

The opportunities available to a young person of 20 have expanded and are much more advanced than those available to someone of similar age 20 or 30 years ago. A 20-year-old is now likely to be better educated and to have more disposable income and more employment opportunities, but although they have all those material things, they often lose community and family support and the sense of knowing where they fit in. We need to tackle that issue.

The all-party youth affairs group wants to involve more young people in the parliamentary and political process on the issues that concern them in the manner used by my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) in the all-party group on children. We want them to be able to make a difference. Recently, my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Phil Hope) and I were involved in taking a group of young people from a YMCA around the House of Commons on an interactive tour. Instead of us dictating to them what we thought they should know, they were asked what they wanted to hear about the House of Commons, the workings of Parliament and the work of a Member of Parliament.

Mr. Reed: Rather than engaging a small number of people in the current process, do we not need to change our politics? We want to encourage young people to get involved, but the current process turns off young people and other constituents. Do we not need to modernise the way in which we do things?

Ms Ward: My hon. Friend is right. I hope that more hon. Members come up with ideas about how to engage young people's interest and listen to what they have to say.

Time is moving on, so I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling for obtaining this important debate. We need to begin talking to young people, not just in our constituencies, but as a Parliament and a Government. I fully support my hon. Friend's idea that the voting age should be reduced to 16. I realise that it is not universally popular, but it sends out the message that we are interested in young people voting. We know that Members of Parliament spend time with pensioners because pensioners vote, so perhaps politicians would be more interested in listening to young people if they voted in greater numbers.

12.2 pm

Matthew Green (Ludlow): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) on obtaining the debate, not least because it gives me the opportunity to make my first speech as Liberal Democrat youth spokesman.

At 23, I was elected and became the youngest ever member of South Shropshire district council, having become involved in politics only 12 months before. I contacted someone with whom I had been at university. She shared a house in a different part of the country with another girl, with whom we had also been at university. After our conversation, she said to her friend, "Matthew's just been elected a councillor." Her friend, a graduate and an intelligent young woman, said, "But I thought Matthew was honest." That is an aspect of the problem: the perception that we change as soon as we enter politics and are no longer ordinary members of society. We need to go some way to break down those barriers.

I have noticed, as I am sure other hon. Members have, that people who turn up to surgeries tend to be older. Indeed, when I take up an issue for a younger person, even someone in their 20s, it is often because a parent has visited me. Such a parent might say, "My daughter lives in a council house that is not up to standard. Will you try to sort it out?" That is part of the issue that we have to deal with. Young people do not even see us as a potential solution to individual problems.

Why has this state of affairs come about? We are too keen to blame young people, but the blame really lies with us. Rod McKenzie, editor of BBC Radio 1 news, says:

> "Radio 1 believes that its target audience of 15-24 year olds are not disinterested or depoliticised. But they are fed up with the sterile and formulaic Westminster political coverage—men in suits"—

I am guilty of that—

> "shouting at each other in parliamentary jargon across the dispatch box. Every time we ask for their opinions online on paying higher taxes to fund the NHS, tuition fees or foxhunting, we get a massive, passionate and thoughtful response. So this isn't about de-politicised youth—it's about Westminster not being relevant."

For a long time, young people have thought that we do not discuss their issues. For instance, the biggest step forward in debating the problem of drugs was taken by the previous shadow Home Secretary who, in what may have been a moment of madness, suggested even tougher penalties for cannabis use. The result was that half the shadow Cabinet suddenly spoke up to reveal that they perhaps had somewhat different experience of cannabis. That freed up the political debate on cannabis, which young people have been discussing for years, believing that we are completely out of touch. The House was afraid to discuss the issue as it is discussed on the street, but ironically, the previous shadow Home Secretary took a significant step forward.

We must accept that although some solutions are in the Government's control—I am keen to hear the Minister's response on those—some are not. I am afraid that we are all guilty. There is a tendency to patronise young people and the attitude is that we know what is best for them. We should be asking them for their views, and in the case of 16-year-olds, their votes.

We have heard about making voting easier by allowing it at supermarkets or on the internet. Those suggestions may be welcome and sensible, but they will not solve the problem, because they are window dressing. The difficulties go much deeper. We have also heard about better education. I welcome that and the teaching of citizenship at schools. I particularly welcome the Youth Parliament. I have been invited to join the board of trustees, and I am delighted to do so. The Youth Parliament is a key to increased youth involvement in politics.

Organisations such as the YMCA have undertaken a number of interesting initiatives that try to get young people to debate the issues, and at the last general election it was able to increase young people's participation in voting. I must praise other initiatives such as the Westminster day, which is a cross-party event organised by Liberal Democrat Youth and Students that took place a few weeks ago. I was delighted that the Prime Minister, who was joined by the Conservative and Liberal Democrat leaders, became the first Prime Minister to speak at the event. That shows that they are perhaps taking the issue more seriously and highlights the fact that the Prime Minister's response to my question on votes at 16 was surprisingly out of touch.

The key is making young people respect society more so that they want to be involved in it, and we can generate respect for our society and our system by respecting young people more. I am afraid that we tend to patronise them. We must reduce the voting age to 16. I shall not bore hon. Members on the point—I hope that they were in the Chamber when I introduced my ten-minute Bill before Christmas—but I must draw out a couple of points.

The Charter 88-YMCA poll result was referred to by the hon. Member for Gedling, who cited two figures, but did not give the age bands. The 47 per cent. figure is for 16 and 17-year-olds and the 35 per cent. figure for 18 to 22-year-olds. Interestingly, people aged 16 and 17 think that voting is more important than do those aged 18 to 22.

Liz Blackman (Erewash): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, allied with what he has just said, introducing

[Liz Blackman]

citizenship teaching is crucial? If we introduce structure and coherence to young people's curriculum diet and then tell them that they must wait until they are 18 to put it into practice, the impetus will be lost.

Matthew Green: I agree entirely. The hon. Lady must have read my notes, as that was my next point. Perhaps as a sign that we are not the only ones who patronise young people, after I put my question to the Prime Minister, "Westminster Live" decided to do a vox pop in my constituency—a bit of a sting to show that my constituents are not interested in votes for 16-year-olds. The most interesting vox pop came from an 80-year-old woman, who said that 16-year-olds should have the vote, but that she could think of a few 80-year-olds who should not.

There is an idea in society that young people do not have views or that their views are not properly formed and that they are insufficiently educated. With citizenship teaching, they will be educated about how to vote and about other aspects of politics, but then there will be a two-year gap, which makes nonsense of the whole idea. If the Government are serious about it, they should also be serious about giving 16-year-olds the vote. I hope that the Electoral Commission makes a positive announcement about that in the next week or two.

We do not give 16 and 17-year-olds full benefit entitlements, but we should either treat people as full members of society or not. One element of getting young people more involved in the political system is treating them as full adults at 16. However, the single-room rent restriction reduces their housing benefit entitlement. That restriction should be ended for people over 16, and I entirely agree with remarks made earlier about the mumbo-jumbo that we speak in Parliament. That must change.

One solution is not in the hands of the Government, but in ours: personal contact with Members of Parliament to show that we are human and interested. Recently, I went out with young people from Ludlow youth forum and held a surgery in a pub on a Friday evening. I did not dress down, but went in my suit. I did not turn my cap around or drink 14 pints, but young people raised all sorts of issues with me, such as skateboard parks and other matters. Using such methods, the issues are just as much in our hands as in the Government's.

12.13 pm

Mr. Charles Hendry (Wealden): I congratulate the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) on securing this important and timely debate, and the extent of the media coverage in recent weeks shows that he picked the subject of the moment. I agree with his assessment of the problem and that of other hon. Members. I also agree about the seriousness of the problem and with most of the hon. Gentleman's conclusions, although I disagree on lowering the voting age. I agree with the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) that it smacks of tokenism and takes our eye off the real challenge, which is how to get more young people who are already able to vote to participate in the electoral process.

Excellent research by MORI, in conjunction with the Adam Smith Institute, and by the BBC into why people do not vote makes stark reading. Only 60 per cent. of those aged between 18 and 24 are registered to vote—when one takes into account low turnout, the figures are even worse—and of those, fewer than 30 per cent. of first-timers voted in the last election. The researchers investigated what percentage of 18 to 24-year-olds participate in local elections: 12 per cent. said that they always participate, 13 per cent. that they usually participate and 8 per cent. that they sometimes participate. That is a third of that electorate, which means that two thirds of first-time local election voters rarely or never vote.

Some 51 per cent. of 15 to 24-year-olds said that they were not interested in politics at all. That gives some indication of the problems that we must address, but none of those people would be helped by reducing the voting age. That distracts us from our task of getting people to turn out when they are entitled to do so. The book "Political Systems of the World" says that the voting age is lower than 18 in only seven countries, including Iran, Cuba and North Korea. The message in those countries is that people are allowed to vote at 16, but only for the one party that is allowed to stand. Changing the voting age does not, therefore, necessarily advance the democratic process.

Only 6 per cent. of young people said that they did not vote because voting was inconvenient. So, what are the reasons behind the disillusionment and apathy? The first is a lack of understanding of the key issues. Four fifths of young first-time voters said that they knew hardly anything or nothing about Parliament, the work that we do or the work of European Union. That figure rose to nine out of 10 when they were asked about the role of local government. That lack of understanding is, therefore, a key issue.

The second issue is trust. According to a BBC survey of younger voters, only 16 per cent. trust politicians to put the needs of the country before those of their party. That is down from 39 per cent. 30 years ago, so there has been a dramatic decline. When asked, "What does politics mean to you?", 39 per cent. gave negative answers, using words such as crooks, criminals, corruption, boring and liars. When people say that they will not tolerate lying by those in ministerial positions, the lesson that we in politics must draw is that something must be done if young people are not to become even more disillusioned.

The third point relates to changing attitudes. Only half 26 to 35-year-olds felt that they were neglecting their civic duty by not voting. That shows how attitudes have changed, and we must urgently tackle the issue. As the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Mr. Shaw) noted, people said that they would not vote in the last general election because they could see no difference between the parties. That issue came up on doorsteps, where people would say, "You'll win anyway" or "I can't really see the difference between your parties." We must make the differences between us clearer.

There is also a feeling of disempowerment, because younger people do not feel that their votes will count. There is a general indifference to the political process.

We must make sure that 2001 is an exception, not part of a downward trend, and we must consider how to change things.

Young people can be given a positive attitude towards voting. An analogy was made with "Pop Idol", although it is not totally relevant. Nine million people voted in that programme, which is more than voted for my party and the Liberal Democrats combined in the general election. Some 10,000 people applied to be considered for the programme, which is three times the number of election candidates. That shows that young people love to vote when they are enthusiastic.

Another lesson that we can learn from "Pop Idol" relates to the fact that it was a positive programme. The contestants did not argue with each other and the negative contributions were made by a panel of judges, whom one was free to despise. The contestants kept it positive and spoke about their strengths and the strengths of the others.

I agree that our job as politicians is to enthuse young people, and we cannot expect them to find politics interesting if we do not change some of the ways in which we address issues. We must show them that we are dealing with their concerns. It is easy to take a patronising view and say, "Young people are only interested in drugs, music and clothes." As the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn) made clear, they are interested in issues across the board. If one talks to them in depth, one finds that they have strong views over the range of issues that we discuss in the House.

When I became my party's youth affairs spokesman, I was slightly dismayed by the number of television and radio interviewers who told me that, because I was representing young people, I would have to know who was No. 1 in the charts, who would get a Brit award and who played the lead in a particular film. Fortunately, I knew the answers, but I was disappointed that those commentators trivialised young people's views on important issues by saying that we must talk to them about pop music or films.

When we talk to young people, we find that they have concerns about education, transport and housing. They are worried about crime, and, as the hon. Member for Watford (Ms Ward) said, they are often the victims rather than the perpetrators. They are concerned about the environment and even about taxation. Some students who were here recently said that they could not believe how much tax they pay on the wages that they earn to pay their way through university. We should take more account of young people's views on the range of issues that we deal with in the House.

Barclays bank recently surveyed younger self-employed entrepreneurs aged under 24. The main frustration cited by 40 per cent. of them was "not being taken seriously"; we must take that into account. Young people starting out in work are not the only ones who find that they are not taken seriously. The young want account to be taken of their views, but often we follow rather than lead. Younger people's views on the environment are often well ahead of those of Governments, politicians and international organisations. We should listen to them more—our policies on the environment, above all, determine the sort of world in which they will live.

We must also show that Parliament can do more to deliver genuine outcomes. First-time voters are an immediate generation—they are used to getting things done quickly, they go on the net to buy things, they have instant access to information. We must show that we can deliver outcomes as well as talk. Too often, they hear people say that, for example, it will take 20 years to sort out the health service. If they have only been alive for 20 years, they cannot relate to that time scale. We in Parliament must be concerned less about the spin and the politics and more about the substance.

Young people belong to a confident generation. They are entrepreneurial, they believe in themselves and they are outgoing. They do not like red tape and they are fed up with the idea of a nanny state telling them how they can and cannot live. As politicians, we must react to that. We must show that we are in tune with their ideas—first, to win their trust and, secondly, to get them to play a greater role in the political process. I congratulate the hon. Member for Gedling on securing the debate and on the way in which he opened it.

12.22 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Christopher Leslie): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) on securing the debate and on so ably setting the issue in context.

The participation of young people in politics is fundamental to the central tenets of democracy. Participation in the democratic process not only legitimises governance and the rules by which we live, but enriches civil society. It connects citizens to the wider community and gives the individual a sense of his role in determining outcomes as well as in the mechanics of decision making.

We had a useful debate on similar issues in Westminster Hall in November, but it is useful to focus on the role of young people. We are discussing not simply voting and membership of political parties, but increasing regular, active participation. Our core principles are to engage and involve the public, particularly young people, through better and more thorough consultation processes and by modernising and reforming the ways in which we interact and communicate with the public.

I do not have time to comment in depth on many of the points that have been raised. My hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Mr. Shaw) spoke passionately about particular matters. I had not realised that he shares an office with my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling, who talked about shopping. Judging by the shirt and tie combos that they are wearing, they went together.

The hon. Member for Wealden (Mr. Hendry) touched on statistics and gave turnout figures from the general election. Of course, they are disappointingly low. There are no definitive data on age differentials, not least because of the secret ballot, but MORI estimates that the turnout of 18 to 24-year-olds was about 39 per cent. Too many young people say that it is likely that they will never vote. A high proportion of younger people have no party identification and 40 per cent. of 18 to 24-year-olds stated in a recent survey that they knew hardly anything about the way in which Westminster works.

[Mr. Christopher Leslie]

The Department of Local Government, Transport and the Regions, which has sponsored research, is examining participation at local government level, young people's views and attitudes on local councils and their images and perceptions of local authorities generally. The Department's study is considering what initiatives are likely to have the most effect on encouraging participation, and I understand that the work will be published shortly.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Ms Ward) on her work in the all-party youth affairs group. As she said, we should not get too depressed about the issue. Like her, I believe that young people are as naturally inclined to take an interest in the state of the community around them as those in any other age group. The challenge is to relate the decision-making processes more readily to those young people and to help younger people to appreciate the fact that, even as individuals, they can make a real impact on the direction that society takes.

On voting processes and mechanisms, the Government are undertaking a series of activities to consider the questions of e-voting and electronic democracy, as we want to harness the power of new technologies to strengthen the democratic processes. Young people are those most likely to be online, but least likely to vote, so my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has established a new Cabinet Committee under the leadership of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to examine the issue in much more detail. The Committee will be helped by the office of the e-envoy in considering not only voting processes, but how generally we may increase public participation through new technologies.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Watford and others said, the Electoral Commission, as an independent body established by this Administration, is doing its own research into reasons for low turnout. It is working with the Hansard Society to consider the effectiveness of election literature and researching the accuracy of electoral registers.

Colin Burgon (Elmet): It is appropriate that my hon. Friend the Minister is responding to the debate, because many of us consider him to be the Pitt the younger of the 21st century. Is there not a danger that we have left the world of work out of our discussion of this complex subject? Mr. O'Brien, who is sitting on my hon. Friend's left in more ways than one, was socialised through the National Union of Mineworkers, which gifted a generation of young people an attitude to politics and socialisation. We need to widen the debate to be able to understand why whole sections of young people are becoming atomised, individualised and depoliticised. Does my hon. Friend agree?

Mr. Leslie: What an intervention! I am not sure whether to take my hon. Friend's comments as a compliment or an insult, but if I can live up to Mr. O'Brien's esteemed reputation, I shall have done very well for myself.

The Electoral Commission is doing good work, but the children and young people's unit should be mentioned, too. It was referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) and the hon. Member for Ludlow (Matthew Green), who is also involved in the issue and whom I congratulate on his new Front-Bench post.

The unit focuses on encouraging young people to engage in the democratic process, and my right hon. Friend the Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs, who is responsible for young people, is involved in a democracy project entitled "Y vote, Y not?", which promotes a young person's agenda for democracy and which young people helped to formulate in a series of workshops throughout the country.

My hon. Friends the Members for Gedling and for Lancaster and Wyre and others referred to the United Kingdom Youth Parliament. It is an independent, non-party organisation, but the Government are keen to support its activities. My right hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for young people has responded to the organisation's agenda and the Government have given core funding for its activities, for the next financial year at least. We also welcome the work being done on the local parliament.

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde): Will the Minister consider, as part of the reform of the House of Lords, a quota for young people, so that they are represented just as the White Paper suggests that women and people from ethnic minorities should be represented?

Mr. Leslie: Our constitutional arrangement needs to include young people much more. I shall certainly pass those comments on to my colleagues.

Citizenship education is crucial, and I am glad that this fantastic piece of work will be in the curriculum from the new school year. Many other activities are taking place, but the issue involves not only Government services, but Parliament. We must focus on the role of MPs in reaching schools and ensure that we listen and evolve our political structures. Change must come from the grass roots as well as from the top down. That is a constant challenge, but one on which there is a rare all-party consensus. We need a step change in our efforts to increase the participation of young people.

Age-related Macular Degeneration

12.30 pm

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise a matter that affects my constituents and people throughout the country: eye care in general and age-related macular degeneration in particular.

In the UK, about 500,000 people are legally registered as blind or partially sighted, but the true number, if it could be discovered, is probably much higher—perhaps as high as 1 million, or even more. Nine out of 10 such people are aged over 65. The Royal National Institute for the Blind estimated a few years ago that about two thirds of visually impaired people do not register their condition with social services and are not formally logged in the system. We do not have information about the real scale of the problems of sight loss and low vision in this country. In my local authority, the London borough of Sutton, slightly fewer than 1,000 people are on the register, and about 100 are added each year, but in 1997 the RNIB estimated that there were probably about 3,170 visually impaired people in my local authority area.

Each year in this country 16,000 people aged over 50 are registered blind as a result of AMD, or macular degeneration. As many as 500,000 people suffer from AMD. Estimates suggest that the number of cases has doubled since the 1950s and, because of the growing elderly population, is likely to treble during the next 25 years. Macular degeneration is this country's leading cause of sight loss among those aged over 50, but most people do not know that, or have not even heard of the condition. That must change, because knowledge is the first step towards preventing needless blindness and helping those with sight loss to adapt and cope more effectively.

Macular degeneration causes the progressive irreversible loss of central vision in an older person. It leaves peripheral vision intact, but causes profound visual disability. Everyday things that we take for granted such as reading, watching television and driving are no longer possible. Sufferers can no longer see the face of a loved one or anyone else. Most people with AMD—85 to 95 per cent.—suffer from what is known as the dry form of the condition, which progresses slowly but eventually results in the outcome that I have described. There is no treatment for the dry form of AMD, although research is being undertaken.

In the less prevalent wet form of the condition, a change in the blood vessels at the back of the eye causes scarring, which leads to the loss of central vision. It is far more aggressive than the dry form: sufferers can lose 75 per cent. of their vision in just 6 months. Early diagnosis is therefore important so that steps can be taken to give assistance. There are treatments that give some respite to people with the wet form.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. Does he agree that the most important elements in dealing with people with AMD are early diagnosis at primary care level, access to ophthalmological specialists, and the adequate provision of rehabilitation and of low-vision aids, which is currently very patchy across the country?

Mr. Burstow: My hon. Friend makes some important points, which I shall develop in my speech, and I look forward to the Minister's response to them. I am aware of my hon. Friend's considerable interest in the matter, both professionally and as the chair of the all-party eye health and visual impairment group, which was established recently and has attracted a good deal of support from all parties in the House.

I mentioned that 75 per cent. of a person's sight is lost in six months with the wet form of AMD. As my hon. Friend says, early diagnosis, timely treatment, and good aftercare and rehabilitation can make a significant difference. In some cases, they can save sight; in others, they can help people to cope better with loss of sight. Regular screening is therefore vital. Promotion of awareness of eye care needs and eye health is also important. The campaign launched by the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association, the RNIB and others to raise awareness will make people more conscious of the importance of getting one's eyes checked. Not only are checks important in terms of enabling people to see by using glasses and changing their prescription, but they provide other health care benefits—for example, screening for glaucoma or diabetic retinopathy is vital, because those conditions do not manifest symptoms until it is too late: when they have had an effect, the harm has been done.

Last week I was pleased to have the opportunity to chair a seminar in the House on behalf of the Patients Association, in which it presented the findings of a comprehensive survey of ophthalmology services throughout the country. The report covered 76 health authorities, and health boards in Scotland, and achieved a 64 per cent. response rate. The survey discovered much that is important. It found that only half the health authorities believe that their current provision of eye health services is adequate, and that almost one in four health authorities do not offer any treatment for macular degeneration.

The survey found that only 1 per cent. of health authorities can offer a routine appointment with an ophthalmologist within a month—that is critical time lost, which can result in permanent loss of sight. It revealed that the average waiting time in health authorities throughout the United Kingdom is between three and six months. That is long enough for people to lose their sight, but not quick enough to ensure that steps are taken to save people's sight, or to help them to cope better with the consequences of losing their sight.

Only one in four English health authorities have done anything to get a grip on their current provision. As my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) says, provision is patchy throughout the country, but only one in four English health authorities either have carried out or are planning to carry out some sort of audit of their existing eye health service provision as part of the implementation of the national service framework for older people. A more worrying figure is that 37 per cent. of health authorities do not know whether they are going to carry out audits and are not planning them. The failure of some health authorities to know even whether they plan to conduct an assessment of current provision is extraordinary.

[Mr. Burstow]

There are a couple of treatments available to deal with the wet form of AMD, although I do not want to portray them as a panacea or magic-bullet solution. Hot laser treatment is a cure that can be worse than the condition. Cold laser treatment works through a process known as photodynamic therapy or PDT. The latter, more recently introduced therapy—it was licensed in August 2000—is based on the use of a light-sensitive drug which targets abnormal blood vessels in the back of the eye and enables a cold laser to remove them and stop their growth. The treatment can have a substantial beneficial effect on the progression of the wet form of AMD, although not in every case: not every person is a suitable candidate. However, it can only halt the process, not reverse it.

I hope that the Minister will address a concern shared by many that was clearly stated in the Patients Association survey, which is that a blight has—perhaps inadvertently—been cast on that treatment by the ongoing National Institute for Clinical Excellence evaluation. A blight is suggested by the results of the Patients Association survey, which found that 73 per cent. of English health authorities had received funding applications for photodynamic therapy, but 67 per cent. of them had turned those applications down. Clinicians had recommended those applications—they were not turned down on the grounds that a clinical assessment indicated that they were not worth having. They were turned down because clinicians were waiting for NICE guidance. Ministers have made it clear that that is not an acceptable excuse.

I hope that the Minister will reconfirm that the Government's position is that NICE should not be used as a reason to exclude the possibility of, at the very least, access on a named basis to such treatments. Since the treatment was licensed in August 2000, 9,000 patients have been denied the opportunity to try it. In 2001 alone, 7,000 eligible patients were not given it, and only 500 patients got it on the NHS—despite the fact that more than 100 hospitals across the country have the necessary equipment. I hope that the Minister can comment on that.

The debate is not only about access to treatment, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome mentioned, about dealing with the consequences of losing sight and the provision of low-vision services. The Macular Disease Society published a survey of its members' concerns, views and hopes for the future. One story that emerges is of its members' experiences of inadequate information being provided to them at the point of diagnosis—in some cases, the diagnosis was not explained at all. Because there were no care pathways that patients could be sent down, they were sent home to cope in complete ignorance of their condition.

Only one in four health authorities plan any form of improvement to visual rehabilitation services. Much could be done to raise the general standard of low-vision services to the best standard in this country: measures include providing greater access to sophisticated reading aids, taking more care and providing more information at the point of diagnosis by eye care specialists, increasing awareness of where to refer people in terms of support and counselling and providing more training and support in the use of low-vision aids. Low-vision experts can advise on basic, practical matters, such as appropriate lighting in a person's home, which can make a significant difference to their ability to use the sight that they still have. They can also advise on rehabilitation training and access to rehabilitation officers, who can recommend the best ways in which to use and adapt domestic appliances.

I end by asking the Minister a few questions and drawing his attention to the recommendations in the Patients Association report, which provides a good basis for taking that service area forward. First, will he consider asking health authorities or the new strategic health authorities and those responsible for implementing the national service framework for older people to undertake audits of their existing services, so that we have a baseline against which we can evaluate progress? Secondly, will he look at current best practice in terms of the information provided to service users? That is particularly important at the point of diagnosis, because it raises awareness of eye disease and the importance of screening.

Thirdly, on the issue of equal access, the survey shows that services are a lottery. Those with the good fortune to live in one part of the country can get a speedy diagnosis and access to treatment and a range of support services; those in another area do not get those things and go blind never knowing that something better could have been available. Fourthly, we need clear referral patterns and pathways between opticians, who should be trained, and ophthalmologists. When the conditions I have mentioned are detected, speedy referrals can be made, which enable prompt action to be taken that in many cases may save a person's sight.

Finally, although the national service framework for older people rightly refers to the need to target the problem of falls among older people, many health authorities do not make the link between visual acuity and falls, despite the fact that it costs the national health service £1.7 billion a year just to cope with the hip fractures and other injuries that are the consequence of falls. The cost would probably be considerably greater if other costs were added, such as those for social services.

Losing sight can imprison a person just as effectively as putting bars on their windows. Taking steps to ensure early diagnosis, prompt treatment and good aftercare and support could be the decisive intervention that prevents a person from finding him or herself on the slippery slope to dependence. I hope that the Minister will assure us of a positive response to the Patients Association's recommendations and to the issues that I have raised.

12.45 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): I welcome the opportunity that the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) has provided to discuss these important issues. I congratulate him on the generally sensible and effective way in which he presented his arguments, but unfortunately I do not agree with every point that he made. The Liberal Democrats talk about a new style of politics. I hope that one day we will see evidence of it in their presentation of their arguments and their opposition to the Government. It is easy to present a position as uniformly bad, and generally speaking that was the hon. Gentleman's starting point today, but I take issue with that. It is not a fair or reasonable description of the national health service today or the progress that we have made during the past four years. I shall return to that as I respond to his four points.

The hon. Gentleman spoke of the need for improvements to local services. He said that there is a need to raise awareness of age-related macular degeneration and visual disease generally, and I agree with him on that. He expressed concerns about equal access, about which I have strong views. I think that his position and mine are probably not too dissimilar. Finally, he called for clear national standards. To be fair, the current Government have probably moved more substantially in that direction than any previous Government. I am not trying to evade the hon. Gentleman's points—I will deal with them shortly—but first I want to provide some context in addition to that which he has already provided.

AMD affects one in 100 people aged over 75, with some 100,000 people overall affected. It is the main cause of blindness in people aged over 50. I agree with the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath), who said that our priorities should be centred, first, on promoting the earliest possible diagnosis of illness—and its prevention, if possible—and, secondly, on ensuring the most effective treatment and cure. Treatment must be accessible and convenient to patients and must incorporate the latest available technology.

I take issue with the assessment that the situation is universally bleak. The Government clearly demonstrated the priority that they attach to the issue when they reintroduced free sight tests for everyone aged 60 or over from April 1999. That costs the NHS £50 million a year, but it is money well spent. The measure reversed restrictions introduced by a Conservative Government 10 years previously. Older people are most vulnerable to eye disease and stand to benefit most from regular eye examinations. I am glad to say that in 1999-2000 there were more than 2 million more NHS sight tests.

However, we must also ensure that the NHS stays sensitive to new advances in the treatment of eye disease and can quickly identify the people who might benefit from them. AMD is the most common cause of sight loss in people aged over 50. It is severely disabling, although it seldom leads to complete sight loss. Only the central vision is affected, so most people with macular degeneration should retain enough side vision to maintain a degree of mobility and independence.

There are two main types of AMD: dry and wet. The dry form of AMD is more common: we estimate that it affects almost 90 per cent. of those with the condition. The onset of the condition tends to be slow. As macular degeneration is an age-related process, it often involves both eyes, although they may not be affected equally at the same time. People are often not aware of loss of vision if only one eye is affected, noticing the condition only when it affects the better eye. Cases in which one eye is affected and the patient is not aware of the sight loss are often picked up at an eye examination by an optometrist as part of an NHS sight test. I hope that removal of the charging restrictions will aid better diagnosis, prevention and cure. Other people find that their visual cells simply stop working, with an effect similar to colours fading in an old photograph. That is known as dry degeneration, as the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam rightly said.

In cases of dry AMD, vision tends to deteriorate gradually and the loss is not always severe. The worst effects can be alleviated with low-vision aids such as magnifiers, telescopes and, increasingly, closed circuit television cameras that project an enlarged image on a display in front of the patient's eyes. Better lighting and large-print books can also be helpful.

Although research is under way, it remains a sobering fact that the great majority of AMD cases—patients with dry AMD—are not treatable. Those patients are equally deserving of support and I pay tribute to the work of many voluntary organisations such as the RNIB, the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association and the Partially Sighted Society, who do so much to improve our understanding of the needs of people with visual disabilities.

The Government are continuing to provide extra financial support to the voluntary sector. We have recently made a grant of £130,000 over three years from October 2000 to a consortium of voluntary organisations, including the RNIB, Guide Dogs for the Blind Association, Action for Blind People and Sense, to develop low-vision services and improve co-ordination between health and social services and the voluntary sector. The hon. Gentleman identified that as an area on which the Government should focus their attention, and we are trying to do so.

Valerie Davey (Bristol, West): Will my right hon. Friend include the Macular Disease Society in future considerations? It is doing a very good job.

Mr. Hutton: We shall certainly consider that. We want to work openly with the voluntary sector, and no one disputes the society's expertise. I strongly agree with the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome that nothing can do more to improve the quality of life for people with visual handicaps than prompt, effective collaboration between the various agencies—health authorities, social services and others. That is the road that we want to travel.

Wet AMD, as the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam said, is the most aggressive form of AMD but is less common, affecting around 10 per cent. of patients. It tends to have a more severe and rapid effect on the central area of vision. Blood vessels from one layer at the back of the eye start to grow into the central part of the retina—the macular area—and may leak or bleed, causing rapid and significant reduction in central vision. It tends to affect one eye at a time, but there is a risk of degeneration in the other eye in ensuing months.

Laser treatment was considered suitable for some patients with wet AMD, but only a very small proportion of all AMD sufferers might be considered suitable candidates for such treatment of the retina. It is normally successful only if the condition is picked up early, and even then not all patients are likely to be suitable. Furthermore, there is a risk associated with laser treatment that lesions may continue to progress after laser treatment and vision may even become worse. In most cases, therefore, the only existing treatment is to reduce the effects of any other eye condition, such as

[Mr. Hutton]

cataracts—I am pleased that we are doing significantly more cataract operations than ever before—so that artificial and natural light can be used more effectively. Patients may also be helped with the use of improved lighting, optical and other devices, and training.

The hon. Gentleman focused on the potential benefits of photodynamic therapy, which offers some exciting prospects. PDT offers a genuine prospect of increasing the accuracy and effectiveness of laser treatment for wet AMD. This treatment uses a photosensitive dye which, when activated in the back of the eye by a light source, closes abnormal retina blood vessels. The underlying abnormal blood vessels are then easily identified and selectively destroyed without damaging the overlying sensory retina.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence is evaluating this treatment. Its appraisal committee will meet on 7 March to produce draft guidance. The committee will have a second meeting on 15 May and guidance on whether the treatment should be generally available on the NHS is expected in July 2002, subject, of course, to any appeals. The hon. Gentleman asked what happens in the meantime, which is a reasonable and fair question. He asked the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears), that question on 10 January. As an assiduous collector of information through parliamentary questions to the Department of Health, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that my hon. Friend set out the procedures that we expect NHS bodies to follow while they await NICE guidance. We expect them to take into account the available evidence and to assess patients in the light of it. Awaiting NICE guidance is not an excuse for NHS bodies to fail to get on with the job that they are supposed to be doing.

At this stage, we do not know what the NICE guidance will be. If the treatment were endorsed by NICE, the next step would be to ensure that the people who might benefit from it are identified and referred as promptly as possible. The measures that we took in April 1999 to extend eligibility for free NHS sight tests to people over 60 will have helped to prepare the way. Optometrists can identify the signs of AMD and, with additional advice and training, they could identify the cases of wet AMD that might be susceptible to the new treatment. A system of local protocols with hospital ophthalmology departments could be developed to ensure that patients are referred promptly for treatment. As the hon. Gentleman has said, there are already examples of such protocols for some other eye conditions, and we welcome those sorts of initiatives.

Concerns have been expressed about the capacity of ophthalmology departments to deal with referrals. The hon. Gentleman referred to a recent survey by the Patients Association that suggests that there are wide regional variations in ophthalmic services. That survey is accurate. Action must be taken to address those problems, and we are doing that. We have allocated an extra £20 million over two years to fund the capital costs of 60 schemes to improve treatment facilities. The NHS is providing more cataract operations than ever before: 236,000 operations were carried out in 2000-01, compared with 170,000 in 1998-99. That additional investment—which is part of a broader and deeper investment in the future of the NHS—will improve the standard of eye care for older people and greatly enhance the quality of their lives. There has also been an increase of about 4 per cent. in the number of ophthalmology consultants in each of the past four years. That trend is set to continue, so that the number of such consultants will rise from 651 to 895 by 2010.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned raising awareness. That is important, and I agree with his comments. I welcome the recently launched FOREsight initiative, which is backed by the AMD alliance of the RNIB, the Macular Disease Society and Age Concern. I hope that the campaign will be successful in raising awareness of AMD among the over-50s, and in encouraging people to visit their optometrists—especially if they suspect that they have the symptoms of AMD. The information booklet for the campaign includes an Amsler grid for self-testing to highlight visual distortions that might be symptomatic of AMD, and information on what to do if AMD is suspected. That might be helpful to some people, but regular eye tests should ensure that any signs or symptoms are picked up in the early stages of the disease, when treatment might be more effective in preventing sight loss.

In 1999, we collaborated with the RNIB on the "Half an hour could save your sight" campaign. Posters and leaflets describing the full range of health benefits from the eye examination were distributed to general practice surgeries, hospitals, public libraries and other public places. The Department helped with the costs of the campaign—I think that we provided about £40,000. I understand that the RNIB is planning a further campaign, drawing on the lessons of the earlier one. We await the outcome of that with interest. I cannot give a commitment to support a new campaign at present, but we will consider whether we can contribute to the initiative when we know more about the proposals.

Mr. Burstow: I am grateful for the Minister's response. Are the Government minded to extend the national service framework for older people? Will he examine ways in which the best practice that was discovered by the Patients Association can become the norm? As he has acknowledged, there are still too many places where services are not up to scratch, and where people do not get access to services as quickly as they need to.

Mr. Hutton: We have no current plans to modify the national service framework for older people, although we keep an open mind about such matters. That is the straight answer to the hon. Gentleman's question. However, all the national service frameworks are kept under close review. They are never the last word on any subject. They are beginning the process of achieving national consistency, for which he and many other people have long called. It is likely that the national service framework on diabetes—and especially its focus on diabetic retinopathy—will be perceived as helpful in dealing with some of the problems of inconsistency across the country. Furthermore, the Government are investing about £600,000 in research that is directly relevant to macular degeneration, as the hon. Gentleman knows because he asked a parliamentary question about it—a question which, I am glad to say, we answered.

The hon. Gentleman raised important issues, and I have tried to respond fully to the points that he made to reassure him that the Government are strongly committed to improving eye health. We have demonstrated the priority that we attach to it by introducing free NHS sight tests—the over-60s are the most vulnerable to eye disease and stand to benefit most from regular eye examinations. We have begun to tackle the variations in ophthalmology services, for example, through the "Action on cataracts" campaign, and we will respond appropriately to advances in the treatment of AMD.

Mortgages (Regulation)

1 pm

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): The capacity of Members of Parliament for self-delusion is considerable and widely remarked on by press and public. We are infinitely capable of taking credit for a rise in consumer spending as much as a drop in inflation, or for the building of a new road as much as a reduction in carbon monoxide emissions, and we will do it without blushing. We are oblivious to the fact that some of the things that we claim to have championed would have happened anyway, and we are positively dismissive of anyone who dares to suggest that the events of which we claim to be the sole and proximate cause are in any way mutually contradictory.

When it comes to delusions of grandeur and self-importance, my own talents are no less than those of my parliamentary colleagues, but even I hesitate to claim that it was my visit to the Speaker's Office on 14 February to secure today's debate on mortgage regulation that set in motion the extraordinary events in the mortgage industry over the past three weeks. The debate was originally entitled "Standard Variable Rates in Mortgages", but that was amended to the more prosaic "Mortgages Regulation" under pressure from the Table Office. I would dearly like to think that it was a leak of Sixsmith proportions about the original title that prompted the Nationwide building society to announce nine days later that it would abolish its higher standard variable rate and compensate its customers. In a similar vein, I trust that the Economic Secretary to the Treasury will be pleased to confirm this afternoon that it was the bleak prospect of responding to this debate that prompted her to rush to press the long-awaited Treasury consultation document "Regulating Mortgages".

After chalking up two such clear evidences of the power of the Adjournment Debate to initiate pre-emptive action, who could doubt that yesterday's announcement by the Halifax about compensation to some of its standard variable rate customers is also a direct consequence of its fear of oratory in the House of Commons? In truth, I doubt it, but in my defence, I am yet young in the House. Given a few more years by the electorate and under the tutelage of my senior colleagues, I will probably arrive at that happy state wherein all good things can uniquely be attributed to my initiative.

> "We could do the right or the wrong thing. We chose to follow the principles of fairness and fair play."

So said Philip Williamson, the head of Nationwide building society, commenting on his company's decision to abolish its higher standard variable rate and actively seek out and compensate customers who had suffered by having their mortgages pegged to it since 1 March 2001. With such a talent for self-delusion, Mr. Williamson is eminently suitable for the House of Commons. The only reason why Nationwide is now doing the right thing is that on 1 March 2001 it did the wrong thing. The Minister will be pleased to hear that I will not catalogue the details of cases on which the Financial Ombudsman Service has made a ruling on dual variable mortgage rates since the beginning of this year. I will, however, clearly outline the common elements of those cases and why I believe that the mortgage lenders acted wrongly.

[Mr. Barry Gardiner]

In each case, the borrowers had taken out their mortgage at a time when the lender had only one standard variable rate. The lender in each case promised borrowers a special deal of a discounted or capped-rate mortgage that would use the SVR—standard variable rate—as its reference point. The lender in each case introduced an additional variable rate and claimed that the reference point for the deal was the higher of the two variable rates. Each lender tried to dress up its new rate in a different name. Halifax had "Halifax variable rate 2" and Nationwide had the "base mortgage rate".

The ombudsmen rightly ruled that in each case the new, lower rate was fulfilling the function of the standard variable rate that the parties had agreed would be the yardstick for their contract. Any reasonable borrower wishing to take out a discounted or capped mortgage would have been entitled to take comfort from the fact that the standard variable rate would respond to the Bank of England base rate in such a way as to attract new borrowers or to retain existing ones. However, the Halifax variable rate 2 was 0.75 per cent. lower than Halifax variable rate 1, and Nationwide's base mortgage rate was 0.5 per cent. lower than the so-called standard variable rate. The higher rates were, in effect, used only by customers who the companies could claim were locked into them. New borrowers took the lower rates. The lenders had held out the prospect of real financial benefits against a known standard—the standard variable rate—but that standard proved to be illusory when they introduced the lower rates. In effect, a mammoth fraud was perpetrated on the customers, which is only now being set right, and that reluctantly and partially.

Let no one be under the blissful misapprehension that Nationwide realised its mistake and happily rectified it. It lost the original complaint to the ombudsman last year and appealed against it. Only when it lost that appeal did Nationwide decide to make a virtue of necessity. It contrived to use the decision to turn back the clock and indemnify all the customers that it had so badly wronged as a strategy to rubbish its competitors. Of course, today we can be thankful that it did, because if Nationwide emerges rather badly from the affair, Halifax—or HBOS—has truly earned its dreadful reputation as the villain of the piece, and not just among taxi drivers and market stall owners. Instead of conceding gracefully after losing its appeal, Halifax publicly insisted that each and every person who considered that they had been similarly wronged and disadvantaged would have to lodge a separate case to the financial services ombudsman.

The Minister knows well that Halifax had at least 500,000 people linked to its old standard variable rate. She must ask herself whether everything stands well with the process of mortgages regulation in this country, when mortgage lenders can cock such a snook at their customers, insisting that justice be dispensed only after submitting to the bureaucratic nightmare of 500,000 separate cases to the ombudsman. It is disgraceful that Mr. Ian Beggs, the senior media officer for Halifax, sought to dismiss the ombudsman's report by claiming that it was only

> "a decision in an individual case. It is not just about the product but also about letters and conversation"

with customers. That is spin worthy of Jo Moore or Martin Sixsmith, and I hope that it will be dealt with in a similar, if swifter, manner.

Yesterday, Halifax was forced into a partial climbdown. Instead of following Nationwide's lead and indemnifying all its affected customers, Halifax has said that it will compensate only the 10,000 customers who had formally complained between 1 March 2001 and 31 January 2002, when variable rate 2 was imposed and withdrawn respectively. Another 20,000 customers who complained after 31 January will not be compensated but given a £100 ex gratia payment. Those who suffered in silence are to be given nothing. At first, quite shamefully, Halifax put out a statement yesterday saying:

> "The ombudsman has confirmed that any customers who contacted Halifax for the first time since February 1 are not eligible for a refund."

The emphasis, I would stress, is that of the Halifax and not my own. The statement was instantly rebutted by the ombudsman, who stated:

> "That is not our position, it is Halifax's interpretation of the ruling. We have asked them to withdraw it immediately."

I am confident that Halifax will ultimately be forced to give way and to compensate all its affected customers. That may cost as much as £200 million, which the company is trying to retain for its shareholders, not its policyholders. At this point, it is right that I pay tribute to journalists such as Richard Dyson and the campaign by the financial section of the *Daily Mail* which, with the Consumers Association, have brought customers as far as they have got today in obtaining redress.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): May I draw my hon. Friend's attention to a parallel case and invite him to ask the Economic Secretary to consider the implications? Higher rates of interest were charged by Paragon Finance on a mortgage book that it took over from National Home Loans in the 1980s. Two sets of National Home Loans borrowers challenged Paragon's higher rates of interest under the Consumer Credit Act 1974 and the Unfair Contract Terms Act 1977. Both arguments were struck down by the Court of Appeal in October, despite considerable sympathy from Lord Justice Dyson, who said:

> "Borrowers have suffered serious hardship as a result of the increases in interest rates charged by Paragon Finance."

Mr. Gardiner: I am delighted that my hon. Friend has made that intervention. So much scamming goes on in the mortgage and consumer credit markets that he does his constituents a service in highlighting the problem today. I am sure that the Economic Secretary will be able to investigate the case that he raises.

It is one thing for consumers to fight against mortgage lenders in this country and to have to go through the ombudsman's procedures to secure justice. It is another thing to see the way in which the Building Societies Association has responded to that. Adrian Coles, the director-general of the Building Societies Association, has accused the ombudsman of introducing

> "regulation by the back door."

He adds:

> "Some of my members are beginning to call the ombudsman an unaccountable, price-fixing regulator."

If the fact that the ombudsman is calling for justice for millions of people in this country is regulation by the back door, we are left to wonder what regulation by the front door might be. The answer is currently contained in the mortgage code, which is a voluntary code entered into by mortgage lenders. Two of the key promises it contains are:

> "We, the subscribers to this Code, promise that we will: act fairly and reasonably in all our dealings with you;"

and

> "correct errors and handle complaints speedily".

Anyone who has followed the saga of dual standard variable rates over the past year cannot believe that the mortgage lenders involved have been complying with the mortgage code.

The Economic Secretary is probably as avid a reader as I am of *Building Society News*, the newsletter of the Building Societies Association. She will therefore have read February's edition. It makes salutary reading, because it contains a major attack on the ombudsman's powers, stating that

> "firms are bound by FOS decisions (as you would expect) but have no way of taking the matter further if they feel an injustice has been done, and therein lies the problem. As the FOS leaflet for complainants, *Your complaint and the Ombudsman*, says: 'If an ombudsman makes a formal decision on your case, this will be final. Firms have to accept our decisions. But you don't. You are free to go to court instead.'
>
> Firms can ask for, but not demand, a hearing in front of the ombudsman if they are unhappy with a provisional decision, but how fair is a hearing where the FOS ombudsman makes a determination on the decision of the FOS adjudicator? It is not an independent process. The final decision (so far as the firm is concerned) is for the ombudsman to make, and there is no provision for a hearing after that. The only course of action open to firms is to seek judicial review, but this process is not an appeal in the proper sense of the word. Rather, in a judicial review, the courts look at the process through which a decision was made, instead of the decision itself.
>
> In the end, to preserve competition for the benefit of the consumer, firms may have no alternative but to turn to the human rights legislation."

That is an extremely sinister development in the regulation of mortgages in this country. The Building Societies Association is, in effect, laying down a marker, saying, "If we don't like the decision of the financial services ombudsman, we may take it to the Human Rights Act 1998." That entails all the costs of a legal process—currently avoided under the ombudsman system—which each individual complainant would have to fight. That is an absolute disgrace, and I look forward to the Minister commenting on the BSA's position.

I am disappointed that the consultation document produced by the Treasury on 28 February indicated that the regulation of mortgages through the Financial Services Authority is to be put back from 1 September 2002 to the second quarter of 2004. That is something for which we have been waiting for a long time, and it is sad to see it receding into the distance. I remind the Economic Secretary of the position adopted by her predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Mrs. Liddell), who said of the mortgage code:

> "It is too soon to decide whether the Code, on its own, is capable of protecting mortgage borrowers to the standard that the Government are determined to see achieved."—[*Official Report*, 7 April 1998; Vol. 310, c. 152W.]

The events of the past year mean that it is no longer "too soon." It is absolutely vital that comprehensive regulation is introduced as soon as possible.

1.20 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr. O'Brien. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner), who takes great interest in these matters, on securing the debate. It provides me with an opportunity to respond to his specific points and to outline the Government's underlying approach to mortgage regulation.

The idea behind the Government's approach is to secure a fair deal for the consumer, while acting in a proportionate manner. We do that by creating an environment in which the consumer is able to make informed, intelligent decisions about financial services, and by ensuring that there are appropriate redress mechanisms in place if a problem arises, whether it is a generic issue affecting a large group of people or a specific issue affecting one or more individuals. Regulation plays an important role, but it is not the only tool in our toolbox. It is certainly not the first thing that we think of when we consider how to make markets work more effectively. There are many other things that we can do: improve the information available to consumers, improve consumer education, promote sharper competition among product providers, encourage the development of voluntary industry codes, set benchmarks for products and so on.

The creation of a single regulator, the Financial Services Authority, is the centrepiece of our policy. As a single regulator, it is in a much better position to respond to a financial services sector in which firms and intermediaries operate in several different markets, in which products are bundled and in which innovations in products, design and marketing occur at an ever-increasing pace. A single regulator also creates a regulatory system that is easier for consumers to understand. Firms and consumers no longer have to deal with an alphabet soup of different regulators, each with different rules and approaches.

The creation of a single ombudsman service is another crucial development. The Financial Ombudsman Service is a one-stop shop for redress when a firm authorised by the FSA is unable to resolve a consumer complaint, and it can step in as an independent, informal and user-friendly alternative to court action for the consumer. The FOS is an important part of the overall consumer protection provided by the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000. It is free to consumers, and its decisions are binding on authorised firms, including mortgage lenders.

In that context, toward the end of last year I examined the general regime for mortgage and general insurance regulation. Specific events had occurred since the original decision to regulate mortgage lenders was taken in January 2000. For example, about a year ago DeAnne Julius was asked to chair an independent review of the banking and mortgage codes to examine the benefits they delivered to consumers. Her report raised the issue of mortgage advice regulation and argued that self-regulation was not a sufficiently strong regime for mortgage service standards. I shall take my hon. Friend's comments today as giving added impetus to that recommendation.

[Ruth Kelly]

I also received strong representations from consumer groups and industry that mortgage advice and advisers should come under the FSA umbrella. In the light of those representations, and taking into account regulatory and market developments, I concluded that there would be significant benefits to consumers from regulating the quality of advice and the qualifications of advisers. Although there is already much good practice, I expect that there will be a higher standard of advice available across the board. Consumers will have to deal with only one agency for compensation and redress, whatever their financial services problems.

To respond to the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas), episodes such as the Paragon Finance home loans example are one of the reasons why we have found it necessary to take further steps to regulate the mortgage market more generally. The decision not only benefits consumers but streamlines regulations for brokers who already deal with the FSA in other lines of business. Mortgage regulation is expected to come into force during the second quarter of 2004 alongside that of general insurance.

I shall explore some of the recent events outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North. He is particularly concerned that in the light of an FOS decision on a specific case, banks and building societies should be required—I take it that this was his suggestion—to put right all similar cases instead of doing so only in response to individual complaints. I shall stand corrected if his meaning was different.

I understand why my hon. Friend finds that idea initially attractive, but it would blur an important distinction that is central to the way in which we regulate. To tamper with that distinction would be detrimental to consumers, bad for the industry and would risk creating two separate regulators operating with different remits. We try to maintain a clear distinction between complaints handling and regulation. The FOS is available to consider individual complaints, whereas my hon. Friend's argument relates to regulation.

The prudential regulation of banks and building societies—ensuring that they maintain sufficient resources and appropriate systems and controls—is the responsibility of the FSA. Standards relating to conduct of businesses for mortgages are currently set out in the mortgage code. It is the role of the Mortgage Code Compliance Board to ensure that personal customers receive a fair deal from the banks and building societies that subscribe to the code. As I said earlier, the decision has been made to transfer mortgage advice and intermediaries to the FSA in 2004.

In practice, the distinction between regulation and complaints handling works well and in the interests of consumers. It enables regulators and ombudsmen to concentrate on their core tasks and avoids their diluting the authority and expertise of one another.

Mr. Gardiner: I appreciate the distinction and I am cognisant of the dangers that would arise if every complaint to the FOS were decided generically and applied to every other case. However, my hon. Friend should take on board the fact that as soon as the lower variable rates were introduced by companies, a whole category of contracts into which those companies had entered were effectively rendered fraudulent. At the moment, the only redress has been through the FOS, but consumers are entitled to regulation that stops such wholesale abuse by companies. I urge her to meet the mortgage lenders involved and encourage them to sort out the problem now. I believe that some arse-kicking now by my hon. Friend will speed up the process.

Ruth Kelly: I thank my hon. Friend. Our diagnosis of the problem is somewhat different. As I understand it, the ombudsman has criticised the information provided to consumers at the point of sale and the ability of lenders to differentiate the rates at which they provide loans to their customers. The core criticism is of the information provided rather than of the system. The FSA is considering how to define and operate its new system of treating consumers fairly and I am sure that it will examine that, but it is for the FSA, not the Treasury, to decide. However, I am certain that it will hear the concerns that my hon. Friend has outlined and consider them seriously.

I thank my hon. Friend for his interest in these issues. Consumers throughout the country will want to follow the debate. He has raised important matters that he should also take up with the Financial Services Authority.

Greater Manchester Police Funding

1.29 pm

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise matters of utmost concern to my constituents and all other residents and businesses in Greater Manchester.

The Minister will be aware that there are serious concerns about police funding. For instance, the chief constable has long highlighted the anomalous impact on Greater Manchester police of the funding of police pensions. The cost of funding the pensions of the force is £67 million per annum, but the Home Office funds only £60 million of that each year. In comparison, the pensions bill of West Midlands police, a similar size force, is £50 million, but the Home Office funds £52 million. Greater Manchester police force has a £7 million shortfall that must come out of its operational budget, whereas West Midlands police force is, in effect, given a £2 million windfall towards its operational budget.

It must be remembered that the Greater Manchester force faces demands imposed by a crime rate that is 41 per cent. above the national average. It also has to meet some major exceptional costs. The Home Office has met two thirds of the cost of last year's Oldham riots, but a major additional cost is left for Greater Manchester police. The biggest exceptional item, on which I will focus, is the cost of policing the Commonwealth games, which are due to open in Manchester in less than five months time. That cost is estimated by Greater Manchester police and the police authority to be £7.88 million. I believe that that cost should be borne by the nation, not only by the people of Greater Manchester.

The Commonwealth games are a major national and international event that will bring more than 5,000 athletes from 71 nations to Manchester and the United Kingdom. The games will bring thousands of spectators and dozens of heads of state to Manchester. We in Manchester are proud to host the games, and proud that Her Majesty the Queen will visit twice in her jubilee year to open and close the event, which will be the largest and most spectacular multi-sport event ever hosted in the UK. I am confident that the games will be a huge success and that the Greater Manchester police will do the most professional job possible to ensure the safety and security of all involved.

It is intolerable that the Government should make the people of Greater Manchester suffer as a consequence of hosting the games. Councillor Stephen Murphy, the chairman of the police authority, warned on 18 January:

> "The absence of funding support will result in either a significant increase in the precept or a deterioration in policing standards across Greater Manchester with a probable escalation in crime rates...to make further savings to meet the cost of the Games would have a major impact on policing and likely impact on the numbers of police officers".

I raised the matter in the House on 24 January. On that occasion, the Leader of the House made it clear that Greater Manchester and its residents should bear the cost. He replied:

> "I remind the hon. Gentleman that Manchester sought to hold the Commonwealth games and, indeed, fought hard for that. I congratulate it on its success. Naturally, there are consequences of Manchester's success in securing the Commonwealth games."—[*Official Report*, 24 January 2002; Vol. 378, c. 1024.]

At that point, we were not hopeful that Manchester would receive support for the policing of the games, but matters had improved by 29 January, when the Home Secretary wrote to the police authority to promise to fund £3 million of the £7.88 million requested. None the less, that leaves almost £5 million to be met, perhaps by increases in council tax. My constituents have already suffered a 47 per cent. increase in council tax since Labour took control of the borough of Trafford six years ago. Alternatively, the cost could be funded by cuts in policing.

The Home Secretary has said that officials and Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary will carry out a rigorous appraisal of the remainder of the bid. I am sure that the Minister will re-emphasise today that the door is not closed. I am also sure that the rigorous appraisal of the cost of policing will ultimately endorse the Greater Manchester police estimate of the cost of security for the games. The residents of Greater Manchester and I want an absolute commitment today from the Minister that the full cost of policing the games will be met by the Home Office.

The Minister may not accept the estimate for the cost of policing the games, but whatever the ultimate cost of policing them is, it should be the responsibility of the whole nation, not only of the people of Greater Manchester. What I want today is not a commitment to find £7.88 million for the costs of the Greater Manchester police, but an absolute guarantee that the full cost of policing the Commonwealth games will be met by the taxpayer nationally, not dumped on the taxpayers of Greater Manchester.

I remind the Minister of the warning given by the chief constable in the *Manchester Evening News* on 21 January. He wrote:

> "We are in a desperate situation, and if I introduce cuts and we don't get funding for the Games, it will have a massive impact on policing in Greater Manchester."

Mrs. Lorna Fitzsimons (Rochdale): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brady: The hon. Lady is in the nick of time, because I was about to conclude my remarks.

Mrs. Fitzsimons: Will the hon. Gentleman accept a comment from a fellow representative of Greater Manchester and taxpayer who takes a keen interest in these matters, having taken part in the parliamentary police scheme this year with Greater Manchester police? To some people, the claim made by the chair of Greater Manchester police authority and the chief constable that the huge increase in their budget this year will result in fewer police officers seems incredible. I have only a simple abacus; how can it be so?

Mr. Brady: I have focused today on the cost of policing the Commonwealth games. I am sure that the hon. Lady will accept that since 11 September, the cost of providing security and guaranteeing safety for a major international event such as the games has increased. It is perfectly reasonable for the view of the police authority and Greater Manchester police to reflect that.

[Mr. Brady]

I do not want to get involved in squabbles between Labour party members, whether they are Members of Parliament or Greater Manchester local authority members. My request today is that the Minister guarantees not a specific sum for the funding of the policing of the games, but funding in full. That is essential. The hon. Member for Rochdale (Mrs. Fitzsimons) and the Minister cannot get away from the fact that if the cost of policing the games is not met by the taxpayer nationally in recognition of the fact that the responsibility is a national one, the burden will fall on the people of Greater Manchester—on the hon. Member for Rochdale, on me, and on all the people whom we represent. Their taxes will rise, or their policing will decline, or a combination of the two will happen.

We face a serious choice. I call on the Minister today to provide certainty and confidence to the organisers of the games, to those who police Greater Manchester, and to the people whom I represent, that the cost will not be imposed on the taxpayers of Greater Manchester, but will be met as a national responsibility, as should always have been intended.

1.39 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): I congratulate the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) on securing a debate on Greater Manchester police funding. It is a useful opportunity to air some of the funding issues currently affecting Greater Manchester and to discuss what the Government and the police are doing to increase resources and reduce crime. I was surprised that the hon. Gentleman did not use the all the time available to him to discuss some of the broader issues involved in policing and police funding in Manchester. He effectively raised only two issues: pensions and the Commonwealth games. I accept that both are substantial issues that need to be talked about, but I intend in my response to range more widely than he did.

Mr. Brady: I will be delighted if the Minister deals with some of the other concerns about funding for Greater Manchester police, but for the purposes of this debate I would be happy with a simple, short assurance from him that the cost of policing the games will be met by the Government. Were he to give that assurance now, I would be happy for the debate not to take up the rest of the time available. We could all go away happy.

Mr. Ainsworth: I intend to go wider than the hon. Gentleman did. I am only surprised that he, as a Greater Manchester Member of Parliament, has not used the time available to him to discuss more his broader concerns about other issues that affect Greater Manchester police authority and policing in Manchester. I will respond to the Commonwealth games issue, but I want to talk about broader issues as well.

It is appropriate to thank all those front-line officers in the Greater Manchester police force who have worked tirelessly in recent months to protect the public in difficult circumstances—policing the disturbances in Oldham, then meeting the heightened security requirements in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 11 September. They have been working under real pressure and we should take our hats off to them. I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees that they have done a magnificent job in providing the maximum protection to the people of Greater Manchester in such difficult circumstances.

The funding increase for Greater Manchester police this year is in line with the average increase for England and Wales. The authority received an extra £9.5 million from the funding settlement. The force will also benefit indirectly from the additional funding provided by the Government to the National Crime Squad and the National Criminal Intelligence Service, which comes out of the police grant before it is divided among local police authorities.

When Conservative Members suggest that police funding is not adequate for the task, it is appropriate to remind people that until the Government established one, this country did not have a national crime squad. We had regional crime squads, but the funding was far less and was of an altogether different order to that which we provide to NCS. NCIS, too, did not exist under the previous Government. This country had the fourth largest economy in the world, a sophisticated modern society, but no national criminal intelligence service. In this debate, we should accept that it is not only money that helps, but the assistance given by NCS and NCIS. Such assistance is of some importance in helping police in Manchester and elsewhere to tackle criminality.

Turning to the main topic of the hon. Gentleman's speech, we are helping Greater Manchester with the cost of policing the Commonwealth games. As he said, in the police grant debate on 30 January we announced that we have decided to make an initial grant of £3 million toward the cost in view of the substantial policing costs faced by Greater Manchester police. We have asked officials of Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary to examine closely the estimates that the Greater Manchester police authority has made of the overall costs that it will face. On the basis of that further assessment, we will consider the extent to which we are prepared to make further grant available to the authority.

The original estimate was £3.9 million, but it has now doubled. The circumstances have changed and there may be considerable justification for changing the figures, but if the hon. Gentleman thinks that the Government can simply accept changes of such magnitude without asking someone to examine whether they are justified, he does not live in same world as me. We will ask HMIC to examine the estimates rigorously, and when we have its report we will announce the extent to which we can help Greater Manchester police authority with the costs that arise from the games. I will not make that announcement in response to this debate.

Mr. Brady: Of course it is reasonable to examine the estimates in detail, but is the Minister saying that he will not fund the whole cost of policing the games even if

HMIC and officials in his Department find that the estimates are accurate? Will he not give me the assurance that I requested?

Mr. Ainsworth: I have said what I have said. We will examine the estimates that we have received. We have agreed to £3 million, and there is an estimate that is well in excess of that. We must properly evaluate any estimates before we can give any commitments, and we are doing that. We have given the job to HMIC, and we shall consider the issue when we have its report. There are other pressures—

Mr. Brady: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ainsworth: I cannot keep giving way to the hon. Gentleman. He had plenty of opportunity to make his case before I stood up.

The Greater Manchester police authority faces other pressures, and the hon. Gentleman will be aware that on 30 January I also announced special grant of £1.44 million towards the additional cost of policing the riots. That was paid to the authority on 8 February. Funding for special grant is limited, and we had to consider demands from other forces that have also experienced riots. Each application had to be treated fairly, and that is what we did.

The hon. Gentleman raised some issues, but not others. My hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Mrs. Fitzsimons) mentioned some of the money that has gone into crime reduction in the Manchester area in recent years. I shall run through some of the statistics so that the hon. Gentleman can see that those funds are not inconsiderable. I do not know whether, like me, he believes that partnership is the key to reducing and keeping crime figures down, but we have invested more than £17.2 million in projects in Greater Manchester under the crime reduction programme. Greater Manchester police made successful grant applications for £1.25 million of that. In addition, the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has provided more than £3.3 million for neighbourhood and street warden schemes.

The £17.2 million has been distributed as follows: more than £9 million has been spent on 41 closed circuit television schemes; £3.2 million on 10 schemes under the communities against drugs programme; more than £1.7 million on reducing burglary initiatives; £1.3 million on targeted police initiatives; and £471,000 on 33 partnership development fund projects. Some £380,000 has been spent under the violence against women initiative to reduce domestic violence, rape and sexual assault by known perpetrators; £153,000 has been spent on small retail projects; and £100,000 has been spent on projects to tackle prostitution.

In the hon. Gentleman's constituency £31,000 has been allocated to a reduced burglary initiative on the Racecourse estate in Sale. The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has provided £242,000 for two neighbourhood warden and street warden initiatives in Sale, West. That is a significant investment in extra resources. I will give way to the hon. Gentleman so that he can tell me whether he welcomes the money that has gone into his constituency and the rest of Greater Manchester.

Mr. Brady: The Minister will not be surprised to hear that I welcome any money that goes into my constituency. I am delighted that help has gone to Sale, West. However, I have a straightforward question for him and I hope to receive a simple answer. Does he believe that the policing cost of a major national and international event should be met by the nation or by local taxpayers in the city that hosts the event?

Mr. Ainsworth: The funding formulae used to decide who funds what and to what extent in relation to events such as the Commonwealth games are not new—they were not invented in the past couple of years. We will consider in detail the costs that Manchester is likely to incur as a result of the Commonwealth games. When we have a detailed report and can see how robust the figures are, we will make a decision on whether we can contribute more than the £3 million that we have already allocated.

The hon. Gentleman identified the problem of police pensions without telling the House that it has existed for many years and that Governments of different party political complexions from those currently in power did nothing about it. We accept that pensions costs represent an increasing burden on many police authorities. The overall police settlement includes provision for expected further pensions costs, but the incidence of such costs is bound to be uneven. As we both know, individual cases and pressures will arise in different years.

A review of police pensions by Home Office and Treasury officials is nearing completion. The views of police authorities, including that of the hon. Gentleman's area, will be taken on board with those of other key stakeholders. We must also consider the impact on Government finances, as we are doing. We want a modernised pension arrangement that is more flexible and affordable for future entrants to the police service. We must have a system that gives greater certainty about pensions obligations of individual police forces. A report on the alternatives available to change the way in which we fund pensions is expected very shortly. The issue is important, but I ask the hon. Gentleman to accept that the Government are trying to tackle some difficult issues that were not tackled for many a long year when perhaps they ought to have been.

Mrs. Fitzsimons: Will my hon. Friend hear some concerns from another Member of Parliament for Greater Manchester? Important though it is to deal with the one-off funding of the Commonwealth games, as the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) suggests, the funding formula itself is important. There is a disparity between the metropolitan boroughs and rural areas. I do not want to denigrate any rural areas, but the increased cost of policing a metropolitan area such as Greater Manchester must be accepted.

I fear that scaremongering in this financial debate will affect the people of Rochdale, even though crime in Rochdale has decreased significantly and police numbers have increased significantly since Labour took power. There is a great deal of concern that the comments made by the chief of police and the chair of

[Mrs. Fitzsimons]

the police authority in their budget debates with the Government are having a detrimental effect on the public and obscuring the facts.

Mr. Ainsworth: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I was just about to say something about police numbers. Crime overall, as well as many categories of crime, has decreased in Greater Manchester, as it has in the rest of the country. However, fear of crime is a real issue. People's perception of the problems of crime and their vulnerability to it has not changed in line with the actual crime figures. Those who unnecessarily alarm people are adding to the fear of crime.

Police numbers are important as part of a comprehensive package of measures to ensure a modern and efficient police service. The public rightly feel reassured by the sight of police officers on our streets. That helps to reduce the fear of crime. It is for the police authority and the chief constable to determine the resources, the precise composition of the force, and the distribution of officers. On 30 September 2001, Greater Manchester had 7,036 police officers, 114 more than in March 1997 and the same number as in March 1995. Although there is more to be done, we have effectively restored the cuts to police numbers in the Greater Manchester area that occurred in the last two years of the Conservative Government. Civilian staff numbers have increased by 415 since March 1997, an increase of 6 per cent, to 3,027 on 30 September 2001.

Mrs. Patsy Calton (Cheadle): I hear all that the Minister is saying and I believe that the number of police officers has increased, but last Sunday I visited the Twining Brook road area of Cheadle Hulme in my constituency, where I met people who told me that women were afraid to go out at night or to let their children play outside during the early evening. How does that square with what the Minister is telling us? Is the distribution of police officers throughout Greater Manchester such that there are more in some areas than in my constituency? I simply do not understand what he is saying, and neither will my constituents.

Mr. Ainsworth: It squares precisely with what I have said. This is an important issue, so I ask the hon. Lady to think seriously about it, leaving aside party politics. Police numbers are not the whole issue. I mentioned the increase in civilian staff, because how on earth are police constables to do the job that only they are capable of doing and only they have been trained to do if we do not give them the back-up necessary to enable them to spend more time out on the streets?

That is part of the reasoning behind the proposals in the Police Reform Bill that we have introduced. We want police officers to be used much more effectively out on the streets of Greater Manchester and elsewhere in the country. That is what the hon. Lady's constituents and the Government want. I hope that our proposals, currently in Committee in the House of Lords, will receive the support of the Liberal Democrats, so that we can increase police numbers along the lines that we promised and ensure that the police are more effective, more visible and can use their time more efficiently.

Mr. Brady: I am sorry that, despite giving the Minister a clear indication at the start of the debate that I wanted an answer and a promise that the Government would meet the full cost of funding the Commonwealth games, and despite his long, meandering contribution to this short debate, the Minister has refused to do what I asked. He says that HMIC officials would reconsider the estimates, but he has not given a commitment that if those estimates are found to be accurate, they will be fully funded by the Government—

Mr. Bill O'Brien (in the Chair): Order.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 6 March 2002

[SIR MICHAEL LORD *in the Chair*]

Iraq

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

9.30 am

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): When I heard last Thursday that the Speaker had granted me one and a half hours' debate on Her Majesty's Government's policy on military action against Iraq, I rang the Foreign Secretary's office to suggest that the subject was of such importance that he should follow the precedent set by Douglas Hurd when he was Foreign Secretary and addressed the question in a Back-Bench Adjournment debate on Lockerbie.

We completely understand that the Foreign Secretary could not consider attending the debate today because of the sad events surrounding the death of his father. I would like to express my condolences to him on his personal loss. People often forget that politicians are human, and that we all have personal grief. The loss of a parent is traumatic, however confident and advanced a person may be.

This debate should take place on the Floor of the House of Commons, not in Westminster Hall. Given what the Prime Minister said to the Australian media, he has a duty to hold a full-dress debate with his parliamentary colleagues—he should not just make a statement. He should make a proper speech that outlines his thinking, as Harold Wilson did almost every three weeks.

What the Foreign Secretary proposed in an article in *The Times* yesterday, and what the Prime Minister is reported as having said in Australia, is of overwhelming importance and concern. It is frankly horrendous to many of us. If there is to be a war, it must surely be a "just war"—in the words of Aquinas. We should consider those words: one of the conditions of a "just war" is that everything possible should be done to avoid war. That means talking to the Government and people of Iraq.

The Prime Minister is quoted as saying that the Iraqis are not like us. My experience is that they are very like us. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Kelvin (Mr. Galloway) will recollect that their foreign affairs group met us when we went to Baghdad in 1994. Halfway through the meeting in the Baghdad reception building, my hon. Friend told me that he was the only person of 16 in the room who had not been educated at a British university and did not have a British university degree. Britain has been the second home of those northern Arabs for a long time. Thus there is every reason to hold discussions—which, I am informed, they want very much indeed—on terms of dignity and good sense.

The idea that we could attack and that there would be a Northern Alliance situation—the Northern Alliance might be the Shia—is a crackpot one. Those of us who visited the great mosque of the Shi'ites at Kerbala and have been elsewhere in Iraq know that it is not that kind of society. I deeply regret that no British Minister and, as far as I know, few in the current diplomatic service have been to Iraq. I say this to the Foreign Office: for pity's sake, listen to some of the former British ambassadors, including Sir Stephen Egerton and Sir John Moberly, who urge great caution. If people do not have direct experience of Baghdad, they should at least speak to those who served there with distinction for many years.

These are not maverick views. Others, including Iran, are appalled at the idea of bombing. Four years ago, my wife and I went on holiday to Iran. One striking feature of that country is the war memorials to the terrible Iran-Iraq war that can be seen not only in Tehran, but in Rasht, Hamadan, Kashan, Isfahan, Shiraz and Yazd. No one has greater cause to loathe Saddam Hussein than the Iranians, but the Iranian Government believe that a military attack, particularly a bombing attack, would be counterproductive. They, who have every reason to be critical of Saddam Hussein, are against such action.

Last week, I was in Tunis, because the Foreign Minister of Tunisia—the most moderate of all Arab countries—requested that I visit him. I am authorised to say that that man, who is a former ambassador in Washington and has been Foreign Minister of Tunisia for 11 years, is wholly against an attack of the kind that is contemplated. That view is shared by Kofi Annan, who says publicly that no attack on Iraq should take place at the present time. Incidentally, if there is to be any action, it should be taken through the United Nations. The idea that we can change matters in Iraq by a bombing attack is preposterous.

My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) and I went to Belgrade. The bridges are still down at Novi Sad, and the old buildings of the Austro-Hungarian empire have been left completely unrepaired. The Pancevo chemical complex is still a danger, and Zastava is just twisted metal. The Government promised that they would rebuild the Balkans, but there has been very little rebuilding.

How much good has bombing done in Afghanistan? It has not caught bin Laden. On 12, 13 and 14 September, when there was great sympathy for the United States throughout the Islamic and Arab world, some of us wanted a proper intelligence operation. However, bombing went ahead and may be counterproductive.

The idea of bombing Iraq is ill conceived, unwise and, some of us think, wicked. If there are to be 200,000 ground troops, I suggest that someone come to the House of Commons and ask the duly elected Members of Parliament for their view.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): I agree with everything that my hon. Friend has said thus far. Does he agree not only that there is widespread concern across the House and in the country about the prospect of a bombing campaign against Iraq, but that Britain's Muslim community,

[Ms Diane Abbott]

which was so concerned about the bombing of Afghanistan, would find such a campaign very hard to accept?

Mr. Dalyell: As my hon. Friend represents Hackney, North and Stoke Newington she can talk with more authority than I can about the Muslim community, so colleagues should take the point from her.

I believe that speeches should be short, so I end with this plea: as a matter of urgency the Prime Minister should set out the Government's thinking, at length and in a proper speech, not in a statement. It should be the kind of speech that Harold Wilson and James Callaghan used to make regularly to the House of Commons—an interruptible speech to prove a case that I believe could lead to terrible consequences for this country.

9.41 am

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): I shall be brief, as I can see that many hon. Members want to speak. I follow my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) by asking the Minister at the very least to take on board a number of points and to pass them on to the Prime Minister who has the principal responsibility for addressing them in a debate of the whole House.

First, the Prime Minister must understand that a war against Iraq would not be a war against terrorism. Despite the assertions made in the United States immediately after 11 September, there has been no evidence to connect Iraq with those terrible events. It would be wrong to seek to extend presumptions about the action in Afghanistan as though they applied equally to Iraq. Such action would be seen as an act of war perpetrated by the United States and supported by us. It would break the international coalition against terrorism, and the consequences of that in terms of international agreement, let alone regional destabilisation in the middle east, are awesome.

If the Prime Minister is intent on going to the United States later this month, there is not much point in his going to see President Bush, but a great deal of point in going to see Kofi Annan. Any action in respect of Iraq must be UN led with a fresh UN mandate. Rather than being driven by an outbreak of daisy-cutters, we need an outbreak of diplomacy. In the 10 years of peace since the war against Iraq finished, Britain has spent an average of £5 million a month in undeclared continuing war. The United States has spent a great deal more: it now amounts to £7 billion. Not one penny or cent of that has been spent on diplomacy.

We must engage in direct diplomatic links. There is a compelling case for the UK at the least to send someone such as Lord Levy to Iraq to discuss security and inclusion, which relate to internal scrutiny. As I understand it from discussions that my hon. Friends and I have held during the past week, that is not off the agenda for Iraq. Iraqis constantly tell us that the situation is like rolling probation. There have been inspections, but no lifting of sanctions throughout the whole period. There was an open-ended sanctions regime demanding inspections wherever, but not one jot of movement towards the complete removal of those sanctions. We must therefore offer something that has genuine meaning to Iraq.

If we also argue that the pretext for any military action would be either the continuing defiance of UN resolutions or the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction, we should be aware of just how tentative the ground is on which we would stake out that claim. If we are not to apply it equally, we should not apply it at all. Israel is in breach of several UN resolutions. No matter how much I disagree with the current Israeli regime and its treatment of Palestinians, I would not suggest that it provides a sufficient basis for bombing Israel. We do not apply the same logic to Iraq—Iraq is said to be different.

Ownership of weapons of mass destruction is another criterion, and we know that Brazil and Ukraine possess such weapons. We also know that America and the United Kingdom are likely to endorse the US plan to extend national missile defence, which will be an act of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, about which the rest of the world feels deeply uneasy. Does that provide a legitimate basis for the right to use weapons against us in a military attack? Absolutely not. The failure in our understanding stems from the fact that our thinking has been entirely military-driven, rather than diplomacy-driven.

The Minister must take back to his Cabinet colleagues the reality that any Prime Minister of this country who signs a blank cheque of endorsement of American military action will be signing up to George Bush's war—the war of his daddy's ego—and such a cheque will not be sanctioned or supported by other parts of the international community. Wherever the Prime Minister makes his announcements about UK involvement—in Australia, Washington or elsewhere—he will end up walking down that path alone. What will be perceived throughout the country as a declaration of war against Iraq will be opposed by large sections of opinion—not just the Labour party, but the public as a whole. Many will choose not to endorse that course of action.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before I call the next speaker, I want to point out that the previous contribution was commendable in its brevity. Many hon. Members are trying to catch my eye: it would help if contributions were kept as brief as possible, so that not too many people will be disappointed.

9.46 am

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): I shall be as brief as possible. I echo the comments of the Father of the House, the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), when he spoke about the importance of talking to the Government and people of Iraq. I recall spending considerable time trying to secure an answer from the Foreign Secretary about whether he had spoken to the Government and people of Afghanistan after 11 September. Eventually, the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw), replied that the information had been placed on the website—not an effective way of communicating with any Government or people. That is not exercising the diplomacy that is so important for Afghanistan and Iraq.

Many people will not understand the degree of trust and the length of the chain of trust required to secure the support of the British people for any action that may follow the Prime Minister's revelations in Australia. Our electors have to trust us. Opposition Members have to trust their leaders and they are happy to do so. I am pleased to trust my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) and my right hon. Friends the Members for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) and for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith). They have to trust the Prime Minister, who has to trust the President of the United States. A long chain of trust should be built up if military action is to gain support in this country, but I fear that it is not being built up.

Mr. Dalyell: Before the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) reaches a conclusion he should talk to the former Conservative Prime Minister, Edward Heath, who has been to Iraq. That is something that divides those who have been to Iraq from those who have not had that opportunity.

Mr. Turner: I accept that entirely. I was about to say that I can trust my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex because I know him personally. Not all my constituents know me personally and I—even less my constituents—do not know personally the others in the chain of trust.

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that trust must be earned? It cannot be demanded. President Bush has not yet shown that we can trust him.

Mr. Turner: The hon. Gentleman made exactly the point that I was about to make, without personalising it—that trust must be earned by the President of the United States in the way in which he deals with international issues. He successfully earned our trust following 11 September; it is not so clear that he has done so today.

Similarly, the Prime Minister must earn our trust. I do not wish to make partisan points, but it is difficult for some Opposition Members to trust the Prime Minister as we would wish to do. As the hon. Member for Linlithgow said, it would help enormously if the right hon. Gentleman came to the House and made the case to the British people for the action that he will support. An act of statesmanship and courage is needed to bring round the mass of people who are not convinced either way. They hear appalling reports of what is going on in Iraq and observe the curious behaviour of nations that may be the targets of Iraq, but they hear little or nothing from the Prime Minister.

Labour Members will recall what it was like in the 1980s when President Reagan bombed Libya, with the support of my right hon. and noble Friend the Baroness Thatcher, which I believed she was right to give at the time. Labour Members felt then that the chain of trust had not been built up or was not being sustained.

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley): Some of our constituencies have large Muslim communities. The chain of trust was difficult to sustain throughout the Afghan war. It will be even more difficult now and we will lose the trust of Muslim communities if we bomb Iraq.

Mr. Turner: The hon. Lady puts it as clearly as I would have done. My concern is not only about the Muslim communities; we need to trust the Prime Minister. In a constituency such as mine, where less than 10 per cent. of the electorate voted for the Prime Minister's party at the last election, large numbers of people do not automatically expect to trust him. Labour Members did not trust the Prime Minister in the 1980s and neither did many Labour voters. I am desperately concerned that unless the Prime Minister comes to the House, goes on television and explains himself, it will not be only the Muslim communities that are fearful of the consequences and unwilling to trust his actions.

I understand perfectly that the Prime Minister may think that he has more urgent and important things to attend to, but on this occasion he must secure the trust of the British people for any action that he decides to support. Whether we think it is right or wrong depends on what the Prime Minister says, and so far he has not said it.

9.54 am

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North and Sefton, East): First, I congratulate the Father of the House, my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on securing the debate on this important subject. He spoke with his customary eloquence and passion and, although it will not surprise him to hear that I do not agree with every particular, I know that he also spoke with sincerity.

The central issue that we must determine is in the form of a question—is it possible to deal with rogue states under the auspices of Security Council resolutions, and is Iraq a serious enough threat to warrant the type of action that seems to be under consideration? If the United Nations is to deserve and continue to enjoy a good level of support, it is vitally important that Security Council resolutions and the sentiments that the UN attaches itself to, in this issue as in others, are taken seriously and amount to more than mere words on paper.

Courtesy of the Prime Minister, who has given me rather more time for such things than I previously had, I have recently been reading more of what one of my hon. Friends—who shall remain nameless but is present today—calls improving texts. One issue that I have examined more closely is the role of the League of Nations in the 1930s. Historians are disputatious on such matters and it is often difficult to claim a consensus, but everyone agrees that the failure of the League of Nations was based on its failure to act against the expansionist tendencies of Germany in the 1930s.

Although I do not make any direct comparison, if an institution such as the UN is to represent everything that we want, it must have respect. It must be known that those countries that support the UN and everything that it stands for consider Security Council resolutions to be more than mere words.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South) *rose—*

Mr. Howarth: I shall give way to my hon. Friend in a moment, but I do not intend to give way further as I am anxious to make progress and be brief.

The question of whether the matter is serious enough to warrant action against Iraq was summed up in an article in *The Times* yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary. He stated:

> "The international community's most pressing demand is for Iraq to allow UN officials to return and inspect his weapons programme. Saddam broke his own word, and has been in breach of his international obligations, since he effectively threw out the UN weapons inspectors three years ago."

That is the crux of the matter and we should take my right hon. Friend's words seriously.

Mike Gapes: My hon. Friend mentions UN Security Council resolutions. Resolution 1284, adopted after several months of painstaking negotiation in December 1999, provides exactly the way out of the problem. As he says, if the Iraqi Government had been prepared to engage with and carry through the resolution, there would have been increasing official exports of oil and the prospect of the sanctions ending within a specified period. The conflict could have been resolved. Unfortunately, those of us who have visited the border with Kuwait and seen the need to provide protection to the Shias in the south and the Kurds in the north, know that unless that UN approach is followed, we will have to protect large numbers of people in the region from Saddam Hussein's aggressive intentions for many years.

Mr. Howarth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention—a rare one because he made my next point for me and my speech will be probably that much briefer as a result.

There can be no doubt that Saddam Hussein is developing weapons of mass destruction of different kinds. No reasonable person can doubt that Iraq's deplorable human rights record deserves attention. Nor can there be doubt that our security is threatened by what might happen if no action is taken. What should be done? The Foreign Secretary's position, as outlined in his article in *The Times*, and the words spoken by the Prime Minister, point us in the right direction. I have no difficulty in supporting them, nor would I if it became obvious that an appropriate form of intervention was necessary.

However, I believe that my hon. Friend the Father of the House has a point about the role of Parliament. A debate and a vote on the subject are not constitutionally necessary—there are plenty of precedents to the contrary—or politically essential. I do not believe that there is an issue of trust, although I accept that we must take into account the many links in that chain, not least the position of Muslims in our country. However, it would be worth debating and voting on the subject, as it would have two consequences. First, it would demonstrate that our parliamentary democracy gives serious consideration to such matters, debates them, weighs them in the balance and then makes a decision. I am sure that any such decision would be one of which the Government would approve. Secondly, provided that the argument was put properly—I am sure that it would be—it would demonstrate that there was overwhelming support for the sort of action that is likely to be proposed. I should have no difficulty supporting the Government and I am sure that most Members would feel the same way.

In summary, there is a case for action, but it must be cautious, considered and carefully weighed, and it would be wise to consult the House before it is taken.

10.02 am

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), the Father of the House, on securing the debate. I agree that it is timely. I endorse his view about the fact that it is being held in Westminster Hall. The fact that we have held this debate should not be used as a barrier or excuse to prevent the matter from being debated on the Floor of the House, where it properly belongs.

This is the first occasion on which I can recall it being so crowded at this end of the Chamber in a Westminster Hall debate. Normally, when I attend Westminster Hall I see a row of Government Back Benchers who are keen to sit close to the Minister and make helpful speeches and interventions. There is a gulf between the tone of Government Back Benchers' contributions and what we have heard from Ministers in the press in the past few days, which is well represented by the physical gulf between them today in Westminster Hall. I feel some sympathy for the Minister, who is out on a limb in the face of all the aggressive pacifism from this end of the Chamber.

Mr. Dalyell: On the reference to pacifism, I wear the tie of the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards.

Mr. Carmichael: I take the hon. Gentleman's chastisement in the spirit in which it is offered. I have been a Member since June last year and am deeply conscious that, in the company of hon. Members such as the Father of the House, I am a parliamentary minnow. I therefore approach the subject with some humility. I may not have learned much since last June, but the one thing that I have learned is never to say never when dealing with such issues. That would be my general approach to the question of military action against Iraq. I would not say never, but I would say not now and certainly not until a lot more has been done to resolve several of the festering sores that exist in Israel Palestine, for example, and Kashmir—situations that we were told would be taken seriously and dealt with properly in the aftermath of 11 September and on which little more than token progress and efforts have been made. To launch a bombing attack on Iraq now can do nothing but harm to the standing of western nations in the middle east in attempting to resolve situations such as that in Israel Palestine, which seems to get worse with every day that passes. Our bottom line must be that nothing can be done without the full authority and approval of the UN. There can be no departure from that as the baseline for future action.

After 11 September, we were promised a war against terrorism. Like several Members and people in the wider community, I felt uneasy with such rhetoric—I kept several of my reservations to myself and perhaps I was wrong to do so. We did so because we were promised that it would be more than a war against Afghanistan; it would be a war against terrorism, and the challenges of globalisation, which allow western developed nations to exploit the vulnerability of undeveloped and developing nations, would be taken seriously. We were told that the problems of poverty and the conditions in which support for terrorism can be allowed to grow would be taken seriously. I have seen precious little of that since the bombs started falling on Afghanistan. Unless and until I see signs that the Prime Minister is prepared to take those challenges seriously, if he comes to the House of Commons to ask for support, he will not find it from me.

The Father of the House referred to the Prime Minister's speech that suggested that Iraqis were not like us. I beg to differ. Cut them and they bleed like us, kill their children and their parents grieve like us. We must remember that what we in this House say and decide will have a human impact. That must be justified in any action that we take. The thrust of Government policy and the tone of their recent pronouncement must be deeply regretted.

10.8 am

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) secured this debate. I am dismayed that once again we are not having it on the Floor of the House and that we might be being led into military action without any serious debate. I was alarmed by both the Prime Minister's statement in Australia and yesterday's article in *The Times* by the Foreign Secretary.

I tabled an early-day motion this week to express the feeling of deep unease among Members on both sides of the House, about which we are hearing today, at the prospect that Her Majesty's Government might follow and support the United States' military action against Iraq. The motion states that we agree with Kofi Annan, who has warned that further military action or an attack on Iraq would be unwise at this time. There is a real danger, of course, that that could threaten the coalition that we have built up to fight terrorism, which would be a disaster. The Governments of some Muslim countries, such as Pakistan and Indonesia, have taken great risks with their own populations. They could face a backlash if their militant groups turn round and say, "Well, you could never trust the west. We told you so."

We are about to hear huge spin about how many weapons of mass destruction exist in Iraq. When we receive the dossier, no doubt we will read that some such weapons are more sophisticated than those in the Pentagon. I expect that, and I shall read about it with interest.

I do not think that there is a United Nations resolution that gives the Americans the right unilaterally to take action while we run alongside as little bag carriers. The United Nations Association of Great Britain and Northern Ireland—I am sure that it has faxed or written to everyone—agrees with me. It says:

> "We certainly do not believe that at present a UN security council mandate exists authorising the type of military action that is currently being discussed regarding Iraq."

It continues to say that it is not convinced that that is the best way forward. However, it does insist that we get the weapons inspectors returned by using all means that we can, including diplomacy, as my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) said.

Last week, I attended a meeting of NATO parliamentarians with the Russians—we now have dialogue with them again. The Russian Federation Members from the Duma were totally against unilateral military action in Iraq, as were other European Members of Parliament of all parties. The Russians pointed out that they are in a good position to help to negotiate the return of the weapons inspectors, and we should take up their offer. I know that such help is on offer because I spoke to people from the Russian embassy yesterday. Why are we not using that? Why is it sacrosanct to use military action rather than diplomacy?

I was born into a party that was proud that conflict resolution and peaceful methods were at the heart of every part of its foreign policy. I know that some of us who signed the early-day motion were described as the awkward squad, but many Labour Members who signed the motion are not the usual members of the awkward squad. We do not believe that the Prime Minister has the right unilaterally to make us support unilateral action by the United States. The party that I was born into has a proud record of seeking peaceful solutions to conflicts, but, at present, it seems that we go to war at the drop of a hat.

I agree with what the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) said. If we support the Prime Minister, who loves his children dearly, when he sends war planes to bomb another country, we must accept that other people who love their children and whose humanity is exactly the same as ours—whether they are in Iraq, Afghanistan or Yugoslavia—will often end up picking up little body parts because of that action. That is why I totally oppose such action and I urge the Minister to use diplomacy and seek a peaceful solution.

10.14 am

Mr. James Wray (Glasgow, Baillieston): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on the issue that the Father of the House raised. During the action in 1991, I was horrified while people in the American Cabinet sat round calculating how many lives would be lost. It was calculated that about 63,000 lives would be lost and 319,000 people would be injured. The Americans asked Scotland to calculate the beds that would be needed if the war continued. The figure was something like 7,500 beds for long-term casualties, and they wanted 500 beds a day. The Americans spent something like $500 million dollars a day on that war and it was costing Britain about $4 million.

Biochemical weapons and long-range missiles were discussed. The other night, I asked the Minister which countries have the capability to produce them. Does Syria have that capability, or Iraq, or Iran, or China, or Japan? I had also asked NATO that question. It said that it could not name a specific country, but some of them might have those capabilities. However, the Minister knew better than NATO—or the United Nations, or any other organisation and country that was sitting around the table, including the Americans—because he named North Korea.

There are many countries outwith those to which I have referred that have a lot of biochemical weapons. Great Britain, America and Russia have polluted the waters. If we are really worried about biochemical weapons, we should focus on the 387,000 tonnes of

[Mr. James Wray]

polluted matter that is being dumped into the North sea and in places such as Denmark, Sweden and the Baltic states. They were told that the 50 years was up in 1997, and, as far as Russia is concerned, the matter was declassified. We could have an ecological disaster, regardless of our worries about countries such as Iran. America and Britain have asked for another 20 years before they declassify the matter, but they should be concerned about what is going on in the Baltic and the North sea as the Russians have discovered that there have been explosions in some of the ships there. That has implications for marine life and we do not want the food chain to be affected.

If America were really interested in peace, it would not withdraw from the anti-ballistic missile treaty by using article 15. That caused the Russian Federation and the rest of Europe to hold up their hands in horror and NATO was not a great help, because it was a shrinking violet.

I was listening to people talking about the United Nations. I was disappointed in it the last time and I have been disappointed in it for the past 30 years, because we would not have the chaos in Palestine and Israel if it implemented the resolutions that have been on the books for 33 years. That concerns me.

We are listening to a right-wing, reactionary American Government and they are dictating to us. Does anyone honestly think that that is right? They did not ask the UN or NATO or anyone else when they bombed Iraq the last time. As a socialist and a pacifist, I am opposed to sending boys—especially from Scotland—to die in the sands at 17 years of age, when they are not old enough to have a drink in a pub. It is sad that we are calling them heroes, when 2,000 veterans of the last war are suing the Ministry of Defence to get compensation for injuries that they received.

I am against all wars and I do not have any admiration for Tony Blair, Bush or the Iraqi president, Saddam Hussein. The only people who suffer in wars are the poor and the defenceless. It is time, as socialists and as a Labour Government, that we showed the way, not by dropping bombs, but by sitting around the table to create a situation in which a world government can be set up to stop the war from happening.

We can now laugh about the non-proliferation treaties because nobody is abiding by them. That—and especially the NMD system that America is going to put up in the sky—has implications for countries such as India. I have always said that one has the right to defend one's country using reasonable defences, but one does not have that right with regard to nuclear defences because everyone is involved, such as European and world organisations. The Americans do not care. They do not even pay their affiliation fees to such organisations—in fact, they have just paid their affiliation fees. They do not really care about Britain, or anywhere else. They just take their own decisions.

It is a case of like father, like son. When Bush's father was in power, America invaded countries as if it was peanuts. It intervened in Grenada, Nicaragua and Panama for instance. I am against that. I hope for a strong, vigorous attack against our Government—against those Ministers who are pontificating about war and killing, although I think that it was President Chirac who said that shields are not as mighty as swords.

10.20 am

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Kelvin): My hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth) spoke eloquently about the United Nations. For the avoidance of doubt, I must say that the Secretary-General of the United Nations has stated explicitly that there is no authority and no justification for launching a war against Iraq. Given their public statements, the majority of members of the Security Council of the United Nations are likely to express themselves similarly. Just as Britain and America did not ask for United Nations authorisation to launch the previous war against Iraq in December 1998—a time to which I shall return—my hon. Friend must know that the United States has no intention of seeking Security Council authority before it launches the war against Iraq. If he is worried about the integrity and importance of the Security Council of the United Nations, he should be on our side of the argument, not on the Government's side.

Mr. George Howarth: If my hon. Friend reads tomorrow the report of what I said, he may find that he is misrepresenting my words. I chose them carefully.

Mr. Galloway: I listened carefully to what my hon. Friend said, as I always do. I clearly recollect that he was anxious for the credibility of the United Nations to be maintained and believes that its centrality to world events is extremely important. As a member of the Labour party, how could he think otherwise? The last organisation in the world that is likely to authorise George Bush's attack on Iraq is the United Nations. If I am right about that, I look forward to receiving support in the Lobby. My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) was right to say that the matter of opposing the war should be dealt with in the Lobbies and in the Chamber.

If the answer to the political crisis in the middle east were the overwhelming use of force, blood, ire, fire and war, General Sharon's Israel would be the most peaceful place on earth. For 17 months, his Government have launched overwhelming fire power at Arab nationalist aspirations—at the Muslim and Christian people of Palestine. The friends of Israel shake their heads to the embarrassment of those sitting next to them, but no one in the Chamber is in any doubt that the policy of war, war rather than jaw, jaw as a means of resolving political disputes is the policy of the Government of Israel.

I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) that in the list of countries that possess weapons of mass destruction, that occupy other people's land and disobey United Nations Security Council resolutions, the one country that he forgot to mention was Israel. It is sitting on top of a mountain of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, which we know about thanks to the brave Jew, Mordechai Vanunu, now in his 15th year in solitary confinement in an Israeli prison. As well as sitting on top of the land of other people, in defiance for decades of international resolutions of the Security Council, Israel is also sitting on top of a mountain of weapons of mass destruction. Yet the only sanction contemplated against Israel is forcing it to take part in the Eurovision song contest.

I am astounded that people are seriously contemplating launching another war in the middle east, at a time when, in Afghanistan, the American forces are engaged in—and I quote last night's news bulletins—

> "the heaviest fighting of the war".

The most intense confrontation of the Afghan war is taking place this week, yet we are discussing whether to start a new war alongside it.

There is already another war in the middle east. The holy land is on fire. People are being killed by the dozen—sometimes, two dozen—each day. F15s, F16s, tanks, heavy artillery, mortars, kalashnikovs and stones are filling the air of the middle east and threatening to drag the region into total war. Yet on top of that conflagration, we are seriously discussing starting another middle east war at the same time. We would have to be insane to depart down that track.

Let us be clear about the scale of the war. Bloody and disastrous though the Afghan war has been, it is a Vauxhall conference war. Another war would be a premier league war, with weeks, if not months, of carpet bombardment of Iraq, followed by an invasion of an Arab country by 200,000 foreign solders, most of whom would be American. Some who invade Iraq may be British. The figures are not mine; that is the Pentagon's own plan. Those foreign soldiers will crush military resistance, including civilian militias, town by town, city by city, village by village. They will occupy and garrison that country and install a puppet government there. That puppet government will be sustained for an unlimited time. That is the enterprise that we are discussing.

Who can sanely contemplate such action? It is not Labour policy; 86 in 100 Labour MPs, polled by the BBC's "On the Record" programme, expressed opposition to such a war. Only seven in 100 Labour MPs expressed support for it. One Government personality said to a friend, "I wonder who the seven were." The policy is American. It is the policy of a right-wing, republican American Administration. I say to Labour colleagues who contemplate supporting the George Bush war mark 2 that my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Baillieston (Mr. Wray) was right: the White House is not a Clinton White House; it is not a third-way White House nor is it a social democrat White House. It is the Reagan-Bush era White House reconstituted.

What sort of Labour Member of Parliament will support in the Lobby a war launched by such a grizzly crew? What justification is there for launching such a war? Iraq had nothing to do with the terrorism on 11 September. Ministers repeatedly made that clear. They said that they had seen no evidence linking Iraq to the terrorism on 11 September—but they tried so hard, did they not? There were anthrax flasks, and meetings with Mohammed Atta in Prague airport that turn out never to have happened. Whatever happened to the anthrax flask that Atta was supposed to have given? We know now that the anthrax used in the attacks on the United States was American anthrax sent by an American lunatic who was probably a former employee of the US Government. The propaganda canards are being dragged out. We have seen them all.

You will recall, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we were told in the Chamber about the five-year-old boy who was imprisoned for throwing a stone at a picture of the Iraqi President, Saddam Hussein. When we asked for further details, the Foreign Secretary referred us to the Defence Secretary. When we asked the Defence Secretary, he referred us to the Minister of State. When we asked the Minister of State, he took shelter behind the protection of intelligence sources.

We all know about the babies in the incubators in Kuwait city and the professional public relations firm that was hired in the US to build the propaganda case for war. The daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador posed as a nurse. She said that she had watched Iraqis in a Kuwaiti hospital unplugging incubators from the wall, which killed the babies, and shipping those incubators north to Iraq. We found out only later that she was a professional actress and that the whole stunt had been paid for as part of the war propaganda.

We remember the presidential palaces. The former Member for Hamilton, South, now the Secretary-General of NATO, held up a map of my constituency in the Chamber and said that the palaces were larger than the area of Paris. However, when they were mapped, they turned out to be smaller than Paddington. We were told that all sorts of weapons of mass destruction could be found in them. When the UN inspectors searched them, they found not so much as a bow and arrow.

I say two things to hon. Members who suspect that Iraq still has weapons of mass destruction. Scott Ritter—the former senior official of the arms inspectorate—who spent years in Iraq destroying weapons, told an audience in this Chamber that Iraq had been effectively disarmed by 1998. He also said that that meant that every child who had died under the sanctions since then had died under false pretences, and that the campaign on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction was the longest running hoax in the international community. Neither my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow nor I know what weapons exist i[illegible]q or in any other country. However, Scott Ritter is in a better position than either of us to know whether Iraq has such weapons, as he spent years destroying them as an employee of the United Nations Special Commission.

There is a better way. Last week, Iraq told Britain that if it believed that there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, it should send a team of weapons experts to Iraq. Why was that offer dismissed so out of hand? Why was it laughed off as a propaganda ploy or a game? If we make allegations about a country, why do not we take up that country's invitation to send anyone we like for any length of time that we like?

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): My hon. Friend has spoken eloquently about the need to maintain the United Nation's authority in the matter. Does he believe that Britain can act unilaterally as a weapons inspector? Should not that be done under the auspices of the United Nations?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): Hear, hear.

Mr. Galloway: I am glad that the Minister said, "Hear, hear" to my hon. Friend's intervention because

[Mr. Galloway]

I want to ask the Minister a blunt question. If Iraq readmits the United Nations weapons inspectors, whom the British and American Governments withdrew, does he agree that war in those circumstances would be unconscionable? I invite him to rise in response to that point, or at least to deal with it in his speech. The House should know whether the war is off the agenda if Iraq admits those weapons inspectors.

I talked about a five-year old boy in the context of Iraq. Yesterday I spoke to a five-year old Palestinian boy on the west bank. I asked him what he was doing in these horrendous days when play and school were impossible. He told me that he was gathering a pile of stones. When I asked him why that five-year old boy said, "I am going to be a martyr. I dreamed that I went to heaven and God was there and we played and he gave me sweets and chocolate." That is the prevailing mindset among children in the middle east about the current conjuncture of events. I warn the Government that to launch another devastating war in the middle east on top of the war already raging there will bring forth a torrent of hatred and bitterness against us that will never subside.

10.36 am

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): I doubt that I can match the eloquence of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Kelvin (Mr. Galloway), but I will seek to emulate his clarity. No Government committed to the security of their citizens can sensibly exclude in all possible circumstances the use of military force. But the use of military force should be a last resort. In saying that I echo the words of the Minister when he replied to an Adjournment debate on Monday.

Military action should never be undertaken without clear and realistic political objectives that are capable of achievement. The duty of a Government in their foreign policy is to secure the interests of their citizens, even if at the expense of alliances. Those are not my sentiments alone. I heard them expressed by Mr. Richard Perle at the Munich security conference just a few weeks ago.

Yesterday in *The Guardian* Hugo Young wrote:

> "Saddam Hussein is an international criminal, brutal to his own people and an unrepentant enemy of any world order the UN attempts to invigilate."

In the capitals of the middle east there is little or no sympathy for Saddam Hussein and his regime. But we know that there is considerable sympathy for Iraqi citizens who have paid a terrible price for Saddam Hussein's intransigence. Since December 1998, when the UN withdrew its inspectors because Richard Butler was not satisfied that they could do their job properly, a strategy of surveillance, containment and deterrence has been effectively pursued against Iraq.

As has already been said, there is no evidence to link Baghdad with the events of 11 September. Nor is there any published evidence of the chemical, biological or nuclear capability of Iraq, but it would be reasonable to conclude from past history that there is a strong probability that such capabilities exist or at least are being actively pursued. There is nothing to indicate that any of Iraq's neighbours, with the possible exception of Kuwait, would provide political backing for military action or host nation support for military operations.

If Iraq possesses weapons of mass destruction it would, if attacked, use them against its adversaries or the allies of its adversaries. If Israel were attacked with weapons of mass destruction, or even with conventional weapons, retaliation would be likely. Its failure to respond under heavy American pressure during the Gulf war is unlikely to be repeated. If Israel were attacked, by whatever means, the prospect of an Israeli nuclear strike in return cannot be ruled out.

The most immediate cause of instability in the middle east at present is the terrible escalating violence between Israel and the Palestinians. Military action against Iraq would severely increase the already formidable difficulties of launching a peace initiative. However, if Russia could be persuaded to enter into dialogue with Iraq, Security Council resolution 1284 could still provide the basis for the return of the inspectors and a regime of targeted sanctions. We should surely pursue that option. Speaking last week at the London school of economics, the Secretary-General of the UN used delicate diplomatic language when he described military action as "unwise".

On the basis of all those facts, conclusions and inferences—none of which is unreasonable—we cannot claim that the case for military action against Iraq has been proved. We cannot conduct our foreign policy on the basis of the principle "my ally right or wrong". The United States has never done so. The events of the 1956 Suez crisis demonstrated that; US unwillingness to support the pound, which, as a reserved currency was under severe pressure, was a compelling factor in causing the United Kingdom to withdraw from that ill-fated and ill-conceived adventure.

At 2.44 pm on 12 January 1991, the US Senate passed a joint resolution to authorise the use of US armed forces pursuant to UN Security Council resolution 678. In short, it authorised the commitment of US forces in the Gulf war. That resolution was passed by only five votes—by 52 to 47. Among those who voted against it were Senators Sam Nunn, Robert Byrd and Daniel Pat Moynihan, none of whom could be described as faint-hearted about ensuring that US interests were other than paramount. That vote tells us that—albeit some 11 years ago—to express reservations about the use of military forces against Saddam Hussein cannot be described as anti-American or appeasement. Before the UK lends its support for action against Iraq, hon. Members must be satisfied that there is no other course.

10.43 am

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): I thank the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) for securing this debate. He has shown a sustained interest in the subject and, although I am rarely in total agreement with him, his long-standing concern for the region reflects especially well on him, as it does on the House. I join him in extending condolences to the Foreign Secretary on the sad death of his father.

Saddam Hussein's Iraq refuses to acknowledge international norms or its own international agreements. It is run by a regime that oppresses its own people and appears intent on developing weapons of mass destruction—we would be naive to see them as being merely defensive in purpose. Iraq under Saddam Hussein represents a clear danger to international security and regional stability and represents a clear affront to human rights—a point about which I would have thought Labour Members would feel especially strongly.

We must be clear that discussion about Iraq is entirely separate from the events of 11 September and nobody seriously attempts to link them in the United States or the United Kingdom—the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) was absolutely right about that. Anyone who tries to establish a link fails to realise that it is a red herring. The events of 11 September may have sharpened perceptions of the various threats posed to international security, but we would be foolish to claim a direct link. Those horrific events changed United States psychology and revealed a new vulnerability. They brought home the fact that the US would rather act to prevent disaster than react when disaster occurs. That is the judgment that it must now make about Iraq.

Containment has been our first aim in tackling Saddam Hussein. It is the policy that we have followed so far—with some success—but we must face the reality that containment alone is not enough to defeat the evil of the Iraqi regime and its weapons programme. Saddam Hussein is abusing the patience of the world and is developing far more destructive potential than he has yet possessed. We must question whether it is any longer realistic to pursue the policy of containment and whether that policy is sufficient to guarantee the safety and security of Iraq's immediate neighbours and the wider world. In an article that I am sure all will want to read in today's *Daily Express*, The Prime Minister says clearly that containment is now insufficient.

As we assess the latent threat that we face from Iraq, we should not rule out any course of action. I visited Washington in December and was reassured by the mature, intelligent and open way in which those at the heart of the Bush Administration were considering all the options and weighing them up before taking action.

Mr. Dalyell: Has not the Prime Minister the duty to come to the House of Commons with his parliamentary colleagues to say the same thing?

Mr. Duncan: On that, I sense that we are all in agreement. Yes.

Conservative Members support the Prime Minister in his determination to tackle the issue and not shy away from it, as some would wish. His full support for President Bush shows an appreciation of the gravity of the issue and we await the outcome of their talks in April. There is clear and present danger and we must face it. Saddam has ignored United Nations resolutions, misused the oil-for-food programme and tortured and killed his people. The no-fly zones are an important policy for protecting the Kurds. I should like to discuss them, but we are squeezed for time and I know that the House will want to hear from the Minister.

There are those who question Saddam's capacity to produce the chemical, biological and even nuclear weapons that we feel are a growing threat. I say to them, where are the thousands of tonnes of precursor chemicals, suitable for chemical weapons use, that are still unaccounted for? Saddam Hussein has not yet complied with UN Security Council resolution 687 regarding inspection, so what is he hiding?

Recently, it has been suggested that Saddam Hussein might once again be prepared to admit inspection teams into Iraq. We would welcome that, but let him say so to the UN and prove to us that it is a realistic option. In the absence of that progress, our options include military action parallel to that undertaken in Afghanistan but, as the hon. Member for Linlithgow says, on an altogether different scale. We should not think that some rebel force, similar to the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan, will take that military action. On that, too, the hon. Gentleman was absolutely right.

If we or the Americans were to use the Kurds as pawns, they would be massacred. It would be wrong and reckless to sacrifice them on the altar of our ambitions to topple Saddam Hussein. If we are to topple him, we must look for other means, which must include winning the hearts and minds of the Iraqis and not simply expecting to win through force. As in Afghanistan, we must always remember whose country it is. We must also be certain to win the peace as well as any war. That means considering a post-Saddam Iraq before we act. We must consider reconstruction, humanitarian aid and the massive difficulty of filling the political vacuum left by the regime of a dictator.

We must be firm in our resolve that there can be no support for any form of separatism or any breakaway state. The integrity and unity of the Iraqi state is a must for regional geopolitics and for the continuing viability of the country. We do not want a triangular split into Sunni, Shia and Kurds. If there is to be a change of regime in Iraq, it must be achieved quickly and cleanly. We should be clear that Arab opinion will not tolerate a long, drawn-out campaign, but demands, if it is to tolerate any action, a rapid and decisive conclusion. We must make it clear that effective and conclusive action would constitute liberation, not invasion.

If, as I believe, the Government have considered Iraq's long-term requirements, they should enjoy our support—the support of all those who have a long-term, serious view of what is needed and of those who genuinely have the interests of the Iraqi people at heart. Those who continue to argue that containment is sufficient must answer the charge of naivety.

10.50 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): I congratulate the Father of the House, my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), on securing the debate.

I apologise in advance as I do not intend to take any interventions. I have barely 10 minutes to respond to hon. Members' questions and to put Government policy on the record, especially in the light of the 16 minutes taken up by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Kelvin (Mr. Galloway).

First, I shall take head-on the points raised in the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow began by making a point that, strangely, is often made when a debate has been secured on an issue: he complained that we never have enough time to debate these things. That view was echoed by the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner), who spent all his time addressing that matter rather than the subject.

I do not need to remind hon. Members that the Prime Minister has spent more time in the House answering questions and making statements than either of his two

[Mr. Ben Bradshaw]

predecessors. I shall bring the matters raised by my hon. Friend and the hon. Gentleman to the attention of my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary.

The Father of the House talked about proposals; there are no proposals, only speculation. The hon. Gentleman said that everything possible should be done to avoid military action; I agree with him. He urged the Government and the international community to talk to the Iraqis. As I am sure he knows, Kofi Annan is tomorrow holding a meeting with an Iraqi delegation in New York and we await the outcome with interest. Our doors are always open to the Iraqis with whom we have contacts in this country and at the United Nations. However, we have nothing to say to them in private that we do not say in public. We wait to see whether they are serious; Saddam Hussein has embarked on charm offensives before and they have come to nothing.

I was grateful to the Father of the House who, in contrast to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Kelvin, at least quoted Kofi Annan accurately. He included the phrase "at the present time" in the Secretary-General's views on military action.

My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) made the point that this has nothing to do with the war on terrorism. We do not quite agree; Iraq is a state sponsor of terrorism. But, we make no secret of the fact that our main concern about that country is its determination to build weapons of mass destruction and the threat that it poses, not just to its neighbours, but to the rest of the world.

My hon. Friend urged the Prime Minister to speak to Kofi Annan. The Prime Minister speaks to him on a regular basis. He called for an outbreak of diplomacy; I am not sure where he has been for the past 12 years. Britain has been in the lead as the architect of the oil-for-food programme and in trying to get a new sanctions regime instituted at the United Nations, which we are confident will be done in May, having won support from the Russians. It is wrong to suggest that Britain has been inactive on the diplomatic front.

My hon. Friend questioned whether there would be any legal base in the hypothetical circumstances that there is military action. The legal view, with which I have some sympathy, is that Iraq is in flagrant breach, not just of United Nations resolutions, but of the ceasefire agreement that it entered into at the end of the Gulf war, which makes that ceasefire no longer valid. My hon. Friend went on to say that other countries possess weapons of mass destruction. That is stating the obvious, but he must accept that Iraq is unique in the history of the world in that it has used chemical weapons against its neighbours and its own people, killing tens of thousands in both cases. He went on to suggest that any action against Iraq would break up the international coalition against terrorism and would go down extremely badly in the Arab world.

It is worth making the point that all Labour Members who have spoken in the debate in opposition to the Government's policy opposed our policy in Afghanistan and opposed our policy in Kosovo. They were wrong then, and they are wrong now. They also raised the spectre of a disaster in the Arab world over Afghanistan—and look what has happened. I know from my contacts with leaders in the Arab world as recently as last week at the Gulf Co-oporation Council and the EU summit at Grenada in Spain that, as the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) said, there is no love lost between the Arab countries and Saddam Hussein. If anything does happen, their main concern is that it works.

I am grateful for the sympathy of the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael), but I do not need it. He suggested that the layout in Westminster Hall meant that the Government were isolated. That was a rather bizarre statement, coming immediately after a supportive speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth) and a supportive intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes). The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland said some wise things about the middle east, but he suggested that, before there was talk about taking military action against Iraq, we needed to solve every other problem in the world. That is a strange argument.

My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) spoke about the Labour party being the party of conflict resolution. Yes, we are the party of conflict resolution and peaceful solutions. But she and her hon. Friends have to ask themselves—as they failed to do in the instances of Kosovo and Afghanistan—what do they do, faced with a brutal, dictatorial regime that is building a weapons of mass destruction programme and threatening its neighbours and us? It has used those weapons on its neighbours and on its own people.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Baillieston (Mr. Wray) spoilt his argument about United States isolationism because he said that he had no confidence in the United Nations either. I do not know where that leaves us.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Kelvin made his familiar views known in his inimitable way. Some of the good points that he made on the middle east peace process would, I believe, carry more credibility if he had not made a career of being not just an apologist, but a mouthpiece, for the Iraqi regime over many years.

Mr. Galloway: Why do you not give way on that slander?

Mr. Bradshaw: We are not discussing—

Mr. Galloway: The Minister is a liar.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. John McWilliam): Order. The hon. Gentleman must withdraw that statement.

Mr. Galloway: The Minister told a lie about me.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must withdraw that statement.

Mr. Galloway: Why? The Minister told a blatant lie about me. What else could I do. What else can I call it? I demand that he withdraws the allegation against me.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must withdraw immediately.

Mr. Galloway: An allegation of dishonourable conduct has been made against me by the Minister. It is an assumption in the House that Members are honourable gentlemen and ladies. His imputation that I am a mouthpiece for a dictator is a clear imputation of dishonour. He is the one who should be withdrawing, not me.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have no alternative, but to report this matter to the House. I must immediately suspend the sitting for 10 minutes.

10.59 am

Sitting suspended.

European Parliament

11.10 am

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. John McWilliam): May I apologise to the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) for taking 10 minutes from his debate? The situation was unavoidable. I shall report the circumstances to the House at 3.30 pm or thereabouts.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I fancy that we may not need all the time available, so the otherwise unfortunate circumstances of this morning may not be disastrous. By good fortune, our debate is relevant and topical because we must decide relatively soon how the next European parliamentary elections should be handled, what system should be used and what the criteria should be.

I remind the House that on 10 November 1998, during the passage of the European Parliamentary Elections Act 1999, the then Home Secretary—the present Foreign Secretary—gave an explicit assurance that the system would be reviewed in light of the 1999 experience and also moved a Government amendment, which I shall quote in full, because it is extremely important:

> "(1) The Secretary of State shall appoint one or more persons—
>
> (a) to review the operation of the systems of election provided for by section 3 of the European Parliamentary Elections Act 1978 as substituted by section 1 of this Act, and
>
> (b) to make a report to the Secretary of State within six months, from the day of appointment.
>
> (2) The Secretary of State shall carry out his duty under subsection (1) within one month from the date of the first general election to the European Parliament which takes place after the coming into force of section 1.
>
> (3) The Secretary of State shall lay a copy of any report received under subsection (1)(b) before each House of Parliament.".

The right hon. Gentleman went further, telling the House:

> "I must make it clear that a review of the operation of the system does not simply mean a review of the counting process. If this House and the other place approve the amendment, the review will consider whether the closed list system itself operated satisfactorily."

He also promised:

> "If the review concludes that the closed-list system is the wrong system as it has produced all sorts of perverse results—and if that is what Parliament finally accepts, and I hope it is—there will be huge pressure on the Government to change. In any event, there will have to be a debate on the result of the review."—[*Official Report*, 10 November 1998; Vol. 319, c. 207-8.]

In the event, the amendment was not accepted.

Hon. Members will recall the to-ings and fro-ings between the two Houses before the Bill finally reached the statute book, but the review was entirely internal to the Home Office—the Government looking at their navel, not an independent, outside review inviting evidence from other interested groups or parties. It was not completed in the six months specified, and there has been no debate until this morning.

The internal review used unequivocal terms:

> "The question of the precise type of voting system is obviously a political one which it would be inappropriate for us to try to answer".

[Mr. Paul Tyler]

Incidentally, that completely negated the statement of the Minister in the other place in answer to my noble Friend Lord Greaves on 4 December 2001. Will the Minister confirm that, as yet, there has been no independent, objective and comprehensive review of the system?

Almost immediately after the 1999 election, a number of myths were peddled by opponents of representative electoral systems. First, Labour reactionaries blamed their poor performance on the system. By a curious coincidence, there was on the same day a by-election under the first-past-the-post system in Leeds, Central. That election had a much lower turnout. In the European election, there was a gap between the parties that reflected the gap in the country, which, had first past the post been used, would have given the Conservatives 60 per cent. of the seats for only 36 per cent. of the vote.

Some Conservatives naturally preferred a system that would have given them that undeserved advantage, although I must say, in fairness to the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May), that Conservative Front Benchers argued strongly for open lists during the latter part of the Bill's passage. I anticipate that that will remain the position of their party.

Others claimed that the system caused the low turnout—23.1 per cent. However, it can hardly be said that such a poor turnout was the result of the system, given that, on the same day, the turnout for the Leeds, Central by-election was a disgraceful 19.6 per cent. So, on a day on which two systems were used, that for the European election was marginally more successful.

However, everybody in the House must take low turnout seriously, particularly because we have experienced further disappointments, so I would like to refer to research done since the European election. Official research undertaken on behalf of the Home Office identified a number of factors accounting for the poor turnout—lack of campaign activity during the European election, electoral fatigue after the Scottish, Welsh and council elections, less media coverage, a general trend towards apathy and a feeling of remoteness from the political process—but failed to find any substantial resistance to the system. For example, 89 per cent. of voters found the ballot paper easy to use and the proportion of spoilt papers, which is a good indicator, was lower than in the 1997 first-past-the-post general election. In an Office for National Statistics survey, 95 per cent. of respondents said that the new voting system had no bearing on their decision as to whether to vote.

Research by NOP found that voters were doubtful about the system for a different reason: they saw the regional closed list as evidence that candidates would put party loyalty before loyalty to the electorate, which might have been a material factor in increasing scepticism and discouraging voting. That view was reflected in debates on the Bill. All in all, the official research concludes that the electoral system had a neutral effect on turnout.

Nothing in the subsequent report by the Independent Commission on Alternative Voting Methods, which is more to do with the mechanics of voting, suggests that changing the arrangements on postal voting, e-voting or telephone voting or other tinkering with the traditional polling arrangements can compensate for the perception that voting does not make a real difference. That is the biggest single factor on the issue of turnout.

In parenthesis, interesting evidence from the 1999 European parliamentary elections came from the experience in Northern Ireland. Electors were already familiar with a representative system, as they have had the single transferable vote for some time, and turnout on the same day in the same election was a comparatively respectable 57 per cent.—two and a half times that in the rest of the UK, which suffered from the closed list system.

In those circumstances, it is no surprise that the Labour party's national executive committee accepted soon after the 1999 European parliamentary elections that the closed regional list was unsuitable for elections in Britain.

I hope that the Government, with the non-party Electoral Reform Society, to which I pay tribute, will now consult widely on a voting system for the 2004 European parliamentary elections, which must achieve the following three essentials. First, it must allow voters to choose candidates, not just parties. Secondly, it must be broadly proportional and avoid wild distortion. Thirdly, it must maintain a link between MEPs and areas of the country, presumably in multi-Member constituencies.

The most voter-friendly system, best able to meet those criteria, is undoubtedly STV, as used in Northern Ireland. It enables voters to rank all candidates within and across parties and to take account of all the factors that they think important. Each candidate, not just those lucky enough to be at the top of the list, has a reasonable chance of being elected. All candidates, including those who think that they might be marginal, would have to work for their support before, during and after the election.

The STV system also reduces the power of the party hierarchy and rebuts accusations of control freakery, which have become part of daily comment on politics in recent years. Under the STV system, success depends on the candidates' appeal to the wider electorate, not on rewards for party loyalty. The system also offers opportunities to independents. Most important, however, no vote is wasted. If the first-choice candidate is knocked out, the vote is transferred to the next preference and so on. Voters need not choose among a list of candidates whom they do not support, and their wishes will not be completely wasted.

Let me give an example, in parenthesis, of what I mean. In the south-west, in 1999, a very popular, active and high-profile candidate, who had served as an MEP, was pushed down the list. The system did not register the fact that he appealed across parties, rather than, for example, simply to Liberal Democrats. Under the previous regime, Robin Teverson was seen as Cornwall and Plymouth's MEP, but that counted for nothing under the list system, because he could not appeal for support among members of other parties on a non-party basis. That was a tragedy for the system and for our part of the country.

STV is obviously the most voter-friendly system, and experience in Northern Ireland gives us a useful and demonstrably successful precedent. However, a fully open list system is worth considering, and the Conservative party took up that position in 1998. The open list system has some features of STV, and the determined voter can break away from the order of preference that the parties dictate. Votes count for the party of one's choice, however, so voters may find themselves helping to elect candidates whose views they do not support.

It must be absolutely clear that the closed list system is firmly discredited, and I hope that the Minister takes this opportunity to say that on the Government's behalf. Indeed, it was discredited to a considerable extent, even before it was used, in both Houses and among Members of all parties. It was accepted only reluctantly so that a measure could be placed on the statute book in time for the election. Unless the Government want to increase cynicism and contempt for artificial party discipline, they should say that the closed list system has been firmly rejected as inappropriate to this country.

Semi-open lists are not much better. To start with, they are incredibly complicated, but that is not the real problem. Voters put an X next to their preferred candidates on a party list, but, unless a lot of people do that and the list changes dramatically, the outcome will be no different. That means that only exceptional candidates have any chance of beating the rank that their party gives them. They would require strong individual support, which is almost impossible to achieve in large areas. Large constituencies are inevitable, and they are likely to become bigger when the EU is enlarged and the number of MEPs reduces. The electorate would be likely to view such arrangements as something of a confidence trick played on them by the parties. Let me give an example.

Let us suppose that 80 per cent. of a party's vote comes from loyal party voters over a wide area who simply put their X on the party list. The other 20 per cent. might come from voters who favour a candidate who is popular because he or she is something of an individualist. Even if that candidate has a much larger personal vote than candidates at the top of the ranked list, he or she simply could not be elected. That would be seen as cheating the voters.

It might be suggested that we should consider alternative vote plus, the system advocated by the commission headed by my noble Friend Lord Jenkins of Hillhead. Had the sequence of events been different—if the commission had been able to report well in advance of the devolution legislation—there might have been merit in adopting a standard system for Scotland, Wales, Greater London and so on. Frankly, that was not an option at the time, although it would be appropriate if one were trying to elect the same sort of bodies, as would have been the case.

AV plus is designed to provide a strong local constituency link and broad proportionality. The former, which would inevitably involve duplication and confusion with the roles of Westminster Members of Parliament, is not especially desirable. Indeed, there would be resistance in the House to a system that emphasised the constituency connection, and MPs would fight such duplication and confusion.

As the 2001 general election amply demonstrated, the most powerful turn off for turnout is the perception that one's vote does not matter. Much comment on that election has been about the average turnout, which was an extremely disappointing 59 per cent., but the perceived foregone conclusion is the big disincentive, as can be shown by disaggregating the figures. What matters is not only the average across the country, but what happened in different constituencies.

For example, in Winchester my Liberal Democrat colleague had a majority of only two in 1997, and every vote seemed to the voter to be extremely valuable. The turnout there last year was 72.3 per cent. In Liverpool, Riverside, a traditionally safe seat for the Labour party, there seemed to be little chance of change and the turnout was only 34.1 per cent. The average disguises such wide variations. Taken with the overall perception that the Labour Government were likely to be returned, the incentive to vote in apparently safe seats for all parties was at an all-time low. I can demonstrate that from my experience.

When I was first elected to the House in 1974, my majority was just nine. The electorate had seen that the result was likely to be close, and turnout was 83 per cent. I am glad to say that, last year, my majority was rather more comfortable and well in excess of 9,000. However, it was difficult to persuade my electorate that the result would be terribly close, and I am sad to report that turnout fell to 63 per cent.

In the next European Parliament, we want to ensure that our representatives have a respectable democratic mandate. If we are to achieve that, we must devise an electoral system that gives the voter real choice, minimises wasted votes and affords votes equal value. Such a system would put the people rather than the parties back in the driving seat.

11.28 am

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): I congratulate the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) on securing the debate and, as chair of the all-party group on electoral reform, I am grateful to be able to make a brief contribution. Before the debate, I heard the hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) say, "Oh God, it's the pro-proportional representation lobby." I have to plead guilty, but it is important to make one or two points about debates on the European Parliamentary Elections Act 1999 and what resulted from of it.

No doubt for the best of motives, it has been said that the system of election adopted under the 1999 Act was favoured and pushed for by Members of the House from all parties who, over the years, have supported the more proportional systems. As we discuss reviews of that system, it is important to state that that was simply not the case. If hon. Members read the debates on the legislation, including my contribution on 25 November 1997, they will see that those people said that there were problems with closed lists.

Ultimately, an amendment that called for a review of the system was tabled by hon. Members such as my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew), who have been notable in their support over the years for a more proportional system. There was concern among those who generally support such a system and those who support first past the post about the closed list system as drawn up in the Bill.

[Richard Burden]

Before I move on to the changes that might be made to that system, we should go back a stage. The valid criticisms that people make of the electoral system that was adopted, especially the closed list system, sometimes lead them to look through rose-coloured spectacles at the system that existed before. Let us remember that, under the previous system for elections to the European Parliament, constituencies often did not reflect real communities and were often not generally known in their area. I lived in part of Birmingham that would have been described, geographically, as west of Birmingham, but the European constituency was called Birmingham, East. Such constituencies often did not reflect anything real.

There is logic in considering the region as the basic unit of election for the European Parliament, as that makes sense in terms of the way in which Europe operates, including the disbursal of European funds and programmes. The regional dimension is vital to that, so considering the link between the European Parliament and the regions is sensible. Whatever criticisms we may make of the precise form of electoral system adopted for the 1999 Act, a regional basis for elections should not be rejected out of hand. There is a great deal of merit in the idea.

I ask supporters of first-past-the-post electoral systems, who object to closed lists on the ground of democracy, to reflect on the fact that an electoral system based on first past the post also results in a closed list. The only difference is that the closed list has one name on it per party, rather than several. It is argued that, if there are a number of names on a closed list, voters are denied the choice that they have under first past the post with single-Member constituencies, but that does not stand up to close scrutiny.

My other point about those rose-coloured spectacles that people sometimes put on relates to turnout. The hon. Member for North Cornwall rightly alluded to the matter. If we consider turnout before the last European elections, we may make some interesting discoveries. It is often said that adopting a more proportional system that ties numbers of European parliamentary seats more exactly to votes cast for the parties has led to a drop in turnout, but the evidence for that does not exist.

Before the adoption of the proportional system, Britain was virtually unique in Europe in electing MEPs in first-past-the-post constituencies. If we consider turnout for the 1994 elections, we see that Britain did not come out well compared with other counties. Turnout was 90.7 per cent. in Belgium, 52.5 per cent. in Denmark, 60 per cent. in Germany, 59 per cent. in Spain and 52 per cent. in France. The percentage in the Netherlands was low at 35.6 per cent.—lower, just, than in Britain, where turnout was 36.4 per cent.

The argument that adopting a more proportional system leads to lower turnout does not stand up to scrutiny. Turnout was low in 1994 and appalling at the last elections under the changed system of parliamentary electoral arrangements, but, interestingly, the drop in turnout for those elections is roughly the same as that for general and local elections. Percentages are dropping across the piece. That is not meant to be comforting. The issue should and does worry all politicians, and the drop represents people's profound disconnection with the political process, but it is not related to the introduction of more proportional voting arrangements.

It is important to get those things on the record, but not everything in the garden was lovely during the last European elections. Turnout was appalling and people rightly had deep reservations about adopting a closed list. That has been given more graphic meaning in the past 24 hours. There is a problem with a list system that does not allow the voter to record any preference for specific candidates of the same party. What happens if circumstances change after the election?

A gentleman named Richard Balfe was elected a Labour MEP on a Labour list at the previous European parliamentary elections. We read, in a rather strange statement, that he has joined a different political party. Interestingly, he joined the Conservatives. It is no surprise that that has received a lot of media coverage—it does not happen often.

When the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Marsden) defected from the Labour party recently, there was an argument about whether, as one elected a Labour MP, he should stand and fight as a Liberal Democrat or resign his seat. It seemed to me that there was a good argument that he should pursue the latter course. However, at least he could argue that people voted for him personally. How far his constituents voted for him rather than the Labour party is an interesting question—perhaps we will see the results of his decision at the next general election—but he could say that people voted for the individual whose name was on the ballot paper, against which they had put their X. He played down the importance of the fact that his name had "Labour" printed next to it. I disagree with him on that, but we can resolve the issue in due course.

In the European parliamentary elections, however, although the name Richard Balfe was on the ballot paper, the individual voter could not record any preference whatever for him. There is a powerful argument that, when he decided, for his own reasons, to leave the Labour party and join the Conservatives, the voter became disfranchised. Mr. Balfe was not elected as an individual, but because he was on the Labour list. He probably needs to consider his position as a result, but his situation says something about the operation of closed list systems that we need to consider seriously.

There is also the issue of fairness. The relationship between the individual voter and people seeking elective office of any kind is important, and there is a great tradition in British democracy of retaining that link so that the voter can acknowledge the importance of party, but connect on an individual level. It is rather fanciful to suppose that political systems can operate in this day and age without organised political parties, but political parties are made up of people. Not all candidates have the same qualities or views, even within the same party. We should protect the voter's right to recognise that and to express preferences, particularly in multi-Member systems. The credibility of the electoral arrangements adopted for the European parliamentary elections suffered from that link being broken.

In the run-up to passing the 1999 Act, several alternatives were proposed. The hon. Member for North Cornwall alluded to the fairly minimalist idea that became known as the Belgian system. In most cases, it achieves proportionality on the basis of parties and it usually ensures that the ranking of party lists prevails in elections, but it does allow the voter to record a vote against a candidate if he or she wishes. The previous Home Secretary was greatly exercised about naming famous Belgians in that debate, and about Mr. d'Hondt, whose name frequently appeared.

It was decided not to adopt that voting system, but if we are reviewing arrangements for European parliamentary elections we should at least consider it. However, I agree with the hon. Member for North Cornwall that it is not the only option we should examine. A range of electoral choices and systems are available, and he is right to say that, at this stage, we must consider the principles on which the system should operate.

One principle that we should support is a voter's right to vote for a candidate as well as a party. That can happen in different ways. The second principle appears radical when suggested in this place, although one would not think that it should be. The system adopted should broadly reflect the number of votes cast for a party in the number of seats it secures. That might be thought to be common sense, but it is all too often seen in this Parliament as radical and outlandish. It is a principle that should be upheld in any review of European parliamentary electoral arrangements.

The third principle is the most difficult, but perhaps, in a way, the most important. The arrangements that we adopt must reflect, support and encourage a reconnection of voters with the political process. That is the real challenge for us all. No electoral system in the world, whether that of Mr. d'Hondt or anyone else, will alone ensure a reconnection of voters with the political process. Electoral arrangements alone do not do that. They can help, but I put it no more strongly than that.

If we provide that help, we must ensure that we move on to the next task. If we are elected to the House on an ever-dwindling proportion of the vote, we shall all suffer. More importantly, democracy will suffer. When democracy suffers, the whole political system, voters and citizenship suffer too. That possibility is faced not only by this Parliament, but by the European Parliament, for whose elections turnout is already low and worsening, to judge from recent examples. We need to turn our minds to the issue.

Wisdom on this subject is not the monopoly of any one political party. All too often we need to examine how we go about our affairs in this place and in political debate, and consider how we contribute to the disconnection.

It seems to me that all too often the press contribute to the disconnection of politics from the citizen. If the press wish to promote real debate, they should examine some of the ways in which they go about their affairs. The issue is partly about making voting easier in all kinds of ways, although on the basis of experiments that have been carried out so far, the impact of that approach seems limited. We can all do something, but that reconnection is most vital. I hope that the review of European parliamentary electoral arrangements will take place promptly and will reflect the principles of voter choice and representation, broadly linking the numbers of votes cast to seats gained. Most important of all, it should contribute towards reconnecting the citizen with the political process.

11.45 am

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): It is a pleasure to engage in this debate—a debate that I remember fondly from the previous Parliament. I congratulate the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) on raising the matter. He made the important point that if there is a review, it should be open and the subject of widespread debate, rather than being an internal matter for the Home Office or the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. One factor in that decision may be the Government's embarrassment about how things have turned out.

I remember the European Parliamentary Elections Bill ping-ponging backwards and forwards between the House of Lords and the House of Commons, and certain phone calls being made by the then leader of the Liberal Democrats to Downing street to say how important and totemic the issue was, and that it should form the basis of co-operation between Liberal Democrats and the Labour Government. Eventually, the Government pushed through the legislation, and I can remember a cheer on the Floor of the House, not from the Labour or Conservative Benches, but from about 20 Liberals, who waved their Order Papers as if the Bill were a milestone to be welcomed.

Listening to the debate today, one gets the impression that people are defensive about the system that has been pushed through. The tone of the debate has been to try to explain why turnout is so low and to argue that it is apparently not the fault of the system. The key point is that European elections are different from every other election. When people turn out for a general election, they turn out to elect a Government. If people turn out for a council election, in most cases, they turn out to elect an administration to run a local authority. I am unsure what people think that they are doing when they turn out for a European election, because the division of seats between parties does not have a dramatic effect on people's lifestyles. I am not sure that people connect politically with the system of government in Europe, which is why low turnouts are inevitable.

In addition, I suspect that the general antipathy towards Europe means that there will always be low turnouts, although it is clear that the turnout under a closed list system was lower than under the original first-past-the-post system. I like first past the post. It is simple and ensures that a Member is linked to a geographical area. Although the European Parliamentary Elections Bill was much criticised when it went through the House of Commons on the basis that the constituencies were large and unwieldy, I thought that it worked quite well.

In my constituency, there was a Member for Dorset. In the next-door county, there was a Member for Wiltshire. That meant that there was a county council, half a dozen local authorities, branches of the National Farmers Union and the Women's Institute, and a definite link between organisations and the elected representative. On the whole, people knew who their Member was, and if there was a problem, they knew who to get hold of. There was also a link between the Member elected to the European Parliament and the

[Mr. Robert Syms]

half a dozen Members of Parliament for that area who would discuss problems and correspondence among themselves.

The then Home Secretary—the present Foreign Secretary—said that the constituencies were far too large and not sufficiently representative, but the Government then managed to give us a system of constituencies with millions of voters. If there was any logic in saying that a Dorset or Wiltshire constituency was too large, there is little logic in having Cornwall, Devon, Somerset, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Dorset lumped together. I do not believe that it is possible to act as a representative of such an area.

We have gone backwards. Having introduced the 1999 Act and abolished those large European constituencies, the Government introduced the Greater London Authority Act 1999, which, under an additional member system, created large first-past-the-post constituencies in London that meant twinning London boroughs. If that size was unacceptable for Europe, it is inconsistent to have first-past-the-post representatives for two London boroughs, because they are similar in size to the former European constituencies. I suspect that the Government's views change depending on what objectives they have at the time. First past the post worked pretty well.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden) is right about the closed list of one, but that allows people to vote for individuals. The hon. Member for North Cornwall made a good point about Mr. Teverson. It is ironic that, had the system been first past the post in the west country, it is likely that at least two Liberals would have been elected. Changing to a list system, in the west if not in the country as a whole, was a disadvantage to them.

I raised another subject with the then Home Secretary several times. If the principal driving force of the system is proportionality, and if people have ticked the box that says, "Conservative", "Liberal Democrat", "Labour", "UKIP" or whatever, what happens when someone switches party? Those Members will not have been voted for personally; they were on a party list. I asked the then Home Secretary about that before the Bill went through the House, but he did not want to address the issue.

The first Member to switch party was Bill Newton-Dunn; he was elected as a Conservative but switched to the Liberal Democrats. The second Member to switch was Michael Holmes, who was leader of the UK Independence party but fell out with its two members and decided to become an independent Member in the south-west. We come next to the far-sighted and extremely principled decision of Mr. Richard Balfe to join the Conservative party, which brings our proportionality back to what it was before Bill Newton-Dunn left us.

It is a poor system if although people have voted for a party, the Member can switch sides. I believe that such a person should be disqualified. Otherwise, it makes nonsense of proportionality. Because by-elections are not held, if Mr. Bill Newton-Dunn, Mr. Michael Holmes or Mr. Richard Balfe were to die, they would be replaced by someone else from the party list that the Member was on at the time of the election: someone would automatically move up the list. Proportionality would thus be restored.

The dilemma with a closed list system is that allowing Members to switch parties at will makes nonsense of it. I agree with the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield that if someone has been elected as Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham, and it was his name on the ballot paper, it is a respectable position to argue that people voted for him—expecting him to use his judgment. However, that argument is less respectable when people have simply voted Labour, and it would be interesting to see what would happen.

The only Member to have switched parties in my lifetime who thought it reasonable to go to his electorate after having changed party was Bruce Douglas-Mann, in the constituency of Mitcham and Morden. He switched to the Social Democratic party, and decided to stand again because he had gained a small majority in 1979 with the help of his Labour activists. Having done the honourable thing, however, he lost his seat to my former colleague Angela Rumbold. Those who switch parties may not necessarily wish to follow that precedent.

There is a general problem with the closed list system. I believe in first past the post, because the rules have been adequately drawn up. Turnout under the closed list system will inevitably be low; unlike the first-past-the-post system, in which candidates had to get their party workers out on the streets, the large regional area constituencies probably led to a lower turnout.

Today the Liberals trotted out their policy for a single transferable vote in multi-Member constituencies, except where there are natural geographical boundaries. I have never been a great fan of STV. We used to use it a little for university elections, but I do not think it is used by any country apart from Malta and southern Ireland.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the single transferable vote is now used for the election of some Members of the European Parliament in the United Kingdom, because it is used in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Syms *rose—[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There seems to be an electrical fault of some sort in the microphone system, or a loose connection somewhere. I can give hon. Members that professional advice free.

Mr. Syms: So long as you assure me that it is not the Iraqis, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I seem to remember that the Australian Senate uses STV to some extent. The biggest problem is that the system requires competition between candidates of the same party. If we moved to an open list system or STV, a great change of culture would be required, especially if the constituencies were geographically large. Also, individuals rather than parties would have to run campaigns. In terms of expense, and in terms of our culture in the UK, that would not go down especially well. In Ireland, individuals' children or grandchildren often inherit constituencies, because party machines have been built up in specific areas to win STV contests. I am not sure that I am a great fan of STV.

There is a respectable argument for the German system, and if we were to depart from first past the post—my first love—and use it for London, Scotland and Wales, it would be sensible to stick to that one system. People would at least have a chance of understanding it. The proposals for the European election were unacceptable, and the system has proved to be poor. Most people would prefer change. My preference would be for first past the post, but moving to smaller regions and open lists might increase public choice. Electoral systems must ultimately be for people, not for party machines.

Another problem caused by closed list systems for large regions was how the parties selected candidates. None of the parties felt happy about the manner in which we had to select and then rank candidates for specific contests. That left a nasty taste in most of our mouths. We ought to review and change the system so that it is more publicly acceptable.

The Government have given us an unacceptable system that needs reform. Change will best be provided by open debate and dialogue between members of parties in the House, rather than internally and quietly. I hope that the Minister will assure us that the Government will be far more open about the electoral system that our people deserve.

11.58 am

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) on securing the debate, which is exceptionally timely. He drew attention to the fact that Opposition parties should not have to bring this matter before the House. Instead, the Government should seek the views of the House and lay their proposals before us. When the Minister replies, I hope that he will make up for the deficit of the failure to carry out the promised review.

In lieu of that, and before we consider what we should do in future, it is worth being realistic about the good and bad points of the 1999 election. For the first time, an election was held across the whole United Kingdom using proportional representation. The implementation of that system throughout the UK was a close-run thing. Hon. Members suggested that it was by no means certain that it would happen at the time. However, it did happen. The Liberal Democrats unashamedly welcome that, and hope for a widening of the application of proportional representation to our electoral systems—for this place among others—in the years to come.

The most obvious of the good outcomes of the change is that a much more proportional result, in party political terms, was achieved than ever before, whether for European or other elections. Secondly, regional balance was provided. I make that point because the hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) alluded to the situation in the south-west. That is fine, but I come from the north-west, where the chances of a Liberal Democrat being elected in a non-proportional system are approximately zero. We now have a fair representation of all the parties in all the regions.

I would not want the House to misunderstand the importance of such fair representation. It is no good for democracy if all the Conservatives come from the south-east of England, all the Labour Members come from the north of England and all the Liberal Democrats come from the south-west. We need the benefits that regional balance has brought.

Another result of change, although perhaps not everyone would agree that this is a positive outcome, is that it has allowed a measure of gender balance in representation. There has certainly been an opportunity for my party to attend to that in a conscious and determined way, resulting in an exact 50:50 split between the sexes. The vagaries of first past the post, for instance, often make that difficult to achieve.

Changing from first past the post to the closed list system that was used in 1999 brought about some clear good outcomes. However, some other effects that are sometimes assumed to be negative have proved, on examination of the evidence, to be neutral. Certainly, the effect on turnout was neutral. There was a substantial fall in turnout between the 1997 general election and the 1999 European election. One could draw the conclusion that that had something to do with the system. However, study of the figures for the 2001 general election shows that that fall was part of an overall pattern of decline.

The Minister might want to reflect on the idea that a reduction in turnout between the 2001 parliamentary election and the next European election equal to that between the 1997 general election and the 1999 European election would imply national turnouts in the low teens for the next European parliamentary election. The Home Office's internal report makes the point that there is no evidence of an impact on turnout as a result of the change that we are discussing.

The second way in which the impact of the change has proved to be neutral is related to the question of whether the electorate were confused, whether they could discriminate, and whether the new arrangements affected the way in which they cast their votes. The Home Office report contains useful figures, and its finding is that voters were not confused. Only a small minority said that they failed to understand the system. The proportion of spoiled votes was lower than in the preceding general election, and there was little evidence that any voter failed to go to the polling booth because of confusion about the voting system—still less because of worry about a very large ballot paper.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall made a point about the Leeds, Central parliamentary by-election, which took place on the same day as the European election. Some myths have been built around that event, but it is worth examining the facts. Almost exactly 13,000 votes were cast in the by-election, and, to within 20 votes, the same number were cast in the same constituency for the European election on the same day. There is every indication that it was the same 13,000 voters who went to the polling station in Leeds, Central, were given two ballot papers, and put them in separate boxes.

Interestingly, the outcome was not the same in the two elections. The voters of Leeds, Central did not vote for the political parties in the parliamentary by-election in the same proportions as they did in the European election in the same constituency area. Those figures are on the record and easy to find. In other words, the voters of Leeds, Central went into the polling booth, were

[Mr. Andrew Stunell]

given two papers and deliberately voted differently in the parliamentary by-election, in which they were sending a new MP to Parliament, from the way that they voted for their Member of the European Parliament.

That is interesting and should dissuade us from the view that the electorate does not know what the hell it is doing. The electorate is quite smart. I will make a point that is not particularly to the advantage of my party: in Leeds, Central, our result for the parliamentary by-election was substantially better than our result for the European election. In all conscience I must say that that was because the voters of Leeds, Central were less impressed with our approach to European policy than they were with our approach to national policy.

I am not revealing any great state secret there—one can see the evidence in any MORI poll—but my point is that, far from being confused by having two voting systems and separate programmes put in front of them, the voters were able to discriminate. I want to nail down the argument that, by introducing a proportional system, we have somehow confused people into not voting, or putting their vote in the wrong place.

Having said something about the good outcomes, and having, I hope, dispelled some of the myths about the neutral outcomes, I should say that there have been some poor outcomes. The hon. Member for Poole says, quite rightly, that there was much waving of Order Papers on the Liberal Democrat Benches when a proportional system was introduced, but it is no secret that we argued strongly that that system should have been better. The system that was introduced is, comparatively speaking, fair to political parties, but it is not fair to voters. The voters, who, as I said, are quite smart, know that well.

All the matters under discussion today could have been presented in the form of an official Government report for consideration by the House, in preparation for the next election. It is a matter of great regret that a full review has not taken place. The Home Office conducted a review that said some useful things, but did not collect evidence in a proper consultative way. There has been no opportunity to debate the outcome. My hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall very properly made the point that, had things gone to plan, such a review would have been a legal requirement under the Bill. It appears to have been a fluke of the timing of the second Bill that that requirement was not built in. It is disappointing that the Government have not felt able to hold such a review.

The Liberal Democrats would like to see the single transferable vote extended from Northern Ireland to the rest of the United Kingdom. That would provide the opportunity to choose between new and old Labour candidates, pro and anti-Euro candidates, men and women, Lancashire and Cheshire, and between Merseyside-based and Manchester-based candidates, in a way that is not open to electors under a closed list system.

Will the Minister introduce a review? Even if he does not, will he abandon the closed list—and if he abandons the closed list, will he ensure that we adopt the single transferable vote? Will he and his Government, for goodness' sake, let go of the candidate selection procedure, so that the popular conception that politicians are in control of the voting system can be ended and the people put back in control? We also need to raise awareness of the significance of the European Parliament and ensure that voters understand what it does.

The hon. Member for Poole made a number of highly relevant points. However, in reply to his point about by-elections, closed lists and standing down, I should point out that the system works for the lower House in Australia, where the Chief Whip of every party holds a letter of resignation from every Member, and may submit that letter if a Member changes party.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): Do not give them ideas.

Mr. Stunell: For every illness there is a cure, and for every cure there is an illness. When we make our claims, we must be careful how we proceed.

12.11 pm

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): To follow what the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) has just said, I agree that we should be careful, especially when we make suggestions that Chief Whips might be listening to. One never knows where one will end up.

The last time the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), the Minister and I debated electoral issues was during proceedings on the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill. I am pleased that that legislation has been enacted. I mention it because at that time, there was much unanimity of view on the importance of that legislation. The hon. Member for Hazel Grove commented on how proportional representation systems have enabled parties to achieve a better gender balance. However, parties should not rely on proportional representation to improve gender balance. It is essential that all parties in this House—especially mine, given its record—work hard to ensure that more women enter the House, so that women are better represented.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall has raised a valid subject. Like other hon. Members, I want to comment on some of the issues relating to individual electoral systems for the European Parliament and elsewhere. However, the core issue that the hon. Gentleman has raised is the fact that the Government gave a commitment to review the electoral arrangements for the European Parliament, but so far have not done so.

I refer hon. Members to a written answer that the Minister gave the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) on 26 February. The hon. Gentleman asked the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions about

> "the timing and structure of the proposed review of the new voting systems for the devolved administrations and the European Parliament and the report of the Jenkins Commission."

The Minister replied:

> "In our manifesto, which sets out our intentions for this Parliament, we said we would review our experience of the new voting systems for the devolved Administrations, the European Parliament, and the London Assembly along with the recommendations of the Jenkins report to assess whether changes

might be made to the electoral system for the House of Commons. That remains our intention. The timing and structure of any review has yet to be decided." —[*Official Report*, 26 February 2002; Vol. 380, c. 1181W.]

The next round of the European parliamentary elections will be in 2004, so the Government will have to get their skates on if they are to conduct an open review of the type that every hon. Member will welcome. They will have to act swiftly if there is to be a genuine assessment of the voting system that was introduced before the last European parliamentary elections, and changes are to be made if the review implies that they are necessary. Yet again, I fear that the Department is too taken up with other matters, and is not addressing the real issue.

There is a need to review. This is not just about closed lists; I hope that the Minister will respond to a report from some months ago in a national newspaper that the European Commission was considering the introduction of transnational party lists as a voting system for the European parliamentary elections. Those of us who do not like the concept of party lists for the elections in the United Kingdom believe that transnational party lists are even more likely to alienate the electorate from wanting to vote.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall suggested in passing that those who opposed proportional representation did not believe in representative systems of election. In fact, the first-past-the-post system, which I believe in, is a representative system, although it does not fall within the category of proportional representation. I would not want the debate to go by without challenging the suggestion that systems other than proportional representation are not representative.

The hon. Gentleman commented on the impact that the closed list system had had on the Conservative party's results in the 1999 European parliamentary elections. He acknowledged that those who were on the Opposition Front Bench during the passage of the European Parliamentary Elections Bill had argued for an open list system. He added that our party would have won more seats under the first-past-the-post-system—but our concern is to support the system that we believe will provide the best representation for the electorate and the best means of developing a Government who can govern and take decisions in the interests of the electorate.

My party has both gained and suffered as a result of the systems of proportional representation in different parts of the country. We continue to oppose proportional representation for the European Parliament and to support the first-past-the-post system, as my hon. Friend the Member for Poole made clear.

My hon. Friend also said how bad the system that the Government had introduced for the European parliamentary elections was. They introduced a closed list system, which increased the control of political parties over the electoral system and reduced the feeling among the electorate that they were connected to those who represented them in the European Parliament.

I accept the evidence, such as it is, as regards the low turnout in the European parliamentary elections. The quantitative research carried out by the Office for National Statistics did not show that the turnout was connected to the voting system, as anyone who reads the Library note on the subject will see. On the face of it, that was the result of the research, but I wonder whether it is true. When I was canvassing during that election, people would ask, "Who is my candidate?" When I explained that there was a different system and they did not have an individual candidate, they immediately turned off, saying, "I want to be represented by an individual who I know and who I can go to."

One fact that became apparent from the low turnout in the European parliamentary elections was that people did not feel connected to the European Parliament and did not, therefore, feel a desire to vote for it. I suspect that the closed list system that the Government introduced will lead to increasing apathy and to an increasing lack of connection between the electorate and the European Parliament, whose Members they elect. Turnout could be adversely affected if we continue to use that system. Indeed, people still ask me, "Who is my Member of the European Parliament?" I have to explain that the Conservative party has allocated individual MEPs particular geographical areas, such as the county of Berkshire, so that they can build up a relationship, and people can feel connected. The system goes against the building of such relationships, however, and does not provide the electorate with the same degree of connection.

My party continues to believe that the first-past-the-post system is the best way to enable members of the electorate to feel that they are voting for an individual who will represent them, whatever the elected body. That system requires a party to have a wide appeal across the electorate, rather than simply to gain votes on the back of appeals to narrow sectional interests, as is the case in some proportional representation systems. This is not only about the individual, but about the need for a party to have a set of policies that appeal widely across the electorate.

The Government should keep their manifesto commitment to review the electoral arrangements for the European Parliament. The fundamental issue for the debate has been that the Government have failed to keep that commitment, but I continue to support the view that the best system for elections to that Parliament is first past the post.

12.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Dr. Alan Whitehead): I congratulate the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) on securing the debate, which has produced some interesting contributions. Clearly the issue will not go away. I am grateful to all hon. Members who took part for their advice, although it will be no enormous surprise when I say that not all of it can be accepted.

In such debates, there is a sense in which we move towards having a philosophical seminar on the practical utility of Kant's categorical imperative as the basis of an ethical system. I am interested both in Kant's categorical imperative and in elections, so I welcome that. However, we need to ensure that we consider not only the philosophical basis of what we are discussing but its utility, as several contributions have emphasised.

In terms of utility, I was a little perplexed by the suggestion that a change in the system would put votes back in the hands of people rather than parties. I wonder

[Dr. Alan Whitehead]

what parties mean in such a view of the world. As my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden) said, parties are collections of people who work within the democratic process for positions and ambitions. Parties are about people. We might paraphrase Voltaire and say that in a democracy, if parties did not exist it would be necessary to invent them. The idea that we could somehow produce a system that checkmated the influence of parties by offering a greater good than them does not have great bearing on the utility of electoral systems, which is what we ought to be thinking about.

Several hon. Members suggested that Members of the European Parliament could have a read-across from Members of Parliament in terms of their constituency responsibilities. I wonder about the genuine utility of that. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield reminded us that even under the previous system, MEPs were not exactly known by every member of every household. Indeed, it is difficult to see how they could have been. Hon. Members have pointed out that under the proposed expansion of the European Community, the number of our MEPs would be reduced to 72 from 87, but the idea that even 72 MEPs across the country could have similar individual connections with constituencies, as if there were a direct analogy with Members of Parliament, is fanciful.

My hon. Friend suggested that in terms of how Europe and its debates work, there was a strong philosophical case for allying representation in the European Parliament with some regional basis, and that has some salience. As hon. Members have pointed out, however, the issue is essentially political. I cannot see the immediate philosophical objection to different electoral systems for different forms of representation, for example. The idea that we must have the same system for Parliament, the Greater London Assembly and European elections does not have a great basis in fact.

One could say that the advocates of the single transferable vote are the Plymouth Brethren of the PR firmament, and tend to regard other forms of proportional or semi-proportional representation as lesser moral activities. However, there is something to be said for taking a pluralistic view of how systems work and considering the relationship between desired outcomes and representative institutions.

Mr. Tyler: Does the Minister not think that there is value in having consistency between the systems that operate for the same election in Northern Ireland and in the rest of the United Kingdom?

Dr. Whitehead: I did mention the Plymouth Brethren element of the debate.

Certain factors associated with the electorate and the system in Northern Ireland enhance the value of using the single transferable vote in Northern Ireland. However, my general point was that for elections to a particular assembly that is directly related to the people whom it represents, and is seen to be making decisions immediately adjacent to those people, one might consider a system different from the one that is appropriate for electing a number of members to another assembly, other members of which are elected from elsewhere.

As for utility, I was interested in the logic of the suggestion that there should be resignation notes in the Whip's locker, especially under a system in which people are elected through party lists. However, that leads us to the further philosophical question—Burke's question, in fact—of whether a person is a representative or a delegate. If people are representatives they should be able to change their minds—but that opens up other problems.

The hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) and others talked about declining election turnouts. Indeed, the Home Office review indicated that there was no direct connection between the new system and the decline in turnout. Many hon. Members have rehearsed the arguments about turnout. It is true that turnout for European parliamentary elections is distressingly low throughout Europe. As hon. Members have said, it is up to all of us to think more widely about how that decline can be reversed, but the idea that one method of electing people to one parliament will turn things around is fanciful.

The debate has concentrated on comparing the closed list system with the open list system but the first election that was held under the new system is not exactly ancient history; it took place only three years ago. At the time, we had extensive debates about the merits of the two systems. The system worked in the election. The publicity put out by the Home Office ensured that public knowledge—both of the fact that an election was to take place and that a new proportional system would be used—was high. About 57 per cent. of the electorate knew that they would be voting in a different way, and there was no suggestion that anyone did not vote because they preferred to vote using a different system. The closed list system is not discredited. Indeed, it continues to operate in several European countries, where there is no ferment of discussion about whether it should be abandoned.

The closed list system has several advantages for voters. It is simple and easy to understand. It relates well to previous systems with which the electorate are already familiar. One vote for the party of one's choice is a familiar scenario for most voters. It produces a proportionate result—an important change that the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) has welcomed. Although some might argue that the complexities of the d'Hondt method might tax the best mathematicians, I suspect that members of the public are not especially concerned about what method will be used to count the votes. The electorate know that the top candidate from each party is likely to get in. It is, therefore, possible to defend the closed list system. So far, it has been used for only one election, which is hardly a fair trial. We adopted it only three years ago and have operated it only once.

The Labour party's manifesto commitment was to review the Jenkins commission recommendations for Westminster elections. The question from my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) included all elections, but if the hon. Member for Maidenhead reads the Labour party manifesto commitment, she will see—

Mr. Nigel Beard (in the Chair): Order. The next debate is on medical liability.

Medical Liability

12.30 pm

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): Thank you, Mr. Beard. I congratulate you on your elevation to the Chairman's Panel. It is nice to meet again in a different environment.

I look forward to the debate. It seems from opening a newspaper or listening to the radio as though everything that can go wrong with this country's health care system is going wrong. We have filthy and germ-infested hospitals, our surgeons are incompetent and our nurses uncaring. Things are so desperate that the Leader of the Opposition has to raise an individual case with the Prime Minister before taking the time to check out the facts or speak to the hospital involved. However, in my experience, most national health service treatments work well, most doctors are good at what they do and most patients leave NHS care not only unharmed, but substantially better than when they entered it.

The recent Wanless report, which focused mainly on NHS funding, contained an interesting finding. People who are asked whether they are satisfied with the NHS are more likely to say that they are satisfied if they have recently been in hospital. That is an important piece of information. We are more likely to see the positive aspects of our health care system if we have direct—not indirect—experience of it. However, there is no point in denying that things do occasionally go wrong in the NHS. Some people are distressed and alarmed by the level of care that they or their relatives receive, and, indeed, sometimes things go badly wrong. We may all remember the case of 18-year-old Wayne Jowett, who had the wrong drug injected into his spine and died some weeks later. We certainly remember the terrible and unforgivable details of the scandals surrounding Bristol Royal infirmary and Alder Hey children's hospital, and Harold Shipman's incomprehensible violence. *The Guardian*'s headline today is "Drug mistake led to baby's heart failure". On one or two occasions, events in hospitals and the health service go sadly wrong.

Those cases are examples of things going wrong, but they are all very different. Various mistakes are made in the health service. There is simple human error, which will always occur, no matter how regrettable its outcomes might be. There is incompetence and negligent failure to pick up on doctors who are out of their depth or who consistently let down their patients. There are criminal evil-doers who wilfully and recklessly damage people in their care. Individual failures and the inability of the system to pick up on those failures play a role in all those categories.

It is difficult to estimate how many adverse events occur in the NHS. A study conducted in two London hospitals found that about 10 per cent. of patients admitted to acute hospitals experienced an adverse event, about half of which were preventable with current standards of care. That is also the picture that I gained following an analysis of the local Norfolk and Norwich hospital.

The debate about problems of medical error must be held on two premises. First, errors will occur. No matter how hard we try, we occasionally get things wrong. One of my friends who is a consultant recently told me that hospital practice should operate under the presumption of Murphy's law, which states that whatever can go wrong, will. There are some lessons in that for the organisation of hospitals and for patient care in general. Processes must be analysed to establish what can go wrong, and strategies of prevention need to be considered.

Secondly, if things have gone wrong, that is hugely distressing for all the parties involved. It should be recognised that no system of dealing with medical errors after they have occurred, whether it be straightforward litigation, mediation, no-fault compensation or a complaints procedure, can do away with that basic fact. There will be conflict, dissatisfaction and irritation no matter which system of compensation and redress is devised. The people who advertise so-called alternative ways of conflict resolution sometimes forget that basic fact.

We must try to do several things. We need to prevent mistakes—and resulting harm—wherever possible, and to help those who have suffered through a medical error quickly, proactively and cost-effectively; and we must do those things in ways that do not demoralise and undermine health professionals at their place of work.

Someone who has taken part in complaints procedures and independent reviews has told me that he has witnessed consultants angrily storming out of meetings about a complaint against them, and immediately joining their team in the operating theatre to conduct major surgery. That cannot be in anyone's interests.

We must guard against surgeons becoming unwilling to operate on high-risk patients; and that is happening. If doctors focus on their position in a league table rather than on what is best for their patients, something is profoundly wrong.

That checklist serves to highlight that the NHS, and the politicians responsible for the NHS, can do better in many areas. For a long time, no quality assurance systems were in place, and patient safety was dealt with in uncoordinated and haphazard ways. The Government have started to implement a proper patient safety agenda to address those problems. The Health Act 1999 set up the Commission for Health Improvement, which carries out clinical governance reviews. There are now national service frameworks for many conditions and treatments. In 2001, a new National Patient Safety Agency was established to collate and monitor a central register of all adverse events within the NHS. The NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill has introduced a new body, the Council for the Regulation of Health Care Professionals, and it has also abolished the community health councils—which some of us have had debates and disputes about—and replaced them with the patient advocacy and liaison services, which we are examining, to see how effective they will be.

Those are great measures. They address prevention, and the design of health care to ensure that it is safe and satisfying for patients, and they ought to be welcomed. However, those measures were introduced recently, and more needs to be done.

By way of offering an example of what further measures should be taken, let us consider the case of injecting a drug that must only be used intravenously into the spine, as happened to a young man named

[Dr. Ian Gibson]

Wayne Jowett with fatal consequences. Two cancer drugs, vincristine and methotrexate, got mixed up. No proper system of reporting and collecting such incidents has been in place in past years. Over the past 10 years, 10 people have died in these circumstances. If one thinks of the amount of injections that are given in hospitals every day, or the amount of times that those particular cancer drugs are injected, that figure is not very high. However, each case represents a huge tragedy, particularly as this mistake—a simple human error—is so easy to prevent.

It would be technologically easy to design the respective syringes and needles in such a way that only intra-spinal drug syringes could be used with intra-spinal needles. It is incomprehensible to me—and to people who work in hospitals—why that has not happened: it seems to be one of those cases where the drug companies point at the needle manufacturers, and vice versa, but why on earth do the Medicines Control Agency or the Medical Devices Agency not intervene? What are they for, if not to make medicines and medical equipment safer?

It is a good idea to standardise best practice, but no health practitioner can know and memorise 300 or so written procedures for every conceivable treatment. That, more than anything else, highlights that the NHS is in dire need of investment in proper information dissemination and storage systems. Too many accidents happen because a practitioner does not have, or cannot find, information that is theoretically available.

No one present cannot have seen, and been shocked by, piles of patient notes—unconnected heaps of paper floating around in cardboard files. Essential, life-saving information is hidden away among stacks of irrelevant—and sometimes decades old—correspondence. Vital information about a patient can be hidden in a welter of waste paper. It is astonishing that a safety-critical process such as health care depends on a documentation system that has changed little in two centuries.

A huge investment in information technology for the NHS is needed. A functioning electronic patient record is essential to the reduction of clinical misjudgement caused by lack of information. One of the longest running electronic patient record systems is in the oncology department at my local hospital, the Norfolk and Norwich hospital. It has served the clinicians there for at least eight years, and it has been demonstrated twice to the Department of Health, but it has not received a flicker of interest. We cannot afford to ignore the under-investment in information dissemination systems in the NHS any longer.

In fact, the solution does not lie with small-scale EPR systems, but with the development of a national medical records system that is maintained on a secure backbone using common and non-proprietary datasets and applications through the wired-up NHS. The NHS information technology strategy that exists must be implemented urgently. I remember the disaster following the introduction of IT systems into the Home Office's passport section, and the thought of a similar occurrence in the NHS sends shivers down my spine. It must be possible to muster the expertise and commitment that is required to get the NHS wired up.

There is a strong economic incentive for bringing the NHS up to speed and into the age of information technology, although I hope that that is not the only argument to which the Department of Health will listen. The Wanless report argues for that.

Medical errors are extremely expensive. Department of Health figures show that the NHS spends £400 million a year on settling claims for negligence. The money that is spent on negligence cases alone would be sufficient to fund the work of a large health service trust for an entire year.

We must rethink what we need to do if things go wrong. I welcome the Department of Health's decision to establish a clinical negligence working party to draft a White Paper on medical negligence and liability.

I shall mention a few more core facts. Last year's Audit Commission report shows that the cost of litigation to the NHS in the vast majority of cases exceeded the value of the settlements that were reached. For every £10,000 that was spent on an average case, the subsequent compensation settlement was £5,000.

In 1999, the Select Committee on Health found that 70 per cent. of claimants came out of litigation feeling dissatisfied and, especially, that many of their questions remained unanswered. Under the current system, it is hard to obtain remedies other than financial compensations, such as prevention of recurrence, apologies and the opportunity to discuss issues with the other side.

Legal aid is available to only 48 per cent. of the adult population in medical negligence cases. One must be either very poor or quite wealthy in order to access the civil justice system. Additionally, medical negligence cases take longer than any other cases before the High Court.

The threat of litigation has profound effects on staff morale and the culture of clinical institutions. Professor Ian Kennedy's report on the Bristol Royal infirmary children's surgery scandal points out that we need a culture of change. A culture of openness and co-operation will not be achieved in the shadow of an adversarial and defensive legal system.

I will be interested to hear from my hon. Friend the Minister about the Department's ideas for tackling those problems. Is the Department contemplating a no-fault compensation scheme, which was recommended by Professor Kennedy? Will the Minister listen to the worries of patient groups that no-fault compensation does not do away with the problems of identifying whether an error has occurred and of public and personal accountability?

The often-quoted New Zealand example shows that no-fault compensation cannot be given to anybody who is unhappy with the outcome of health treatments. People who receive treatment are ill, and it is necessary to distinguish between an operation that could not help a patient and an operation that was botched. If we give up that distinction, medical compensation may become unsustainable. The New Zealand model is continuously adapted to consider such problems.

Is the Minister considering the use of mediation as an alternative form of conflict resolution? How would mediation relate to litigation? Could people access the courts after they had tried mediation?

Some people argue that an extended and more flexible complaints procedure could offer the solution to the problems that I mentioned earlier. However, if compensation was made available within complaints procedures, which the National Audit Office suggested in 2001, they might become as defensive and adversarial as court procedures are at present.

I realise that we are examining a complicated problem for health service providers, patients and politicians. I doubt that there are many easy answers. I hope that the Minister will enlighten us about the lines of thinking that the Department of Health pursues. The problem is major to the NHS, and if we do not solve it, we may increase the cynicism that people have towards our health system.

12.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Yvette Cooper): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) on securing this important debate on medical liability and clinical negligence. It is an important subject and my hon. Friend has made some significant and thoughtful points.

The national health service treats thousands of patients every day. It treated more than 12 million patients in England in 1999-2000 alone. Additionally, 43 million patients attended out-patient clinics and more than 14 million visited accident and emergency departments. My hon. Friend is right that with so many patients being treated, clinical errors are sometimes inevitable. When things go wrong, it is important that patients can take the appropriate action and that there is a simple, clear and transparent system for dealing with their concerns quickly, effectively and with the minimum trauma. My hon. Friend is right that there are two aspects to this. It is about learning from mistakes to prevent their repetition and about ensuring that patients get proper redress, explanation, and response.

Under the current system, compensation for harm or injuries suffered as a result of clinical negligence is, in general, paid only where legal liability can be established. Compensation is payable where it can be shown that there has been negligence either by act or omission, there has been harm, and the harm was caused by the negligence. Each claim for compensation will need to be considered on its own merits. Where an agreement between the parties involved cannot be reached, the issues can be resolved only through the civil justice system.

The Government believe that NHS patients who have been harmed or injured as a result of clinical negligence should be able to obtain correct and full compensation. That applies equally to NHS patients treated in the independent sector or overseas and those treated in NHS hospitals. The need to reform the handling of clinical negligence cases was illustrated by the criticisms of the present system in the National Audit Office report published in May 2001, to which my hon. Friend referred, "Handling Clinical Negligence Claims in England".

The report highlighted the increasing number and cost of claims, including legal costs, the length of time it takes to settle claims and the problems caused by the existing separation of the complaints and compensation systems in providing the remedies that claimants say they want. In particular, it pointed out that legal and other costs of settlement can often be greater than the settlement itself for some smaller-value claims. The summarised accounts for health authorities, NHS trusts and the NHS litigation authority show that expenditure by the NHS on clinical negligence for the financial year 1999-2000 was £373 million.

The costs of clinical negligence are rising for a number of reasons. Examples include recent House of Lords and Court of Appeal judgments, which have had implications for compensation levels in general. Several factors need to be taken into account. The numbers and costs of clinical negligence claims are significant concerns to the public, the Government and the NHS. We said in the NHS plan that we intend to make further changes to the system for dealing with clinical negligence to try to address those concerns. My hon. Friend asked a series of questions about the Government's present thinking. I will try to set out for him some of the issues that are being considered at this stage, but he will understand that conclusions have not yet been reached.

The chief medical officer, Professor Sir Liam Donaldson, is chairing an advisory committee, drawn from patient groups and the medical and legal professions, to consider possible options for change. The public have also had an opportunity to make their views known. We are taking an open-minded approach to a wide range of potential measures and are not ruling anything out at this stage. However, in considering what reforms may be necessary, the chief medical officer's advisory group is exploring a number of specific areas for reform, including no-fault compensation.

No-fault compensation would remove the need for a claimant to show negligence. Previously the Government have not been convinced of the need to introduce such a system on the grounds that it might not make the process of resolving claims any less adversarial, because disagreement over compensation would remain, and it might not address patients' concerns about receiving an adequate explanation of the events that led to the injury. Such a system would not necessarily reduce the increasing number of claims or the costs to the NHS.

Different factors must be taken into account. We want to develop a no-blame culture in the NHS and need to take account of the issues raised in the report on Bristol Royal Infirmary, which my hon. Friend mentioned, and measures that are being implemented following the chief medical officer's report "An organisation with a memory". We must consider all those factors in reconsidering no-fault compensation.

Another area for evaluation is the interface between complaints and claims. Currently, these are seen as separate processes, but the CMO and his advisory group are considering whether a more intelligent, responsive and patient-focused approach to complaint and claims handling is needed. That might be to provide joint remedies that are more closely tailored to individual claims and complaints, including financial, non-financial and practical measures that would quickly address concerns. As many people have commented, a poorly handled complaint can result in a claim that could have been resolved at a much earlier stage in the process.

[Yvette Cooper]

We are considering the role of mediation and other alternatives to dispute resolution through the courts. My hon. Friend talked about the issues surrounding mediation. As hon. Members may know, the NHS Litigation Authority, which manages most claims for the NHS, is working with the Legal Services Commission to develop a joint strategy to promote greater use of mediation. Since May 2000, the NHSLA has required solicitors representing NHS bodies in claims to offer mediation in appropriate cases. The findings of that initiative are being considered as part of the chief medical officer's work to find out whether more can be done to encourage mediation as an alternative approach.

The final main area in which reform is being considered covers the way in which compensation awards are paid. We are considering carefully the relative advantages and disadvantages of using structured settlements or periodic payments instead of lump sum awards. Periodic payments allow for part of an award to be paid in tax-free instalments for the duration of the claimant's life. As periodic payments can be reviewed, such a system could help to ensure that any changes in patients' circumstances or needs are accommodated and that assistance is better tailored to their requirements.

Those broad areas are being considered. Clearly, a number of complicated issues are involved, but the intention is to announce the outcome of the CMO's review later this year. Other issues which my hon. Friend mentioned are also at stake. There are ways to reduce clinical negligence costs in the meantime. It is important to prevent clinical errors from occurring in the first place. The NHS must respond in a way that prevents such errors and respond to errors appropriately so that we can learn from them.

There are other ways of changing the clinical negligence system. We must ensure that money spent on claims goes to the patients who deserve it and not on spiralling legal costs. The NAO has acknowledged the steps that have been taken by the NHSLA and the Legal Services Commission to improve the speed and quality of claims management by rationalising access to better legal advice for claimants and defendants. We must build on that work to ensure that claimants get timely access to the compensation that they deserve. At the same time, we have to address the increase in costs for the NHS.

Perhaps most important, we need to continue the work that is under way on reducing clinical errors in the first place. A series of new mechanisms are in place to ensure that we prevent errors and create the right learning culture—rather than a blame culture—across the NHS, as set out in the CMO's report "An organisation with a memory". One development from that is the new independent body, the National Patient Safety Agency, which was established in April last year. It operates a new national reporting system to record adverse events, the problems to which my hon. Friend referred, and also near misses, which should certainly be included even though adverse consequences may not have happened. We must ensure that lessons learned in one part of the NHS are properly shared with the entire service.

The new National Clinical Assessment Authority will also provide a fast response to concerns about doctors' performance and a central point of contact for the NHS where such concerns have arisen.

Dr. Gibson: Before my hon. Friend proceeds with discussion of the new structures—and they are welcome—will she spend a minute on medical technologies? Sometimes the wrong tubes are fitted, the wrong anaesthetics administered and the wrong syringes made available to patients, but it is possible to outdo any potential mistakes technologically. Labelling is another serious problem requiring thorough examination. Is that being done?

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend is right that technological solutions can prevent repeated errors. We must ensure that when new technologies become available they are in place to respond to adverse events and near misses. It is sometimes obvious that technology should be introduced in response to problems. It ties in with the need to respond to events taking place throughout the country. A national reporting system to pick up and respond to such events is part of the overall picture. Otherwise, a particular problem could arise in one area and the lessons to be learnt from it not reach other parts of the NHS. A local response may not be noticed across the NHS.

Part of the problem is picking up problems, but my hon. Friend is also right that the technological solutions should be in place. He mentioned particular examples, so I will write to him with the details of the responses in those sectors. New technology is part of ongoing work and it is important that the right systems are in place to learn from mistakes and prevent their repetition.

My hon. Friend also mentioned clinical governance, which is crucial at the local level for raising early concerns. Clinical governance provides NHS organisations and health care professionals with a framework for quality improvement that will, over time, develop into a single coherent local programme for assuring and improving the quality of clinical services.

My hon. Friend also rightly mentioned the Commission for Health Improvement, one of whose functions is to help the NHS identify and tackle serious or persistent clinical problems. Information about clinical negligence claims is considered by the Commission in the context of its clinical governance reviews of individual NHS organisations.

Considerable work is being undertaken across the NHS with the aim of learning from problems and preventing their repetition, and resolving the difficult issues surrounding medical liability and clinical negligence. No simple answers can be found, but it is widely felt that improvements can and must take place. We need to reflect on the issues and debate them fully, but the reforms must take place. The aim is to improve the current system of handling and responding to clinical negligence claims. We expect those who are harmed or injured to receive appropriate and adequate compensation, and an apology and an explanation of what went wrong where costs are reduced. That would cause less trauma to all involved. I look forward to discussing these issues further with my hon. Friend as we set out what changes must occur throughout the NHS in the interests of patients and the medical profession, including clinicians.

Level Crossings

1 pm

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the issue of level crossings. As so often happens, I started to deal with a specific local problem, but have become aware of a wider issue that should be drawn to the attention of hon. Members and the Minister.

The specific problem relates to a Railtrack proposal to change the method of operation of a level crossing at Pooley Green, Egham. Egham is in the north of my constituency and is immediately next to the M25 motorway. The general point that has arisen from my investigation is that there appear to be no constraints on Railtrack's ability to close level crossings, to increase barrier down time or to disrupt road traffic considerably in an area. That is no basis for a genuinely integrated transport policy, and that is why it was important to raise the matter in this debate. I look forward to hearing the Minister's comments.

On 4 October 2000—coincidentally the same day as the Hatfield train crash—an accident occurred on the level crossing at Pooley Green where traffic is frequently backed up on both sides. There is, of course, a yellow box junction on the crossing, and no motorist should enter it until his exit is clear. However, motorists sadly often ignore those regulations. A bus was trapped on the level crossing by the barriers. Fortunately, the bus driver had the presence of mind to get his passengers off the bus and no one was injured. However, the accident could have been serious. Railtrack responded immediately by imposing a 20 mph temporary down line restriction across the level crossing. There are different forward visibility curves if one approaches the level crossing from different directions, and it was not considered necessary to impose a temporary speed restriction on the up line.

Her Majesty's railway inspectorate issued a notice to Railtrack that required it to propose long-term mitigation measures by 27 April 2001. The level crossing is an automatic half-barrier level crossing, and it looks like state-of-the-art technology to my untrained eye. The train activates the barriers as it approaches the crossing, the half-barriers drop and then rise again as soon as the train passes. Currently, the barriers are down for approximately 10 minutes an hour at peak periods, and traffic tails back substantially.

Railtrack unveiled its proposal for the level crossing at a meeting on 12 April 2001. The proposal suggested replacing the automatic half-barriers with manually operated full barriers that would be covered by closed circuit television controlled from the Feltham signal box some miles away. A ringing bell would alert the signalman to an approaching train, and the signalman would look at the CCTV coverage of the crossing as he lowered the barriers. He would then set the signal to clear for the approaching train only when he was sure that the barriers were closed and the crossing was clear. As Railtrack said at the time, the effect would be to increase the peak-hour barrier closure period from 10 minutes to 40 to 45 minutes per hour.

Railtrack announced that it was going to cut off Egham from its hinterland at peak hours for a substantial part of each hour, effectively paralysing commerce and traffic in the town. Considerable concern has been expressed about the proposal, as one might expect. The ambulance and fire services have concerns about emergency response times. The local chamber of commerce is greatly concerned about both the direct economic cost to businesses and the broader cost of road traffic congestion.

Borough and county councillors are concerned about the impact on the town and adjoining communities of traffic avoiding the bottleneck. Bus operators have expressed doubts about their ability to continue the frequency and perhaps even the route of some services if the proposal goes ahead. The Highways Agency has expressed concern that traffic will tail back on to the M25 slip road, and perhaps on to the motorway itself, with significant consequences. There are also environmental concerns about the air pollution resulting from the extra standing traffic.

Railtrack says that it needs to make the changes to lift the temporarily imposed 20 mph limit. That would increase the capacity of the line and allow new train paths to be generated in response to the pressure from train operating companies to lay on more services. Railtrack's view of the world is entirely railway-centric. It does not take into account the external costs that the railway solution imposes on other transport users. Even if a bridge or a tunnel were an affordable solution—and it probably is not—it is unlikely to be technically feasible in that location because of the immediate proximity of the M25, which is on a substantial embankment.

Railtrack held a workshop on 17 April 2001. The borough council was invited, but no one from the highway authority—the county council—was present. Perhaps that is indicative of the problem. During the discussions, no consideration was given to the possibility of maintaining the 20 mph temporary speed limit. I am not suggesting that that is an ideal or optimal solution, but if all transport modes, not just railways, were debated under Railtrack's approach, we would at least have considered the possibility of maintaining the 20 mph limit.

Railtrack is not motivated solely by safety, although that is an important consideration. It is also motivated by the desire to maximise capacity. I held a series of meetings with Railtrack and took a delegation of councillors to see the Feltham signalling centre in operation. From our discussions, I learned that Railtrack could impose a solution without the requirement for consultation and without having to take into account in any structured way the requirements of other road users. I learned that there is no mechanism for determining how to share fairly a scarce resource—in this case the little patch of road that forms the road-rail interface at the level crossing. Once the Secretary of State has approved an order proposed by Railtrack, there is no appeal mechanism.

The switch from automatic half-barriers to manually controlled full-barrier crossings covered by CCTV is a step backwards in terms of technology. Some hon. Members will have been to France, where half-barriers seem to be ubiquitous. They drop at a moment's notice, and a few seconds later a TGV hurtles past at 120 or 130 mph. I find it slightly embarrassing to think that the

[Mr. Philip Hammond]

British solution to the problem is to remove the advanced automatic barriers and go back to a more primitive manually controlled solution. It is bizarre that Railtrack is not required to consider road traffic in the design of level crossings. Apparently, the railway has priority and there is no requirement to balance the needs of road and rail users. Perhaps that leads to a cavalier attitude.

At the outset of this debate, it was suggested that Railtrack would increase the barrier down time to 40 or 45 minutes. Doubt is being cast on that figure—perhaps it will be only 35 minutes. The fact that no detailed analysis has been done, and no definitive figure is available, underlines the lack of any requirement on Railtrack to argue its case. The real problem is that Railtrack is not independent. It has a clear financial interest in enhancing the capacity of the railway and is responding to pressure from train operating companies in dealing with such matters.

Until this issue arose, I was always extremely supportive, as were my constituents, of attempts to improve and increase rail services on the branch line that serves Egham. I have also supported the air track proposal that would bring a rail link into Heathrow from the south-west, possibly using that line. The Minister should be aware that community and political support for improved and enhanced rail services will soon melt away if their introduction will result in disruption.

Representations and responses must be made to the Secretary of State by 24 March. My local authority has just made its response and, in due course, I will urge the Secretary of State to send the proposal back to Railtrack. It must examine the benefits achieved versus the burdens imposed on road traffic and seek alternative methods to reduce the maximum down time at peak hours. However, work is scheduled to proceed in April and I imagine that contracts have already been let. I am sceptical about whether anything can be done at this stage.

The issues that I raise today were mentioned by the hon. Member for Lincoln (Gillian Merron) in a Westminster Hall debate in February 2000. The situation has changed little since then. Railtrack has effectively been nationalised and is a quasi state-run body, rather than the private company that it was in 2000. I hope that the Minister will acknowledge the element of direct Government responsibility.

The hon. Member for Lincoln found herself in a similar situation to the one that I described. She received a vague response from the Minister then responsible for this issue, now the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Beverley Hughes), who said:

> "The transport White Paper announced the...development of local transport plans, which need to address all forms of transport. Local transport plans are important in this context. The part that rail plays in transport provision must be seen as part of the Government's integrated transport policy...There needs to be a partnership between transport operators, local authorities, business, local interest groups and users to ensure that all modes of transport are properly integrated".—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 22 February 2000; Vol. 344, c. 338WH.]

Those are fine words, but it will take more than a bit of waffle about partnership to resolve a situation in which a cash-strapped, quasi state-owned monopoly with a financial incentive to provide more train paths proposes a change that will impose a considerable burden on a community that has no voice at all. Local transport plans and integrated transport strategies have not contributed very much to the debate in Egham.

The Minister should also give some thought to the effect of the Human Rights Act 1998. Now that Railtrack is effectively a state-controlled organisation, is the lack of ability to appeal entirely consistent with the spirit, if not the letter, of that Act?

Clearly, there are no proper mechanisms in place for resolving conflicts of interest between road and rail use, or for evaluating the costs and benefits of proposals—at least, there is no publicly accessible mechanism. The process appears to be unilateral and controlled by a body with a financial interest. There is no mechanism for forcing Railtrack to recognise and take into account the external costs imposed by a course of action. Although the railway was for many years in decline, that may not have been a major problem in this case. Although what happened recently has not been helpful, I am pleased, taking the medium-term view, that the railway is in a period of renaissance and that we can anticipate that road and rail traffic will to continue to grow. Although the issue that I have raised relates to a change in operating procedure because of safety concerns, the same issues will arise whenever Railtrack seeks to establish additional train paths to accommodate growth in rail traffic. I was genuinely shocked, and so were the councillors involved, to discover that Railtrack could theoretically close a level crossing barrier for 60 minutes in the hour and that there is no formal mechanism by which the other parties interested in that transaction could bring their concerns to the table.

I want to make four specific points. First, I urge the Minister to take a critical look at the application of the 2002 order for the Pooley Green level crossing, which he is about to receive, and to consider asking Railtrack to look again at the proposal. Secondly, I ask him to consider whether it is general practice to retreat, in technological terms, when faced with such problems. It cannot be in the interests of UK plc that Railtrack's response to a problem with automatic half-barriers is to retreat to manually controlled full barriers, thus significantly increasing the down time of the barrier per train crossing. I therefore ask the Minister to consider the possibility of authorising the siting of infringement cameras similar to those used at road traffic lights. Railtrack would install the cameras and keep the revenue generated by the prosecution of drivers or the imposition of fixed penalties to encourage drivers' behaviour to become more compliant with Railtrack's railway safety requirements. I hope that the Minister will seriously consider that proposal.

Thirdly, will the Minister consider the establishment of a proper forum for consultation on procedural change or increased barrier down time? There should be a formal mechanism for Railtrack or the responsible highway authority to come to an agreed position rather than Railtrack simply imposing its requirements.

Fourthly, to inform the process that I have just described, I ask the Minister to consider the possibility of providing a publicly available, independent cost-benefit analysis to review proposals made for changes in level crossing operating procedures, so that the external costs can be fully taken into account. At the same time, I ask him to consider delivering a mechanism for an independent element and a right of appeal in the event of such changes taking place. I emphasise my support for the rail renaissance, but I am worried that in my constituency at least, public support will decline sharply if burdens are placed on communities apparently without a proper process taking place.

1.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson): I congratulate the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) on securing this important debate, on conducting it with his usual forensic attention to detail and on his courteous manner in doing so.

I agree with much of what the hon. Gentleman said, although he lost the plot at one stage and said that Railtrack had been nationalised, which it certainly has not been. I can see from the rueful smile on his face that he does not really believe that, but he made a good point. I am pleased that he agrees with us that the railways are in a period of renaissance and that, perhaps for the first time in 100 years, there has been an improvement in their performance. I thought that I heard him say that a crossing could be closed for 160 minutes in an hour, although the *Hansard* reporter may have heard something different. We may return to that point later.

I am sure that we all agree on the importance of ensuring the safety of road and rail passengers at points where the two modes of transport intersect. The hon. Gentleman spoke graphically about that. Sadly, wherever railway and road cross on the level, mishaps are possible. Each year, a number of people are killed on level crossings, often in vehicles. In 2000-01, 10 people were killed on them.

We must do everything possible to contain that risk. The public has the right to expect that risks will be properly assessed and appropriate action taken. The type of protection that is provided depends on the prevailing road and rail traffic levels at the crossing, which of course can change from time to time.

The Level Crossings Act 1983 enables my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to make an order that may specify in detail the protection to be provided, be it a full or half-barrier, lights or road markings and the railway signalling or other means whereby the train is given the right to proceed over the crossing. The order-making procedure can be used to alter the protection at a crossing in the light of changed circumstances or experience. I think that this is what has happened in the hon. Gentleman's constituency.

The safety of a level crossing, particularly a half-barrier crossing, depends partly on the road user using the crossing correctly. A determined or impatient driver may skirt round a half-barrier, sometimes with disastrous results. If a crossing is regularly misused or for some reason more than usually prone to incidents, Railtrack, the legal operator of the crossing in the great majority of cases, may need to examine the reasons for the problem and how it can be minimised.

In 1997, the Level Crossings Act was amended to increase the circumstances in which the Secretary of State could make a new order in relation to a crossing. Previously, an order could be made only if the crossing operator—in this case, Railtrack—agreed. Now, the Secretary of State has the power to make an order with or without Railtrack's agreement.

Mr. Hammond: Can orders specify a maximum barrier down time? In other words, can the Secretary of State secure the protection for road users that I am concerned about?

Mr. Jamieson: When the Secretary of State takes a decision, the rail and road issues are given equal weight. He weighs the matter up, considering the views of Railtrack, the highway authority and any other authority that is involved. In most cases, level crossing orders are made on the Secretary of State's behalf by the Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate. It examines all the circumstances and consults the relevant local authorities, including the highway authority. I think that, on highway matters, Runnymede council is the agent for Surrey county council. The inspectorate generally holds a local meeting to hear the views of local residents, businesses and rail users.

In the vast majority of cases, a solution that is acceptable to the railway inspectorate, users, local authorities and others can be found. In a small number of cases, it may be difficult to find a solution that is acceptable to all. For example, a high level of protection at a crossing, such as a full-width barrier, may result in the crossing being closed to road traffic for longer periods and that may exacerbate road congestion. In such cases, the parties may consider more radical solutions, such as removing the crossing and replacing it if necessary with a bridge or tunnel, which has the great benefit of eliminating most of the risk inherent at the level crossing. As the hon. Gentleman pointed out, that alternative is not possible on the site that we are discussing because of the lie of the land.

In the absence of agreement, the Secretary of State may become involved. He would need to take account of the views of the Health and Safety Executive and other interested parties in coming to a decision. I repeat that he must give equal weight to the various views with which he is presented.

Mr. Hammond: The Minister is dealing with a case in which Railtrack has proposed a change in the operation of the level crossing. However, I also want to consider a situation in which an existing level crossing is not being changed, but the barrier down time is being significantly increased because additional train paths are being created. Does the Secretary of State have any power to intervene to set a maximum allowable barrier down time?

Mr. Jamieson: As several intricate issues are involved, it might help to make the position clear if my officials wrote to the hon. Gentleman through me, rather than my making it up on the hoof or giving him an incomplete answer. We will then have a complete understanding of the legal situation.

[Mr. Jamieson]

The incident at Pooley Green level crossing at Egham on 17 October 2000 did not reach the media because of the dreadful events at Hatfield on the same day. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware that the incident had the potential to be extremely serious. He said that the bus driver had the presence of mind to get the people off the bus. Unfortunately, he did not have the presence of mind not to enter the box on the crossing in the first place, and he put himself and his passengers at serious risk. His exit was blocked by a queue of rush hour traffic heading towards Egham high street and the M25 slip road at junction 13. Within moments of the bus becoming trapped on the crossing, an approaching train started the sequence for the operation of the level crossing. The bus was completely destroyed, and it was fortunate that no passengers were on the train at the time and therefore no injuries. Loss of life and further damage were avoided only because certain events fortunately came to pass.

The Surrey police charged the bus driver with motoring offences and the prosecution was successful. The level crossing is an automatic half-barrier installation and is fitted with road traffic signals. It is operated automatically by the approach of a train. Once the train has started the sequence of operation, the sequence cannot be stopped. I am advised that the level crossing met the required standards when it was last modernised in the late 1970s. However, the Pooley Green level crossing has a poor safety record, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows. Some 11 serious incidents have been recorded that resulted in a total of four fatalities since 1983. Road traffic has increased substantially over this period. Those incidents did not occur because of any fault in the barriers or any action by Railtrack, but because of the way in which road users try to weave through the barriers before the train arrives. That is highly dangerous and puts at serious risk the driver, those on the train and any pedestrians nearby.

As a result of the continuing investigation into the accident, Her Majesty's railway inspectorate discovered that substantial road user indiscipline at the level crossing was causing serious concern for the safety of rail and road users. There was therefore a reasonable likelihood of further collisions. I cannot overstate the importance of motor vehicle drivers acting responsibly and safely. Unfortunately, the drivers who act responsibly and safely on this and some other crossings are in a minority.

Since the accident in October 2000, there has been a temporary 20 mph speed restriction on the down line, as the hon. Gentleman said. The crossing is sufficiently visible to trains on the up line to allow them to operate at the appropriate line speed. A Railtrack employee now staffs the crossing and monitors the flow of traffic. If necessary, he can make an emergency telephone call to the signal box to ensure that preventive action is taken. Under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974, Railtrack was asked to take emergency action on 14 February 2001 to minimise risks to the public. That followed an unannounced visit by Her Majesty's railway inspectorate when problems caused by queuing traffic, red traffic light offences and yellow box marking offences were noted on many occasions during the morning peak hour.

I have not had time to cover several issues that the hon. Gentleman raised, and he made some important points. I answered some of the questions that he asked at the end of his speech but, if he feels that I have not covered other matters in sufficient detail, I will write to him.

Housing (St. Albans)

1.30 pm

Mr. Kerry Pollard (St. Albans): I am delighted to have this opportunity to debate the important topic of key worker housing in my constituency. St. Albans has the lowest unemployment in the country. As a consequence we have a shortage of key workers and skilled workers. My definition of a key worker is a nurse, teacher, police officer and so on, but I accept that someone who is running a business will consider any employee to be a key worker as companies employ only the people that they need to keep the business running.

The special care baby unit at Hemel Hempstead general hospital was going to be closed down due to lack of staff. One of the prime reasons for not being able to recruit was the lack of affordable housing either to rent or buy. Housing in St. Albans is among the most expensive in the country and the area has one of the smallest rented sectors in the country. Indeed as the local Member of Parliament with a salary two and a half times the national average I could not afford to buy a modest three bed semi-detached house in the constituency. I was therefore pleased when the Government recognised that the provision of key worker housing was vital to many constituencies, particularly in eastern and south-eastern regions.

In the first bidding round for extra funds for key worker housing Hertfordshire did less well than our neighbours. The Tory county council complained vigorously about that. At the same time I pointed out to the Minister for Housing and Planning, Lord Falconer, that our need was greater than almost anywhere else. I was delighted therefore when Hertfordshire came out top in the second round. The Government acknowledged our great need.

It is not just the Government who have been keen supporters and providers of key worker housing. The investment bank Schroders have taken up the cause. A recent article in *The Observer* states:

> "Have investment bankers at Schroders been smoking dope? What else could explain straight-laced money men investing £45 million in building homes for essential workers at below market rents?"

Schroders is making a nice return on its investment. In that instance everyone wins.

I have to point out the hypocrisy of Tory-controlled Hertfordshire county council which complained about the lower than average grant for key worker housing when at the same time it is selling off its own housing stock. Even when I wrote to challenge the leader of the county council about that, he wrote back that before any more houses were sold he would personally have to approve the sale. There was no admission of any inconsistency or thanks for bringing it to his attention or an undertaking that sales would now be stopped.

With the concentration on key worker housing, developers have quickly cottoned on to that and are now substituting key worker provision for general social housing provision. Their reasoning is that key workers are perceived as more preferable neighbours than those housed by registered social landlords. Being cynical, I suspect that developers prefer a police officer to an ex-prisoner being housed. That could add to the selling price of the homes on a development that has key worker as opposed to general social housing. St. Albans council has recognised that preference by developers and has conditioned a recent planning decision specifically prohibiting key worker and insisting on general social housing. That is the subject of an appeal by the developer with everybody awaiting the outcome with great interest.

Councils should include in their district plans a yearly target for key worker housing and an appropriate policy. Once the target has been planned for, councils can refuse further key worker units and insist on the provision of general social housing. Once planning permission has been refused, the planning inspectorate must support that decision if it is challenged by the developers—and there is no doubt that they will regularly challenge. If the planning inspectorate does not support it, it drives a coach and horses through all the local district council's policies and will not help with social, general or key worker housing provision. All participants understand what is possible and what is required.

Our public services are suffering as a result of the lack of affordable housing because they cannot recruit staff. One way of helping is to provide homes specifically for these workers—key worker housing. The Government have recognised the problem and allocated additional ring-fenced funds. All the extra money is for homes for sale, but we should also provide rented homes for key workers.

Finally, I would like to highlight an innovative key worker scheme in my constituency. An office block that stood empty for two years with no potential buyers—despite being actively marketed—has been secured by Try Homes with a view to demolition and building flats in its place. I was approached to facilitate this proposal and, after bringing together Try Homes and Hightown Praetorian housing association—one of the major local suppliers of registered social housing—a planning application was submitted. It included one and two-bedroom flats with shared amenity space and a small office for Try Homes. The site is close to the railway station, city centre and other amenities. It is also in a mainly residential area with a similar block of flats opposite.

The uniqueness of the scheme is that the developers have agreed to keep 40 per cent. of the homes available for key workers to rent. The housing association has put together a package that involves no public subsidy and allows the rents to be borne by an £18,000 annual income, making them affordable for teachers, police officers and all the other key workers outlined earlier. Overall, it amounts to 40 per cent. key worker provision, homes for rent, no public subsidy and affordability.

The scheme has received widespread support within St. Albans—from headteachers, the Bishop of St. Albans, health trusts and many others. St. Albans is at the cutting edge of housing provision and the scheme has national implications. However, local authority planners are not sure whether to recommend approval.

We need much more affordable social housing in St. Albans, as we currently house some families in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. We also need key worker housing. The Government are helping with special provision for key workers. I have tried to show how active partnering can provide homes and that the

[Mr. Kerry Pollard]

Try Homes-Hightown Praetorian scheme is ground breaking. It will be to our council's credit if it approves it.

1.37 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for St. Albans (Mr. Pollard) on securing the debate on key worker housing in St. Albans. I am well aware of his extensive knowledge of, and interest in, housing issues in St. Albans and the south-east, and of his successful work in arranging annual conferences on the subject.

I should like to explain the Government's proposals for resolving St. Albans' housing problems, and the general programmes to help key workers and secure more affordable housing, including the planning system. I shall also comment on the tension between providing housing for key workers and increasing pressure on the same funds for general social housing and tackling homelessness. Such tensions are acute in London and the south-east.

I shall not comment on the current council planning application. My hon. Friend has made his case, but the Secretary of State may have an important role and I do not want to prejudice any decisions.

Schools, hospitals, the police and other public services are vital. In London and the south-east, public services operate in a competitive market and have to compete for skilled staff.

My hon. Friend is right to argue that the private sector also experiences problems with recruiting skilled staff. There are skill shortages in some parts of London and the south-east. However, I agree that we should take a narrower approach to key workers, partly because of the role of public services in underpinning the economy. For example, we must ensure that young people leave school with the right kind of skills for today's job market.

My hon. Friend outlined the difficulty and pressure experienced by key workers in finding affordable housing, which is well understood in London and the south-east. I pay tribute to the excellent results achieved by key workers in my hon. Friend's constituency because, despite their difficulties, teachers in St. Albans helped Hertfordshire to achieve GCSE results that are among the best in the country, and the police helped to ensure that the area has the lowest crime rate in the east of England.

Staffing difficulties in the special care baby unit in Hemel Hempstead general hospital were also mentioned by my hon. Friend. He takes a particular interest in such issues because he is a sponsor of the Royal College of Midwives. The West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS trust acknowledges the lack of adequate accommodation for staff that has caused problems in attracting nurses to the hospital, although I understand that a post has not yet been refused specifically on those grounds. The hospital is working with English Partnerships to develop new accommodation for nurses, although it will not be ready until next year. I hope that it will help to meet some of the real pressures on nurses looking for accommodation in the St. Albans area.

In recognition of the difficulties faced by key workers, the Government published the Green Paper "Quality and choice: A decent home for all" in April 2000, which set out our policies on home ownership. It included existing schemes and proposals for a new initiative to help people into low-cost home ownership—the starter home initiative.

The aims of the initiative were to help key workers—especially health workers, teachers and police—to buy homes within a reasonable distance of work, thus promoting a culture of opportunity, choice and self-reliance, and giving people more of a stake in their neighbourhoods; to ensure that key workers could buy homes in areas where high demand and prices may otherwise price them out of communities to whom their services are vital; to support other housing related objectives that contribute to the regeneration or development of an area; and to promote a better mixture of housing tenures to achieve more sustainable mixed income communities.

One aspect of providing housing for key workers in London and the south-east is that housing policies must take cognisance of people's housing aspirations and not force them to live in homes that they do not want. We have identified that many key workers prefer home ownership to other types of housing, so the starter home initiative tries to meet those aspirations.

The Government made available £250 million in 2001-02 and 2003-04 in support of the scheme, which is already up and running. The bulk of that, some £230 million, was made available in the first round. It was allocated to 95 schemes in September 2001 to help 8,000 key workers buy homes within a reasonable travelling distance from their place of employment. The schemes included share ownership, equity and interest free loans primarily for the purchase of existing properties on the open market. New-build schemes were also provided to allow key workers to purchase using starter home initiative equity loans or through shared ownership.

In St. Albans, that meant that Aldwyck housing association was successful in obtaining funding based on a county-wide bid under the first round. It will make offers to key workers, including some in St. Albans, during the next few weeks. I shall ask my officials to ensure that my hon. Friend is kept informed about the allocations.

Additionally, Ridgehill housing association was successful in securing funding. It has worked with Hertfordshire constabulary and is providing police officers with three properties in St. Albans that are divided into smaller units. The units are for rent and will be ready in the next few months. My hon. Friend mentioned the need to provide homes for rent under the starter home initiative. Ridgehill is also providing grants to allow key workers to purchase their own homes. It is working with a police officer in St. Albans who will purchase a property with a grant. It is expected that more grants will be approved during the coming year.

In the wider picture, many of the successful bidders in the first round were registered social landlords. Some developer bids were successful and they will be implemented in conjunction with RSLs, who will administer and claim the grant. Other successful bidders included local authorities, an unregistered housing association and a charitable care and support organisation.

The second round of the starter home initiative involved the allocation of £20 million of the budget as equity loans of £10,000 each to help 2,000 key workers in high-cost areas outside London in which further assistance was required beyond that provided by the allocations that were made in September 2001. My hon. Friend is correct that that round addressed a wider area than the first round, which was heavily concentrated on London. There has been a welcome and positive response to the allocations.

Assistance under the second round of the starter home initiative will focus on people who are able to purchase a home with less assistance than that provided by the first round. I am pleased that bidding for the second round is well under way following guidance that was issued in 2002. As my hon. Friend said, Hertfordshire, including St. Albans, is targeted for assistance. Bids are due back on 16 March 2002, and we will be able to announce the successful schemes in May 2002.

I am aware of the disappointment in Hertfordshire that bids for the first round of starter home initiative funding were scaled back. Indeed, several Hertfordshire Members have written to me about that. Nationally, we received bids amounting to over £520 million. That substantially outweighed the available budget of £250 million, so all large bids had to be scaled back. However, the over-subscription of the scheme highlighted that it was popular and that people required such assistance.

We decided to allocate the bulk of the starter home initiative funding—£230 million—in the first round because it was considered important to get the schemes up and running. That was done by careful evaluation of the bids while taking account of a range of factors, such as affordability of housing to people on modest incomes, the proposed assistance to allow key workers to purchase properties, administration costs and whether additional financial contributions were provided by other sources.

However, in the first round, £7 million was allocated to help 267 key workers in Hertfordshire. The second round includes funding to help a further 127 key workers throughout Hertfordshire—70 nurses and other essential health staff and 57 teachers—with equity loans of £10,000 each. If the bids for the second round of the starter home initiative are forthcoming and gain approval, we will have given £8.27 million of support to help a total of 394 key workers throughout Hertfordshire. Of course, that includes people in St. Albans.

The use of the shared ownership scheme has been especially important because it combines the aspirations that key workers and others have for home ownership with the advantages of low-cost ownership. That has been particularly beneficial for people who might have the prospect of a higher salary further down the line, but who start out on modest incomes.

My hon. Friend has pointed out the kinds of prices and financial pressures that people can face when they are starting out and have to pay for high-cost housing. However, I have visited shared ownership schemes where people who are on modest incomes are able to look at buying their own home—albeit, to start with, they will have a smaller share of the equity. I have visited homes occupied by, for example, a fireman and a teacher, or a nurse and a teacher, who have been able to move out of rented accommodation. I am sure that my hon. Friend knows more than I do about the costs of private sector rented accommodation in the area that he represents, but I know of some people who have been able to move out of expensive private sector rented accommodation in a high-demand, high-value area, and into a shared ownership home, where they find that their net outgoings on housing have considerably decreased, and that they have secured a home for themselves.

Other initiatives are being taken to build on shared ownership—and similar schemes—to ensure that we can alleviate some of the current pressures on key workers in high-demand, high-value areas of London and the south-east. The starter home initiative complements other measures that we are taking. We are determined to help key workers find affordable housing. There has been criticism that the starter home initiative is too small. It cannot hope to provide accommodation for all the key workers who want it, but it has succeeded in doing some pump priming of a wide variety of different schemes that will maximise the amount of affordable housing in London and the south-east.

The Government's determination to meet some of the real pressures on key workers in London and the south-east has been highlighted by the establishment in my Department of an affordable housing unit, with a remit to put into place, by the end of 2002, measures that will significantly increase the delivery of affordable housing within three years. Those measures will include bringing empty properties back into use, and the initiatives that my noble Friend Lord Falconer, the Minister for Housing and Planning, has recently announced with regard to looking at ways of using air space by building above low-rise properties to ensure that we provide more housing units.

A great deal of discussion is also taking place about the use of the planning system to ensure that we procure more affordable housing in any housing development—there is even discussion about requiring that from commercial and other types of development. In London, there has been a high-profile discussion about whether we should be looking for 50 per cent. affordable housing. Under the current planning system, St. Albans' local plan requires housing developments to contain 25 per cent. affordable housing. If those kinds of policies are rigorously enforced, that will help to ease some to the pressures on key workers.

We are consulting on radical proposals for more effective delivery of affordable housing through the planning system. The new tariff-based approach that we are proposing as part of the consultations around the planning Green Paper, and associated documents, will mark a radical change from the current planning system. It will ensure that planning is more responsive to the community's affordable housing needs. In many areas we expect the provision of affordable housing—including key-worker housing, where that is a priority need—to be the main beneficiary of this approach.

Mr. Pollard: Does my hon. Friend agree that key-worker housing should be additional to the 25 per cent. requirement, rather than form part of it? In my constituency in particular, and throughout the east and south-east, there is a great need for key-worker housing. However, we also have an overwhelming need for affordable social housing. I alluded in my brief speech to families living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. That has happened in the past two years, but it did not happen in the 10 years previous to that, and it causes tension. Developers have cottoned on to that need, and are trying to substitute key-worker housing for general affordable housing. We must address that.

Ms Keeble: My hon. Friend has raised a number of issues, and I shall certainly deal with them. There is no definition of affordable housing, but we do not necessarily mean it to be social housing for rent. It could be affordable housing to buy. On requiring key worker housing from the planning system, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the point that I made at the beginning of my speech. We are considering mixed-tenure developments in order to ensure that we do not have monolithic single-tenure estates like those built in the past, which we are now knocking down.

It is essential that local authorities have a clear understanding of housing needs in their locality. When considering economic growth, provision needs to be made for any consequential growth in the social infrastructure, such as demand for school places and health services. That provision must include affordable housing for key staff. Authorities need to be innovative in how they deliver the right mix of accommodation, as they will often provide private developers to procure it and to consider different types of tenures and financial arrangements within a housing development.

Many innovative approaches are being developed locally to St. Albans. For example, in Stevenage surplus business premises are being brought back into use as flats for letting, and Watford and Three Rivers share funding and letting arrangements for new developments. Authorities need to consider whether they should fund shared ownership schemes if they are needed. They might consider the type of developments being made elsewhere. Private sector developers will engage in quite sophisticated partnership arrangements, both with housing associations and with local authorities, to make sure that they have a range of different types of tenures and prices within one housing development. That would mean that residents did not have the social stigma of being a council tenant or a housing association tenant as opposed to a private owner-occupier.

Spending on affordable housing has increased. Funding for the affordable housing programme delivered by the Housing Corporation is set to increase to more than £1.2 billion by 2003-04. That is almost double the 2000-01 level. Key workers will also benefit from our empty homes strategy and our planning agreements for the inclusion of affordable housing in new developments.

In conclusion, affordable housing provided through development is just one way of maximising the opportunities that lie around us. Many of the initiatives that I have mentioned will result in more and better housing in incremental amounts. Together, those initiatives will make a real difference to key workers in St. Albans and other areas with the same difficulty. I am pleased that my hon. Friend highlighted the fact that it is also important to make sure that there is adequate provision of subsidised social housing for people who need to rent it. Often in discussions about London and the south-east there is tension between the needs of key workers and the need for general social housing. Quite often, the needs of the second group are ignored.

There are no simple solutions to the problem. We need to work with our partners in the private sector, in housing associations and in local authorities to make sure that we get the right type of housing, the right mix of tenures and the right prices. We and our partners need to make the best use of land and investment to create more homes and widen the range of housing on offer. I hope that I have set out clearly some of the Government's approaches, and that I have reassured the hon. Gentleman that the Government are aware of the problems of key workers and are taking action that will specifically benefit his constituents.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 7 March 2002

[SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

Heritage Attractions

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

2.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Dr. Kim Howells): I welcome the opportunity to debate the important role of the historic environment in our cultural life. It is one of our great national treasures and the backbone of our tourism industry, and we plan to make it accessible to everyone.

In recognition of the importance of our historic environment, in December 2001 my Department and the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions jointly published "The Historic Environment: A Force for Our Future", which, following a wide-ranging review, is the first statement of Government policy on heritage for a generation. It is far-sighted, and is about more than maintaining our historic buildings and places or learning from the past. It stresses that the historic environment can improve the quality of life for all of us through the regeneration of our towns, cities and countryside, and by encouraging a greater sense of community and prosperity.

We set ourselves five specific tasks with which to achieve our aims: to provide leadership, to realise educational potential, to include and involve people, to protect and sustain the historic environment and to optimise its economic potential.

"A Force for Our Future" contains commitments to continue public funding for the care of the historic environment and to maintain an effective framework of statutory protection. It looks in detail at what can be done to develop the potential of the historic environment sector through funding, legislation, policy guidance and delivery mechanisms. For example, it recommends ways in which organisations can work together more closely and resources can be better deployed. It sets a challenge for everyone in the sector, and we are now working to turn our vision into reality.

The historic environment has huge potential as a learning resource in all areas of education—in schools, further education and later life. Historic sites constitute a learning experience in their own right and as a tool for other disciplines. They can also play a role in developing a sense of active citizenship, encouraging people to feel a greater sense of belonging and engagement. Great strides have been made in realising the educational potential of historic sites—especially for schoolchildren—and in developing a more inclusive approach to their presentation.

Nevertheless, we realise that much more can and must be done to reach new audiences and increase popular awareness and appreciation of the local historical environment. We want teachers to recognise the relevance of historic attractions as a resource for a wide range of subjects and we want to increase opportunities for people of all ages to develop their interests.

On 1 December 2001, free entry to our national museums and galleries became a reality for everyone. Visitor numbers at the Victoria and Albert museum, for example, rose from 42,623 in December 2000 to 174, 249 in December 2001. Similarly, the number of visitors to the natural history museum rose from 89,000 to 163,000 over the same period. We intend to build on that success.

In consultation with all the relevant bodies, we are considering ways in which to provide free access to the historic environment for children. That proposal, which was announced in "A Force for Our Future", has attracted great interest. Although particular sensitivities must be taken into account—for example, we must not deprive sites of essential funds—we are confident that it has the potential to strengthen our collective efforts to raise public awareness and the enjoyment of our rich heritage.

Similarly, the highly successful annual heritage open days gave the public an opportunity to experience some of England's hidden architectural treasures. In 2000, nearly 1 million people visited more than 3,000 properties in England—an astounding figure. That is a great tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Howarth), who had a great deal to do with it.

Other events, such as national archaeology days, an architecture week and a museums and galleries month, have helped to promote public awareness. We are exploring with English Heritage how best to develop those initiatives and whether that approach might now be extended to the historic environment as a whole, in the form of an annual historic environment week.

As well as making the historic environment accessible to everyone, we want to ensure that it is something with which the whole of society can identify. English Heritage's report entitled "Power of Place" rightly laid emphasis on the fundamental issue of whether the heritage is indeed a common inheritance. That emerged as a key issue in the consultation process and the MORI survey that informed "Power of Place". We must take seriously the implications of the survey's finding that many members of the black and other minority ethnic populations find the historic environment of little relevance or interest. A shared sense of heritage should surely bind society, so that it becomes the heritage of all our people. We are working with our partners on developing a social inclusion policy for the built heritage. That will be published shortly, and public comments will be invited during the summer.

Our concept of what constitutes the heritage continues to evolve. We have moved beyond the traditional chocolate box image of the past, and are now responding to people's wish to broaden the definition of what should be valued.

We are now looking at ways in which people of all ages can become more involved in the historic environment, through education programmes and the greater use of volunteers. Central to that process has been the heritage lottery fund's focus on community involvement. Lottery funding for heritage projects during 2000 topped £300 million. Parks, historic landscapes, museums, galleries, and blighted towns and

[Dr. Kim Howells]

villages have all benefited. Four years ago, the focus was very much on funding for individual buildings, with a narrow definition of heritage. Work is now much more likely to embrace the wider community, and applications to the fund now need to demonstrate how projects have been developed with local involvement.

Over the past decade, issues relating to physical access have rightly been high on everyone's agenda. Following the Government's acceptance of the key recommendations made by the disability rights taskforce, we will publish "Planning and Accessibility: A Good Practice Guide" to help local authorities, developers and others achieve a more consistent approach to access for people with disabilities.

I was lucky enough to be in Canada recently. Although the temperature there was 10 deg below freezing, I did not want to miss the opportunity to go up into the Rockies, and I walked up through the famous canyon known as Johnson's canyon. Everything was frozen, but I was able to walk up the first kilometre of that canyon without once having to use steps or climb over a lump of rock; it was entirely wheelchair accessible. Ramps were bolted to the canyon walls, people in wheelchairs were given places to pass, with boards telling them about the geology and the surrounding environment. That is taking accessibility seriously, in one of the great tourist attractions of that part of the Rockies. Things have a symbiotic reciprocity. If we can extend accessibility we can also make places much more attractive to visitors.

English Heritage will update its publication "Easy Access to Historic Properties" to take account of the duties that will be introduced in 2004 under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. It will give advice to owners and local authorities on the application to listed buildings.

Visiting historic attractions is the most popular activity for holidaymakers in Britain. That is a significant fact. A recent report by the English Tourism Council and English Heritage shows that more than 54 million people visited heritage sites in 2000, spending around £280 million. Britain is a land packed with outstanding heritage and cultural sites, and it is essential that tourist boards feature those stunning assets in their promotional and marketing activities.

Working in partnership with the tourism industry, the Government have launched several campaigns and initiatives to guide visitors back to the UK and to provide a strong message of reassurance after the tragic events of 11 September and the great trauma of foot and mouth disease. The problem is extraordinarily serious. I know that it is unfashionable to talk about balance of payments deficits these days, but our deficit is about £14 billion a year. If we could recover just a small part of that through British tourists taking holidays or short breaks in this country, it would be an enormous boost to the tourism industry in general, and especially to the upkeep of the historic places in question.

On 23 January, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State launched UKOK to promote Britain in seven key overseas markets—the USA, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Ireland, Belgium and France—which together account for 60 per cent. of visitors to the UK. The campaign offers millions of dollars' worth of great travel and accommodation incentives from more than 1,000 UK tourism businesses, to make a holiday in Britain better value than ever before. The UKOK campaign provides a strong message of reassurance to guide visitors back to Britain's four key strengths, one of which is, of course, our great heritage.

Last week my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced that the Government will make available up to £20 million of additional public funds to promote Britain abroad as a tourist destination. The "million visitor" campaign is the biggest tourism marketing initiative ever funded by the British Government and it underscores our commitment to the UK's tourism industries, including the historic attractions sector.

The tourism industry is joining forces with us to promote our excellent tourism product. The industry has already committed £5 million in cash and we will match industry funds pound for pound. This is the first time the Government have created such a powerful public-private coalition with industry organisations. That is the result of the great traumas of 2001. First there was the downturn in the American economy, which affected the numbers of tourists flying in from the United States—the biggest spenders by far among our tourists. Secondly, there were the terrible events of the foot and mouth outbreak. Thirdly, there was the terrorism of 11 September. If we have not learned from those events, and if we do not fundamentally change our approach to the industry, we will suffer in the future. However, I am confident that we have learned from what has happened.

The new campaign will target our seven key markets. Its aim is to attract 1 million extra visitors to Britain this year, and at least £500 million in spending. At its core will be a massive TV-led advertising campaign, focusing primarily on our great heritage, countryside and cities. A particular focus will be on royal heritage and the Queen's golden jubilee celebrations.

On 5 March, to promote the golden jubilee, the British Tourist Authority launched a royal heritage map. It is published by the Department, and I am very proud of it. I have a copy with me, and I am sure that many more will be in circulation soon. I believe that a text was sent to his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales to sign, but he quite properly junked it and wrote his own. The text used was written by his own fair hand. We have designed the map to provide tourists with a way round Britain, so that they can see the great sites of our royal heritage. It ranges from the site of the battle of Culloden near Inverness to many sites on the south coast and in Cornwall. It is very attractive, and it will be a great resource.

A further initiative, the Great British heritage pass, not only gives admission to nearly 600 historic castles, houses and gardens, but allows visitors substantial discounts. Thousands of overseas visitors have used and enjoyed the scheme, and the historic environment has benefited greatly.

The combination of heritage and landscape has a huge appeal for tourists. We launched a campaign called "Your Countryside, You're Welcome" yesterday—well, it seems like yesterday, but in fact it was a few weeks ago. The campaign will encourage people to rediscover the countryside after foot and mouth disease. Needless to say, the historic environment has a big role to play in rural development.

I should pay tribute to the owners of the many private historic houses in the United Kingdom. They have often kept those properties in marvellous condition through thick and thin. They have had difficult times, and they have not enjoyed many of the benefits that have accrued to houses owned by English Heritage and the National Trust. I am looking hard at what we can do to help private owners and their representative association.

We must always be aware of the fact that inadequately managed sites—especially those with high visitor levels—risk being damaged, as well as losing their appeal. They must be managed sustainably, and we said in "A Force for Our Future" that we aim to have management plans for England's world heritage sites in place by the end of this year. Those plans will be based on sustainable development principles, and we hope that other historic visitor attractions will follow our lead. My Department and its sponsored bodies will be happy to offer advice.

Perhaps the most important step that we can take is to move visitors to a much wider range of attractions, which we have generally failed to do. London is the great honeypot, the great icon of British tourism. In 2000, there were 25 million inbound visitors to London, which is a phenomenal number. Of those, only 1 million went to Wales and 1.7 million went to Scotland. One imagines that places in between may have done slightly better or slightly worse. Those are serious statistics, and we can certainly improve on them.

I am interested in studying countries abroad that are good at drawing people to the generic product—to use marketing speak—and ensuring sure that they then move out from the honeypots to places that they did not even know existed. That is a challenge not only for the British Tourist Authority and the English Tourism Council, but for regions that may not be marketing their wonderful hidden treasures in the right way. I want to help regions to market those treasures from the centre, and to use imagination and resources to market them in the regions, too.

We are working with English Heritage to establish an historic attractions advisory unit, which will draw together best practice and advice from across the sector on issues such as management skills, marketing, visitor management, customer care and conservation. Those are central to guaranteeing success.

Our historic attractions are a great source of pleasure and stand as a record of artistic and technical achievement. We do not often consider them, but they are an inspiration for creativity in our own age and for the future. We can regard them as a library, or a great quarry, from which we can draw inspiration. The building that we are in now is a world heritage site, I think. Everyone is nodding, so I seem to be right. I have been in the House for 13 years, but still walk around and look in amazement at some of the craftsmanship and wonderful design, especially in the great hall outside this Chamber, which is a work of art by any definition.

"The Historic Environment: A Force for Our Future" sets an ambitious agenda. If we are successful, our vision will help to deliver a society that recognises the historic environment as a resource for all, regardless of social status or background, and in which its importance as an economic asset, attracting millions of visitors a year and generating about 5 per cent. of the nation's gross domestic product, is harnessed skilfully and productively.

2.51 pm

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I welcome you back to another debate on culture, media and sport, Madam Deputy Speaker—and I congratulate the Minister on making such a sterling contribution after five hours' effort on the subject of Ofcom in the Chamber yesterday.

On behalf of the official Opposition, I, like the Minister, am delighted to acknowledge the magnificent contribution that our first-class heritage attractions make to tourism, the economy locally and nationally, and to employment in leisure and ancillary activities. I shall pose several questions to the Minister about the cost of the increased free access, how it will be resourced and what impact it will have on other attractions that continue to charge, such as National Trust houses.

I am providing some breathing space for the Minister, in which he can look at the map and identify the two entries on it for the Vale of York. I am delighted that there are 32 English Heritage sites and 90 National Trust properties in Yorkshire, so Yorkshire should figure disproportionately on the map that is the Minister's pride and joy. The Vale of York itself has English Heritage's Roman site at Aldborough, which must be one of the oldest such sites in Britain, and the National Trust's Beningborough hall and gardens. I urge the Minister to consider the impact and expense of free admission for children, pensioners and students to some attractions. It should be properly thought through, especially in terms of its implications for other attractions.

I congratulate the Minister on extolling so eloquently the virtues of two Conservative achievements. I appreciated that. The first was the contribution made to national heritage by the heritage lottery fund, which was set up by the former right hon. Member for Huntingdon, John Major. The Conservative party takes disabled access to all public buildings seriously, and I welcome the fact that in the run-up to 2004, the Government will fully implement the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, introduced by my parliamentary neighbour, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague), when he was Minister for Social Security and Disabled People in the Major Administration.

The Minister mentioned the Budget and the new scheme that the Government have proposed, which we warmly welcome, although we will take time to consider its impact. I urge him again to seek the support of his colleagues in the Treasury to ensure that the English Tourism Council has a proper marketing role. That would be entirely consistent with the Government programme that the Minister described, whether in relation to a Great British heritage pass, the royal heritage and the Queen's jubilee, or museum week. I have embraced the idea of that week, and have received an invitation to be a patron of the local museum at Thirsk, which I accepted with warm enthusiasm. I realise that the Government have

[Miss Anne McIntosh]

identified seven markets and hope to attract 1 million extra visitors, but can I ask the Minister how they expect to achieve that without a proper and complementary marketing role for the English Tourism Council?

In addition to the documents to which the Minister referred, I would add his Department's annual report for 2001. The Department states that it wants to increase access to, and participation in, the cultural and sporting life of the nation, while maintaining the quality of the experience that it offers. It also wants people to have the opportunity to develop their potential and enrich their lives and those of their communities through cultural and sporting activity. Therefore, it works with others inside and outside the Government to create greater opportunity and to increase the extent to which it is taken up. Moreover, as the Minister explained in his opening remarks, the Department believes that its policy on access contributes to the promotion of learning, employment and social inclusion.

In July 1998, when the Government made a commitment, through the Department, to introduce free access for children from 1999 and for pensioners from 2000, and universal free entry to museums in 2001, the British public found the idea attractive. My concern is that the Government failed to realise all the implications and ramifications. The policy will have an impact on regional museums and will cost national museums revenue and increased VAT charges. That is not the Minister's direct responsibility, but I urge him to make representations to his colleagues. What better time to do so than now, before Budget day?

The museums that do not charge cannot reclaim VAT on services because they are not businesses, whereas I understand that museums that do charge, can. The Government announced in early April 2001 that they were planning to share a £7.1 million grant among five national museums to enable them to charge just £1. So long as they charged even that, they would have been able to reclaim VAT. In the 2001 Budget, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a U-turn: all the main national museums that allowed free admission would in future be refunded the VAT that they incurred on purchases. The Government appear to have got themselves into a mess over their policies on admission to museums and galleries.

In January I was contacted by a constituent, John Rathmell, who runs the Clearstory railway museum from his home. He said that visitors were to be charged for entry to York's national railway museum—during a two-week Thomas the Tank Engine event in February—only two months after admission prices were scrapped by the Government. I believe that we are still awaiting a response from the Secretary of State about that. I urge the Minister to use his good offices, through his Department, to seek an early reply my constituent.

Where national museums are not charging, the implications for local museums are great. In December, the *Evening Press* in York published a reader's letter on the subject:

> "While I am respectful of the contribution of the National Railway Museum to the tourism industry of York and the preservation of railway heritage in general, I must make an observation in the light of the article...of December 6. This pointed out the apparent anomaly of the charges to be made for the return of the Thomas The Tank Engine event in the light of the much-heralded ending of admission charges, paid for by government subsidy...There is a further anomaly in the fact that the museum charges £4 for parking in the visitor car park. Therefore, visits are only 'free' for those visiting by public transport or on foot."

To some extent, the Minister and his Department have stirred up a hornets' nest with their policy on charging.

The questions that I want to put to the Minister are about the fact that nothing is free. There is no such thing as a free lunch, because at the end of the day, someone picks up the bill. Where there is to be more free access, how will that be resourced and at whose expense? Has the Minister considered that extending free access to some attractions could harm neighbouring attractions that charge? In that context, I have already referred to the railway museum in York.

I understand the Minister's desire to attract foreign tourists. That aim is also close to my heart. I wish to declare an interest in that my husband works for an American airline company, which obviously operates a two-way business, not only transporting tourists and those who work for British businesses to the United States, but, we hope, transporting even more people from north America to the United Kingdom.

Has the Minister considered that we could be subsidising foreigners to visit our attractions? As many hon. Members will appreciate, when one lives next to an attraction, one often takes it for granted and does not take the opportunity to visit, whether or not there is a charge. What is the Government's estimate of the annual cost to the Treasury of allowing free access to English Heritage sites for those under 16 and students, pensioners, and all visitors? I have a high regard for the Minister, and although it might be difficult for him to give me that information at short notice, a written response by Monday would be most welcome.

Dr. Howells: I can give the hon. Lady that information immediately. I am afraid that I cannot tell her the cost of free access for under-16s, but I can tell her about under-15s, although the figures are only preliminary estimates. They are as follows: Government properties, £4 million; National Trust properties, £4 million; local authority properties, £1.5 million; and private properties, £7 million.

Miss McIntosh: While I am assimilating that information, will the Minister confirm that that is the cost to each of those bodies?

Dr. Howells: Yes, it is.

Miss McIntosh: For how long do the Government propose that the policy will apply? Is it a permanent policy or is it a temporary policy, which, like so many Government policies, will be kept under review? What assessment have the Government made of the possible impact of VAT law on free access for visitors to English Heritage sites? Moving close to home again—my constituency is within one mile of York minster—what assessment have the Government made of the possible impact of free access to English Heritage sites on other attractions such as churches? I am sure that he will be aware that York minster is seriously considering raising funds through charges because the upkeep of that fine building is tremendously expensive. What evidence do the Government have that such a policy would appeal to those who run English Heritage sites or to the general public? Have visitor numbers risen in proportion to the additional costs?

Why have the Government chosen to debate this matter in Government time, rather than sport, tourism or other more pressing concerns? Is there an especially important announcement that we are awaiting so eagerly today? Which heritage attractions are to be free, and by what criteria will they be selected? Will the Government compensate such attractions should they suffer loss of earnings?

On a wider point, what are the Government doing, in addition to the measures that the Minister has already mentioned, to attract not only foreign tourists but vital domestic tourism? I welcome the UKOK campaign, but the Minister must accept that it does not address that point. The York tourism board, for example, would be keen to attract tourists from other regions of Britain to our heritage sites, countryside and sporting sites. Will the Minister address that matter?

In response to the foot and mouth crisis, to which the Minister referred, the Government announced funding of £18 million for the marketing of British tourism. I understand that £14 million is destined for the British Tourist Authority and £4 million for the English Tourism Council. Those sums are grossly inadequate. The English Tourism Council's urgent pleas for realistic help should be respected.

Dr. Howells: I am sure that the hon. Lady was busy preparing her speech when I made the announcement, but we are currently conducting a £5 million campaign—UKOK—and a further £20 million campaign, which will be matched by £20 million of private sector funding. The British tourism industry has never known such funding. Surely she must welcome that.

Miss McIntosh: The Minister will, I am sure, have a response to my question about how much of the funding will go to the English Tourism Council to enable it to undertake a tourism marketing role. The council will have a dual role in attracting both incoming visitors to the country and visitors resident in the United Kingdom to different English regions. A breakdown of the funding from the Government would be welcome. If the Minister wants to help tourism, why does he not agree, today, to give the English Tourism Council a marketing role, particularly as he has said that the Government might be minded to do so in the future?

As luck would have it, while the Minister was speaking, I received, by hand, a letter from someone concerned with one of the historic houses to which he was kind enough to refer. The letter is from Mr. Bagot of Levens hall in Kendal, Cumbria, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins). Mr. Bagot wrote to my hon. Friend, who has forwarded his briefing to me, to say that

> "Levens Hall is a major tourist attraction in the Lake District, comprising as it does an historic estate with a magnificent Grade 1 Listed house, with world-renowned Grade 1 Listed Topiary Gardens."

I will have to visit to find out what a topiary garden is.

Dr. Howells: Topiary is at its most visible when somebody spends many years cutting their privet hedge into the shape of a beast or a heraldic emblem. Topiary gardens are huge versions of that. The garden referred to in the letter is almost unequalled in western Europe.

Miss McIntosh: I am most grateful for that explanation; the Minister whets my appetite even more. He may or may not realise that the first parliamentary seat that I fought as a Conservative candidate was Workington in Cumbria, which is next to my hon. Friend's constituency.

I have a useful briefing here from the Historic Houses Association, which refers to the colossal cost of preserving privately owned houses. The Minister will appreciate that without constant maintenance, decay and collapse occur with alarming speed. Once lost, such precious assets are gone forever. The briefing continues:

> "The private owner has long been recognised as the most cost-effective guardian of heritage properties and funds their preservation out of taxed income, at no cost to the state. This situation should be compared with the maintenance of similar properties owned by the National Trust, which enjoys benevolent tax status, and properties in the care of English Heritage and Local Authorities, which are maintained out of public funds."

It ends with a plea, which I shall take the opportunity to pass on to the Minister:

> "It is the HHA's challenge, working with other heritage bodies"

to decide how to preserve impressive and valuable pieces of our national heritage for future generations. It is the association's fervent hope that the Government will support

> "better fiscal relief for the maintenance of our historic buildings"—

that is imperative, in the view of the Historic Houses Association and those who visit such houses each year—

> "if this important aspect of the heritage of our country is to be preserved."

After the debate, and once my papers have been returned, I shall pass that plea on to the Minister through my hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): The hon. Lady will be aware that English Heritage makes available grants to historic buildings and heritage sites in return for making access available. In the context of the comments in the letter, does she agree that if we are to make tax relief or grants available to historic sites, we should be assured that access is allowed? According to a recent National Audit Office report, access is not always available even when grants have been made.

Miss McIntosh: The hon. Gentleman leads me down a dangerous path, as I am only a shadow spokesman, not a Minister. In a personal capacity, I believe that one must be take care to ensure that access is allowed when at all possible, but also that it does not endanger the property. One can imagine the practical problems that might be caused if too many people visited a property in a short time, given how brief the tourist season is in this country. We could take as an example the number of feet that have trodden up the steps of Westminster Hall.

I shall now raise a serious matter that is mentioned in today's edition of *The Daily Telegraph*. I take this opportunity to make a personal plea to the Minister, who always listens with care and attention to his

[Miss McIntosh]

parliamentary colleagues, and I urge him to make the speediest and most eloquent representations to his right hon. Friend the Chancellor on the point I am about to mention.

The headline reads, "The Chancellor to sell the family silver after all", and the article tells us:

> "The Treasury is to press ahead with the sale of its collection of rare 17th-century silverware despite protests. Gordon Brown, the Chancellor, withdrew the items from auction in October after an outcry and promised to rethink his plans. But the Treasury has now disclosed that it is trying to sell the silver to 'institutions willing to display the items to the UK public.'"

This is a serious matter, which represents a U-turn by the Government, who said last October that they would not sell the nation's silverware. The Treasury is now saying that this will take place, thus enabling the silverware to be placed in the public domain—but it is already in the public domain. The Treasury is assuming that the V & A, which is another national treasure, will want to pay a considerable sum to purchase that national silverware and put it on display.

I urge the Minister to make every conceivable representation to ensure that that perverse situation will not be allowed. The silverware is, and should remain, in the nation's keeping. I gather that Mr. Barrie, director of the National Art Collections Fund, said that if the sale went ahead it would open the floodgates for Government Departments under pressure from the Treasury to sell more paintings, furniture and silver.

It has emerged that the Silver Trust, a charity established to commission and then lend to No. 10 Downing street a 65-place silver service for banquets, might rethink its long-term plan to give the service to the nation. I strongly urge the Minister to ensure that the Government do not raid the larder for the nation's silverware, and that the silverware is kept in safe custody and on display with public access, without any requirement for other bodies to purchase it.

I welcome today's announcement by the Government. I urge the Minister to confirm that his Department envisages a marketing role for the English Tourism Council and to explain what, in his personal view and in the view of his Department, the implications will be for regional museums, churches and other parties, such as York minster, that are under pressure to charge to recover their costs. Will he explain also how the National Trust—a private organisation, in contrast to English Heritage, which is a Government agency—will be affected by the Government's proposal?

3.17 pm

Jim Knight (South Dorset): I am pleased to contribute to the debate on access to heritage attractions. I want to broaden the scope slightly, given that I represent South Dorset, which is part of the newly designated world heritage site, the Jurassic coast. UNESCO made the announcement in December, and it was a great delight to us in Dorset and Devon to receive that status. I know that you have visited the area, Mr. Pike, because I remember you coming to dinner about five years ago. I also know that you are familiar with the place and appreciate what a pleasure it is to visitors.

The world heritage site begins at Old Harry rocks just off Swanage. The coast continues through my constituency, including Lulworth cove and Durdle Door, and it includes ranges on which the Army unfortunately seems to want to fire shells. That is a side issue that I may have to raise with other Ministers, but perhaps the firing may expose some nice fossils. The coast continues to Weymouth, Portland, Chesil beach, the Fleet and beyond. It is a treasure and the first site in England—and I think Wales, too—to achieve world heritage status as a natural environment.

My impression of the comments of the Minister and the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) is that they have focused on the built environment and architectural heritage, but the Jurassic coast is clearly more a matter of natural heritage. For those who are not familiar with the area, what is celebrated there, apart from the beautiful coastline, is a precise and accurate timeline for the Jurassic period. Evidence can be seen, such as excellent fossil remains, including fossil forests by Lulworth cove and dinosaur remains at Lyme Regis. The area is a treasure educationally and for geomorphologists, but also for walkers. We look forward to the benefits that world heritage status will bring.

The Minister talked about built heritage and how many sites are artistic and technical monuments, providing inspiration, but natural monuments exist too, such as those I have named from my area. He also referred to the built environment as a quarry for artistic inspiration, but there are real quarries at the world heritage site in my area. If he visits quarries on Portland or in the Purbecks, he will see a timeline of the Jurassic age, which became exposed as the stone was exploited. We see much Portland stone at other world heritage sites around us in London, now that the process has gone full circle.

I was particularly pleased to see the sculptured landscape at West Wears on Portland last Friday. The work is by John Maine, who designed an important sculpture that is over on the south bank. Marvellous terraced steps look out over the sea and Chesil beach. The artist used the various rock strata and capped each step with a wave. The work is quite remarkable, and it is a peaceful place from which to view the landscape. I would recommend any hon. Member to see it, and I would be delighted to buy them a cup of tea after the experience.

World heritage status does not, however, come without challenges, as I am sure all hon. Members will testify. In particular, I am pleased that I can discuss access problems. The access barriers in my area do not relate to cost, because people are not charged to walk the coastal path or to see the sea and the cliffs. Rather, they relate to providing transport, disabled access and the right accommodation, which would allow us to attract the full range of visitors and to benefit in economic development terms.

There is also the issue of managing visitors and channelling them in the right direction, which is why transport is crucial to exploiting the potential of our world heritage status. The railways in Dorset are not too bad, as railways go these days, and I am delighted that the Strategic Rail Authority recently announced that the line between Wareham and Corfe Castle is to be restored. The heritage railway that runs from Corfe down to Swanage can join the main line, and other services can be generated to enhance access to the start of the heritage coast. Services into Devon simply do no exist, and the railway is not a realistic option for those who want to exploit the full potential of our heritage coast.

Buses are erratic. More subsidised buses have come on stream in the past few years, although too many for my liking seem to be subsidised to run empty. Some are very large and cause problems in Corfe Castle. The potential for buses to use liquid petroleum gas and other forms of environmentally friendly fuel is being explored, and work is being done with firms such as BP, which exploits oil in Poole harbour on the world heritage coast and brings it onshore at Wych Farm in my constituency. Essentially, however, buses will not solve our transport problems.

There are also difficulties with our roads, particularly in Weymouth, and we are campaigning hard for a relief road. All those activities are designed to sort out a transport infrastructure and to give people gateway points to access the coast without destroying it. I appreciate what the Minister said about making access sustainable so that we do not damage the very jewels that people come to see.

We must find a way to work across authorities. We get assistance from the regional development agency, but I would welcome further Government help. That will ensure that the Department works with us and looks critically at the management plan that it wants us to put in place by the end of the year. It will then be able to ensure that we have a realistic transport plan, so that access to our coast can become a reality.

My next point is on disability. I was enchanted by the Minister's story about his trip to the Rockies and walking a mile into the snow-covered mountains. I was reminded of the path from Lulworth cove to Durdle Door. The Weld estate, in conjunction with the county council, has recently spent a lot of money improving it, because it was being quickly eroded—more than 250,000 people visit the area each year. Unfortunately, it is a stepped path, and I know that the Weld family are worried that they will have to find a way to improve it yet again to enhance disabled access.

The natural environment, especially the cliff paths on the Dorset coastal path, which extends to the south-west, presents a particular challenge to those who want to give people with mobility problems proper access to our tremendous natural heritage, which the rest of us can access so happily. I do so most weekends with my dog, and even with my wife and family.

Accommodation is a real challenge. We now have world heritage status, but were we to experience a great influx of visitors, particularly from overseas, I am not sure whether they would recommend the area if we were judged on the quality of the full range of accommodation. The fear is that visitors will stay further along the coast and come to the area only on day trips, because we do not have the range of high-quality accommodation to enable us to benefit economically. If we do not benefit economically, local residents might start to resent the traffic generated by day trippers who do not stay and spend money locally.

We need support from the Department and we must work with it on improving our accommodation. Funding has been made available for upgrades. Recently, I spoke to my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies), a newly elected Welsh Member, who lectured on tourism. He mentioned measures taken to help proprietors of bed-and-breakfast accommodation, guest houses and so on to make the investment necessary to upgrade their properties. I would love to see that happen in my area.

In Dorset, and over the border in Devon, we are acutely aware that world heritage status has no cash attached. However, it is a great marketing tool. For instance, Weymouth and Portland borough council, Purbeck district council and Dorset county council are all putting world heritage status at the top of their economic development plans. It is seen as a great driver, lifting our economies and allowing us to strike a balance between the quality of life that we all enjoy as a result of our beautiful natural environment and getting economic benefit from it.

The regional development agency is being helpful, as it is paying for a consultancy to enable us to harness that economic development potential. We are talking to the natural history museum about the possibility of it developing the site, because it has hundreds of fossil specimens from Dorset that are not displayed. We have the potential to offer the museum a tremendous facility in the area. I am working also with hon. Members who represent neighbouring coastal constituencies, but we need more support.

The Minister talked about what could be done in terms of the built environment. I interpret that to mean historic houses and so on. He also talked about the Department showing leadership in developing educational potential and sustaining the environment. I request that such support be extended to the natural environment and heritage, and that we be able to access the heritage lottery fund fully. Some sites receive subsidies through schemes such as the Great British heritage pass, and we should not be denied such public money because our site is free at the point of access.

I got excited when the Minister mentioned his new map of heritage sites, which was published last week, but I was disappointed when I looked at it, although, I hasten to add, not because it is entitled "Britain's Royal Heritage". That heritage is obviously to be celebrated, especially in this jub[illegible] but I am disappointed that we are not on it, given our world heritage status and that Weymouth has royal connections. George III began the tradition of seaside holidays there. Some places on the map have slightly tenuous links with royalty.

Dr. Howells: I apologise to my hon. Friend for missing the world heritage site off the map. We would come close to some dangerous rocks if we started to talk about fossils and royalty, but I assure him that I have urged the regional development agencies and tourist boards to construct regional maps on the basis of that map. The idea is that we bring people into the regions, and then the regions take over.

Jim Knight: I thank the Minister, and I look forward to the region featuring the world heritage coast prominently on its regional map. I hope that working within the Department but across regions might help to provide a signpost for those who visit the New forest, for example, so that they move out of the south-east and

[Jim Knight]

into the south-west to visit our marvellous heritage coast. Obviously, I shall look carefully at any future prints of the map, or maps that follow it, to ensure that the mistakes are not made a second time.

I welcome the debate. We in Dorset and Devon are trying to tackle problems, so we realise the full potential of the world heritage status that our coast has recently received. I plead with the Minister and the Department: we should not be forgotten in future, natural heritage should be kept in mind and heritage sites must relate to more than the built environment.

Mr. Peter Pike (in the Chair): The hon. Gentleman has reminded the Chair, who represents a constituency in the Duchy of Lancaster, of the need to consider such matters closely.

3.33 pm

Nick Harvey (North Devon): In welcoming the debate, I congratulate those who, over a long period, have done much to protect our heritage and offer access to it. I also welcome the initiatives mentioned by the Minister and express the hope that they improve access to heritage sites over time. I agree with the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) that a decent marketing budget for the English Tourism Council would probably improve the take-up of opportunities, but that is largely a debate for another day.

In June, the nation will celebrate the Queen's golden jubilee. Modern Britain is much more diverse than the Britain of 50 years ago, and with that diversity comes a range of ways to perceive our heritage and highlight our history. This summer, people will celebrate in many ways. People in different parts of the community have different hopes and expectations of what the country's heritage can offer them. Heritage should not be forced on people. If access exists without quality, there is little point in offering access. The key to encouraging people to take up opportunities is access to quality projects.

The hon. Member for South Dorset (Jim Knight) made a good point about heritage meaning not just built heritage, but the natural environment. As we all seem to be giving broadcasts on behalf of our constituencies, I should say that my constituency of North Devon has a stretch of heritage coast and a lot of National Trust properties. We have good take-up among people who come to visit those attractions, although my constituents might shudder in disapproval if I argued for a huge increase, particularly at peak times of the year. Clearly, the nation's heritage comes in different shapes and forms. Those all benefit national and local identity, local communities and their fabric, and the economy. Successful projects provide essential jobs and create wealth.

If we consider some of the country's obvious tourist attractions, such as Bath, Oxford and York, we can see the economic value and the international cultural value of working to preserve the heritage in those places. About 11 million visits a year are made to English Heritage sites alone. Our historic environment is dear to the hearts of those who visit such sites and to the 2.7 million National Trust members.

One or two hon. Members have referred to access and access for the disabled. An estimated 8 to 9 per cent. of visitors to English Heritage sites have disabilities. Although it is often by definition difficult to make some sites accessible to the disabled, not least because it is an essential part of the job of English Heritage and the other bodies that look after them to preserve their original fabric, there is still more that we can do to improve access to parts of sites that may sensibly be made accessible.

Only 40 sites offer audio tours with hearing loops and even fewer have taped tours adapted to basic language. There is a lot to do, and the heritage lottery fund has a role to play in encouraging organisations that apply for grants to ensure that reasonable access for people with disabilities is provided.

We should also concentrate on access for children. I welcome many proposals in "The Historic Environment: A Force for Our Future", especially the recommendation that children should be allowed free admission to sites of cultural and historical importance. The Secretary of State has proclaimed free admission to national museums and galleries to be a spectacular success and says that charges were clearly restraining many people, particularly families. I hope that our historical environment will now be democratised, as some of the nation's other treasures have been through the introduction of free admission to more and more sites.

I also welcome proposals to extend the blue plaque scheme across the country. Those plaques provide a useful insight to the lives of those who have contributed to our heritage. Funded by the heritage lottery fund, English Heritage is collating for its website a collection of photographs of all England's listed buildings. That is a step towards making our historically important homes and buildings accessible. Some homeowners are concerned that the record will be abused by housebreakers and the like, but those concerns can be overcome by tightening the website's security. English Heritage is also considering an exemption scheme for cases in which it may be proven that inclusion could cause unwarranted or substantial damage or distress.

Overall, we should encourage access to more homes of historical significance. Many artworks and historical artefacts that such homes contain are exempt from inheritance tax in exchange for reasonable public access. Where that is the case, homeowners should be obliged to include their properties on the website.

There should also be a stricter definition of what constitutes "reasonable access" to ensure that taxpayers get value for money from the exemption. Two thirds of the UK's built and natural heritage is maintained, as the Minister said, by private owners. Keeping those properties in a condition that meets visitor expectations and conserving them at current levels can be expensive. The Historic Houses Association estimates that the annual cost of maintaining the privately owned homes is about £80 million. If we intend to open more such homes to the public, more investment is needed.

We cannot expect vast amounts of public money to be invested in those homes, but we can try to encourage additional private investment by examining further the VAT regime. I must put on record an interest, in that my home is a listed building. However, as I do not intend to offer public access to it, I do not wish to avail myself of any special tax concessions. There is an anomaly in the respective treatment of older buildings and new builds. I know that the Government have considered the issue and I hope that they remedy it.

The heritage lottery fund has an important part to play in guaranteeing access to sites. Its strategic plan for 1999-2002 cited education and access as one of four strategic priorities. Up to March 2001, 69 per cent. of the projects that it funded achieved enhanced access to heritage. That is good, but there is more work to do to ensure that the other 31 per cent. begin to achieve it as well. It is all very well spending large sums on preservation and conservation, but if the sites are inaccessible to the public, the money is not well spent.

I have been lobbied, as I imagine others have been, about the case of Hatchmere lake in Cheshire, where heritage lottery fund grants mean that significant parts of the lake, which used to be accessible to the public, no longer are. That should be the exception, not the rule. There may, on occasion, be a heritage case for limiting access. If so, a clear public statement of that need must be made. Extending access also means reflecting what is required in different regions. We recently debated the unequal distribution of lottery funds. That is as true for heritage as for any other lottery work.

We need to take a wide view of what constitutes our heritage. Only this week, it was revealed how quickly our records become obsolete. A multimedia version of the Domesday book created by the BBC in 1986 is now unreadable. A collection of images and sounds compiled to record the state of the nation in 1986, including images of Maradonna's hand of God goal, hill farmers struggling to cope with the fallout of Chernobyl, Michael Heseltine storming out over the Westland affair and thousands of other records of everyday life, was recorded on 12 inch video discs, which now cannot be read. By contrast, the original 11th-century Domesday book is in good condition at the Public Record Office and accessible to anyone who can make a reasonable case and has the right credentials to read it.

Despite such setbacks, computers hold the key to preserving much of our heritage that we do not have the resources or facilities to display, as they provide access for people who are unable to stroll around heritage sites. The work of Turner gives an example of how modern technology can be used to display our cultural heritage. Turner's bequest was that his work should be preserved for the nation and displayed for all to see. Although it is disappointing that no dedicated gallery has been built to display those 30,000 works, the entire Turner bequest went online last week on the Tate gallery's website. Many are probably viewed better that way than with the naked eye.

For many people, interactivity and the internet will be how they experience the UK's heritage. Although strides are being made to provide for that in schools and universities, there is much more that we can do to improve access. The internet has immense potential for opening up opportunities for students and it gives a taste of what the UK has to offer to visitors from overseas. As a medium, it is unsurpassed as a way to improve access to the many cultural and historical artefacts that cannot be displayed.

The work carried out by the British museum in collating its collections is much to be admired, and a great deal of work goes on in many nooks and crannies to preserve our heritage, although much more can be done to improve access to it. We should be proud of what has been done and proud of our heritage, but we must remain vigilant and diligent in ensuring that more and more people experience it, especially through giving such opportunities to overseas visitors. We are moving in the right direction. I commend the document to which the Minister referred and hope that access to heritage improves in years to come.

3.45 pm

Mr. Bob Laxton (Derby, North): In this life, they say that time flies when you are having fun. I have obviously been enjoying myself to such an extent that I have difficulty recalling when I first became involved, in my previous capacity as leader of Derby city council, with what is now the Derwent Valley Mills world heritage site. Seven or eight years ago, the then officer for tourism on Derby city council, Marion Nixon, an officer called Reg Whitworth from the adjacent authority of Amber Valley and I were considering the pressure placed on the Peak District national park, the first national park in the United Kingdom. The park receives huge numbers of visitors, totalling several million each year. In many places, the park is grossly over-walked and over-cycled. Of the millions of visitors, many come into the county for only a day or a few days.

We looked at the possibility of trying to draw people into south Derbyshire and guide them up the Derwent valley to look at a real gem of industrial archaeology, including superb country houses, such as Chatsworth and Kedleston hall. There they could also see the superb pumping station that pumps water from the Derwent into Cromford canal, take in sheep pastures and do a hill climb in an area where they could ride railway wagons down to the Cromford canal. There is a series of mills along the Derwent valley and the total distance is perhaps 15 or 16 miles.

Things have moved on since that time seven or eight years ago and the Derwent valley mills are now designated as a world heritage site. I am delighted about that. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] My right hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Alan Howarth) says, "Hear, hear" loudly and clearly. Of course, we were delighted when he was able to visit the mills in the Derwent valley to see the site for himself when he was a Minister at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

As I said, things have moved on, although difficulties will always remain. My hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Jim Knight) has referred to issues of access, a matter that greatly exercised our minds. If mills are spread along a 15 or 16-mile stretch of river, there are real problems with access. Much of the land between sites is privately owned, so gaining access to such places would be a long-term project.

Some of the mills are very old. The silk mill in my constituency of Derby, North was the site of probably the first major industrial dispute in this country. In the great silk mill lockout, workers were locked out and starved back to work. In Derby, we remember that on or around May day every year. Boar's Head mill at Darley

[Mr. Bob Laxton]

abbey, also in my constituency, is privately owned and dates back to an interesting period of history when undershot turbines ran all the machinery and, latterly, generated electricity for the mill. At Peckwash mill, little of the mill now remains. I refer to the mills at Millford and the great Strutt mills at Belper, one of which was the forerunner of the new factory processes at the time and was built to be fireproof, as the dust and material flying around mills made them a fire risk. The mill was designed with a floor built on ceramic pots to prevent the risk of fire. I refer, too, to the very old mills, such as the Arkwright mills at Cromford and the Masson mill a little further up the road at Matlock Bath.

The site has the potential to be a superb heritage site. We should be able to exploit such sites for tourism, which would be of great benefit to the area economically, historically and educationally. We hope that those who come to visit will remain in the area longer than they would otherwise do.

There are concerns, however, one of which is about the status and management of inscribed and proposed world heritage sites. Local authorities have been involved in establishing a local authorities-world heritage forum. In August 2000, the body submitted observations to English Heritage on the Government's review of policies relating to the historic environment, which contained the statement:

> "The Government should give greater recognition to the importance of World Heritage Sites, either in primary legislation or at least in policy guidance. Such a policy document should set out those measures Government intends undertaking to discharge its obligations under the World Heritage Convention of 1972 to identify, protect, conserve and present World Heritage Sites in the United Kingdom."

My right hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East, in a speech to the local authorities-world heritage forum in Portcullis House on 13 March 2001, acknowledged:

> "Much remains to be done to safeguard the UK sites that have already been inscribed...indeed, inscription on the World Heritage List is only the beginning."

I could not agree more with that statement.

I return to the issue of the current status and the measures for protection of the sites. Some member sites are under direct Government control, but in this country there are many sites in private or multiple ownership whose protection depends on co-operation between Government, national and regional agencies, local authorities and owners, and on a wide variety of statutory and non-statutory measures.

I have a copy of some planning policy guidance notes—PPG15, published by the former Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions. It applies to England alone, although there are similar circulars and guidance notes for the Welsh Office. The key points made in PPG15 are that

> "no additional statutory controls follow from inscription...inclusion in the World Heritage List is a 'key material consideration' in determining planning applications and listed building consent applications...each local authority concerned should formulate specific planning policies for protecting the sites and include them in their development plans...environmental assessment is needed for 'significant development proposals'...local planning authorities are encouraged to work with owners, managers of sites and other agencies to ensure that the comprehensive management plans are in place."

Paragraph 6.35 of PPG15 refers specifically to the world heritage convention:

> "The Convention provides for the identification, protection, conservation and presentation of cultural and natural sites...Individual governments are responsible for the nomination of sites, and for ensuring the protection of sites inscribed on the List."

Most of the sites have elements of statutory protection within them such as listed buildings, ancient monuments, areas of outstanding natural beauty and sites of special scientific interest. A number of cultural sites have protection through the designation of conservation areas.

The Government have an obligation under the world heritage convention. Responsibility for world heritage matters is exercised by several Departments, with the DCMS taking the lead. The First Ministers for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland and the Foreign and Home Secretaries are also involved. A wide range of Departments is involved in the process. It can be seen that the responsibility is given and/or accepted by a wide variety of governmental and quasi-governmental agencies. The various Ministers of State regularly communicate with each other on these matters. There are well-established mechanisms for communication between national heritage bodies, and that includes the local authorities-world heritage forum.

Nevertheless, mechanisms are needed to ensure consistency on recognition of the status of sites, on guidance to site managers in the widest sense, on the content and coverage of management plans and on both the theoretical and actual protection of sites. The need for consistency is paramount.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): I agree with a large amount of what the hon. Gentleman says. World heritage site status has just been granted along the coast between Dorset and Devon in my constituency and that of the hon. Member for South Dorset, who unfortunately has had to leave. I agree that there should be some consistency, but these sites are very different. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the information bureaux and the gateway towns should all reflect the individual nature of the world heritage sites in their area? There should not be unanimity across the board.

Mr. Laxton: Had the hon. Gentleman been here to listen to the contribution by my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset he would have heard him argue that the natural heritage of that site was perhaps unique and therefore different from the site I am describing. I am arguing for consistency of approach, not for uniformity or standardisation. Each site is different and has its own strengths and weaknesses. Every site has its merits. There needs to be a consistent governmental approach to dealing with these sites. That certainly does not mean uniformity of approach or an identikit position on them. I was not arguing that in any way, shape or form and I hope that most hon. Members understood that.

Consistency of approach becomes more important because we have almost reached critical mass in terms of the cultural, historic and natural sites that have been inscribed. Although there is no statutory recognition of the sites at present, more effective protection would flow from proactive recognition of the status of these sites in legislation or statutory instruments. There is a lack of recognition of the distinctiveness of not just world heritage sites but the buffer zones surrounding them. In contrast, many buildings, monuments and sites fall within existing statutory designations. However, although they have merit in themselves, some will never aspire to the description of "outstanding universal value".

The number of sites that have been inscribed has reached a critical mass. Talking as I have about the consistency of the Government's approach and the way in which they can support, nurture, improve and preserve the sites, I should like the Government to produce a statement on how they will co-ordinate the discharge of their obligations under the world heritage convention to identify and protect United Kingdom world heritage sites, particularly with the agencies involved and the devolved Administrations in the United Kingdom.

4.1 pm

David Wright (Telford): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Laxton), who raised several issues about world heritage sites, as did my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Jim Knight). We are having a little world heritage site jamboree this afternoon and I do not want to break with that tradition. I welcome the debate, and especially the Minister's opening remarks. I thoroughly enjoyed listening to them; they covered a wide area of tourism policy throughout the country.

The debate is especially significant for my constituency, which contains the Ironbridge Gorge world heritage site. The importance of that site will not be lost on hon. Members: in 1709, Abraham Darby first smelted iron and coke there, and inspired the industrial revolution. The symbol that most people identify with the area is the iron bridge built between 1777 and 1781. The gorge was designated a world heritage site in 1986; it was the first industrial archaeology-based world heritage site so declared, a distinction of which we are proud. It met the UNESCO criteria for designation, the most striking of which is that Ironbridge represents a masterpiece of human genius. If hon. Members ever walk along the gorge and see the fantastic bridge, they will indeed see such a marvel.

People live in the gorge. We must acknowledge that world heritage sites are not dusty old museums that display exhibits, but living communities. Ironbridge has some 4,000 residents who have jobs, shops and houses and use the area as a living environment. We must balance the activities of preserving world heritage sites with the needs of the local communities.

It is also important that we consider the significance of world heritage sites for United Kingdom tourism. Last year, 600,000 people visited the gorge. Having heard about national figures, I am sure that the Minister will agree that that is a phenomenal number of visitors in one location in Shropshire. The local authority estimates that £76 million of expenditure spins off from the site each year, purely in Telford and Wrekin. The site provides important investment by attracting other visitors to Shropshire to visit Shrewsbury, Ludlow and adjoining towns. It is a honeypot site for tourism in Shropshire: 2,500 jobs in Telford and Wrekin are dependent on its success.

I was interested in the Minister's comments about the need to produce a management plan. I can proudly brandish the plan that was produced for the site this year. Obviously, I am pleased to report that we are a bit ahead of the game. I pay tribute to the organisations that have drawn up that management plan, and to Councillor Phil Davis in particular. He has been active locally on the subject of world heritage for many years and is a good friend of mine. He puts an enormous amount of work into preserving the environment of Ironbridge and into moving the debate about world heritage forward.

I am pleased that the heritage plan mentions conserving and improving sites in the gorge. As my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North said, world heritage sites often cover a large geographical area. The gorge is no different. A range of museum sites runs along the span of the gorge along the banks of the River Severn in my constituency. The plan mentions future development, which must be sustainable in order to ensure that not only are museums in the area successful, but so too are the local economy and the environment for jobs and residential purposes.

The plan also refers to improving access. The gorge, by its very nature, is a constricted site. The Minister talked about his interesting adventure in the Canadian Rockies. I would like to walk him up Jiggers bank one day. He would find that it is even steeper than some of the mountains in the Rockies. At times, it is difficult to gain access to the gorge. It still has several industrial uses, so the road network is heavily used by industrial traffic. Tourism and industry are juxtaposed in the gorge—now, as historically. The management plan identifies that as a key issue and considers how to manage visitor throughput and topics such as park-and-ride and transport system management in the area.

Much good local work has been done over many years in improving access. The Ironbridge Gorge museum trust runs a very successful passport scheme for admission to the museums. Visitors pay about £10.50 and can then visit all the sites in the gorge that are in the trust's ownership. It is a non-time-limited pass. Those who purchases a pass in a museum site can return in two, three or four years' time and use it to visit the other sites, too. That is a positive way of handling access and trying to encourage repeat visits to attractions such as the gorge. That is perhaps a tip for other locations and world heritage sites.

There are excellent services in the gorge for people with disabilities. I have already mentioned inter-site transport networks. Tourists arrive at parking sites and then use rolling public transport links to travel between museums. The partnership has done excellent work on the world heritage site management plan and on the management of the gorge. However, the Government should consider three issues on the subject of the ongoing support of world heritage sites, and the gorge in particular.

First, there must be local infrastructure investment. The level of visitor throughput and its significance for the local economy means that there is a large footfall of visitors in a small geographical area. That area needs to be well maintained, attractive and easily accessible, so there are significant pressures on local authority budgets. Local authorities that have world heritage sites in their area receive little recognition of that fact in the

[David Wright]

budget settlements calculated by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. We must consider the impact of world heritage status on local authority budgets. Although world heritage sites are major generators of local income, they also place pressure on local taxpayers, who have to provide servicing for those areas.

Secondly, we need investment from the Environment Agency for England and Wales, particularly in the Ironbridge gorge. No one can get to the sites in the gorge if it is under water, as it quite often is these days. It has a significant flooding problem, which affects tourist business in the area. No one can get into a museum if it is under 6 ft of water. Obviously, associated cleaning, repair and maintenance costs follow from that problem. That is a major disruption to the tourism industry's activities throughout Shropshire. The Minister will know about the problems in Shrewsbury and further down the river towards Bewdley. The gorge is hit especially hard, as the level of the river can rise quickly to damaging levels. Significant recovery expenditure is required for the area, and investment by the Environment Agency for England and Wales is important. Joined-up Government action is required, as other hon. Members have mentioned.

The third issue concerns the potential expansion of subsidised entry for world heritage site facilities throughout the United Kingdom—we have heard from the Minister about that. My hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset said that that may not be important or applicable in some circumstances. However, I would welcome support for subsidised entry to sites such as the Ironbridge gorge, which is one of Shropshire's centrepiece tourist attractions.

I was impressed by the Minister's response to a parliamentary question that I tabled the other day. He said that there has been a 76 per cent. increase in the average number of visitors to the museums and galleries in London that previously charged admission. We as a Government should take credit for that. I am proud of that achievement in respect of our national collections. However, many people find it difficult to access those museums in London because they do not get the chance to come down here. Often, a day out to museums in their region is equally important. We must consider locations other than London.

Ironbridge gorge makes a major contribution to Shropshire's economy. It is an engine house for that economy, as the figures that I mentioned show. With support and assistance, we can make the gorge even more successful and it will continue to be a driving engine behind the local economy to make our area successful well into the future.

4.11 pm

Alan Howarth (Newport, East): It is a great pleasure to join other hon. Members, and especially my hon. Friend the Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting. I congratulate him on getting a share of the portfolio of the Minister for the Arts. After all, being a Minister for the Arts is as great a privilege as any other in the Government. My hon. Friend brings his characteristic no-nonsense approach to politics and policy and his evident personal enthusiasm to his responsibility.

I congratulate the Government on the publication of their policy document, "The Historic Environment: A Force for Our Future". I know that the document spent a little time in gestation—I had some part in its paternity. I am delighted to see it as a strapping infant.

The Government have made that statement with the benefit of advice that the sector offered in "Power of Place", which was a response to the challenge that I gave it during a speech that I made to the English Historic Towns Forum conference in Hereford in November 1999. I invited the sector to join the Government in a comprehensive review of heritage policy, because it was more than time that that took place. The findings of the process have been extremely instructive, and the process itself had the utmost value, because a variety of organisations, bodies and interests joined in throughout the country. It was educative, and developed public awareness of crucial issues for the heritage in a way that can only be for the good.

I thank English Heritage for the part that it played in leading the process, and the other major participants: the heritage lottery fund, the National Trust, the Historic Houses Association, the National Amenity Societies, the Civic Trust and many others.

In my speech in Hereford, I tried to put my finger on why heritage matters. I said:

> "The contribution of the historic environment to contemporary life is as wide-ranging as it is profound. Historic buildings and other survivals of the past are a source of sustained pleasure, whether we are consciously studying them or simply allowing them to serve as the backdrop to our daily lives. They stand as a record of artistic and technical achievement in every conceivable medium and an inspiration to creativity in our own age and for the future. They are a potent educational tool, providing insight into virtually every aspect of our long history. And, at a still deeper level, they are a focus of our identity as a nation, an expression of continuity and stability to sustain us as we respond to the challenge of a new millennium. We cannot move forward into the future with assurance unless we know who we are and from where we have come. To be aware of the significance of the heritage and acknowledge our responsibility for protecting it is evidence of our maturity as a society."

We have in Britain a national love affair with the heritage, with all the confused emotions that are liable to play their part in a love affair. There is something of a boom in nostalgia. We sometimes seem to have become a nation of genealogists and metal detectorists. We have an insatiable enthusiasm for Merchant Ivory films and flea markets. For 20 years I lived just off the Portobello road and watched the growth of that extraordinary phenomenon. It was almost a compulsion on the part of increasingly more people to pay increasingly crazier prices for a piece of the past. It seems that the more intensive the processes and experience of change for us in the modern world, the more urgently we feel the need to connect with the past. I take nothing but pleasure in the remarkable public response to the opportunity afforded by heritage open days.

I sometimes worry, however, about what is almost a caricature vision of England, of herbaceous borders and warm beer—George Orwell treated the warm beer with irony, but I believe that John Major really liked the stuff—Batsford books, the jury system, the House of Lords; perhaps I had better not go too far down that track. Nostalgia and escapism are innocent, but every now and again there is a touch of the neurotic in the national discussion about heritage. We note the panic of the dispossessed when Radio 4 schedules are altered or the format of *The Times* is changed.

I deprecate experts who browbeat the public and pedants whose learning is tinged with paranoia—a poor substitute for the scholarship, authenticity and craftsmanship that should inform our approach to the heritage. There is sometimes a danger that attitudes to the heritage can be divisive and that the vision can be differentiated too much by class and involve possessive manipulation of the national identity. The challenge for my right hon. and hon. Friends is to support the development of a heritage for everyone, to enable us to be a one heritage nation.

My speech at Hereford concluded with a challenge to the sector, asking how we could do more to ensure that a new generation of young people will claim the heritage as their own. An important poll that English Heritage commissioned in the context of the "Power of Place" exercise found some disturbing information. Three in four people surveyed thought that the contribution that black and Asian people had made to our national heritage was not adequately represented in the conventional presentation of the heritage. The proportion of black and Asian people who held that view was considerably higher. Our engagement with the heritage should enable us all to recollect and become better integrated as a society and should help regeneration in not merely physical and economic but cultural and social terms. The heritage should point us as much to the future as to the past.

I applaud the Government's statement in "A Force for Our Future", and I applaud the Minister's speech. The tone of both was generous and the range comprehensive. Of course there are details to be filled out, but it is encouraging that the document has been produced with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in the lead on behalf of the Government as a whole. Important elements of the document have been contributed by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and other Departments that have a part to play in meeting the Government's heritage responsibilities, such as the Ministry of Defence.

I am pleased that the document confirms that the Government will continue their innovation that there should be ministerial champions in Departments across Whitehall—champions with responsibility not only for architecture and design within their individual Departments, but with extended responsibility that takes account of the heritage and the green environment. That is a commitment on behalf of the whole of Government, with Ministers across a wide range of Departments tasked to meet their heritage responsibilities.

In the document, the past is not opposed to the present. It pleases me that English Heritage and the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment are working well together. Together, they have a role to play in promoting a high-quality national debate, in improving our national education with regard to the heritage and in encouraging our people to insist on the very best.

I hope that the work of the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment will assist our generation in creating a new heritage that future generations will take great pride in. When we were establishing the commission, I inquired about the public sector's annual spend on building. Two years or so ago, it was £24 billion. That is an enormous sum, and it offers a huge opportunity for good—or for bad.

The document and my hon. Friend's speech make clear the Government's commitment, in the context of the heritage, to education, social inclusion and the promotion of the creative economy. It is pleasing that the document puts such great emphasis on the educational work of heritage bodies—after all, education should be intellectual access to the heritage.

English Heritage is enabling more than 500,000 school children a year to visit its properties free of charge on curriculum-based trips. It is also playing its part on the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. The National Trust tells us that 600,000 or more children visit its properties. I also commend the educational work of the Royal Parks Agency and the Historic Houses Association, among other bodies.

The Government rightly take pride in their commitment to the creative partnerships programme: a substantial investment of £40 million is being made in 16 disadvantaged areas of the country to enable all the different cultural organisations and presences to make a better contribution to educational opportunity for people in those areas. I also hope that culture online will become a reality, because the use of new technology provides us with important opportunities—as the hon. Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey) has reminded us.

On social inclusion, I am pleased that the document states that a further document is to be produced by the Department on the built and historic environment, following its excellent publications on libraries and museums and social inclusion.

I also join the Government in paying tribute to the work of voluntary organisations in the heritage sector. Without the work of volunteers, we would have very little access to the heritage. It is pleasing that, as a development from the work of those involved in "Power of Place", a heritage link—a network of voluntary organisations—is being developed.

Several hon. Members have spoken about the importance of access to the heritage for disabled people. The disability rights taskforce—which I had the good fortune to be able to set up in 1997—and the Disability Rights Commission are attaching great importance to that. Heritage institutions and organisations need not be nervous about the requirements that they are expected to meet by 2004. The example that my hon. Friend the Minister gave of his trip up Johnson's canyon shows what one can do if one tries, using a little imagination, energy and skill.

The lottery distributors have been an extremely beneficial force. Since the beginning of their history, they have rightly insisted that it should be a condition of lottery funding that the projects that benefit from it provide access for disabled people.

Miss McIntosh: The right hon. Gentleman is in the unique position of having had experience on both sides

[Miss McIntosh]

of the House. I am sure that he will join me in recognising that that was a Conservative contribution, the importance of which the Minister has admitted.

Alan Howarth: Absolutely. That is on the historical record, and the hon. Lady is entitled to draw our attention to it.

Can the Minister say whether English Heritage has picked up on my suggestion that it might be a good idea to offer prizes for the design of the physical aspects of access to heritage properties? There has been nervousness because it is seen as difficult to provide physical access in a style consistent with the heritage character or aesthetic quality of the property in question. I think that that fear is misplaced, but it would be helpful for English Heritage to offer examples of good practice, as I am sure it is doing, and encourage the development of good practice by offering prizes or some other recognition. Perhaps we might see something about that in the updated version of "Easy Access to Historic Properties". I congratulate the Historic Houses Association on its disability grant scheme. I am pleased that it is a member of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport's social inclusion working party.

Inhibitions on what my right hon. and hon. Friends at the DCMS are able to do derive mainly from the historic limitations on the Department's remit and budget. Several colleagues have mentioned this afternoon the Government's achievement in enabling free entry to the national museums and galleries. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) seemed to be a touch grudging on that subject. It was a civilised move, which has started to work very well. It was a passion of the former Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). He deserves to be remembered as a great Secretary of State, but perhaps would want to be remembered for that achievement, above all.

I would like to praise others by name in connection with free entry to the national museums and galleries, including Sir Denis Mahon, a passionate campaigner for that and one of the country's great benefactors in his promise to donate pictures to the nation. The National Art Collections Fund campaigned vigorously for free entry and fully supported what we sought to do. It, too, during 100 years of history, has been an extraordinarily important benefactor to the nation. I also single out for special praise Ms Helen Donoghue, our adviser. She devised the technical scheme that, after many rigours, we were finally able to persuade the Treasury was acceptable and would work by way of modification of the value added tax regime. I should be delighted if, as the document suggests might be possible, free entry could be achieved to English Heritage properties, but such things are expensive.

I say to my right hon. and hon. Friends who are already thinking and negotiating hard over the new comprehensive spending review that it is the turn of the heritage and our museums and galleries to get a good crack of the whip. We have done very well for the arts and we must build on what has been achieved there. However, I would dearly love to see us do more in real terms to improve public funding for the heritage, museums and galleries.

Parts of the heritage have not traditionally been the responsibility of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and it has not been funded to support them. What I want to say is in no sense a criticism of the Department but rather a statement of a problem. I think that we have yet to develop convincing policy on how local government can have better capacity to carry out its cultural responsibilities, which is crucial. We initiated local authority cultural strategies, and my memory may play me false, but I think that there is little, if anything, on that subject in "The Historic Environment: A Force for Our Future". Local authority cultural strategies will enable a better cohesion and integration of effort by local authorities in areas of policy that have an important bearing on culture, but they will still need to be funded.

Meanwhile, we have an important study, "Renaissance in the Regions: A New Vision for England's Museums", produced by Lord Evans of Temple Guiting and a group of colleagues commissioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury. It is a new vision for England's museums. It is a pretty gritty and in many respects cheerless document, but it is an extremely important statement. I wanted that exercise carried out. Throughout my time at the Department, I was concerned about the relative impoverishment of local authorities, and their inadequate ability to provide the support that they needed and wanted to provide for their own museums and galleries.

"Renaissance in the Regions" notes that there are 1,860 registered museums in this country—I am not speaking of the national museums and galleries. Some are quite brilliant and have been splendidly supported by their local authorities. Some have been enabled by the lottery to achieve some exciting developments. Some are already proving to be catalysts for regeneration in their communities. The new gallery at Walsall has become legendary in that regard, and what Peter Jenkinson and the local authority in Walsall have done—as Councillor George Gill has done in Gateshead—shows what can be achieved where there is real vision, determination and ingenuity.

However, local authorities are experiencing great difficulty in doing what they would like to do. The Department was able to give some support in the regions. The designation challenge fund for museums was established in 1999, to provide £15 million over three years and has supported 62 collections throughout the country. Some very fruitful programmes have been funded by the Department for Education and Employment—now the Department for Education and Skills—achieving a great deal on the basis of good value for money. It is a caricature to contrast metropolitan brilliance with regional dinginess. Heaven knows, some of the metropolitan, national museums and galleries are still not finding life easy, and there have been brilliant achievements in the regions. However, there is an element of truth in that caricature.

"Renaissance in the Regions" reports that total core revenue funding provided by local authorities to museums and galleries in 1999-2000 was £118 million. That was the same in real terms as in 1995-96. According to the study, the total contribution by local authorities in 2000-01 was £219 million. That is not insignificant funding, but it is not nearly enough. "Renaissance in the

Regions" states the problems of the sector. There is fragmentation of effort and good practice is not being sustained. Because of the miserable salaries of staff in museums and galleries, it is difficult to sustain expertise and scholarship. There is no money for collecting, and there is all too little money for information and communication technology.

"Renaissance in the Regions" proposes the creation of a network of regional hubs: museums identified to become regional centres. It calls for investment via Resource for three years to enable those hubs to develop their capacity and strategic plans. The report proposes that the strategy should be supported by the lottery, foundations and the private sector. It says that the total sum that is required to fulfil the strategy is £267.2 million, not all from central Government. On top of that, additional money would be needed to give better support to area museums councils, for designated collections, to national museums and galleries to enable them to do more in partnership with regional museums and galleries, and to local authorities.

How, then, are we to fund local authorities to enable them better to undertake their responsibilities in the cultural dimension? They are under implacable pressure to spend more on social services, schools and police. Politically, it is practically impossible to raise council tax to find extra money for other projects, because of the gearing effect. Of course, shrewd local authorities invest where they can, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Jim Knight) said, but how can we strengthen their position?

Some people have proposed that there should be a standard spending assessment for culture. However, my friends in local government tell me that that is not a good idea: if local authorities are expected to spend an indicative amount on culture, those few authorities that are spending at a high level, perhaps more than indicated by the SSA, would come under pressure to spend down to the SSA, but the system would not compel authorities that are spending less to spend up. Should we introduce a statutory obligation on local authorities to support their museums and galleries in the way that they are required to support their libraries, as some have suggested? That is tempting, but as the history of our public library system during the past 30 or 40 years shows, the existence of a statutory obligation by no means guarantees spending on a sufficient scale.

The Department has been a victim of Treasury brutalism. To put it crudely, when we raised the issue, we were told that money for the DCMS would have to be cut if we wanted money for local authorities to support culture in their areas. It is a tragedy that the Treasury has operated a vendetta against local authority spending for so many years—since the mid-1970s, certainly. I do not believe that there would be any inflationary consequences in allowing local authorities, which are accountable to their electors, to make judgments about what they spend. As a principle of democracy, they should have that freedom.

In the main, the libraries and museums in our regional towns and cities were the product of the great age of municipal government pre-1914, when central Government did not presume to dictate to local government what it might or might not do. Be that as it may, we are in the situation that we are in—but I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will find a way to crack the problem.

To assist local authorities to take better care of the built heritage in their areas, I proposed that a fund should be created to which local authorities would submit bids for money to support heritage maintenance work—heritage housekeeping—all over the country, not only in the famous heritage towns and cities such as York, Bath and Winchester. They are wonderful places, but fine historic urban fabric in many other towns and cities as well is becoming tatty and is decaying because it is not possible for local authorities to provide grants to support refurbishment, and because private owners do not see that such work is necessary or sufficiently in their interest.

I believe that local authorities are eligible to bid for money from a £50 million fund provided for environmental projects from the new opportunities fund. My hon. Friend the Minister will correct me if that is wrong. That is a pathetically small sum, if we consider the number of local authorities in the country and the other calls on the fund. I do not think that it is referred to in "The Historic Environment: A Force for Our Future" but I should like to encourage my hon. Friend to secure a large increase in funding either from the new opportunities fund or from elsewhere.

In the document, the Government exhort local authorities to spend. They commend "character assessment", and they strongly commend the development of management plans for historic visitor attractions. My hon. Friends the Members for South Dorset, for Telford (David Wright) and for Derby, North (Mr. Laxton) have spoken eloquently of the needs of the world heritage sites that they are proud to have in their areas. Developing those management plans is not cost free, and their implementation is certainly not cost free.

We are told that English Heritage is going to issue advice to local authorities on the care of heritage in their ownership. The heritage lottery fund has similarly noted that local authorities need to make a long-term commitment to the sustainability of heritage attractions. If access is to be maintained and improved there will be revenue consequences. As the heritage lottery fund reminds us, the lottery is not in a position to meet those liabilities, although there is an intriguing reference in "The Historic Environment: A Force for Our Future" to the heritage lottery fund combining revenue and capital elements in applications. I would be fascinated if the Minister were to tell us more about that.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has many partners. Indeed, its success and effectiveness depend on its collaboration with other Departments, institutions that operate at arm's length, and of course independent institutions. The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions planning Green Paper tells us that there will be a review of the case for integrating the present array of planning controls into a single regime. I hope that the DCMS emerges from that process as the continuing champion of heritage. If it is not in the thick of the process, there are risks that other pressures will operate to the detriment of heritage.

[Alan Howarth]

I shall say a brief word about university museums and galleries. "Renaissance in the Regions" notes that the Arts and Humanities Research Board is investing twice as much as the area museum councils, which are short of money for that purpose, in university museums and galleries. That is an area in which we need collective decision making by the Government. The Department for Education and Skills is in the lead because we are discussing university museums and galleries, but I hope that my hon. Friends at the DCMS will do their best to ensure that the necessary assistance is provided. Our universities hold some of the country's great collections, and I should particularly like the VAT concession, which has already been extended to national museums and galleries to enable free entry, to be extended to universities. Technically that would not be difficult, because the schedule could be added to; it is a question of political will.

I shall say a word about our historic houses in private ownership. When I entered the DCMS in 1998, the atmosphere between the Treasury and the Historic Houses Association was edgy. As my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) reminded us, it is a bedrock principle that, where grant or tax relief is provided, the quid pro quo must be access. There have been cases of abuse of conditional exemption by a small number of private owners. In the nether reaches of the Treasury, however, I found that a bit of the old class war was still going on. My hon. Friend the Minister would never countenance anything of this kind, but the Inland Revenue was adopting a crude, counter-productive attitude.

I sought to make the atmosphere more friendly and practical, and I appreciated the tribute that my hon. Friend the Minister paid to the private owners of our historic houses, which are one of the great glories of our heritage, for their architecture, their settings, their contents and their history. They are also a massively important asset to the tourism economy. They are significant employers. We cannot overstate the importance of tourism to the economy. The miserable events of last year underline that. Equally, we cannot overstate the importance of our historic houses to tourism. According to the British Tourist Authority, 73 per cent. of foreign tourists say that they want to visit historic houses. In 1999-2000 there were some 10.5 million visitors to these houses and many more to their grounds and other attractions.

The Historic Houses Association estimates that privately owned historic houses contribute some £1.6 billion to the tourism economy, but the owners face huge problems in maintaining their homes, which must be maintained to the highest standard. I do not know how many hon. Members, perhaps 20 years ago, saw an exhibition at the Victoria and Albert museum called "The Destruction of the English Country House". It told a dreadful story. Our generation must take the necessary steps to ensure that this great national treasure is properly conserved. As it is, some 26 per cent. of major repairs to historic houses are funded from sales of works of art. Only the other day, the Marquis of Bath announced that he would have to sell works of art at Longleat to set up a maintenance fund. That can be done once, twice, and in some houses even three times, but what a terrible shame. If we continue down that track we will destroy what it is that tourists come to enjoy.

As we all know from our own household experience, it costs far more to repair and refurbish if a property is allowed to deteriorate. Then one has to rescue it. Because of the difficulties last year with foot and mouth and the American economy, quite a few owners of historic houses have had to defer repairs. We need to address that problem pretty urgently and energetically.

I am sure that it is accepted by both Government and Opposition that the private owner has a special understanding and commitment. He lives in the property. The fact that it is a lived-in house gives it a special character and makes people want to visit it. I wonder whether there is scope for the heritage lottery fund to relax its tough line on support for private owners of historic houses. Something has to be done to help. Grant aid covers only 10 per cent. of major repairs. I am advised that the English Heritage grant scheme has been suspended. One estate election, which was not originally designed for that purpose, but was the principal fiscal relief assisting maintenance, has been removed.

There is, so far, no VAT concession on repairs to secular buildings, but I am pleased to see that in "A Force for Our Future" the Government say that they will carefully consider the recommendation in "Power of Place" that there should be a single VAT rate of 5 per cent. on all building works. I am sure that that is right. It is certainly logical. The DCMS will need to box pretty clever to achieve it, though. It will be difficult politically. "A Force for Our Future" is less explicit on the problems of historic houses than is "Power of Place", but it is good to read that the Government fully endorse the increasing importance attached to the preventive maintenance of historic fabric.

If we accept that there is a public interest in the conservation of our historic houses, it follows that we must find better ways in public policy to support their conservation. Grants from the heritage lottery fund and English Heritage will be important, but the Government must introduce a new tax regime to help owners bear the cost of routine maintenance. That is the pattern that we find across most European countries. We must find a way to preserve these national assets without allowing an inappropriate private gain.

I am encouraged that following "Power of Place" a working group from the sector, the CBI and the Treasury is constructively examining the problem. We have come a long way from the atmosphere that prevailed in 1998 and it would be timely if changes could now be introduced. Because of the difficulties facing tourism, the conservation of our heritage assets is an essential national investment. Even for a capped amount of £10 million, a great deal could be done to transform the position for owners who act as stewards—wonderful stewards—for this part of our national heritage. Much as I applaud the Government's commitment to marketing our heritage to tourists throughout the world, we had better look after what we are marketing.

I have tested the patience of the Chamber, but I must also emphasise that churches and cathedrals are among the glories of our national heritage. I was surprised—almost scandalised—to read in *The Times* of last Saturday that the Archbishop of Canterbury was reported to have said:

> "It is scandalous that we"—

the Church of England—

> "have to pay so much for buildings we have inherited on behalf of the nation."

Well, they are the property of the Church, and it is treated more favourably than some other owners.

It is fair to recognise that the Government described vividly and poignantly to the European Commission the predicament faced by small congregations when asked to cope with the large costs of restoration of the church fabric. My hon. Friend the Paymaster General wrote to the Commission proposing that there should be a reduction of VAT to 5 per cent. on repair bills to listed places of worship. However, according to *The Times*, the archbishop seemed to doubt whether that was really a matter for the European Union, and asked

> "What is £100 million to the Government?"

That attitude is a little cavalier, given that £100 million is a lot to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, as it is to most Departments faced with all the demands for public expenditure on good causes. It may be an error in reporting, but the archbishop was not reported as referring to the charitable relief on donations made by individuals or others to church maintenance funds.

The Times suggested that only as an afterthought did the archbishop acknowledge the Government's interim scheme to return in grant aid the difference in costs between VAT at 17.5 per cent. and VAT at 5 per cent. I note that the Department estimates that that is worth £30 million, while the archbishop said that it is worth only £10 million. Those are estimates, but whatever the amount, such a proposal was a generous and creative initiative by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and I hope that the churches acknowledge it as such.

I draw the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister to quality. How can we ensure that the repairs to our listed churches will be of an adequate standard? In the mid-19th century, funding and enthusiasm for the repair and restoration of churches were relatively abundant, but too many of our Victorian forebears did hideous things. How will the DCMS and English Heritage ensure that, in the rush to get the work done in this window of opportunity from 2001 to 2003, shoddy and inappropriate work is not carried out to the precious fabric of our churches and cathedrals?

In addition to their physical fabric, our churches and cathedrals' musical heritage is precious to many of us and has been extraordinarily fruitful. When I was Minister for the Arts, I discussed the matter with a brace of deans of the Church of England and found that the Arts Council of England needed a little prodding to engage its interest. I believe that prodding is permissible under the arm's length principle and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to say that progress has been made or that he will administer a further prod himself.

It is easy for Back Benchers and ex-Ministers to state problems; it is for present Ministers to negotiate solutions. There is a first-rate ministerial team at the Department. I applaud the Government's vision in the document, their recognition of the diversity of our heritage, their affirmation of its profound value and their acceptance of their fundamental responsibility to support its perpetuation and to make possible improved access to it.

4.54 pm

Miss McIntosh [illegible] am pleased to sum up on behalf of the Opposition. It is appropriate that this debate is held during the year of the golden jubilee. It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Newport, East (Alan Howarth), who obviously feels for his departure from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport after contributing so much while he was there.

We heard much about world heritage sites during the debate, and especially the Jurassic coast. I regret that the "Jurassic Park" expert, the hon. Member for South Dorset (Jim Knight), is no longer present.

In the general election campaign, the Conservative party pledged to create a jubilee fund to support churches, and community and village halls. I shall respond to points that were made by the right hon. Member for Newport, East and the hon. Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey). I am sure that hon. Members and the Minister know about my ongoing campaign in both the European Parliament and the House, where I have persistently questioned the Second Church Estates Commissioner on the vexed question of the VAT rate for new build being different from that for repairs. I am mindful that the Chancellor said in a statement that grants would be given to make up the difference. I am sorry, but that is not good enough, because the situation costs our churches an enormous amount.

An article in *The Independent* on 14 December 2001 welcomed the publication of "The Historic Environment: A Force for Our Future", although it stated that a specific question remained. It said:

> "the report falls short of a commitment to resolving one of the biggest problems raised by the heritage lobby—the imposition of 17.5 per cent. VAT on repairs to old buildings—from which new building work is exempt."

I stand by the questions that I asked the Minister during my introductory remarks, and I am sure that he will have had time to show me where the Vale of York entries are on the map.

I am sure that the House will be interested by the charges for entry to churches and cathedrals. At present, no church in the north charges for admission. However, as I said earlier, York minster is considering charging. Canterbury cathedral charges £3.50 for adults and £2.50 for children and concessions. St. Paul's cathedral charges £5.50 for adults, £4.50 for concessions and £2.50 for children. Westminster abbey charges £6 for adults, although concessionaries and children may enter for free. I urge the Minister to make urgent representations to the Chancellor on my point.

Of course, we have not heard from the hon. Member for Battersea (Martin Linton) this afternoon, although he made an interesting contribution during our debate on the Line of Route. He said:

> "The reason why we believe in free access to museums is the same as the reason why we believe in free access to information and knowledge: museums and galleries are there to inform. The

same principle has never been applied to heritage sites...There is a difference in principle."—[*Official Report*, 31 January 2002; Vol. 379, c. 508.]

Will the Minister confirm that there has been a substantial change of policy since that debate?

I have enjoyed our debate. The Jurassic coast expert—the hon. Member for South Dorset—referred to BP. I declare an interest, because I served an Industry and Parliament Trust fellowship with BP, and I had the pleasure of visiting Poole during that. There is an impressive operation there, and the contribution that companies such as BP make to our heritage and environment should be greatly appreciated. We should recognise the emphasis that we should place on transport and available accommodation.

The access to quality projects was referred to by both the right hon. Member for Newport, East and the hon. Member for North Devon. I endorse their comments wholeheartedly. The hon. Member for Derby, North (Mr. Laxton) called for a comprehensive management plan, and there is some sense in that. The House will bow to his experience in local government and to his suggestions for opening up heritage sites in that way. The hon. Member for Telford (David Wright), who told us that we were having a world heritage site jamboree this afternoon, referred to flooding in the gorge. I sympathise, having had experience of such problems. Most of Vale of York seems to have been built on a flood plain, and all too often we have floods that destroy tourism.

Tourism is big business, as the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport has said. It employs 2.1 million people in the United Kingdom, and contributes £75 billion to our economy. As the Minister and other hon. Members said, and as I am painfully aware from the experience of my husband's business, the events of 11 September, the flooding of November 2000, the foot and mouth crisis and—in my part of the world—the two disasters on the railways on the east coast have had a mega-impact on attracting foreign visitors. I hope that any initiative that the Government take will help to restore our confidence, which has been damaged. Graphic pictures were shown in our media and then fed to foreign media, and that alone showed the lack of confidence in the industry. Anything that can be done to restore confidence is welcome, and the British Tourist Authority is making tremendous efforts in that regard.

The right hon. Member for Newport, East paid tribute to the work of owners of private houses and country homes. The Minister and I both sat on the Committee that debated a statutory instrument on the future of Apsley house. During today's debate, it came to my attention that Mr. Compton, the new owner of Newby hall in my constituency, would also add his weight to my plea for representations to be made to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to give historic buildings the fiscal relief that we all recognise is so urgently needed for their maintenance.

No one is asking the Government to intervene in circumstances such as those of Mr. Compton, but private house owners are the caretakers of our national heritage for the future. It is not just the Historic Houses Association and private owners but, as hon. Members have said, English Heritage, the National Trust and many other organisations that keep our national heritage for future generations.

I referred earlier to the Thomas the Tank Engine exhibition at York's national railway museum. I hope that the Minister understands the anomaly in that case; the museum felt moved to introduce charges two months after admission prices were scrapped because Thomas the Tank Engine was a major, costly exhibition and was going to cost £250,000. The museum had to cater for the sheer volume of visitors and the extra cleaning, maintenance and staffing involved. It recognised that, generally, loss of income from adult tickets would be compensated by the Government, but it was allowed to charge on that occasion.

I should like to join in congratulating those responsible for working towards opening up our heritage to visitors. I leave the Minister with the thought that there will be an impact on sites that would be made free to certain categories—children and others—under his proposals. In particular, we must ponder the future of our churches and other magnificent buildings which future generations should enjoy.

5.3 pm

Dr. Howells: We have had an excellent and informative debate, which was much longer than I thought it would be. I have learned a great deal. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Arts, Baroness Blackstone, as the issues under discussion are her ministerial responsibilities. She took over from my right hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Alan Howarth), who was Minister for the Arts until June 2001, and, shortly, I will try to deal with some of the issues that he raised.

The hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) was grudging about the effect of free entry to museums. I was going to read her a long official response to that, but I have decided not to do so. Instead, I will say that I came from a town that did not possess a museum or an art gallery, but I was passionately interested in art, and I discovered and developed that interest because I could walk to the national museum of Wales—which was 22 miles south of where I lived—to see one of the greatest collections of impressionist paintings in the world, the Gwendoline Davies bequest. That inspired me, and it must also have inspired thousands of kids like me.

I am sure that all the hon. Members who are present could tell similar stories. Such exposure to something that is different and fine and lasting—that is an example of creative excellence—is an invaluable lesson to all of us. It adds richness to our lives in a way that hardly anything else can.

We can deal with the technicalities of cost, and we can discuss whether we can persuade the Treasury—as my right hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East urges us to do—that experiences such as that which I described are food for the soul. As he said, when we look back and try to understand what we have inherited, that which we deem to be valuable is often a result of pursuits that were not highly regarded at the time they were produced.

I have been appalled at some of the things that my Government have done—and that they did even when I was a Minister in the Department—with regard to stressing the need for utilitarianism in the way we educate our children. I do not agree that, somehow, maths is more important than art, or English is more important than dramatic expression or dance or music. Often, we measure past societies with regard to their artistic achievements—and we consider them to be at least as important as their scientific or engineering achievements.

Miss McIntosh: I did not wish the Minister or his right hon. Friend to think that I am being grudging. The tone of my comments can be put down to my being a canny, cautious Scot who, at the end of the day, wants to know what the bottom line is.

I was brought up 25 miles from Darlington, where Stephenson's Rocket was on display, as Darlington to Stockton was its original route, and I was greatly disappointed when it was moved to the national railway museum in York—even though that is closer to where I am now based.

Dr. Howells: Absolutely; I agree with the hon. Lady's sentiments.

I return to some of the points made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East—he made so many of them that I have about eight pages of notes.

I have forgotten how my right hon. Friend described the sense of preciousness, but I will try to remember. He called it a kind of paranoia. He described our paranoia about change as a touch of the neurotic. That is true, but it is curious that that sense of paranoia also has a valuable edge.

The hon. Member for Vale of York talked about railways. I was born and raised nearby the world's first industrial railway.

Miss McIntosh: Darlington to Stockton was the first.

Dr. Howells: No. That is yet another English imperialist fib. The first industrial railway ran from Abercynon to Merthyr Tydfil. It was built by a Cornishman—Richard Trevithick. He brought the iron down from the blast furnaces of Merthyr to Abercynon, from where it was carried by canal to Cardiff.

My hon. Friend the Member for Telford (David Wright) and I could have a row about where the first industrial site in the world was. I suspect that it was probably on the outskirts of Cairo, or whatever it was called in those days. As far as Britain is concerned, it was probably Merthyr. He will not agree with me, of course.

I appreciate what the hon. Member for Vale of York says. Whatever we do about free entry, we must ensure that it is sustainable. The worst thing in the world would be for us to take it away now that it has been introduced. She is right. We must measure it and prove that it is having a big effect on the numbers of people who visit museums. If it encourages people from the parts of our society who at the moment do not visit museums and galleries, we must consider that carefully, because I am worried about that.

This afternoon we heard some wonderful contributions, in particular about the natural and the built industrial environment. Historic tramways have been tarmacked over in my own patch. What I received as a result of what my parents, grandparents and great-grandparents told me about the significance of piles of stones and rocks is gone or going from collective memory, because of philistinism. We have great people in local government, but we have others who cannot understand why we should pay any attention to such matters. As a result, such places have become not sites of heritage but places to dump stolen, burnt-out cars and to fly-tip, and the piles of stones have no historic significance. That is an enormous tragedy.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East drew attention to the exhibition at the V and A that took place at least 20 years ago. We are both a bit long in the tooth now, but I remember it well. It was about a great tragedy, and it opened my eyes to the way in which, from the 1890s onwards, Americans came over, bought our heritage and took it back with them, because their economy was booming. As the excellent representatives of the Historic Houses Association explained to me yesterday, they did so because of the drop in farm prices, which is interesting, considering current circumstances.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Jim Knight) has gone to speak in the debate on environmental taxation, which is important, as I am sure his neighbour, the hon. Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire), would agree. My hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset referred to ensuring access to the natural historical environment, and he is right. He drew to our attention important points about the need for transportation systems that do not damage the environment that we are trying to protect. He also made some interesting comments about how it might be possible to raise the standard of accommodation, something that troubles me greatly. We have some of the best hotels in the world in this country, but we also have a long tail of underperformers. We are about to spend a huge amount on marketing Britain abroad, and England inside Britain. We cannot afford to persuade people to come here, and British people to spend a weekend at a hotel, perhaps somewhere near Ironbridge, and for them to get a bad deal. That would be squandering money. They are used to asking the travel agent for a four-star hotel in Lanzarote, and more or less knowing what they are going to get.

As ever, the hon. Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey) made a thoughtful contribution. As he knows, I believe that north Devon is one of the most wonderful parts of Europe. It has the most marvellous scenery. To go somewhere such as Lundy—I do not know whether he represents Lundy—which has a very nice boozer and some good heritage beer is to go to a place that is full of history. It is an extraordinary spot, where much good work has gone on. The hon. Gentleman has properly talked, as did other hon. Members, about the Historic Houses Association. He might like to know that DCMS is now in the process of appointing the Earl of Leicester to the English Heritage Commission. To ensure that the voice of the Historic Houses Association is heard first-hand in the agencies and chambers where decisions are made is one way of moving forward.

The hon. Member for North Devon drew our attention to something very important: the increasing access afforded by putting some of our great collections online. That is terrific and it is tremendous to see so many museums, agencies and galleries doing it. The hon. Gentleman may disagree with me—I increasingly sound like a raving reactionary, the older I get—if I say that there is something wonderful about standing in

[Dr. Howells]

front of the real thing. I went to see the American Sublime exhibition at Tate Britain. To stand in front of a painting 12 ft wide by 5 ft high is something else. It is not the same thing even to have a 6 ft flat screen. However, I know what the hon. Gentleman means, and it will be great for young people, schools, colleges, researchers and those who cannot get to galleries to have collections online.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Laxton) gave a wonderful description of the Derwent Valley Mills world heritage site. It is a wonderful area, superb for anyone interested in industrial archaeology and architecture. I know the importance of the lobbying work that he and so many others did on that.

My hon. Friend made an eloquent plea for co-ordinating a consistent approach across Government Departments in ensuring, albeit on a site-by-site basis, access to and protection of heritage sites, both built and natural. He was quite right about that and I shall ensure that his contribution in today's debate is brought to the attention of colleagues in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and other relevant Departments. As he asks, we take very seriously the discharge of our obligations, and the world heritage site status that means that the UK is answerable internationally for the preservation of our sites. He is right to raise that matter, but we do not take the responsibility lightly.

My hon. Friend the Member for Telford mentioned the Ironbridge Gorge world heritage site, which I think was the first in Britain. That was a great achievement. The iron bridge is a masterpiece of human genius. I think that it is as wonderful a bridge as has ever been built anywhere in the world. It laid the way to the excellence in design that was mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East and has inspired generations of designers, architects and engineers.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East mentioned the large numbers of visitors coming to our sites and the need for a proper, sustainable approach in developing and protecting them. Unlike anyone else in the debate, he spoke about the problems of living on such a site. What I found most attractive about Ironbridge is the fact that people live there. It is very much a living environment, as is the Dorset coast. In a sense, the conflict between ensuring that people can lead productive lives and ensuring that somehow they can have a relationship with the environment that does not endanger it is a tension that is to be welcomed and not held back. I would hate to see the depopulation of those areas. The hon. Member for Vale of York and my right hon. Friend reminded us of the dangers of flooding. We must think about that when we work out revenue requirements to ensure that protection is sustained.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East brought his great experience as Minister for the Arts to the debate, and he was as thoughtful and incisive as ever. He challenged us to think about many issues, none of which was more important than a comment that he threw out at the beginning of his contribution. He said that we should have ministerial champions for architecture and design, and that such champions should roam across Departments challenging whether what we are doing enhances British, and world, design and architecture. He is absolutely right. All of us in the Chamber are debating the excellence of bygone ages, which is the truth of the matter.

Look at our lifetimes—I am probably older than my right hon. Friend, judging by the look of his hair—and see the dreadful mess that we have made of some of our urban centres. That was driven by the most awful kind of utilitarianism and notions that assumed that somehow society would take care of itself. The great debates about quality of life in society dropped away, along with architectural and design criteria such as excellence, beauty, the sublime and architecture and design's relationship with the environment within which they exist. Those ideas became so unfashionable for such a long time that the philistines triumphed, but their triumph has not been permanent.

We have seen real changes in the past 15 years. I remember being castigated 13 years ago for standing up in the House and saying that I hoped that Wales would not end up looking like Reading, West. Every time I had driven up from south Wales along the M4, I had seen an ever spreading red presence of what looked like Noddy architecture. The next thing I knew I was summoned to Reading by Reading city council, which sharply informed me that it was Labour controlled. It asked whether I had ever set foot in Reading. It took me around and showed me what it was doing with the canalsides and riversides, and how it was desperately trying to ensure that Reading became a good place to live. It has done some great things there. That taught me never to judge a town from the motorway.

I hoped that my comments would spark a great debate about not only what we have done to our town centres but how we design our suburbs and communities. We have a long way to go, and we are probably still driven by a utilitarian desire to build the most for the least amount of money, rather than concentrating on the quality of people's lives.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East mentioned a staggering figure, which I did not know, saying that the Government spend £24 billion a year on building.

Miss McIntosh: May I momentarily drag the Minister back from Reading to respond to the point that several right hon. and hon. Members have raised about the Historic Houses Association and the vexed question of tax?

Dr. Howells: I am sorry if I have been rambling. I was starting to enjoy the debate. It reminded me of the days when I was in opposition and we used to talk things out.

Just before I come to that, I wish to comment on the suggestion by my right hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East that English Heritage should offer prizes for designs to improve access to heritage properties. That is an excellent idea. I have not heard anything about it, nor have I been advised that the Department knows about it, but I will certainly follow it up. It sounds like a very good scheme. He also paid tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) for the sterling work that he did, such as ensuring free access to museums.

On historic houses—I have to jump past several pages of notes that I took during the debate—I understand that the heritage lottery fund has been consulting about that and other issues in preparing a new strategic plan for 2002-07, which will be laid before Parliament at the end of April. We look forward to seeing the heritage lottery fund trustees' responses in the new plan, but I cannot give the hon. Member for Vale of York or my right hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East any news beyond that. However, I shall undertake to speak to my noble Friend the Minister for the Arts to ensure that the response is given the publicity that it requires.

I would like to thank all right hon. and hon. Members who have taken part in the debate. In the couple of minutes that are left, I would like to respond to a question about churches and listed places of worship. As several speakers made clear, our cathedrals and churches are a very important part of the nation's heritage, and many are especially important to local communities. I am sure that others in this Chamber have visited Suffolk, as I have. It has wonderful churches but nothing whatever to support them as great tourist attractions. That is a shame. Together with the Church, we must think hard about how we can offer support.

The listed places of worship grant scheme has come into effect. It allows eligible repairs to listed places of worship to benefit from the equivalent of a reduced rate of VAT. It will have clear community benefits and has been welcomed by those who are responsible for such buildings. It will constitute a substantial increase in support for the historic environment: current estimates suggest that about £30 million a year of new money could go to listed places of worship.

That will be a big help, but much more is needed. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East urged, I hope that we can convince the Treasury that the cause is absolutely vital, not only to protect our heritage but to encourage the creativity, good design and excellence that we need from our young people now and in the future.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-eight minutes past Five o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 12 March 2002

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

Consignia

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

9.30 am

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving up your time this morning to enable this debate to take place; I also thank the Minister. I know that many Members will wish to speak this morning, and I think that, by reducing the length of our speeches, we should try to ensure that everyone has a chance to do so. It is unfair that hon. Members should have to wait so long, when we often seem to repeat ourselves.

I emphasise the importance of today's debate, which is about the future of Consignia and postal services—the name Consignia is not appropriate, but we have to use it, at least for today.

Proposals for the introduction of competition in the United Kingdom postal services, forwarded by Postcomm—the Postal Services Commission—are currently out for consultation. The closing date is this Friday, 15 March. If the proposals are not altered—and all the indications suggest that they will not be—they will have a huge impact on our postal services. I, and other hon. Members, many of whom are here today, have a number of concerns that need to be highlighted.

I shall give the Chamber a good example of why I believe that Postcomm is not for change and does not want to extend the consultation period. One of my local councillors, Mr. Molyneaux, is a member of Chorley district council, which covers a rural area. He wrote to Postcomm asking it to consider extending the consultation so that everyone would have time to digest its proposals and put forward their views. The sympathetic listening ear of Postcomm replied, "Sorry, no change." That is not good enough, as it sets us worrying about the future of the people involved.

It is necessary to run through Postcomm's proposals first. In phase 1, from 1 April 2002, Postcomm will grant licences for operators wishing to provide large bulk mailing services with a minimum of 4,000 items. In phase 2, from 1 April 2004, licences will be granted for operators wishing to provide large mailing services with between 500 and 1,000 items. Phase 3, from 1April 2006, will see the complete liberalisation of all UK postal services. In practical terms, phase 1 will open up the market to the extent of 30 per cent. of Consignia's inland letters revenue—40 per cent. of its volume—and phase 2 will open it up for 60 per cent. of inland letters revenue, or 70 per cent. of its volume.

Two questions, which are linked, arise immediately. First, one must seriously question the pace at which competition is being introduced. Secondly, the way in which the market is to be liberalised will, in my opinion, cause far more damage to the consumer and the Post Office. We are opening up the most profitable part of the postal service at the expense of the least profitable part. Logic should apply, and there should at least be a balance. In my opinion, the unprofitable part should be tested first. In any event, Postcomm should certainly not allow cherry-picking. That is the danger; that is why Postcomm is wrong.

I have grave concerns about the impact of competition on our postal network. Private companies will want to operate only the profitable services, which will result in cherry-picking. The unprofitable rural services will then lose the cross-subsidy from the profit made by the urban services, and prices for consumers will inevitably rise. That will be combined with a fall in the standard of service. In simplistic terms, in rural areas the price will rise and the level of service will drop. That is where the suffering will start.

The universal postal system, with its uniform tariff, is something that we should cherish. We should not allow it to be abandoned under Postcomm's proposals. Postcomm will argue that everything is in writing so we need not worry, but it cannot say how the service can be sustained. It worries me that Postcomm seems to think that it can sustain the cherry-picking of the most profitable areas, expect next-day delivery in all the rural areas, and still make a profit somehow. Only two things can happen. Either the rural service will begin to drop away or the price will go up so much that we will have to have a uniform price of about £1. That is when the cherry-picking will start, with competitors coming from outside to provide services much more cheaply.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): So far, the hon. Gentleman has been very persuasive in his anger at the regulator's suggestions. Will he explain, therefore, why he voted to set up the regulator? There was no regulator until the Government introduced the legislation under which the Post Office currently operates.

Mr. Hoyle: I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman can still make political points, even if he came here to be constructive and helpful. Never mind; if he wants to play politics, let us deal with his point. We knew that there would have to be competition, and that something like Postcomm would come along. We set up Postcomm in the belief that it would help the consumer. That was the idea, but Postcomm has got it wrong and is working against the postal service and the consumer. We did not realise that it would understand its terms of reference differently from everyone else. I think that that deals with the silly point that the hon. Gentleman made.

One does not have to look too far to see that there will be problems. There are harsh lessons to be learned from countries that have already introduced liberalisation and competition. Sweden is a good example. Since 1993 the number of post offices there has fallen by 52 per cent., the public letter price has increased by 60 per cent. in real terms, and the Swedish post office is in financial crisis, having lost 1 million kronor in the first quarter of 2001. Since 1990, people in the smaller towns in New Zealand have been waiting an extra one, two or three days for mail. The market in Spain—for which the Government seem to have an affection—has been fully liberalised since 1960, but less than 70 per cent. of letter mail was delivered on target in 2000.

[Mr. Hoyle]

We should let those examples speak for themselves; they should act as a warning to Postcomm not to let such things happen here. Unfortunately, that warning has so far gone unheeded. We have all begged for an extension of the consultation period. Let us hope that ears are listening today.

I do not see how the problems that I have described can be avoided under Postcomm's present proposals. Indeed, Consignia has already let it be known that, on the basis of experience in Sweden, competition in the UK could increase the price of the first-class stamp from 27p to 40p and that of the second-class stamp from 19p to 30p. People may be willing to pay more if they get a better service, but that will not happen, particularly if they live in rural areas. If the profitable services are removed, Consignia will be left to pick up the pieces of the unprofitable services; unlike its competitors, it will be unable to refuse delivery. That will add further to the losses incurred over the past two years, and to the possibility of large job losses and post office closures. We are all well aware of that.

The Government, too, have a role to play. They are the major shareholder, and I urge the Minister to consider suspending their dividend requirement to help Consignia through this testing period, because Consignia is being hammered from both sides. Postcomm in helping no one—neither the postal service nor the consumers. The Minister should withdraw Consginia's obligation to pay off the Government every year, so that it will be able to use plenty of financial muscle in taking on the competition.

It should be remembered that such concerns are held not only by hon. Members here today; both the trade unions and Consignia have grave reservations about Postcomm' s proposals. A National Audit Office report entitled "Opening the Post" stated:

> "the introduction of competition could result in a breakdown in the delivery of the universal service at a reasonable uniform price".

The NAO was sending everyone a warning shot. The report stated further that Postcomm needed to make a

> "convincing case to demonstrate that any steps they take to introduce competition will not endanger the continued delivery of universal service."

An article in *The Economist* stated:

> "By exposing Consignia to competition so quickly, Postcomm runs the risk that it will further weaken an already shaky service by allowing a challenge from strong European competitors...whatever Postcomm says, the price of sending a letter would increase significantly, while profits would go abroad."

Those concerns have rightly been voiced about the pace of change and the way in which competition will be introduced. The European Commission proposals for liberalisation are different in two fundamental ways. First, the Commission has introduced competition by lowering the weight and price threshold, which covers all categories of mail and user, whereas Postcomm is opening up bulk mailing. That conflicts with the Commission's approach and relates only to large business. Secondly, the pace of liberalisation is more gradual, which I believe needs to be the case in the United Kingdom, given Consignia's present position.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): When the Select Committee on Trade and Industry visited the Commission recently, the Commission said that it was not up to it to tell any country how to run its service. However, it observed that the pace was much faster in the UK, and suggested that we might ask the Government how they expected a company that lost £1 million a day to sustain a universal service obligation.

Mr. Hoyle: I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman has highlighted those worries. We all share them, and I know that he has talked about them recently.

Although I am not wholly convinced by the proposals forwarded by the Commission, in terms of the mechanics and the timing, they are greatly preferable to those that we are currently considering. That is another message to Postcomm. Its proposals for competition, and eventually full liberalisation of the postal network, constitute a major threat to the universal postal service at a uniform tariff. I have grave concerns about the future of Consignia if the present proposals are allowed to go through.

If we are not careful, Postcomm could turn a great public service into another Railtrack. I therefore urge Postcomm initially to extend the period of consultation so that more time can be taken to consider in detail the proposals and all replies from interested parties, which are still being written to Postcomm. We must ensure that the present proposals are altered, so that companies cannot cherry-pick services and leave others to suffer.

I urge the Minister to use his influence and powers, and those of the Secretary of State, to ensure that Postcomm reforms its present proposals, so as to help the Post Office by supporting local post offices and avoiding more closures. An equal service in towns and rural areas must be assured. I also urge him to use his influence to scrap the name Consignia. The Royal Mail is the best known name in the UK after Coca-Cola, and it still sticks in my throat to say Consignia. Consignia the name to the dustbin and bring back the Royal Mail.

I urge the Minister to suspend the Government's requirement for the dividend and work with Consignia, the trade unions and Members of Parliament to build a constructive relationship, so that the Post Office can again be a successful, profitable company that delivers an essential and much cherished service.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): I understand that my hon. Friend was motivated to introduce the debate because he represents a rural area. Does he understand that there is considerable concern in urban areas, such as my constituency, too? Although the quality of Royal Mail services is improving in those areas, there is still concern about it, which has been exacerbated in our area by Consignia's apparent plans to slash the number of pillar boxes so as to save £1 million.

Mr. Hoyle: I agree with my hon. Friend. The problem that we face is that there is no relationship between the consumer and what is taking place; that is my worry as well.

I represent a rural area with an urban core—a town of 25,000 people—so I shall take Chorley and the districts around it as typical, and outline the situation that I do not want to see. I am sure that everyone can envisage it.

In the commercial sector, lots of people will be running up and down in different coloured striped suits and different hats to deliver the mail at different doors. Then one or two of those people, in their different outfits and different little vans, might bring competition to the areas just outside that sector; Postman Pat might be consigned to them as well—but who will want the rural areas? Who will want to deliver to a farm on the moor near Chorley? No one.

All the firms will want the commercial sector, and that is where all the competition will be, as it was when the buses were deregulated. In the city centres one could not move for bus after bus, whereas the rural services were like a forgotten species. The same thing will happen with postal services if we are not careful, and that is why I hope that we will change direction—that we will scrap the name Consignia, bring back the Royal Mail brand and ensure that all services are protected in both urban and rural communities. We must ensure that the services provided by the good people who work for the Post Office in Chorley can continue, without the worry that Postcomm is causing them.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is evident that many more hon. Members wish to speak than signified a wish to do so before the debate. I remind hon. Members that notification is helpful, because it allows some selectorial wisdom to be applied.

9.45 am

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): I congratulate the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) on raising this important subject, which is of concern to many hon. Members, as the attendance at today's debate shows. However, I also gently chide the hon. Gentleman, because when he talks about Postcomm being his Government's Railtrack, he must remember that the man who wound up Railtrack is the same man who, when he was Secretary of State for or Trade and Industry, originally created Postcomm. That man is presently the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, and he has a track record of this sort of thing.

It is no pleasure to anybody in the House to see the Post Office in the state that it is today, with the problems that it faces. Those problems are disturbing because, as has rightly been said, the universal service is well regarded throughout the country, and its continued maintenance is considered essential. When the Minister sums up the debate, no doubt he will tell us that we should all relax, because for the first time, the universal service has been enshrined in legislation. However, its provision was never in doubt before, whereas now there are doubts about whether the Post Office will still be able to afford it.

I am sorry—I keep referring to the Post Office, but I should, of course, be saying "Consignia". I join the hon. Member for Chorley in his plea about the silly name that the organisation has adopted. Nobody recognises it, and the change was a useless waste of money. Perhaps the organisation could go back to its original name, which was well understood and respected.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): Does my hon. Friend agree that in many parts of the country people are not receiving the basic universal service at the moment, because of union intransigence, managerial incompetence or a subtle combination of both? Indeed, Consignia is in danger of being penalised by the regulator because it is already failing to provide the service that people have a right to expect.

Mr. McLoughlin: I always agree with my hon. Friend. He is right about the services in certain areas of the country with specific problems. In my constituency, which is a large rural one, the Post Office is held in high regard and so are the postmen who deliver our mail. The uncertainty that they currently face is very worrying for them.

The situation has not been helped by certain remarks. The Secretary of State, in a recent debate on the Floor of the House, accused some Conservative Members of scaremongering about the future of the Post Office—but the scaremongering has been done by some of the senior management in the Post Office. When the chief executive appeared before a Select Committee just before Christmas, he let slip that there might be 30,000 redundancies. If that was not scaremongering, I do not know what is.

I want to keep my contribution short and to the point. The Post Office provides a good service, but that does not mean that it cannot adapt. It needs to adapt. Some time ago, when I occupied the position now occupied by the Minister, I had responsibility for it and it was well aware of the challenges presented by e-mail and the faster communications that we all want. How the organisation raises its game to respond to that challenge is vital, and I urge the Minister to treat the management of the transition with great care. Perhaps he will tell us what powers he has over Postcomm, the regulator. I know that that is a moot point; one is never sure what powers Secretaries of State have over regulators. Listening to the Secretary of State for Transport, one might think that he had never interfered with Tom Winsor, but Tom Winsor gives a different account. It will be interesting to hear what the Minister says.

The speed of change worries the many postmen who deliver our service, and who are welcomed when they do so. The Government must keep that in mind; it is no good their saying, "It's the regulator," because they created the regulator in the first place. Some hon. Members who are complaining about the regulator now voted to have one, and for this system of running the Post Office. What we have now is the Government's great third way, which they are coming to regret, because it does not seem to be working very well.

There is also great concern about the future of the post office network. I hope that the Minister will be able to reassure us about the speed of post office closures, which has increased dramatically over the past few years. The Government will say that there were many closures during 18 years of Conservative Government—but I have never argued that post offices would never close. They will close because people retire and sell the premises, and it is sometimes difficult to replace them. However, the number of closures last year—some 500—is way beyond what happened before. If the Minister chides me about the number of closures under the Conservative Government, I shall reply that over the five years that this Government have been in office,

[Mr. McLoughlin]

closures have run at double the rate that they did at any period during our 18 years. The Government's record is not good.

There is wide support for the Post Office in the House. However, that does not mean that it does not have to recognise and manage change and become more competitive. If it does not, the huge price rises that the hon. Member for Chorley suggested might be in the pipeline as a result of the changes that the Post Office faces will take place, and it will go into terminal decline. That will not be good for the country, and it certainly will not be good for the many rural areas that rely on their postal service.

9.52 am

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh): I am afraid that time will not allow me to respond to all the interesting points made by the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin). I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) on having initiated this timely debate on the Post Office and the Royal Mail, and thank him for the tremendous job that he has done in campaigning to try to retain this vital public service. He has articulated the sense of alarm and foreboding that pervades the people of this country at the prospect of the road that we are taking. There is a fear that enormous damage will be done, and a British institution that provides a great public service will wither away. The concern not only is felt by trade unions and people in the Labour party, but extends throughout the population.

I shall quote a paragraph from a document produced by Postcomm in June 2001, called "Promoting Effective Competition in UK Postal Services":

> "In introducing competition, Postcomm must act in a manner best calculated to ensure the provision of a universal service. Postcomm notes that this is not necessarily the same as ensuring Consignia provides a universal service if it could be provided in other ways, nor does it imply that the universal service is equivalent to Consignia's current range of products. For instance, Consignia's current operations and range of services generally do more than the minimum required to satisfy the universal service requirement in the Postal Services Act 2000".

I repeat:

> "Postcomm notes that this is not necessarily the same as ensuring Consignia provides a universal service".

What does that mean? I grew up in rural Scotland, and my hon. Friend is well aware of the situation there. Does it mean that in rural areas the royal mail will be delivered by someone who is not a postman or postwoman? Are we talking about privatisation? That would be utterly unacceptable to the overwhelming majority of people who reside in rural areas.

We have heard alarming stories to the effect that some people's post may not be delivered to their doors, so presumably some pensioners will no longer receive that universal daily service. I do not believe those stories, but it is important that my hon. Friend the Minister should knock any such rumours on the head today, and confirm that the Government will not allow postmen and postwomen to be replaced by people from a private company. It is vital that the universal service, at a universal price, should remain.

The Minister may have read the article in *The Scotsman* the other day by Bill Jamieson, a great liberal free-market thinker. He says:

> "Scare stories abound of no post before lunch-time (a state some say has already arrived), of 70p letters and the end of all mail deliveries north of Watford. Why can't the Post Office just stay as it is? Because it's bad, its broken, and its bust. That's why."

The majority of British people totally reject that. My experience of the Royal Mail in my constituency, where I have lived for more than 30 years, is that it provides an excellent service. I have lived in two locations and our mail has always been delivered in the morning. In fact, most people in Edinburgh have their mail delivered in the morning. We do not have a second delivery at Newcraighall, although there was one at Portobello. I am very much in favour of a second delivery, which should be introduced in areas where it is not already provided. The internet is fine, but it is no substitute for a decent Royal Mail delivery. We cannot possibly argue that we are delivering better public services if we eliminate the second delivery in some areas. Providing better services means extending the second delivery as far as is practical, although I accept that will happen only in densely populated areas within a certain distance of the local post office depot.

Ever since my right hon. Friend who is now the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions made his original announcement, I have maintained a long correspondence on the future of the sub-post office network. The most recent letter that I received from the present Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is dated 22 November 2001. It relates to a concern of which the Minister will be aware, because of the situation in his own constituency—the fact that although the Government have taken significant action on rural post offices, they have not done the same for the sub-post offices most at threat. Those are the sub-post offices a high proportion of whose business is benefits business, and they are often on peripheral council estates, where the whole business depends on the footfall—to use the jargon—generated by people coming to claim their pensions and other benefits.

I am worried about the fact that a reduction in the geographical distribution of the sub-post office network is envisaged. My aim—and, I am sure, the objective of other hon. Members in the Chamber—is to ensure that that does not happen. The Prime Minister sent out the message that the Government's objective was not only to halt the decline of rural post offices but to deal with the problems affecting urban post offices.

I wanted to talk about the universal bank, plans for which have been curtailed, and to say something about making Post Office services universal, because some sub-post offices offer some services and others offer other services. However, time does not allow me to go into those matters, so I shall conclude by saying that the Post Office is a great British institution. That is not to say that it cannot be improved—but I trust that we will not go down the road proposed by Postcomm.

9.59 am

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): Fortunately, a last-minute change in my diary enabled me to be here, because I want to congratulate the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) on the excellent timing of the debate. The Minister has some questions to answer, which could help at least to reduce some fears.

Mine is a rural Scottish constituency in an area where there are many other rural constituencies. Hon. Members have already outlined how worrying Postcomm's proposals are for us and our constituents, and have talked about our great respect for the individual people in Royal Mail who deliver the post and provide a good service. In speaking of the universal service obligation, it is important to recognise that such areas are already penalised by the digital divide, as the Minister knows only too well. Yesterday, a constituent at my surgery said that BT had told him that the fact that his computer hangs up all the time on a bog standard modem was not its problem. Apparently, BT only has to get his voice through the line, because that is its universal service obligation. The worry is that competition will lead to the downgrading of the universal service obligation.

That is the most feared part of the current consultation. If one presses the regulator on how the circle will be squared if Consignia cannot cope after losing so much money, and on the fact that its understanding of how competition works will damage the universal service obligation, the regulator's terrifying response is, "We can always redefine the universal service obligation"—the obligation to our constituents, that is—"and reduce the burden." The idea that there is a threat to reduce the service to our constituents is not scaremongering; it comes from the consultation document.

Even more frightening for sensible, rational decision making, is the fact that the Government have published a document that is meant to guarantee the universal service obligation when there is competition, yet they have still to consult on how that obligation should be defined. That will be addressed in the next phase of consultation. It would be far more sensible to consult the public about what they require from the universal service obligation, and then consider how that can be delivered and maintained.

I confirm what has already been said by the European Commission: it is perfectly in order to levy the other operators that are allowed to compete to cross-subsidise the universal service obligation, if that remains with Consignia. Apparently the regulator does not have the power to do that at the moment, and it would be helpful if the Minister confirmed how such a power could be provided. Would primary legislation be necessary to confer it, or could that be done by statutory instrument? It would be even more reassuring if the Government confirmed that they are drafting the necessary legislation at least to ensure that the full range of options is available.

Finally, it is important that the Minister should explain in what form the Government envisage the universal service obligation surviving. Will he confirm that it will be retained—and not merely as a basic minimum to keep everyone happy and enable the Government to tick the box that says that there is a universal service obligation? We want a real universal service obligation that delivers to our rural constituents.

10.2 am

Geraldine Smith (Morecambe and Lunesdale): In making this brief contribution, I shall confine my remarks to the Postcomm proposals that are currently the subject of consultation. I firmly believe that the proposals are ill founded and premature, and if implemented, will have a devastating effect on British postal services. Both the universal service obligation at an affordable price and the Post Office Counters network will be put at risk. Equally important is the fact that thousands of postal workers' jobs will put in jeopardy. Let us remember that that is in addition to the 30,000 jobs that are already threatened—a threat that has nothing to do with the postal regulator. Extra job losses would arise as a result of the regulator's actions.

As I said, the proposals are premature and will be implemented well in advance of the European proposals, which extend at least until 2009, and would provide for some sort of review before full liberalisation went ahead. That is not the case with Postcomm's proposals.

Postcomm's proposals come at a time when Consignia's financial position is already unsustainable. It is losing in excess of £1 million a day—the latest figure that I saw was £1.5 million—because it costs 28p to sort, distribute and deliver a letter bearing a 27p stamp. Yet when Postcomm said to the regulator last year that it wanted to put up the price of a first-class stamp by a penny, the regulator refused to allow that.

Sweden is often cited by Postcomm as an example of a liberated market that retains the universal service. If we followed the Swedish example, the price of a first-class stamp would be about 39p, but Postcomm has not said how much the ordinary public should pay for a stamp if competition is introduced into the postal service.

When the Post Office is losing money, it is ludicrous to propose that it open up one third of its most profitable business to competition in April. Let us be clear: we are not talking about fair competition, or ensuring a level playing field. The Post Office's competitors will not be required to provide a universal service at a uniform affordable tariff, nor will they have to sustain the unprofitable network of sub-post offices—not to mention the post bus service and all the other activities that the Post Office has taken on. On the contrary, they will be allowed to cherry-pick the most profitable town and city services that currently fund the unprofitable areas by cross-subsidy. Those competitors could include European postal operators, who will be able to cherry-pick our best services, yet their markets will still be closed to us. Their markets will not be opened up by European liberalisation. In my view, that demonstrates yet again the ill conceived nature of the proposals.

I am well aware that the Government take the view that the universal service obligation is not at risk because it is enshrined in legislation. They have formally committed the Post Office to maintaining a network of rural post offices and to preventing avoidable closures. I am sure that the Minister will reiterate those points in his reply to the debate. Upon examination, however, those commitments are not quite as good as they are cracked up to be. The standard of service apparently offered under the universal service obligation is substantially below that currently provided by the Post

[Geraldine Smith]

Office. The obligation requires only one collection from all post boxes on every working day and one delivery to each home or premises in the United Kingdom.

All hon. Members will be aware that the vast majority of post boxes are cleared several times a day, especially those in major city centres, where boxes are cleared almost continually. The primary reason for clearing post boxes is not because they would overflow with mail if not cleared, but because it enables mail to be processed and sorted ahead of the evening peak period. If mail could not be cleared throughout the day, the postal service would not be able to cope with the evening peak, which would cause delays in delivering mail.

Although the other obligation is to provide a daily delivery to homes and premises, most urban areas, including Morecambe and Lancaster, in my area, receive two deliveries a day, not one, so the obligation would guarantee only a reduced service. That is all that the universal service obligation would give us, so it cannot be claimed as a benefit.

Mr. McLoughlin: One of the other Post Office proposals is for later deliveries to households. Does the hon. Lady agree that that would be dangerous for the small businesses in our constituencies? It would be yet another argument against small businesses locating in the countryside. They would want to be in the towns, which goes against some of the Government's other policies that are intended to spread the load in the rural areas.

Geraldine Smith: I agree. The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point. That would lead to a reduction in services, and businesses would feel it.

We should remember that under the universal service obligation, the average household would be lucky to receive a delivery every other day, because mail would be caught up in the system. The primary duty of the regulator is to protect the universal service obligation, and to introduce competition only if it could benefit the consumer. We need to send a clear message to the regulator, to ensure that the Post Office's competitors are not businesses that are simply looking for an easy profit. It is my constituents, and the vast majority of British citizens throughout the United Kingdom, who rely upon the postal services. They are the real consumers. They do not want to see the postal service run down or post offices closed, nor do they want to see postmen and postwomen thrown on the dole.

I make my final point directly to the Minister. The Post Office is a publicly owned company, and the Government have responsibilities. It is not good enough for them simply to say, "There's an independent regulator so we can't do anything about it." I hope that he will tell me that he has made strong representations to the regulator, that common sense will prevail and that the British postal system will provide an excellent service to the public.

10.10 am

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): I too congratulate the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) on securing this excellent debate. It must be rare to have near unanimity in the Chamber, and I hope that the Minister takes note of it.

Those who argue for greater competition within the postal service should reflect on how many operators are likely to want to take on deliveries to rural areas, especially the highlands and islands of Scotland. There may be a universal service obligation, but there is probably already much less of a service in those areas than in many other rural areas. In some island areas, the universal service obligation is little more than a joke.

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that several island communities, including some in my constituency, are already exempt from the universal service obligation? We are concerned, because we see the deregulation proposals as the thin end of the wedge.

Mr. Weir: Indeed, I was referring to that.

Even firms that already deliver parcels to the highlands and islands of Scotland charge much more than the charges in urban areas. That can only become worse under Postcomm's proposals. The universal service obligation may be enshrined in statute, but it is doubtful whether even that restricted obligation could survive the present proposals. In any event, current legislation would not prevent a substantial rise in prices or cut in deliveries. Consignia is no angel, as it has already considered ways of cutting deliveries, and one suspects that it would not be entirely unhappy if the universal service obligation were restricted. We are here to defend the Post Office and the delivery service, not Consignia.

I appreciate that the Government have suggested that they would insist on the retention of the universal service obligation, but I ask the Minister specifically: how will that be done if Consignia is losing business and haemorrhaging money? In the face of full-scale competition in which competitors cherry-pick the profitable parts of the business, how would one insist that a carrier continue with that obligation? Would the Government be prepared to give massive subsidies to a private company to continue that service? If the proposals go ahead, after Railtrack we could have Mailtrack.

The international comparisons are not encouraging. The Swedish example has already been cited. Prices there have increased by 72 per cent., and deliveries in rural areas are not made to the door, but residents collect mail from cluster points on the postman's route. The number of post offices in Sweden has halved from 1,900 to 900 in 10 years. The profits of the Swedish post office peaked in 1999, but it now runs a deficit that approaches £20 million a year, and staffing has been reduced by 20 per cent. In New Zealand, which is similar to Scotland in many ways, people in smaller towns now wait an extra day or two for mail.

The changes proposed by Postcomm would have a dramatic and detrimental effect on the rural areas of Scotland, which have suffered badly from the impact of foot and mouth and the downturn in the tourism industry—and I suspect that that is true of other parts of the United Kingdom as well. It is hard enough to find alternative employment in such areas, without our sacrificing services that already exist.

The Post Office is part of the fabric of rural life. We have already heard about the continuing threat to sub-post offices. It has been calculated that 80 per cent. of rural sub-post offices could go in some areas of Scotland, as a result of a combination of Postcomm's proposals and the proposals for automated credit transfer.

As the hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Geraldine Smith) said, the Post Office runs a post bus service in many rural areas. The impact would therefore be not only on the postal service but on rural transport services. Under the proposals those would go, because they would be uneconomic for Consignia to continue. How do the Government propose to upgrade transport in rural areas to take account of falling services?

The proposals for the future of Consignia are thoroughly bad and should be rethought. The idea of a cheap universal postal service was introduced in 1840 because of the number of individual carriers who charged what they liked and caused distress. That postal service is now under threat, and ending it would be a disaster for Scotland.

10.15 am

Mr. John Grogan (Selby): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) on his vigorous and passionate introduction to this debate. I shall make three brief points on Postcomm, Postwatch and good practice in Selby.

The hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir Robert Smith) had it right when he said that Postcomm's first duty and responsibility should be clearly to define the universal service obligation and how we deliver it at an affordable and geographically uniform price. The idea that consultation should follow in the autumn clearly gets things the wrong way round and beggars belief.

I disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley in that I believe that there is still hope of persuading the regulator to change its mind. Indeed, there must be hope, because the regulator must listen to parliamentary opinion, whether it is expressed here or in the three early-day motions. We want a steady-as-she-goes, cautious, unspectacular regulator that carefully and cautiously opens the postal market to competition. We do not want a gung-ho regulator. The decisions that the regulator makes in the next few weeks will define its role and how it is seen.

There is hope. The *Financial Times* carried a quote from Graham Corbett, the chairman of Postcomm, but no relation to Railtrack's Gerald:

> "I don't think we are going to stand absolutely rigid...if we are presented with good reasons for changing our minds."

The article goes on:

> "Postcomm said there had been discussions with civil servants at the Department of Trade and Industry, but insisted no direct pressure was applied."

I hope that those discussions were, and continue to be, robust. Indeed, the language beloved of Richard Mottram might not be entirely inappropriate, because it is crucial that Postcomm listens to parliamentary opinion.

An organisation called Postwatch is the voice of the consumer, and it, too, must be much louder and clearer in the next few weeks. Postwatch has nine regional councils, and I rang the northern council in Bradford yesterday. It is administered by the Bradford chamber of commerce, which is a fine, upstanding body that does a great deal for the city. It is crucial that Postwatch in the north shows that it is not a prisoner of big business interests, but that it will represent the whole north. I note that Postwatch has particular responsibility to serve the interests of the disabled, the chronically sick, pensioners, people on low incomes and those who live in rural areas.

Postwatch in the north of England has invited all Members of Parliament to its annual public meeting on 19 March—next week, after the consultation ends. I asked what views it would put to Postcomm, but it said that it could not tell me because it was going to feed them to national Postwatch, which would amalgamate those with other regional views and pass the results to Postcomm. I call on Postwatch in the north clearly to declare its regional views, because the age of devolution has come. It must present those views to next week's public meeting. There are rumours in the north that Postwatch there takes a slightly less gung-ho attitude than national Postwatch, which, however, seems to be a bit of a lapdog in certain respects. Let us prove that and get those views out in the public domain.

I want to draw attention to an example of good practice from Selby, because this has been a rather pessimistic debate in many ways. I must praise a gentleman called Bill Earnshaw, who is the business development manager—I think that is his title—for Consignia in the north. His job is to act as an entrepreneur and to reopen rural sub-post offices. In the Selby area, he regularly holds meetings with the Countryside Agency and the Village Enterprise and Rural Shops Association, which is run by a lady called Dorothy Muir and aims to help village post offices and shops. As a result, action is being taken on the three post offices that have closed in my constituency since 1997. One has reopened in Drax. We are having a meeting about another—Appleton Roebuck—on Friday and there are still problems with finding a new postmaster or postmistress for Sillingfleet. Co-operation between agencies can make a difference, and the Post Office is to be commended for that. The danger is that such initiatives will be swamped if the proposals go through unamended.

10.19

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): In the 1960s and 1970s, people in Wales campaigned tirelessly to have swyddfa post, which means post office in English, studded above the door. That is understandable. Consignia, however, is a nonsense word, and I do not know what it means in English, let alone Welsh. While Consignia is a nonsense word, the Postcomm proposals clearly are not nonsense. As other hon. Members have said, they are a threat to the universal service and the universal tariff. I want to consider the effect on rural areas such as my constituency, Caernarfon.

Under legislation, there must be a delivery and a collection every working day, but what does that mean for small, rural businesses such as those in my constituency? People who have set up new businesses there represent the cutting edge of rural life—they are the entrepreneurs of the future and they depend on the post—but the proposals are a serious structural threat to those businesses.

[Hywel Williams]

The problem is not just the cost of individual letters, but the fact that the terms will be skewed. There will not be a level playing field. The situation in my constituency regarding sorting and delivery is bad enough. Community councils and individuals in my area have raised the issue of the number of letters taken to Chester—and, at the weekend, to Manchester—to be sorted. A letter from a community such as Sarn Mellteyrn is delivered to Rhoshirwaun, just up the road, after being taken to Chester or Manchester.

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd): I, too, represent a north Wales constituency and I know that the postal service in north Wales has been centralised in Chester. Will the hon. Gentleman congratulate Consignia on having made some sop to Welsh pride? It has located the toilet block for the Chester offices in Wales.

Hywel Williams: That is welcome, if minor, news.

Will a commercial organisation cherry-pick the service? Would the French, the German or even the Swedish post office deliver a letter from Rhostryfan to Rhosgadfan for 27p? I doubt it tremendously.

The other effect that I worry about is that on sub-post offices. After a huge effort, the people of Llithfaen in my constituency bought their local post office and shop. This is not a private finance initiative venture or a public-private partnership; the local community is taking responsibility and working to counter out-migration and to revitalise the community. People from other communities in Wales visit Llithfaen to see what is happening there—some came from Cefn Pennar recently. It is a model for small, rural communities, and it is under threat.

Sweden is quoted by some as an example of which to beware, but is discounted by others. The discounters—the supporters of liberalisation—say that Sweden is a small country. So is Wales. Sweden, they say, has a large rural hinterland. So does Wales. They also say that Sweden has a right-wing Government who are fundamentally at odds with the values of the community that they govern. I shall say nothing about the situation in Wales.

The Minister will reaffirm the Government's commitment to the vitality of rural life, but the Postcomm proposals represent one more pressure on rural communities. They are not welcome in Wales and they should be withdrawn.

10.23 am

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): Consignia faces losses of £1.5 million every day, as well as the loss of 30,000 jobs, and the regulator is to introduce changes in April—a year ahead of the European Union. It is estimated by Consignia that the EU liberalisation measures alone will cost the company £500 million a year. On top of that, the UK regulator will cost it an extra £250 million. Those extra costs are additional to the job losses that have already been announced. Although our European counterparts are ready to go in April, there will be no reciprocal opportunity for Consignia to compete in mainland Europe. Frankly, that smacks of unfair competition in its worst form.

Studying the EU proposals, one finds that they are characterised by progressive lowering of prices and weights in order to introduce competition gradually so that the impact on universal provision at a uniform price in terms of the customer can be examined over time. If one compares that approach with that of the regulator in Britain, the difference is that between a gradualist, sensible approach with the customer in mind and a big bang, the outcome of which is unclear in terms of market meltdown, services and prices. The regulator should definitely think again.

The National Audit Office has already done some work, which resulted in the report, "Opening the Post: How Postcomm are Regulating Postal Services", which suggests that the current regime of reducing real prices, requiring universal provision at a uniform tariff and accelerating competitive access will not hold up. It asks many questions about the sustainability of the universal service.

The regulator is completely unsatisfactory, even on the question of who would pick up the pieces in the event of Consignia's collapse. He seems to think that someone would pick them up, realising that there was a real opportunity. Martin Stanley, chief executive of Postcomm, said that cherry-picking would be impossible, because of the requirement to deliver to all households. When a member of the Public Accounts Committee pointed out that one simply had to deliver 90 per cent. oneself and the remaining 10 per cent. through Royal Mail so as to cover the rural areas, he seemed surprised at such great business insight on competitive activity.

I have no faith in the regulators; the propositions are completely untested and constitute a massive risk to the British public. There are no safeguards akin to those elsewhere in the EU and the Government should demand harmonisation with our EU counterparts in terms of liberalisation of the marketplace, so that we have a level playing field.

It is outrageous of the regulator to allow only six weeks for consultation, in breach of the Government guidance, which stipulates 12 weeks. That means that the Public Accounts Committee can interview the regulator, but not Consignia, because that interview is scheduled for after the consultation closure deadline. Hon. Members and the Government should demand an extension to the consultation, given the extent of public interest.

Members should also demand that the liberalisation reforms be delayed and restructured so that we can go hand in hand with our EU counterparts. Nine out of 10 people in Britain think that they receive from the Post Office a good service that provides value for money, so why destroy it? I call on the Government to act. They have been standing by, as the single shareholder, waiting for the regulator to produce its proposals. We have had the proposals, and they are unacceptable.

10.28 am

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I congratulate the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) on introducing an excellent debate. He made his points sharply and captured a consensus that I largely endorse.

The regulator has come in for a certain amount of caning, but one must say that the consultation exercise has had two beneficial effects. It has opened up a public debate on the desirability of competition in the Post Office—how much there should be and how quickly it should happen—and stirred up a debate on the nature of the universal service obligation. What does it mean? Is there a social obligation? The radical and rather contrarian views of the regulator have, at the very least, helped us to focus on those questions.

As to whether there should be competition in the Post Office, most of us would argue that, in most markets, competition is desirable. It improves performance and makes people more conscious of costs. There is certainly plenty of inefficiency in the Post Office. I was recently taken round a highly mechanised sorting office in which a large group of postal workers were sorting envelopes. When I asked what they were doing, I was told that, when the machinery was ordered, someone forgot to specify the need to sort A4 envelopes, so they have to be taken out by hand and sorted separately.

The system is replete with such incompetence. A degree of competition to force Post Office management to pay attention to issues of efficiency is surely right, but the problem is that this is a peculiar industry in that it operates on a network, like the railways. If one reduces volumes in a network, one drives up unit costs. One cannot duplicate a network, which is a problem that was unforeseen when the railways were privatised. The more cream-skimming or cherry-picking that is allowed, the greater the danger that competition will push costs up rather than cut them. Price capping, such as applies in the postal service, means that the Post Office, rather than earning profits, suffers increasingly large losses.

How fast the growth of competition should proceed is an issue for debate. I agree with the hon. Member for Chorley that the balance struck by the European Union is probably about right, but the British regulator seems to have guessed the competition sustainable in the industry. Consignia argues—rightly or not I do not know, but the matter needs clarification—that the limit of 4,000 bulk items proposed by the regulator would account for half the Post Office's business. The regulator, on the other hand, seems to believe that it would account for only 25 to 30 per cent. That is a massive difference that would make an enormous difference to the economics of the Post Office. Will the Minister clarify his understanding of the new competitive threshold?

If the regulator pushes ahead with maximum competition, some consequences are inevitable, as we are already seeing. First, the Post Office will not be able to proceed with investment, because it will not have the cash to fund it. I can cite a good example from Twickenham, where a post office with a TW postcode is the only one in London that delivers within the first-class mail target of 92 per cent. It is a very efficient sorting office, but the machinery is antiquated and must be replaced within two years.

As a result of that, the Post Office sought planning permission a few years ago for a new development. The matter is controversial and I shall not go into the details. The new sorting office has been built and is sitting there, but the Post Office is not moving in. When I asked why, I was told that the Consignia board has frozen the investment because it does not have the cash. The postal service has suffered 20 years of the Treasury taking out dividends, which is now being compounded by a profit squeeze.

The cut in services is another damaging consequence of the way in which the competitive regime is evolving. We may consider the more dramatic possibilities, such as the withdrawal of elements of home-to-home delivery. The single delivery pilot scheme at first sight seems innocuous, but the feedback that we are receiving from a large number of self-employed people working at home is that enormous damage could be done. Segregating the bulk business of large-scale companies and giving them priority service disadvantages not only households, but small companies. There will be a lot of fallout from that decision.

We need to take a balanced view about the competition that the Post Office can reasonably sustain. That is the first issue. My second point relates to the meaning of the universal service obligation. I am increasingly confused by the arguments made by people in the industry. Many hon. Members have said that our understanding of that obligation is that it is a social obligation to protect rural areas, such as the far-flung parts of Scotland, which are costlier to service than urban areas. That is the right thing to do, but the message I have had from the regulator and his staff is that they reject that argument completely. They say that it is just as easy to deliver in Orkney and Shetland as in central London and that there is no problem associated with rural areas.

I have not been able to analyse the data, but I would like the Government to explain their understanding of the problem. If they share Postcomm's analysis, the basis on which the universal service obligation has been predicated for many years falls to the floor.

Mr. Carmichael: Some of my hon. Friends and I recently met Martin Stanley, chief executive of Postcomm, who told us that that part of Consignia's loss amounts to a mere £80 million a year. His argument was that the universal service obligation would be safe in a deregulated market because banks, building societies and credit card companies would want the same standard of delivery. He said that those big mail users would be the saviours of the universal service obligation in communities such as mine. Does my hon. Friend agree that that represents breathtaking complacency from Postcomm, which is surely born out of sheer ignorance?

Dr. Cable: It is certainly highly optimistic. I seriously wonder about the sustainability of rural areas if it rests on such acts of faith.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will want to correct what he said a moment ago, as he was either wrong or does not understand. He said that universal service protects rural deliveries in Scotland, but it does not apply only to Scotland. Huge rural and remote areas of the United Kingdom outside Scotland rely on universal service.

Dr. Cable: The hon. Gentleman misunderstood. I referred to Scotland, which provides perhaps the most extreme example of geographical spread.

David Hamilton (Midlothian): I represent not a far-flung place in Scotland, but a semi-rural area with small villages. Following bus deregulation, our local authority

[David Hamilton]

spends £1 million a year on subsidised transport. The proposals would have an effect not only on far-flung areas, but wherever there are villages in Great Britain.

Dr. Cable: I entirely agree. The problem is subtle, as the hon. Gentleman rightly emphasises. As a result of taking those interventions, I have used my 10 minutes, so I shall wrap up with two quick points.

The regulator brought to the surface the question of how the universal service obligation would be financed. The assumption all along has been that Consignia covers the cross-subsidisation, but as it makes losses it has found that impossible. I have asked why the new competitors cannot pay a levy to the Government that they would use to fund the universal service obligation. Mr. Corbett asked the same question on the "Today" programme on the morning that he launched his consultation, but he has never asked it publicly since. I have been told by the industry that someone from the Department of Trade and Industry rang him up to tell him that he was treading on thin ice and that it would be a good idea to say no more about it. The argument is that the Government forgot to create legislative powers to impose such a levy.

I would like clarification from the Minister. Were it possible, it would be sensible for the new cream-skimming competitors to pay a levy to contribute to the maintenance of the universal service obligation. They pay VAT, of course, but VAT goes to the Treasury, not the industry. Have the Government considered that option? What are the legislative possibilities for introducing it?

Another speaker touched on my final point: we talk about the universal service obligation, but the real need is not in the mainstream Consignia or Post Office business, but in that of Post Office Counters. That is where the threat to rural areas and small communities lies. The debate is separate, as that is a separate part of the Post Office, but it is worth flagging up the fact that the doubts remain as big as ever, despite all our discussions on the subject.

We still face a looming disaster. In a year, the counters business will have lost more than £400 million with no obvious sign of replacement income. Unless the Government clarify quickly how many people will be given the new post office card account to keep them in the network, there is a danger that that part of the Post Office will collapse, quite apart from the Royal Mail business.

10.39 am

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): I congratulate the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) on securing the debate, which has been interesting. Many concerns have been expressed about the state of our postal services by hon. Members from a range of parties and parts of the country. At times, however, I thought that I had blundered into a meeting of the parliamentary Labour party. There are clearly marked differences of view among Labour Members on the future of our Post Office and Consignia.

The hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members, including the Liberal Democrats, have spoken on the general theme that having competition is fine, but not too much and not yet. We must consider the background to the debate on the Postcomm proposals. The European Union has already agreed to phase in much greater competition in postal services from next year, so the only real debate is on how quickly or slowly that is done. The hon. Gentleman made a case for extending the consultation period, but even if it were extended by a month, six months or 10 years, I doubt that he or his hon. Friends, who make the same arguments, would change their views.

Geraint Davies: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that Postcomm's economic analysis has been published only in the past few days? It is unrealistic and unfair to expect the Government or Consignia to have made a rational appraisal of it.

Mr. Waterson: The problem is that the postal service and Consignia do not have any time left to get their act together. The arguments of the hon. Member for Chorley would be much more persuasive if our postal services were not in such an appalling mess. The theme of improved service to consumers peppers the Postcomm proposals and I remind him that Consignia is still miserably failing to hit its modest delivery targets—except in Twickenham, apparently.

Consignia has the worst industrial relations of any organisation in the economy. It loses £1.5 million a day and 1 million items of mail a week—it is simply in a mess. Hon. Members do not have to listen to me; they could listen to the regular interviews with Allan Leighton, the chairman of Consignia, on the "Today" programme.

Geraldine Smith: I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's suggestion that the Post Office is in a mess; it provides a good service to most areas of the country. I have had only one complaint about the Post Office from my constituents since I became a Member of Parliament. The Post Office provides the cheapest service in Europe. It is losing £1.5 million a day because the regulator will not allow it to put up the price of stamps. Its hands are tied behind its back.

Mr. Waterson: That says it all. During the debate, many crocodile tears have been shed about how awful it would be if the proposals were introduced, because they will put up the price of stamps. Two bodies are rather keen to put up the price of stamps: the trade union—which, incidentally, sponsors the hon. Lady—and Consignia's management.

Geraldine Smith: The Communication Workers Union does not sponsor me. There is no direct sponsorship of Labour Members of Parliament, but I do have an interest; I was a postal worker for 18 years. I think that I understand the industry.

Mr. Waterson: I am prepared to give way to the hon. Lady again if she is willing to contest the list that I have, which counts her among a number of hon. Members who are constituency-supported CWU Members of Parliament.

Geraldine Smith: The hon. Gentleman made the point that I was sponsored by the CWU. I am not; I have no interest to declare, and never have done. I would be grateful if he withdrew his remarks.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (in the Chair): Order. May we return, broadly, to our business?

Mr. Hoyle: On a point of order, Mr. Atkinson. A serious allegation has been made against an hon. Member. It should be withdrawn, because it cannot be substantiated. That would be the right way to make progress. The issue should not be left in this manner.

Mr. Waterson: The issue is one of Members' interests, and the hon. Lady has made her position perfectly clear. What the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) said is not unparliamentary.

Mr. Hoyle: I think he should do the decent thing.

Mr. Waterson: I am happy to withdraw the suggestion that the hon. Lady is sponsored by the CWU, but I notice that she did not contest my assertion that her constituency party is supported by it.

Postcomm's proposals are designed to help the consumer, and it believes that

> "customers' interests will generally be best served in a competitive market...Competition promises to give most customers improvements in service quality.
>
> Consignia's current monopoly in the letters market is not working in the best interests of postal users or Consignia".

It adds that

> "Consignia has consistently failed to meet its own delivery targets."

It is worth reminding hon. Members that, for each year of the previous Conservative Government, the Post Office as it then was—and, I hope, will be again—made profits. Problems are arising because it is making substantial losses.

Mr. Colin Challen (Morley and Rothwell): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the Post Office is making losses because it faces a huge investment backlog that was created by 90 per cent. of its profits under the Conservative Government going to the Treasury?

Mr. Waterson: On those matters, I am happier to listen to the views of the chairman of Consignia. He admits that costs are out of control, which is why Consignia has a programme to save £1.2 billion of costs and to shed some 30,000 jobs. Attacks on the regulator have peppered the debate, but this Government set up the regulator two years ago and all Labour Members, including the hon. Member for Chorley, voted to set up Postcomm.

Mr. Carmichael: I have listened to the hon. Gentleman for seven minutes, and I am still no wiser. Is the Conservative party in favour of implementing the Postcomm deregulation proposals?

Mr. Waterson: May I come to the main part of my argument? The regulator was set up by this Government, not by the Conservative party. The consultation process ends this Friday, I think, at which time Ministers must make a decision about Postcomm's proposals. I agree with the point that was made about the dividend. When will Ministers recognise the fact that they cannot legitimately expect to take a dividend from Consignia while it is making such substantial losses?

The universal service obligation is not being met and in parts of the country people are not receiving daily deliveries. In many other areas, the obligations on next-day delivery of first-class mail are not being met. Sooner or later, irrespective of the competition proposals, the regulator may have to take action against Consignia because of its failure to meet its current obligations. Again, Postcomm, the regulator, makes it clear in its proposals that the universal service obligation must be protected. That is a central, statutory obligation on the regulator. I do not think that the Government would allow anything that would scrap the universal service obligation. Indeed, if they tried to do so, we would oppose them.

We have heard about the continuing closure of sub-post offices although, as the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) said, that is a separate debate. Last year, a record 547 post offices closed throughout the country. We are experiencing the aftermath of legislation passed by the Government that allegedly gives Consignia commercial freedom, but in reality allows Ministers to interfere in every level of Consignia's management. Only last Friday, *The Times* reported that Ministers were said to be deliberately interfering with Consignia's wish to get on with announcing proposals to bring itself back to profit. I turn now to the role of the union.

Mr. Carmichael: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Waterson: I shall not. I am running out of time.

The union is rather like the Bourbons: it has learnt nothing and forgotten nothing. In an interview in *The Times*, Mr. Billy Hayes was quoted as saying that the union may consider withdrawal from the Labour party at its annual conference. We are witnessing a debate on internal strife in the Labour movement rather than the interests of consumers, but the real issues are improving postal services for consumers, improving the reliability of postal services throughout the country, protecting Consignia's dedicated staff who deliver the mail to our homes and securing a future for our Post Office in the 21st century.

Postcomm's proposals require serious consideration, and we look forward to the Minister's decision on them. Whatever happens must happen quickly, or there will be no Consignia or Post Office for us to debate.

10.49 am

The Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness (Mr. Douglas Alexander): Like so many others, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) on securing the debate. I pay tribute to his long-standing interest in postal matters.

My hon. Friend and other hon. Members raised a huge number of important points, and I shall endeavour to cover them during the last 10 minutes of the debate.

[Mr. Douglas Alexander]

Given the turnout, it almost goes without saying that there is real strength of feeling among hon. Members of all parties about the proposals. I shall address commercial freedom and then move on to the dividend, the name and the substantive question of Postcomm's proposals.

Mr. Carmichael: Does the Minister accept that today's turnout and the number of hon. Members who attended but could not be called to speak show that the subject should not be dealt with in Westminster Hall? Will he ask the Leader of the House to find time for a proper debate on the Floor of the House?

Mr. Alexander: I welcome the opportunity to have the debate. All hon. Members had the opportunity to attend and its virtue was established by the contributions that were made.

Many of the observations reflected the fact that in March 2001, for the first time, Consignia became a plc operating in a regulated postal market with a newly defined relationship with the Government, as sole shareholder. That decision was taken against the background of the Post Office in the latter years of the Conservative Government. I remind Opposition Members that it was deprived of investment and direction during many of those years.

As the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) pointed out, the Post Office slipped behind its competitors and also allowed its relationship with its work force to deteriorate to the extent that over half the United Kingdom's industrial action occurred in the company. The market is growing increasingly competitive, with competition from new forms of communications ranging from courier and express services to the progressive opening of the letters market. Consignia's problems are, therefore, deep seated and long standing, and its current poor performance results from its failure to resolve such problems over many years.

The explicit aim of Government policy, which was embodied in the Postal Services Act 2000, is to give the Post Office greater commercial freedom. Not only Post Office management, but the unions called for such freedom and believed it vital if the organisation was to address the needs of a changing marketplace and invest in new services. Other elements of that freedom included a new dividend regime that gave Consignia the right to retain a greater share of profits that could be reinvested in the core business and the ability to borrow to finance strategic investments.

At least two hon. Members mentioned the dividend payment. I confirm that, at present, the Government have not decided whether to accept a dividend from Consignia for 2001. A decision will be taken in the context of the forthcoming strategic plan and the review of capital structure that is due in the weeks to come. Additionally, the dividend regime is based on Consignia's own strategic plan and was designed, subject to Consignia meeting its profit target, to be half the rate at which profits were moved from the business under the Conservatives.

The new commercial arrangements of the business and the new arms-length relationship with the Government are designed to give Consignia the commercial freedom to develop new products and services, to invest, to price commercially for business users and to borrow for growth investments. That freedom was, and is, necessary to enable the business to respond to competition and to meet changing consumer demands in a better way.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chorley raised the name and offered a view that has widespread appeal—my discussions with my constituents show that. However, the decision to use "Consignia" was a commercial decision taken when the company was established as a plc. As such, it continues to use its Post Office and Royal Mail brands throughout the country. However, my hon. Friend may be comforted by the fact that Allan Leighton, the interim chairman, has made his explicit view on the name clear. He said that, although it is not his first priority because of the company's circumstance, he is reviewing all aspects of the business.

Chris Ruane: Is the Minister aware that the Government are considering a supermarket regulator? One name that has been bandied about is Offtrolley. If Postcomm were to consider a change, does he think that that would be more suitable and appropriate?

Mr. Alexander: As several hon. Members pointed out, the consultation ends on Friday, so I suggest that my hon. Friend endeavours to bring the matter to the attention of Postcomm's commissioners before then.

Mr. McLoughlin: Can the Minister help us out? I believe that he referred to Allan Leighton as the temporary chairman. When do the Government expect to announce a full-time chairman?

Mr. Alexander: I used the term interim chairman. A process to appoint the permanent chairman of Consignia is under way, but we are constrained by the timetable operating on that, given that it is a public appointment and that we must follow the Nolan recommendations. We are making as much progress as possible, consistent with our obligations under the Nolan processes.

A further feature of the structures established in the 2000 Act—the basis of today's debate—is the regulatory reform necessary to promote and protect the consumer's interests. The Act established not only an independent regulator, Postcomm, but Postwatch, which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) said, is specifically charged with responsibility for dealing with consumer needs. Given the tenor of some contributions, I must emphasise that the approach to establishing an independent regulator was widely sought, not only in the House, but beyond.

In a document circulated to all hon. Members in September 1998, the CWU, the union representing many postal workers, urged the Government to establish exactly such an independent body. Recommendation 9 from the CWU states:

> "A Regulatory agency to be known as Ofpost—comprising a small panel supported by specialist staff—should be created by statute and appointed by Government and act as independently as the public sector status of the Post Office legally permits."

Consumer interest remains of principal concern to the Government and is the central feature of postal services reform introduced by the Act. The maintenance of that universal service, about which many hon. Members spoke, is of the highest priority. Our commitment is well demonstrated by the 2000 Act, which, for the first time, enshrined the universal service obligation in United Kingdom law, as several hon. Members made clear. In response to the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir Robert Smith), I reiterate that the legal obligation to maintain a universal service is the primary duty of the regulator.

I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley and the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine that the daily postal delivery service to every address, irrespective of location in the United Kingdom and at a uniform tariff, remains at the centre of our approach to the postal service.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): Is there a lacuna in the legislation that prevents the regulator from charging a levy on incomers to subsidise the universal service?

Mr. Alexander: The terms of the 2000 Act are well known. Consideration was given by my predecessors at the Department of Trade and Industry to determine an appropriate financing arrangement to secure the universal service obligation. As many hon. Members have made clear, there is scope for the regulator to raise prices. Under the previous proposal introduced by Consignia, a decision was taken by Consignia to withdraw that application. That should not prejudge any future application by Consignia in relation to pricing, however. Postcomm is an independent body regulating the United Kingdom postal market.

Sir Robert Smith: Is the Minister saying that, if Postcomm misjudges the market and Consignia cannot deliver the universal service obligation under the regime proposed, the only option will be sticking up the price and doing exactly what everyone fears? Prices will go through the roof to maintain the universal service obligation.

Mr. Alexander: No. I made it clear that there is scope in the 2000 Act for applications to be made to increase the price charged by Consignia for first and second-class stamps. Any determination would be made on the basis of merit and a decision would be forthcoming should any application be made.

I shall deal with the specific point regarding the timing of the consultation, given the strength of feeling communicated in today's debate and in an early-day motion tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies). The proposal document on which consultation is taking place follows a document issued by Postcomm in June 2001, which set out options for liberalising the market. That document established a timetable, including a 12-week consultation on those initial proposals to start in June 2001, and that such a proposal document would be set out at that stage.

In response to Opposition Members' observations, I emphasise that the regulatory body is independent and will be guided by representations made during the consultation. The Government must be mindful of the regulator's position, and of the regulator's primary duty to uphold the universal service obligation. I understand that, as of the start of the debate, neither Consignia nor the CWU had formally responded to Postcomm's proposals.

I turn to the point raised by the hon. Member for Twickenham. With regard to the proposals, we would urge Consignia and Postcomm to see whether reconciliation can be achieved.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (in the Chair): Order. We must move on to the next business. Before I call Mr. Oaten, I ask hon. Members who are leaving to do so quickly and quietly.

NHS Funding (South-East)

11 am

Mr. Mark Oaten (Winchester): I welcome this opportunity to discuss funding for health services in the south-east. The debate is not a bid for more money for the health service; although I passionately believe that more money should come into the health service, the debate has narrow confines and I do not want to get into a party political argument about the extra resources that the national health service needs to enable it to deliver high-quality services. The debate is intended to examine how to allocate the existing money that the Government have to spend on health services—and, specifically, to raise my concerns about funding allocation in the south-east.

The debate is also not intended to present an argument against the well-travelled principle that we need to try to target the parts of the country that have greater needs. I am not saying simplistically that the north is getting too much and the south should get more because I recognise that whatever formula the Government have in place should include a needs assessment. When they came to power in 1997, the Government were right to decide that certain areas in the north of England had great health care needs, and that the formula should reflect that. However, I am concerned that the balance has shifted since then, and that the formula no longer offers a satisfactory way of assessing the health needs of the south-east.

At present, we have a formula that ranges from 83 to 134 per cent., depending on where in the country one is located. North and Mid-Hampshire health authority, which serves my constituency, is at the bottom of the range—it is the lowest funded health authority in the country—and that is why I, and several of my hon. Friends, are here today.

However, the changes in the way that the formula is assessed, and in the way that money will flow down to the primary care trusts and the various new structures, offer an opportunity to review the formula, and that is why the debate is timely. I also stress that there is cross-party support for some of the things for which I am arguing. With regard to the early-day motion, we struggled a bit for that support, but I managed to find the hon. Member for Portsmouth, North (Syd Rapson), along with many Conservative Members who represent constituencies in the south-east and other Liberal Democrat Members who feel strongly about the issue.

Where is the evidence? What can I do to persuade the Minister that there is a specific problem in the south-east that needs to be addressed? Let us start with the argument that hospitals need to become more efficient. The south-east has some of the most efficient and high performing hospitals in the country. With regard to all the various Government standards and targets, those hospitals have been awarded beacon status, and they have been able to get the three-star status.

There are many high performing hospitals in the area. My local hospital, the Winchester and Eastleigh Healthcare NHS trust, has three-star status. It has achieved all the Government's significant targets. It is a beacon site for personnel, information technology and shared services. Auditors have awarded it excellent financial control, and it has above average reference costs. However, although it is, by all accounts, one of the highest performing hospitals in the area, it faces financial difficulties. Therefore, the problem that we face is not about hospitals failing to perform, as they are meeting Government targets.

My next point addresses their financial performance. Can they meet their targets within budget? No. There have been significant financial pressures on health services in the south-east. My hospital has achieved all the objectives to which I referred, and it has been financially prudent, but in 1999 it overspent by £1.4 million, and in 2001—the current financial year—it is £1.2 million overspent. For the next financial year, the projected overspend is £500,000, despite savings of £1.45 million. Many high performing hospitals in the south-east face serious budget difficulties.

Demographic arguments are involved that the formulae have not picked up to the extent that they should have. One relates to the elderly population and is evident in the problem of bed blocking and its associated difficulties.

I am aware that the Government have provided some new money. The Hampshire area received one of the highest allocations to tackle intermediate care and bed blocking. There is no doubt that the crisis is enormous. There is what has been described as a Berlin wall culture between social services and health services, driven by a desperate need to tackle the problem of taking people out of hospital beds and getting them back into the community. The difficulty is that some new money from the Government is capital money that relates to building new facilities, but the revenue required to support those new facilities will be extremely hard to find under the current formula.

The area has an additional problem. Bed blocking is often the result of people trying to access nursing homes and finding that such residential care no longer exists. For some people running such homes, it makes financial sense to sell the home off. Because of current property prices, they can earn much more if the plot of land is converted into houses or flats. I should like the Minister to address the problem of the demographic change involving the elderly population and the acute difficulties of bed blocking.

Mr. Archie Norman (Tunbridge Wells): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that in west Kent the revenue that we receive per elderly person is one third of that received in parts of east London for care homes? As a result, Kent and Sussex hospital has to open up extra wards for patients who should otherwise be released into care homes. In the past year, the number of patients who had to be brought back for extra treatment following operations rose by 18 per cent., which is among the highest figures in the country. As the hon. Gentleman says, the NHS hospital must pay the price and use its resources and revenues to make up for the fact that we have lost so many care homes in west Kent.

Mr. Oaten: The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point. The conclusion that I would draw is that the world has moved on. When the formulae were set and the system was devised, we did not have the difficulty of care homes shutting to the extent that they are now. We now have a phenomenal property boom, and land prices in the south-east put extraordinary pressure on the area.

I shall give further examples of why we are under such pressure. The recruitment crisis is particularly acute in the south-east and relates to the difficulties affecting care homes and the cost of living in the area. I am sure that hon. Members present in the Chamber can cite examples of hospitals that have had to recruit from abroad. Although the formula includes a market forces element, I do not believe that that element is keeping pace with the reality of the day-to-day pressures that exist, especially in relation to recruitment. Things are extremely difficult in my constituency because of property prices. With a flat costing £120,000, it does not take a genius to work out that a nurse's salary cannot be multiplied enough to secure a mortgage on a property in the area.

One example of the impact that that has on patients worries me greatly—waiting times for radiotherapy treatment, particularly radiotherapy for head and neck cancers and subsequent treatment. In my area at the moment, not a single patient has radiotherapy treatment within the recommended good practice guideline or what is described as the maximum acceptable waiting period. There are similar stories for other procedures in radiotherapy, and I am extremely concerned about what is happening. The linear units that provide radiotherapy in Southampton cannot cope with the pressure, so Southampton patients have to go to Midhurst, but the machine there has broken down. Many people in the Hampshire area are simply not receiving radiotherapy treatments within the recommended time scales and that scares me. If I were ill, I would be extremely concerned, as many of my constituents are. That is another example of the pressures that we face.

Let me give three more examples. There is also pressure on GP practices. In the last month, three GP practices in my constituency have closed their books. Two reopened their books last week, but they say that they cannot physically accept the number of applications from patients that they are receiving.

One practice in Wickham is located next to the new village of Knowle. The pressure on the south-east to take more homes impacts on the ability of GPs to take new patients. Surely there is a crisis if GPs in the area say that they cannot physically take any more patients. Many GPs link that situation to new developments. If the Government's target of 900,000 homes for the south-east is to be met, surely that influx of people must be reflected in the formula that the Government devise for the future. GPs tell me that if the situation continues, they will desperately need more resources to be able to keep their books open.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I have a personal interest in this matter in that my wife is a GP in the south-east. Is my hon. Friend aware that there is a problem not only with GPs' having to close their books, but with their ability to recruit new GPs to their surgeries? That ties in with the issue of property prices, because of course surgery values have increased. If a GP has to buy into a practice when they join it, they have to pay into the capital value of the surgery to buy out whoever is leaving, but a new GP often simply cannot afford to do that. One or two practices in my constituency have recently been trying to recruit, but have had not one applicant. They are attractive surgeries, and one might think that, on the whole, surgeries in the south-east were quite prosperous.

Mr. Oaten: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point, which is linked to market forces and the cost of living. The problem has various impacts. The example that he gives of GPs' inability to buy into practices is just another one.

I hope that I have shown that, although we have efficient hospitals, budgets are under stress. A demographic change is causing bed blocking, and there is a difficulty with nursing homes being sold to purchase property in the area. We would all regard the waiting times for radiotherapy as unacceptable. There is a particular problem with GPs' inability to take more patients, and a recruitment crisis. At the same time, we face the prospect of more housing in the south-east.

Those are the difficulties, but what is the solution? I shall suggest some possible ways forward. The Government have changed the way in which funding of the health service will operate in the local region, and the Advisory Committee on Resource Allocation is considering how the formula can be changed. Will the Minister confirm that there is an opportunity to debate how the formula will be set in future?

Another opportunity for change concerns the census data. Many of us in the south-east feel that things have moved on a lot since the last census. I hope that the Minister will confirm that any new formula or system being devised by the Department of Health will be based not on the 1990 data, but on the latest census data available, which I think is the 2000 data. That would help to make the case for some of the demographic changes that have taken place.

Will the Minister comment on the suggestion that fixed costs and administration charges be removed from the formula? Let me explain what I mean. Under the NHS plan, all health areas are required to consider GP appraisals and to have in place good human resources practices. In the Hampshire area, there may be about 100 GPs; in Doncaster or elsewhere in the north, there may be 60. The health authority or primary care trust has a duty to carry out those appraisals whatever, but my authority has only 83 per cent. of the funding to do that, based on the formula.

I am concerned that many of the fixed costs, which have nothing to do with need and which every authority has to deal with, are still based on the formula. Could we not take some of those fixed costs from the formula to assess the need element? At the moment, all the fixed administration costs are based on the formula so that a reduced amount based on need is being given for expenses that are not need-related. I would also like the Minister to look again at the market forces element. It needs to be adjusted; it is too narrow and does not reflect the current property difficulties. A possible solution may be to narrow the current range of 83 per cent. to 134 per cent. Unfairness will exist at both ends of the range and it would be fairer to narrow the range of the formula.

My final plea to the Minister is to implement some of the proposed changes, many of which I welcome. The primary care trust, as I know from my discussions with it, also welcomes many of the changes, while recognising the many transitional costs involved in some of the

[Mr. Oaten]

structural changes that will take place in the health service over the next two years. Will the formula recognise those transitional costs and the fact that some of them are fixed and need additional provision?

I hope that I have, in the 15 minutes for which I have spoken, demonstrated the demand and the need that exist, and suggested a way forward. The matter is critical. The Government have continually to find pots of money to fire-fight and throw at problems in the south-east. Why not get it right in the first place so that the south-east has a decent level of funding, my constituents can feel secure rather than constantly having to panic about health needs, and health authorities in the area are not constantly having to come to the Government and demonstrate a case—which the Government nearly always accept and throw money at? We should put our effort into the formula. We have a unique opportunity and I hope that the Minister will have some suggestions about the way forward.

11.16 am

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): I congratulate the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) on securing the debate. I want to support, and amplify, some of his comments.

First, I support the hon. Gentleman's argument that we should use the most accurate census figures. As the Minister will know, Milton Keynes is the fastest growing city in the United Kingdom, so I have a particular interest, with all public services, in ensuring that the most up-to-date population figures are used.

Secondly, I shall comment on the hon. Gentleman's remark about demography. It is often argued that the ageing population in the UK adds costs to the health service, most obviously by increasing the number of delayed discharges. However, we also need to consider the health costs of other population groups. Milton Keynes has a particularly young population. We have a high rate of teenage pregnancy and a need for much improved services for sexual health generally—not services that are much used by the most elderly. It is not only the elderly who place additional burdens on the health service, and the formula should take account of that.

Before I comment on the formula, I remind hon. Members of the enormous change for the better in NHS funding in the south-east since the election of a Labour Government in 1997, which I shall illustrate with examples from my constituency. We should not always concentrate on the ways in which the health service does not deliver; we should remind ourselves and our constituents of the improvements that have occurred.

As I said, Milton Keynes is the fastest growing city in the UK. For the past two decades we have had population growth of between 2 and 5 per cent. per annum. Despite that growth, in the decade to 1997 no extra beds were provided at Milton Keynes general hospital. Huge pressure built up on the hospital and its beds over those years, resulting in the usual problems of long waiting lists, high cancellation rates and unacceptably high levels of cross-infection when medical cases were mixed up with other cases.

Since the 1997 election, new beds have been provided at Milton Keynes general hospital and the community hospital, additional consultants have been recruited in particular specialties and additional nurses have been employed. Unfortunately, the nurses have had to come from abroad because there are not enough trained nurses in this country; it takes time to train new nurses. Extra facilities have been provided for ophthalmology and orthopaedics to shorten waiting times, especially for cataract operations and hip replacements. The situation is still not as good as I would like it to be, but we will have a 28-bed unit in the summer, and a diagnostic and treatment centre is planned for 2005.

Waiting times are shorter—for example, the average time that a woman with suspected breast cancer in my constituency waits to see a consultant has more than halved in the past year—but they are still not good enough and more money is needed. We are going in the right direction, however, and people working in the health service in my constituency say that at least they can see light at the end of the tunnel, even if they are not sure how long the tunnel is.

I stress the fact that when we talk about the health service, we need to think beyond hospitals, as well. In the past the lack of resources for the hospital was mirrored in other parts of the NHS. In 1997, for example, Milton Keynes had fewer community psychiatric nurses per head of population than the rest of Buckinghamshire, despite having the highest rate of mental illness in the county. The child and adolescent psychiatry services were so stretched that young people with psychiatric problems had often seriously deteriorated before they received medical help. The provision for young adults with learning disabilities was so poor that the parents of teenagers with those difficulties besieged me with anxieties about what would happen to their children when they became adults, as there was no hope of supported accommodation for them in the community.

The extra resources provided by the Government have started to make a difference—Buckinghamshire had an extra 10.2 per cent. this year—but it cannot make good in five years the consistent underfunding of the previous 18 years. As the Minister knows, my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Brian White) and I complained bitterly about the unfair distribution of resources in Buckinghamshire, which discriminated against Milton Keynes compared with south and mid-Buckinghamshire. I am pleased that gradually that situation has been reversed and extra Government funding has allowed the health authority to provide for Milton Keynes without having to take money away from south or mid-Buckinghamshire.

Against the background of a significant increase in capital and revenue funding, I, too, am concerned about the funding formula, to which the hon. Member for Winchester referred. It is reasonable that the funding formula should reflect need and I am mindful that the south-east is the most affluent region in the country.

The recent report of the director of public health for Buckinghamshire shows that the standardised death rate for the county is 670 per 100,000 compared with the UK average of 729. I commend the director for not resting on his laurels. To provide himself with a benchmark against which Buckinghamshire could measure improvement, he sought comparisons across the rest of Europe and tried to find other regions of similar affluence as a spur to reduce the death rate in the area further. On the basis of need, it is not unreasonable that Buckinghamshire should receive less funding than other parts of the country where the need is much greater.

The real problem for the NHS in parts of the south-east, especially Buckinghamshire, is the high cost of living and the difficulty of recruiting and retaining staff. The extra allowances for some nurses and other staff were helpful, but there is a problem from the bottom to the top: for example, there is great difficulty in recruiting carers and care assistants in Milton Keynes. The council and the primary care trust launched an excellent initiative to reduce delayed discharges, using extra funding from the Department of Health to set up a home care team to rehabilitate people at home after hospital treatment. That project was funded, but there was difficulty in recruiting the necessary home care assistants.

The local economy is extremely buoyant, and there is an active retail sector; the shopping centre has expanded by 40 per cent. in the past year, which has had a huge knock-on effect on employment. Care worker pay rates of £5.70 an hour are uncompetitive locally. Residential care homes in the private sector cannot recruit staff either. Retention and recruitment is a real problem. The formula needs to take account of the comparative wage levels in the local economy because the NHS is competing with the private sector for staff at all levels.

The second problem is the lack of affordable housing. A joint initiative between the hospital trust and a housing trust to provide affordable housing for rent and shared ownership near the hospital has enabled the hospital trust to recruit people for occupational therapy or physiotherapy posts from elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Those people could take the jobs because they knew that they could find affordable housing.

We cannot keep producing ghetto housing for public sector workers. As well as examining whether the funding formula can recognise the extra housing costs, will the Minister talk to her colleagues in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions about the need for more affordable housing, and for more housing generally in the south-east? Unless more land is released for housing, the gap between the affordable housing sector and the private market sector will grow to such an extent that affordable housing will not offer a way for people to step into the private market, but will be a ghetto in which they are maintained for the whole of their working lives.

11.26 am

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): First, I congratulate my neighbour, the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) on raising the topic in debate this morning. Fareham falls under the Portsmouth health area. I notice that the hon. Member for Portsmouth, North (Syd Rapson) also wants to speak. I suspect that many of our concerns are the same. Our local hospital, the Queen Alexandra hospital in Cosham, is in his constituency. I should like to talk about some of the funding issues that we encounter in my part of Hampshire and the knock-on effects on the care that my constituents have received.

The Portsmouth Hospitals NHS trust announced last October or November that it had a £5 million deficit on expenditure for the financial year. It was able to broker £3 million of that deficit but had to find cost savings to recover the other £2 million. At the time the management identified that it would have to lose 150 jobs through natural wastage, some of which would be in front-line medical services. That is of great concern to local people at a time when health needs are increasing and, judging by some of my correspondence from local people, the level of health care in Portsmouth and Fareham appears to be declining.

In its financial report towards the end of last year the Fareham and Gosport primary care group highlighted the problems that it anticipated. It projected an overspend of £1.4 million and identified ways in which it could reduce that to £620,000, partly through allocation of reserves and partly through savings. Interestingly, because the local hospital had outperformed the national targets for waiting times, it thought that it could save £250,000 by allowing waiting times to slip from 15 to 26 weeks. I do not think that the Government gave it that money to cover deficits elsewhere. It is interesting that hospitals can reallocate money given to them by the Government for specific initiatives to cover shortfalls elsewhere. Even having identified various savings, it is still left with an overspend of £620,000 and, again, it will try to broker the limit. That means that the deficit will roll forward to next year, when perhaps there will be an overspend, too, so the process of deficits will continue to roll on from year to year.

Much has been made of the way in which the Government have increased spending in real terms, but it is interesting to examine how some of that money has been spent. The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) asked a parliamentary question on 5 March about administrative expenses as a proportion of health authority spending. The answer was revealing: the health authority covering the constituency of the hon Member for Winchester spent £6.8 million on administration in the financial year 2000-01, which was 1.6 per cent. of its total expenditure. In the Portsmouth and South East Hampshire local authority area, the administration costs for the same financial year were £10.4 million, 2.6 per cent. of that health authority's expenditure.

It could be argued that there had been economies of scale, which accounted for some of the differences between the two health authorities, but the spending on administration was much the same. The difference between them was only £4 million. We must consider the best practice of health authorities in their expenditure on administration. From 1 April, the health authorities will be swept away by strategic health authorities for Hampshire and primary care trusts in Portsmouth to cover Fareham and Gosport. I want to ensure that, in that reorganisation, the money spent on administration decreases, thus enabling more money to be spent on health care. The £4 million difference in administration costs between the two health authorities would have covered most of the deficit on spending for the Portsmouth Hospitals NHS trust of £5 million, so the health authorities and PCTs must consider administration finances as the new structure is introduced.

Hon. Members will have received, as I did, a list of complaints and problems from constituents about the services that they do not receive. Recently, Fareham

[Mr. Mark Hoban]

experienced the withdrawal of podiatry services to a wide range of elderly people, who will need to find private chiropodists. That will badly affect those in their late 80s, who are not sure to whom they can turn to receive that care. There is only one NHS dentist in Fareham, whose lists are now closed to NHS patients. A dental access centre has opened in the town, which has been welcomed by many people who have no NHS dentist. However, the centre does not have a patient list, and people can only make appointments on the basis of needing treatment. I am looking forward to visiting it a week on Friday to see what demand there is in Fareham for that service. I suspect that I shall find that demand exceeds supply.

Recently, the Blackbrook maternity home in my constituency was closed. It was a local facility and greatly relied on by mothers in Fareham for post-natal and antenatal care, as well as for delivering their babies. It is meant to be a temporary closure; it is the second temporary closure in two years and it is causing real worry. The problem was caused in part because maternity care in Portsmouth has been under pressure. When arriving at Portsmouth hospitals to have their babies delivered, women have been turned away and told to go to Chichester or Southampton. That is not an acceptable level of service.

Despite the Government's message about real increases in health spending, the experience of my constituents is that they have not seen that flowing through. That is a fundamental issue, because they are trying to match up their tax increases and the level of spending on the health service with what, to their minds, is the health service's failure to deliver the care that they expect to receive. That goes for all age ranges. I have talked about the closure of the maternity home in Fareham. The hon. Member for Winchester highlighted the issue of nursing homes. That is a real problem in south-east Hampshire.

One of the problems facing the owners of care homes is the impact of the change in standards for nursing and residential homes. In February 2001, I met a group of nursing home owners who said that they were under financial pressure. They viewed the high land values and the offers from property developers as a way out of their personal crises. They were not able to generate the revenue needed to pay for improvements to their homes that had to be made in order for them to stay in business and make a reasonably profitable livelihood.

Most of the dozen care home owners who attended were at the small end of the market, with homes providing up to 20 beds and offering more personal attention and care. Half of them thought that they would sell up in the next five years. More importantly, they believed that their businesses would not be bought as going concerns to provide care for the elderly, but would be sold to property developers, as that is simply the only economic answer for them and for those who want to enter the health care market.

I congratulate Hampshire county council on the work that it has done to try to secure nursing home beds in the county. In the past financial year, it increased nursing home fees by three times the rate of inflation. That was funded not by Government grants but by council tax payers' resources to try to maintain the supply of nursing home beds in the county. The council has done the elderly of Hampshire a great service and should be commended. However, I share its concern that it cannot continue to do that ad infinitum. The Government need to consider the revenue funding for nursing and residential homes to ensure that there is adequate availability of beds in future. As the health service changes, we will need to rely much more on nursing homes.

When I went to the Queen Alexandra hospital last summer to discuss the new hospital plans, it was considering a decrease in the number of acute beds in line with the model proposed by the national beds inquiry. However, that was predicated on the existence of intermediate care beds, either in hospitals or residential and nursing homes. If there are no such homes, we will end up with a much greater problem with bed blocking, as there will be fewer acute beds and more patients experiencing delayed discharges.

There is a fundamental funding problem in Hampshire. We can talk all we want about changing the formulae, but we must also consider how health care is delivered. The Government speak of the link between reform to the NHS and increased funding, but people on the sharp end of the health service in my constituency have noticed that although taxes have risen and health care spending has gone up, reforms to improve the health care that they get have not been introduced. The Government should consider carefully the reforms that they are pushing through to ensure that we free up more money for health care and spend far less on administration.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Peter Atkinson (in the Chair): Order. Before I call the hon. Member for Portsmouth, North (Syd Rapson), I must tell hon. Members that I propose to start the winding-up speeches at 12 o'clock, so if the three hon. Members who are seeking to catch my eye keep their speeches to about seven or eight minutes, they can all be called.

11.38 am

Syd Rapson (Portsmouth, North): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) on securing the debate, which is about the south-east region, as opposed to the parochial areas that we represent. Like the hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban), I shall concentrate on what we know and have to deal with. I have an inherent distrust of formulae; having been in local government and having created annual budgets, the potential for manipulation is quite well known to me. We must consider carefully how the formula is structured, and I welcome the words of the hon. Member for Fareham on the subject.

There is tremendous potential for economic expansion in the south-east. It will be the area that everybody looks at. That expansion produces benefits and disbenefits, such as pressures on housing, which can lead to difficulties in getting new general practice surgeries, for example. With regard to that, the cost of property in and around my constituency is so high that accommodation is hard to find. Therefore, economic expansion can also work against us.

We are proud that there have been several major Government announcements about Portsmouth: shipbuilding is returning, space exploration companies are winning major contracts and the Navy is re-gravitating to Portsmouth. Those are good things, and I am making the most of them in political terms, but they produce the same knock-on effect, because house prices rise dramatically due to the pressure caused by people moving in—and all the other problems that have been mentioned also get worse.

I have the greatest admiration for our local health groups. The health authority—as it was—did a tremendous job, and established good relationships. The new primary care trust and the trust are doing a marvellous job, in light of all of the pressures. They are loyal, and they are working within the realms of their ability, but they have worries about constraints on the budget, which restricts what they can do, and they express their concerns to the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock), the hon. Member for Fareham and me, who have regular meetings.

I wish to focus on the small point that the formula must be reconsidered, and the demographics must be looked at. The expansion of the economy, and the benefits that will flow from that, will make things worse. We must to try to re-balance that. If the Minister were to address that point, I would be grateful.

11.41 am

Mr. Archie Norman (Tunbridge Wells): I congratulate the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) on introducing the debate. It is of great relevance to constituents of hon. Members throughout the south-east of England.

With regard to the issue under debate, the case has been ably made, so I will focus my remarks on the key points. The first and most obvious point is that the crisis in heath care in the south-east was predictable. All the factors that we have talked about are capable of being forecast and understood. During the past three or four years, hon. Members warned the Department and its Ministers that this crisis was likely to arise—particularly with regard to bed blocking. Therefore, the Minister must answer a key question. Does the Department have any radar at all? If it has any capacity to forecast the extent of the problems as they arise, what does she envisage is likely to happen in the coming years? Currently, it is difficult to see why the situation with regard to bed blocking, for instance, might improve in the next two to three years; all the signs are that it will get worse.

Every hon. Member who has spoken has raised bed blocking, and in Kent the problem is on the verge of crisis. There are clear diseconomies: the Department is underfunding care homes and as a result, the NHS is having to take the strain. That has serious knock-on implications for the standards of clinical care in areas such as readmissions and the inability to give people the right level of intermediate care after they have had serious operations.

The problems are being driven by the implementation of new regulations. We have all heard that at first hand, from our visits to care homes, as my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) has said. We know that the problems are a result of the introduction of measures such as the minimum wage, and of the squeeze between the rising cost base and the opportunity cost of better property prices.

I and most other hon. Members know that, currently, there are care homes that are contemplating going out of business, and some of them are likely to do so in the coming months. Therefore, the problem will get worse, rather than better. In the whole of west Kent, I do not know of a single example of an entrepreneur or businessman who is planning to set up a new care home, so it is extremely difficult to see why this situation will not get worse. The problem goes straight back to the question of subsidies. That was predictable. The Minister might like to comment on that. As she will know, in Kent the Government elderly residential standard spending assessment—the formula per resident over 65—is £351. In Islington it is £917. That produces the appalling inequity in the system whereby London boroughs can purchase the best care homes in west Kent. As a result, patients released in west Kent into care homes must take the second choice of care homes and are often moved a long way from where they live or from their relatives. It is not merely that we do not have enough care homes. We have the second-best care homes. That is creating tremendous resentment among patients and immense frustration among NHS professionals.

The figures show the knock-on effect on the NHS. Last year, there was an 18.9 per cent. increase in delayed discharges in the south-east, which is appalling. It means that the percentage of delayed discharges in relation to the total number of patients is now 9.5 per cent., the highest in the country. What clearer statistical illustration can there be of the extent of the problem and the knock-on implications for the NHS?

The same applies to readmissions. As I said earlier, last year, west Kent had the second largest rise in readmissions in the country, because patients have to be sent home too early without adequate care. The result is predictable. They come back into hospital for further treatment later. There is real suffering among patients and real costs. The problem must be addressed. It is a crisis. It is not something that can be glazed over. It is obvious that the system of funding for care homes needs to be reviewed and that the interface between the two departments needs to be addressed. The crisis needs to be tackled now.

I do not have the figures, but on balance it is probably true that in the past few years the weight of capital expenditure in the NHS has gone into the north and the midlands. If that is true, that has happened for entirely understandable reasons. We understand that there are well deserving cases for new hospitals elsewhere in the country. However, the result is that we have a growing problem in the south-east.

We now have in principle a green light to proceed with a new hospital in Tunbridge Wells for the Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS trust and more investment in Maidstone. That is entirely welcome. It is a big leap forward. However, it is happening treacly slowly. I ask the Minister to consider how fast capital expenditure is being brought to bear. We first submitted a proposal for a new hospital in Tunbridge Wells in 1997. We now have the green light to proceed, but it is five years later. Even on the best possible time scale, that hospital is unlikely to open for another five years, so we are looking at a

[Mr. Archie Norman]

10-year lead time to tackle the problem. Can the process of investment in new hospitals and facilities in the south-east be accelerated so that we can have new capital facilities and so that doctors, nurses and staff can start working in conditions fit for the 21st century instead of for the 19th century?

11.48 am

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) on having secured the debate. Most of my focus will be local. I also congratulate him on being timely. The issue was taken up by last week's *Health Service Journal*, which states:

> "The projected deficit, submitted to regional offices at the end of last week as part of the annual service and financial framework round, has arisen because the demands on the service are running far ahead of the large increases in funding."

Health Service Journal goes on to discuss the south-east, where the problem is most acute. Chris Hurst from the Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals NHS trust said that mental health and information management and technology were likely to suffer as attempts were made to balance budgets, as they were generally seen as soft targets. He did not know how the gap between demands and funds would be bridged. Closer to home, Ian Marriott of Southampton and South West Hampshire health authority said:

> "For the whole of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, there is a potential deficit of £76m...that comprises a split between the NHS trusts of £17m and primary care trusts of £59m. On top of the £76m"

it is being asked to find

> "about £30m of cost savings. The confidence on this is variable. My submission says the level of savings is daunting. We are not going to magic these figures away. In any budget there is a margin of error, but not £100m."

That comes from a journal that understands such things.

On the issue of local prescribing, I received submissions from local primary care trusts. Advice from the south-east regional office during 2001-02 was that an increase of 5 per cent. would be appropriate. Local people warned that it was more likely to be 8 per cent., and, in effect, the outturn was approaching a 10 per cent. year-on-year increase. There is no sign that those increases in drug spending will be taken into account.

The pressure, however, has been almost entirely caused by certain Government initiatives. The single therapeutic area currently responsible for the greatest increase in expenditure is lipid lowering drugs or statins. The Government rightly boasts of their success in increasing the prescription of such drugs. However, they must appreciate that that comes at a price.

Another pressure is the mandatory implementation of National Institute for Clinical Excellence guidelines. I have no problem with that, because they are funded. However, there is still a robust denial that that will have an impact on spending on other drugs. Perhaps it will lead only to a greater year-on-year deficit.

I echo the sentiments already stated that it is right and proper that areas in greatest need receive most money, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester pointed out, it cannot be entirely fair that the range of funding is so wide—83 per cent. to 134 per cent. An adjustment of only 5 per cent. at each end of the scale would go a long way towards helping the Winchester and Eastleigh Healthcare NHS trust, for example, without imposing any significant challenge for the highest funded, which would still receive 50 per cent. more per capita. That problem must be addressed.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (North-East Hampshire): The hon. Lady makes important points in an important debate. Does she agree that, although it is clear that people in the area in which we live—Hampshire—are healthier and have better longevity, a certain level of health care, including the time in which one can expect to be treated and a manner of treatment which one ought to be able to expect, should be taken into account in a civilised society when developing a health funding formula?

Sandra Gidley: I entirely agree. It is telling that the majority of hon. Members taking part in the debate are from Hampshire. That must say something.

The Winchester and Eastleigh Healthcare NHS trust has three-star status, so it could be argued that it does not need the money. Putting aside for one moment the argument that the star ratings are based on selective and arbitrary measures, the system is badly overloaded. Most people wait 18 months for a hip replacement, which is also the case in Southampton and South West Hampshire health care trust. Consequently, in order to meet targets, the Winchester and Eastleigh trust spent approximately £1 million accessing private health care. "Aha," I hear hon. Members say, "The Government provide money for that very purpose." They do, but not enough. They provide funding only to the tune of £500,000.

The waiting list for orthopaedics is unfortunately—or fortunately, in a way—a result of the population living longer. We have a long life expectancy in the south of England, and have reached the stage of replacing hip replacements because people are living so long. People should not be penalised for living longer. However long they live, they deserve access to prompt and high-standard health care. That is rapidly becoming more difficult to provide.

Analysis of recent NHS performance indicators shows that the performance of Winchester and Eastleigh trust is below average for both delayed discharges and improvement of 13-week out-patient waits. That shows that the south-east's health care system is creaking under the strain. It is more worrying that although my local trust has retained better than average outcomes for most types of cancer, its performance is slipping from year to year. That aspect cannot be totally unrelated to the difficulty of access to radiography treatment, which my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester highlighted.

I want to mention primary care trusts because, theoretically, they will be in control of a huge proportion of health spending. I have a real fear that much of that money will come with strings attached, and there will be little freedom to spend it. PCTs are set and ready to go. I gather that few of them have appropriate financial expertise available to help them. They have been forced to accommodate a share of the current health authority deficits. Does the Minister agree that that is no way to launch a new organisation? Will she undertake to find funding so that new PCTs start with a clean balance sheet and do not struggle to address problems that are no fault of their own?

The Government have a golden opportunity to redress existing inequalities and to come up with a fairer funding formula that takes into account not only the specific problems of the north, but specific problems of the south and, especially, the deprived rural areas in the south that receive little attention.

11.56 am

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I am delighted to add my tribute to those paid to my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten). He set out a cogent case for the need for more funding for the health service in the south-east. He drew our attention to demography, the problems of the shortfall of social services funding and the problem that much funding that enters the health service is non-recurrent, which makes planning difficult and stores up pressures for the future. He mentioned, as did other hon. Members, the problems of recruitment and retention in the south-east, and discussed waiting times for cancer treatment. He also made an important point about whether fixed costs—administration costs—which should be the same for every head of population, should be subject to the formula.

I want to address many issues that my hon. Friend raised, but he was a little too charitable, in his diplomatic manner, toward the Government when discussing overall funding levels. It must be recognised that almost every—if not every—health authority and trust throughout the country is facing huge pressures. It is difficult to know the areas from which we can take funding in order to improve funding for the areas that south-east Members, including myself, represent.

The health service has been chronically underfunded for not only 18 years, as the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey) said, but for 20 or 21 years. The step change in funding that people thought that they were voting for in 1997 did not occur until 1999-2000. Figures show that the settlements in 1997-98 and 1998-99 were among the most miserly real-term increases of the past few decades. That cannot be disguised and history cannot be rewritten by people who continually talk about 18 years of underfunding, but know that that occurred for 20 years.

It is clear that we were right when we said—both times—that taxation should rise fairly to fund a bigger cake. We could then discuss how the cake should be divided, but a bigger cake is needed. When the Government are faced with that point, they cannot get away with arguing that they have given the health service more funding than our party called for. If one looks at the arithmetic, that is nonsense. We committed ourselves to the Government's spending plans plus extra funding from specific taxation increases. To argue that that is less than the Government would spend implies that, if we were in office, we would simply get a pile of cash and burn it, rather than add to the spending through specific, fair and targeted increases in revenue raising. More funding is required in the overall system.

Then there is the question of how one divides the cake. I think that the Government accept that a formula-based allocation of all the funding does not seem reasonable. I am referring to the fixed administrative costs, which are not related to some of the demography on which the formula depends. The Government top slice funding from the cake and allocate it in their own way, rather than according to a formula. That represents an inherent recognition that the formula-based allocation is not always the best way to allocate funding.

I am a little more cautious than other hon. Members about calling for the difference in funding levels between needy and less needy areas to be narrowed. One could not necessarily justify that before seeing a narrowing of health inequalities. One sad aspect of the Government's record is that we have not seen the narrowing of health inequalities that we all want as quickly as we might have. However, if the Government can deliver on that, the difference in funding levels could be narrowed.

Of course, the Government recognise that the formula sets only the target funding. The allocations then move towards that target as quickly as growth allows. In years of low growth, there is little movement towards the target because the allocations are so flat. I am interested to know whether the Government believe that they are doing enough to move authorities that are underfunded according to the formula more quickly towards their target. These health authorities and primary care trusts will exist throughout the country, and a number in the south-east feel that, if the formula exists, they should at least be moving towards the target more quickly.

The hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West made a number of good points. I know Milton Keynes general hospital well and am also aware of the pressure that it is under with the area's expanding population. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester, the hon. Lady talked about the need to use the new census figures as soon as they are available. Similarly, she made important points about creating a housing ladder, not just of affordable housing but from which people can move up.

There is a problem with saying that one area is underfunded because another is overfunded. I remember hon. Members from the Northampton area complaining in 1997-98 that Northamptonshire health authority was allocating all the growth money that they had expected to the Kettering area. Rather than blaming the Government, however, hon. Members from the Kettering area claimed, in an almost simultaneous press release, that Kettering was not getting the extra money because it was all going to the Northampton area. That "robbing Peter to pay Paul" mentality simply will not do.

I believe that similar things have happened in Buckinghamshire, where other hospitals, including those in Aylesbury and Wycombe, are also under pressure. I accept that demographic growth there has not been as great as that of Milton Keynes.

Dr. Starkey: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the extra money for Milton Keynes has come only from growth money. We have been complaining because we did not see why our historic underfunding should

[Dr. Starkey]

continue, but the fact is that the money came only from growth money and was not taken from other parts of Buckinghamshire.

Dr. Harris: I accept that, but two points need to be made. First, money can be taken from growth money only when there is growth money, and the hon. Lady will accept that, in the first two years of the Labour Administration, there was precious little growth money. Secondly, if money is taken from growth for one area, less is available from growth for another. That is a fact of life, and all areas are suffering extreme pressures. If those hon. Members who represent other parts of Buckinghamshire were here, they would not tell a happy story about full funding.

The hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) rightly questioned whether it is sensible to lose front-line staff when there are so many pressures on the health service. How can the Government justify hospitals having to make huge cuts—they are not efficiency gains, cost savings or cost improvements—when they are under such pressure?

The hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman) made an important point. Even where places in care homes are available, often better-funded social services authorities can pay a higher price and outbid those in the local area. That is a particular problem on the south coast, where London social services authorities buy beds because it is perceived to be a nice place for people to spend time in rehabilitation, long-term care or residential homes.

It is bizarre that the Government should allow any delayed discharges, which are an abuse of people stuck in hospital beds and a huge waste of resources. That is the nub of the problem; it is not simply a matter of more money. The money could be better spent if funding were given to social services to obliterate delayed discharges, which tie up large amounts of NHS capacity. Money is paid over the odds, particularly on the south coast, for people who could be treated locally to go to France for treatment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) mentioned the problems of areas that are not Government targets losing out. She quoted the director of finance at the Oxford Radcliffe hospital on the subject of mental health and information and communications technology who said, rightly, that they are soft targets. There are no targets in the Government's performance-indicator game in such areas; they are de-funded to meet other targets. My hon. Friend spoke of her direct experience of the huge pressures caused by demography and the pressures on drug budgets of prescribing new and effective drugs.

There is general underfunding, and more resources are needed. Clinical priorities are distorted because of the Government's insistence that certain targets are met, which means that anything that is not targeted is de-funded and, as *The Sunday Telegraph* reported, surgeons are asked to do less clinically urgent operations before those that are more urgent. Mr. Rawlins of Bedford hospital said that that distortion of clinical priorities "may be unethical". It is unethical; I have asked the British Medical Association to consider whether it is ethical for doctors to go along with a central diktat to treat less clinically urgent cases for political reasons, rather than on the basis of patient need.

Money could be better spent if it were directed in large amounts to the needs of social services authorities to enable them to afford to place people in care homes. In my constituency, it is not so much a Berlin wall, as the Government said, as a Berlin trench. Both sides are digging for funds; they are both significantly over budget; they get on well together and there is excellent joint working, but if they do not have the funds, there is little they can do.

The Government must recognise that there is a false economy in failing to deal with recruitment and retention problems, especially in the south-east, as hospitals are forced to pay over the odds for agency nurses. Paying nurses a decent amount, or providing increased amounts—more than what is promised—for housing costs and living allowances would be a more cost-effective way of generating a home-grown work force that could afford to stay in the service and was prepared to do so. Those are significant problems, which the Government must face now.

12.9 pm

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): I welcome you to the Chair, Mr. Benton. I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) on securing this interesting and well-informed debate and on his early-day motion drawing attention to the problems of funding health care in the south-east.

I stray into the debate, which has referred mainly to Hampshire health care, with trepidation. However, the points that have been raised will be familiar to all hon. Members in the Chamber. They certainly apply to my constituency of East Worthing and Shoreham. The speeches this morning also show how large and diverse the south-east is. It includes Milton Keynes, Winchester, Fareham, Portsmouth, Tunbridge Wells and my constituency on the Sussex coast. The hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey) mentioned the public health director in Buckinghamshire: I should be interested to know what part of continental Europe he contrasts with Milton Keynes when he goes further afield in his comparisons of the success in her county.

The debate has also shown that it is not just a question of funding, important though that is, but that much more complex issues are at work such as the cost of living and recruitment problems. Life is not a bowl of cherries in the south-east as is so often thought. We have great contrasts. Arundel is the healthiest place to live in the United Kingdom and is one of the more affluent parts of the country, but just along the coast, Hastings, with all its health care and social problems, is one of the most deprived areas in the south-east. One of the wards in Worthing is in the top 10 per cent. of deprived wards in the country.

The south-east is the largest region in the country, accounting for 13.5 per cent. of the population. As the hon. Member for Winchester mentioned, it is set to grow disproportionately with the building of at least 900,000 new houses over the next 15 years. It is the fastest growing economic region and the Government intend it to be one of the top 10 economic regions of Europe; but that will not happen with our current infrastructure problems, not least the shortfalls in health care provision and the associated cost of living limitations.

We have a very elderly population and, coming from Worthing, I know more about that than most. Sussex alone has eight constituencies among the top two dozen with the largest number of older people. In West Worthing 42.6 per cent. of constituents are of pensionable age and in my constituency the figure is 32 per cent. Older people bring more health funding requirements with them. It is not just a question of the orthopaedic costs, although I speak as someone whose father has had a hip replacement of a hip replacement and he is only 67. As the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West mentioned, we also have a young population in the region. The younger and older age groups impose the biggest strains on the health service and the funding requirements that go with it. We are seeing the consequences at both ends.

There are enormous discrepancies in the amount of per capita funding that we receive, as my hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman) mentioned. In the forecasts for 2002-03, the per capita funding through health authorities is £1,204 for Camden and Islington, £1,041 for east London, £1,002 for Manchester and £940 for Sunderland. Yet it is £741 for west Kent, £745 for west Surrey and £790 for west Sussex. Those are enormous discrepancies, which cause great problems in our constituencies. There are also great discrepancies within social services funding. Much of it goes towards the elderly. My authority spends an enormous amount above its standard spending assessment. Authorities throughout the country spend £1 billion above what the Government fund them for and think they should spend. It largely goes on extra care for the elderly. The demographics of the situation mean that that problem is getting worse.

As hon. Members have said, the imbalance of the system where the NHS takes the strain for the underfunding of social services, leading to the delayed discharges and bed blocking is worse in the south-east than in any other area. It is more than double what it is in the north-west. Premature discharges from hospitals because of the shortage of beds result in people coming back into hospital as emergency admissions only a few days or weeks later. Again in the south-east we suffer from that more than any other region as figures released just the other week show. Hospital emergency readmissions are climbing all the time.

The position will get worse in the south-east. There is, as my hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells said, a crisis in care and the health service, particularly in our region. Because of the extra capitation for funding social service places in London, for example, London boroughs place their elderly people into nursing and residential homes in Kent and Sussex. Our local authorities cannot afford to place our own people in local residential homes.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban), I congratulate Hampshire county council, which has bucked the trend by increasing the number of available residential places—but at great cost to local council tax payers. Other figures, such as those on hospital waiting times and waiting lists, show that, not surprisingly, the south-east again bears the brunt of the problems. The percentages of people waiting for more than 12 months are 10.9 per cent. in west Surrey, 8.7 per cent. in east Surrey and 9.3 per cent. in west Sussex. Disproportionately, three hospitals in the south-east are among the bottom five in the national tables on in-patient waiting times: the Royal Surrey county hospital in Guildford, the Princess Royal hospital in Haywards Heath and the East Surrey and Crawley hospital in Redhill. Which hospitals and health care trusts are among those with the longest trolley waits? They are all within the south-east: Brighton, Surrey and Sussex, Dartford and Gravesham, Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells, and the Royal West Sussex hospital all have well above average trolley wait times. I fear that the situation is getting worse.

We have all heard about pressures on GPs. Worthing has had some of the biggest pressures in the country. Almost a year ago we had a debate in Westminster Hall on the subject and in the summer the Minister kindly came down to Worthing to see the problem at first hand. I fear that nothing has been done and the problem is getting worse. Just about every GP surgery within Worthing has closed its lists. New GPs and practice nurses cannot be recruited to help with that worsening work load.

GP vacancies across the region have leapt up disproportionately in the past year. In east Kent, GP vacancies have gone up from 13 to 29 per cent. In Oxfordshire, the area of the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris), they have gone up from 24 to 62 per cent. In west Kent it has doubled, from 31 to 60 per cent. That is a common problem across our region.

Nursing vacancies have similarly increased, as the hon. Member for Portsmouth, North (Syd Rapson) said. He also mentioned the problem of GP surgeries. The surge in property prices has meant that people are being priced not only out of buying residential homes but out of buying and extending new surgeries. The cost of living in the south-east also means that we have some of the highest figures for nursing vacancies and ancillary staff in the country. As the Audit Commission found, the additional cost of employing agency staff is excessive. Agency staff now cover one in 10 daily shifts in the NHS. The cost to the NHS of employing temporary nurses rose by a record 20 per cent. in 1999-2000 because agency staff typically earn nearly 20 per cent. more than NHS nurses. That is not an ideal situation.

There are also vacancies in social services. If one does not get the social services right, people are neglected, particularly elderly people and they end up as emergency admissions, placing additional pressure on hospitals. Kent, in particular, which is the largest authority in the country, currently has social worker vacancy rates of around 20 per cent. I could touch on many other areas. The hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West mentioned the enormous gaps in mental health care, particularly for adolescent mental health services, which is a particular problem in the south-east. My hon. Friend the Member for Fareham referred to the enormous variation in management costs across the country, particularly in our region. It is not surprising that just a few weeks ago the Department of Health had to admit that we have a record number of managers, a

[Tim Loughton]

record number of low bed numbers and a ratio of 1.15 administration and estate management staff for every one bed in the country. That situation is getting worse and the discrepancies between the regions are enormous.

It is therefore no surprise that in January a leaked memo from Ruth Carnell, the chief executive of the NHS in the south-east, showed an overspend of at least £60 million in health care in the south-east. That money will have to come from somewhere. We have a real problem in the south-east and we need a fair assessment of the demographic and population density pressures on our services. Above all, we need a joined-up approach, not the existing fire-fighting approach mentioned by the hon. Member for Winchester.

12.19 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): In the short time available to me, I shall endeavour to deal with the majority of points raised by hon. Members. If I do not have time to deal with specific points, details or technicalities, I undertake to write to hon. Members.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) not only on securing this debate, but on the way in which he presented his case. It was a pity that the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) should have accused him of being over-charitable. A debate is obviously taking place between the two hon. Gentlemen on where they eventually want to position themselves, and we will all be delighted to see the result.

The hon. Member for Winchester made some important points. Indeed, hon. Members representing seats throughout the region raised issues that we all see on our visits and experience in the community. He made some suggestions about the formula, and I shall respond to them in detail.

I pay tribute to the Winchester and Eastleigh trust. It is doing an excellent job; I have seen the presentation made by Mr. David Livermore, the chief executive, on the funding pressures faced by the trust. It is a beacon site, and I am delighted that it is delivering all its targets. I acknowledge Mr. Livermore's drive to try to deliver on budget, and his difficulties in achieving it.

The hon. Member for Winchester asked for the new census data to be used as quickly as possible, as it would ensure a more accurate formula. I am told that we will be using the new census data, but that the administrative processes involved will mean that it is likely to take another two years for it to be fed fully into the formula. However, if I can shorten that time, I shall do so. It is important to all hon. Members that that up-to-date information should be available. Most of us know how fast our communities can change during a 10-year period. It is therefore important to make sure that the information is up to date.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether we could take the fixed administrative costs out of the formula, so that it was targeted at health needs rather than administrative functions. It would probably be a difficult task—these things always are, and formulae are complex—but I could ask the review body to consider that aspect. I would welcome suggestions from the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members on what fixed costs might be taken into account.

The hon. Gentleman asked about market forces and the pay element of the formula. I am told that the university of Warwick was asked to review the number of pay zones incorporated in the formula this year, and I am told that the number of zones has increased. The market forces factor has been updated as a result, so that it is a little more sensitive to the wage rates that are being paid.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about the transitional costs of shifting the balance of power and whether they would be met. I am informed that £55 million will be provided transitionally in 2002-03 and 2003-04 to meet those costs. Pressure on the delivery of health care would be lessened as a result of being able to meet the inevitable transitional costs. Once the shift in the balance of power is completed, administrative savings of about £100 million will accrue from the reduction in the number of health authorities, but transitional costs are inevitable.

Mr. Oaten: I am grateful to Minister for answering those points so clearly. Will she confirm that although there may be a review to consider the impact that market forces have on wages, the market forces element of the formula should consider also some of the other issues that have been mentioned this morning, such as property prices, because market forces have an impact not only on wages, but on many other aspects of health care provision?

Ms Blears: I take the point made by the hon. Gentleman. Some factors in the formula relate to housing, but they are based more on people's access to basic facilities such as central heating, indoor sanitation and other traditional factors of deprivation that have been included in Government formulae for many years. However, housing costs are not specifically included. The hon. Gentleman makes an important point.

My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey) made the interesting point that, in addition to the number of elderly people in communities, the health needs of young families are also a factor. I hope that hon. Members will be aware that there are competing internal tensions and contradictions in trying to provide fairness for different areas of the country, for different groups in the population and for those with different health needs.

Although many hon. Members have mentioned the increase in the number of elderly people who are living longer and, therefore, causing health costs to rise, life expectancy is lower in some areas of the country than in others, which require extra funding to address the social deprivation that leads to lower life expectancy. As my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West and the hon. Member for Winchester recognised, including health inequality in the formula and directing funds towards areas of greatest need is entirely proper, although staff recruitment and retention, housing costs and economic pressure in the south-east must also be taken into account.

I hope that hon. Members of all parties will recognise that in devising a formula, it is important to target resources on the areas of greatest need. It is a matter not of counting heads, but rather of directing health service resources to the places where people are more ill more often and die earlier, as well as providing the continuing care that is important for communities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West acknowledged the progress that has been made on extra capacity in the past few years. To set the debate in context, there has been an increase this year in health service spending nationally of almost 10 per cent., an extra £601 million this year for the south-east, and an increase in social services spending over the past five years of about 20 per cent. compared with an increase in the last five years of the previous Administration of only 1 per cent.

There are pressures. Far too many people wait too long for treatment, far too many people wait in hospital to be discharged and I accept that there are huge pressures in the south-east, but that must be seen in the context of significant and substantial increases in national health service investment. I hope that hon. Members will build a consensus around the need for increased and sustained investment in the health service, not just in the next few years but hopefully, for a long time to come, so that we can redress decades of underfunding.

My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West is right that we must do more to encourage imaginative housing schemes to give people a first step on the housing ladder. That is incredibly difficult when one considers the average house price in the south-east. NHS Estates is now involved in a large-scale programme of shared ownership and shared equity schemes, trying to utilise parcels of NHS land together with developers so that part of the development provides affordable housing units for staff. We are facing exactly the same problems with teachers, police officers and other public sector workers.

My hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North (Syd Rapson) made some extremely good points on behalf of his community, which took into account the economic expansion in the south-east. That is a driver and the engine of our economy, so it is vital that we deal with the issues of housing and recruitment.

The remarks of the hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) must be set in the context of the increased investment in his local area of £48 million this year. He mentioned chiropody and dentistry. I am afraid that hundreds of dentists withdrew from the national health service when their contracts were changed in the early 1990s. That decimated NHS dentistry. We are doing a great deal to bring those dentists back, but it is not easy. I am pleased that he has a dental access centre in his constituency and I hope that he will visit it. We shall do what we can to increase the number of NHS dentists.

The hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman) was especially concerned about delayed discharges. I am pleased to be able to tell him that delayed discharges in the south-east have decreased by 183 since last September as a result of the extra £100 million invested last year and the extra £200 million that will be invested in the forthcoming year. I think that, in his area, £2 million was invested this year and £4.5 million will be invested next year. I am not saying that that will solve the problem because we all know what problems exist, but there is increased investment. It is not only about providing increased investment for bricks and mortar. It is also about providing more domiciliary care support in people's homes to keep them independent. An awful lot of elderly people do not want to go into residential care; they want support at home, which is what we are trying to provide.

The hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) commented on the funding of primary care trusts. They have been involved in the whole service and financial frameworks round. They will inherit health authorities' assets, as well as their liabilities. From now on, they will be the power and the driving force in health communities. It is right that they will make decisions about priorities in consultation with their local communities.

Housing (Hyndburn)

12.30 pm

Mr. Greg Pope (Hyndburn): I am grateful to have secured this debate on housing in Hyndburn, which is undoubtedly the most important issue facing my constituency. I am also grateful for the opportunity to place on record my thanks to my noble Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning, Lord Falconer, for visiting my constituency at my request in October 2001. He also visited the neighbouring constituencies of Blackburn, Rossendale and Darwen, Burnley and Pendle, which have virtually the same housing problems as Hyndburn.

It is fair to say that my noble Friend was shocked by what he saw. Of course, he met councillors, Members of Parliament and local authority and private sector representatives, but, most importantly, he met people who live in my constituency. I took him to Lonsdale street in Accrington, once a sought-after place to live, but now a place where decent families try their best to bring up their children in the most appalling housing conditions. I showed my noble Friend an abandoned and derelict housing block, which has been vandalised, which is regularly set on fire and which is infested with rodents. Yet, houses in the middle of the block and facing it are occupied. In 2002, people are living there in the most appalling conditions.

The raw statistics make pretty grim reading. In the borough of Hyndburn, 9,000 houses are unfit for human habitation. Of those, 8,000 are privately owned. Some 2,700 houses have been abandoned. They have no value, and people simply walked away from them when they could not sell them.

In the statistical appendix to its 2001 housing investment programme bid, Hyndburn council estimated that the cost of making fit the unfit private homes in the constituency was about £180 million. In the last year for which I could obtain figures, the council was spending slightly more than £1 million on the problem. In best value performance indicator BVP162, the Government asked what percentage of unfit private houses the council had made fit or cleared during 2000-01—the last year for which figures are available—and the council's answer was 1 per cent.

It would [illegible] easy for me as the Labour Member of Parliament for Hyndburn to point the finger of blame at Tory-controlled Hyndburn council, particularly as we have all-out elections in early May. I shall not do that, however, for two reasons. First, the people who live in such housing deserve better from their elected representatives than cheap point-scoring. On such issues, it is better for us to forget our politics. I, the Government and Hyndburn council—whoever runs it—should work together for the good of those people.

Secondly, the problem is not really the council's fault, because it does not have the resources to put right the problems that my constituents face. The majority of homes in Hyndburn—more than four out of five—are privately owned. Of those, 30 per cent. are unfit for human habitation and another 10 to 15 per cent. are becoming unfit. As Lord Falconer would testify, the statistics do not do justice to the scale of the problem. One needs to meet the people who are trapped in those houses—people like Robert Treasure of Steiner street in Accrington, whom I had the privilege of meeting last year when I went to his home. The conditions in which Mr. Treasure lives are almost unimaginable. It is not an exaggeration to say that he exists in the sort of Victorian squalor that most people would have thought had been swept away generations ago.

An elderly lady from Accrington came to my advice surgery close to tears. She had moved into a property on Pearl street when she got married, after the second world war, then a nice part of Accrington, but now something approaching a war zone. Houses are abandoned and wrecked, and unscrupulous landlords buy up properties for next to nothing and put in them people with drink and drug problems. She cannot move—she is trapped; nobody would give a mortgage on a property in Pearl street. Her only chance of getting out is if the council demolishes the street—I hope that that will be done soon and think that it will be.

During the general election, I met a lady living on Garbutt street and asked her for her vote. She said that she would not vote for me or my opponent; she had been let down by everybody of every conceivable political party. She was right—if I had lived in her house I would not have voted for me. It is a badge of shame on the reputations of all who seek to represent people like that lady that she is still living in those conditions. We have seen a complete collapse in the housing market in parts of my constituency. There is a cycle of despair in which the prices of properties are so low in some areas that they are completely worthless.

In Lambeth, not far from where I have a London flat, there is a terraced house for sale with an asking price in excess of £300,000. In parts of my constituency, that property would not be worth a tenth or even a hundredth of that. People are trapped in negative equity. They are unable to sell or to move and houses are abandoned; there is a surplus of houses in the market. We have a doughnut effect: in the inner parts of towns, the market is collapsing or has collapsed, and on the edges of towns, new build is very popular. My constituency is a collection of small mill towns that are proud of their historic distinctions. Residents do not want to see a blurring between Great Harwood and Clayton, Clayton and Rishton or Oswaldtwistle and Accrington. However, there is huge pressure on new build on the green belt areas between the towns, whereas in the centres of towns the housing market has collapsed.

In parts of my constituency, renovation will not be enough. The houses are just too poor to repair. In other areas it is not worth repairing them because there is no market for that kind of housing. It is increasingly clear that we shall have to demolish a large number of houses. That should have been done in the 1960s, as it was in places such as Sheffield, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle and all the major cities. Demolition did not happen in east Lancashire partly because of the structure of local government. In my constituency alone, there were half a dozen tiny urban district councils, which did not have the resources to clear those properties. They have been replaced by slightly larger district councils, but they, too, are far too small—Hyndburn council does not have the resources for clearance, nor does Pendle or Rossendale. The irony is that city authorities are now getting grants from the

Government to knock down the houses with which they replaced the terraces—in east Lancashire we have not even replaced the terraces.

Last summer saw large-scale disturbances in the neighbouring constituency of Burnley. There is no doubt in my mind—and none in the minds of anyone who has been to Burnley and knows east Lancashire—that the appalling housing conditions were a contributory factor to those disturbances. We were extraordinarily lucky that those disturbances did not spread to neighbouring boroughs, such as Hyndburn to the west and Pendle to the east. The taskforce report on the disturbances states:

> "In almost every sense it is clear that, whilst Burnley is not a city, it experiences all of the chronic problems associated with inner city deprivation."

That is true for not only Burnley but Accrington, Nelson, Colne and large parts of Rossendale and Blackburn. If we do not want a repetition of those problems, we must face the fact that we need to invest in those areas.

When Lord Falconer visited east Lancashire, he invited the local authorities to submit a 10-year bid. It is clear that we could double the amount of money that Hyndburn council has next year, or triple or quadruple it, and that it would not make that much difference. A one-off payment will not resolve the problems. We must have year-on-year investment, for which we need a 10-year programme of housing renewal.

This is not simply a Hyndburn problem; it would be appalling enough if it were confined only to my constituency, but all the neighbouring towns and constituencies have the same problems. Throughout the sub-region, which includes Blackburn, Hyndburn, Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale, half the houses were built before the first world war. We have twice the national average of private homes that are empty and abandoned and a quarter of the housing stock is unfit for human habitation. It was with that background that the east Lancashire partnership, acting on behalf of all the local authorities in east Lancashire, submitted a 10-year bid, which will cost in total some £670 million.

If that bid were successful, we would be able to remove the surplus housing stock by clearing the worst of it. That would enable us to remodel the housing market, which we desperately need to do to stop the doughnut effect and make it worth while to live in the inner part of Accrington or any of the other towns in east Lancashire. It would also enable us to improve our neighbourhoods with grants and loans and some environmental work. Therefore, I cannot impress enough on the Minister how important it is that the bid be successful. My purpose in securing the debate is to urge the Minister and the Government to support the bid. We can make a huge difference to the lives of tens of thousands of people in my constituency and east Lancashire as a whole.

The lady whom I met during the general election said that politicians of all parties had failed her, and she is absolutely right. A Conservative-controlled council is failing her, but she was equally failed by Hyndburn council when it was a Labour-run authority. She was failed by a Conservative Government for 18 years and she is being failed by this Government. She was failed by my predecessor, Ken Hargreaves, who was a good Conservative MP, and she is being failed by me as well. We have a once in a generation opportunity to put the matter right and make a difference to that lady and others like her who are living in unfit housing in my constituency and in other constituencies. I urge the Minister to join me to make a difference.

12.48 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope) on securing the debate and describing eloquently what is, for him and other hon. Members, a pressing and important matter that touches the lives of many of their constituents. The Government fully share his concerns, and I am glad to have the opportunity to set out the Government's view. The hardship that my noble Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning saw in the Lancashire towns when he visited them impressed itself upon him. I have not visited Hyndburn, but I have certainly seen similar areas in the north and in parts of the midlands as well.

The issue of housing in Hyndburn is part of a broad east Lancashire housing problem. East Lancashire towns in general are characterised by high proportions of aged, privately owned terraced houses in poor condition. More than 60 per cent. of the stock was built before 1919—my hon. Friend referred to somebody who moved into such a house after the war. Presumably, over the years, the structural state of that house will not have changed much. I am sure that people will have made many improvements, but not such as to deal with some of the structural difficulties of that type of housing.

The continued existence of such housing means that there are surplus supplies of obsolete housing. My hon. Friend referred to the problems in Burnley and elsewhere—the disturbances during the summer—and it is clear that housing was an important contributory factor. Housing issues, including housing disadvantage and decay, are overlaid by racial and ethnic divides.

As my hon. Friend rightly said, the problem of low demand is not unique to Hyndburn—it is shared with neighbouring areas in east Lancashire and other areas throughout the north and the midlands, particularly in parts of the east midlands. It is, in many respects, a reverse image of the difficulties in London and the south-east. The challenge for the Government in the low-demand areas is to deal with obsolete housing and recreate value where the housing market has completely collapsed, whereas the problem in London and the south-east is to mitigate the effect of very high values in areas of high demand such as the part of Lambeth described by my hon. Friend. The Government have to deal with both of those problems, recognising that they require different solutions but are both intensely human.

The Government are committed to tackling low demand and we have set ourselves the target of reversing declining demand by 2010. One of the main reasons why we attach so much importance to that is that low demand blights communities and people's lives. The symptoms are cruel and immediately apparent in east Lancashire and elsewhere. As my hon. Friend said, people no longer want to buy or live in the mostly terraced housing, so row upon row of houses are boarded up, vandalism is rampant and crime is increasing

[Ms Sally Keeble]

Once decline sets in, it is hard to reverse. The people who are left feel under siege in their own communities and are unable to move out. Unfortunately, we are faced with this kind of decline in too many communities throughout the country. The housing problems caused by low demand are overwhelming the capacity of all agencies to respond to this and other aspects of regeneration.

It might help my hon. Friend if I set out some points about the Government's contribution before talking about the housing market renewal fund, which is extremely important.

Nationally, as we made clear in our housing policy statement in December 2000, we are committed to addressing housing problems across private sector tenures, which are particularly prevalent in my hon. Friend's constituency, and those in the public sector, as part of our strategy for housing renewal and tackling social exclusion. Local authorities have a vital role to play in that and we have substantially increased the resources available for housing investment. Allocations to authorities for the coming year will total £2.6 billion, three times the amount provided by the last Conservative Government.

I understand why my hon. Friend made certain points about his constituents having been failed, but the Government recognise the difficulties and we have policies in place to tackle them. It should be borne in mind that the problems were a long time coming and that resolving them fully will be a difficult, long-term job. A large part of the overall spending will go towards delivering our commitment to bring all council housing up to a decent standard by 2010. However, authorities' housing programmes fund a significant amount of private sector housing renewal work—local authorities currently spend more than £250 million a year on more than 70,000 dwellings.

We are providing considerably more funding this year for the north-west—an extra £55 million through the housing investment programme—and some £9.7 million has been allocated to east Lancashire local authorities this year for improving housing through the housing investment programme. This investment programme is due to increase by nearly 20 per cent. in England during the next three years.

Some 21 authorities in the north-west region will share an extra £243 million over the next three years through the neighbourhood renewal fund, which deals with some of the wider regeneration issues in my hon. Friend's constituency and in other towns in the north-west. In east Lancashire the neighbourhood renewal fund will provide an extra £20 million for regeneration during the next three years. That extra funding will enable those authorities to make significant improvements to living conditions in their area and give homeowners the incentive to invest in their homes.

Apart from neighbourhood renewal and the increased funding from the housing investment programme, there are also proposals, which my hon. Friend rightly identifies, for a market renewal fund that will deal specifically with the need to restructure the housing markets in some areas, particularly in the north-west, and create value where presently there is none. That is the nub of many of the problems in my hon. Friend's constituency. Many people have come to the view that combating low demand will require intervention, particularly at the sub-regional level.

We have received comprehensive proposals for a housing market renewal fund from several different authorities and we are considering them as part of the current comprehensive spending review. The review will conclude in the summer and at this stage I cannot say any more about the prospects of finance for the proposals, although this debate will help to raise the profile of the issue and underline the importance of ensuring that difficult housing issues are properly understood by the Government.

However, whatever the outcome of the spending review, action should not be postponed, and we look to local authorities to make a start. Inevitably, there are difficult choices to be made. Restructuring the housing market can mean managing the decline of an area, removing obsolescent housing and reducing the scale of new building. That requires engaging people in a real and honest debate about the future.

It can be very uncomfortable for people to think in terms of their house or housing in their community or area being either demolished, partially demolished or substantially changed. The situation requires stakeholders to work together in a genuine partnership. Hyndburn must, of course, play its part in that. I acknowledge the work of the east Lancashire partnership, which provides a sound foundation on which to build, and it might be of help to set out some of its work to find a long-term strategy for the problems that it faces.

The east Lancashire partnership and the east Lancashire housing forum have been considering new ideas and jointly devising some ways forward. My hon. Friend has made the case well that the problem does not exist solely in one area, so the solutions will not be found inside one local authority boundary. The east Lancashire partnership strategy was launched almost two years ago. It sets out a vision for east Lancashire in 2020 and identifies the significant challenges that the sub-region faces in tackling the problems of a declining, low-wage, low-skill economy, with the attendant problems of poor health and housing, dilapidation and crime. The vision is of east Lancashire offering city living in a rural context, with services for the 500,000 inhabitants planned accordingly.

The strategy envisages a new, integrated transport system run along the lines of those in metropolitan passenger transport authority areas, an expansion of cultural and sporting activity and of higher education opportunities and higher retention rates. However, it is also clear that the number one priority will be to tackle the acute housing problems. The strategy has been produced as part of the Local Government Association's new commitment to regeneration programme, and east Lancashire is one of the 22 pathfinders nationwide.

The Government office has played a part in advising on and supporting development of the strategy, including regular review meetings with the partnership. The strategy is a voluntary document, as there is no statutory requirement to produce it. However, local strategies are becoming increasingly important in combating problems such as those faced by my hon. Friend's constituency.

The east Lancashire partnership housing strategy was published a year ago, following detailed research by consultants and extensive consultation. It sets out an appreciation of the demographic, physical, economic, social and environmental factors that are the main drivers of the sub-region's market across all housing sectors. Its proposed solutions are very much in line with Government policies and mirror ideas on urban regeneration and emerging initiatives, including neighbourhood renewal and the new deal for communities. Those largely depend on successful lobbying for new resources, and the strategy provides a framework that should help the partnership to make a more cogent case. I am sure that my hon. Friend and Members of Parliament for neighbouring constituencies will play an important part in that.

Partnership between authorities and other agencies in the area is key if we are to make an impact on the problems. I urge my hon. Friend to encourage people in his constituency to strengthen further the ties between different parts of east Lancashire, for the good of the whole area.

It might help my hon. Friend if I say something about his local authority's housing performance. The local authority has made considerable progress. I take his point about his constituents feeling that they have been failed by it, but it is important to give due credit for its efforts to overcome problems. Officials conduct annual assessments of all local authorities' housing performances, and Hyndburn has some strengths. It is to be commended for the inclusive nature of its housing policies. The council manages 3,800 homes, which are distributed across the borough. There have been some clear achievements, partly as a result of a policy for ethnic minority groups. I am sure that that policy went a considerable way to ensuring that my hon. Friend's area did not see problems of the sort that occurred elsewhere in the summer.

Mr. Pope: I deliberately did not attack Hyndburn council. Its officers do a good job, especially Ken Bury, the director of housing, so I am grateful for the Minister's points about the council's record. Its difficulty is one of resources.

Ms Keeble: When a local authority has such massive problems but is clearly taking steps to deal with them, it is important that it is given some credit. It has also done some good partnership work and has made progress on providing decent homes. There is scope for improvement on some issues, as it would be the first to recognise, but it is important that the council continues its constructive and long-term strategic approach towards tackling some problems.

I said at the outset that we were dealing with serious and long-term problems to which there are no easy or quick fixes. There is a clear role for the local authorities to work with others, including regional partners. The Government are committed to playing their part in tackling the real but often under-recognised problem. We need to ensure that people with roots in those communities and a long-term commitment to them, who have seen the area's decline over the years, do not feel let down by their council, Government or MP. They must be able to see that policies are being put in place to deal with their financial security—after all, most people who buy their homes see them as their bedrock financial security. They must also see a way forward for their community, so that it can be restored to the kind of condition that they often look back to. They can then lead much more constructive, safe and secure lives.

NHS Waiting Times

1 pm

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): I was grateful to be drawn in the ballot for debates, because escalating NHS waiting times are a matter of extreme concern to my constituents, and I am grateful to the Minister for taking time out of her day to reply to me.

Since I entered Parliament last June, many of my constituents have entreated me to take up their cases. Some, of course, are trivial, but many are important—often desperately so—to the person writing. All hon. Members must find that many people turn to them as a last resort. Despite a huge mailbag, however, nothing has moved me more than the plight of cancer patients in my constituency, who now face the most dreadful and stressful wait for treatment following surgery.

The issue was first brought to my attention by a remarkably brave and sensible lady, who was diagnosed with breast cancer on 21 November. To the Government's credit, she was referred promptly for surgery, but what followed was totally unacceptable. Her surgeon advised her that she would need to begin radiotherapy within four to six weeks. Six weeks elapsed, but her calls to the hospital did not result in an appointment. She went back to her surgeon, who said that he was powerless to begin radiotherapy and that the decision lay with the hospital managers. Eventually she was told that she would begin treatment on 25 March, a full 16 weeks after surgery. At a time when she should be focusing all her energy on healing, her condition is being compounded by having to deal with NHS bureaucracy. She has had to face yet more stress and anxiety, which can only have hindered her recovery. She has still to begin her radiotherapy treatment.

When the issue was first brought to my attention, I wrote immediately to the Secretary of State to seek his intervention. Such was the urgency of the case that I not only wrote, but faxed the letter to his private office. My office followed that up with a telephone call on 8 February. The issue was clearly urgent, but despite raising it on the Floor of the House and chasing an answer to a parliamentary written question, I succeeded in securing an answer from a Minister only on 4 March. I appreciate that many increasingly vocal demands are being made on the Government by people who are competing for Ministers' attention, but given the personal nature of my intervention, the Government's response time was nothing less than disgusting. I hope that the Minister will deal with that specific point.

Since I first highlighted the case, other people have contacted me. My constituent's experience was not an isolated incident. Sadly, she is just one of the many victims of a system that, under a Labour Government who are approaching their sixth year in office, faces chronic shortages of staff and equipment.

Britain has about half the number of radiotherapy machines per million people that France and Germany have and a third the number that the United States has. The problem is compounded by a national shortage of radiographers. There are about 500 vacancies across the country, including five at the Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS trust in my area. This morning, following a meeting, I received a letter from the trust's chief executive, which concludes:

> "We are also suffering with the additional constraints of the lack of medical manpower, currently 40 per cent. mean national vacancy and 33 per cent. local vacancy. The frustration"—

that of my constituent and others—

> "is shared by us all, and whilst we are trying to improve matters, I am sorry that I cannot be of much help in reducing your constituent's wait for her Radiotherapy treatment at present."

We are told that, historically, we have failed to train enough specialists and that it takes time for them to come through the system. However, a third of the people who train as radiographers never enter the profession because of pay and conditions in the NHS. Of the 34 new radiotherapy machines acquired by the NHS in the last two years, most have been used to replace existing equipment, rather than to provide a material increase in capacity.

The experience of my constituent is typical of that of thousands of cancer patients throughout the country who find themselves quickly referred into the system. However, once they have ticked the box to hit the headline target of prompt referral, they are starved of the necessary care and treatment to be certain of full recovery—driven, effectively, into a deadly bottleneck. I know that Ministers work long and hard to try to deliver a better health care system, but the new Labour preoccupation with just a few selective headline targets is conning the British public into a false sense of security. A quick first-rate referral is vital, but it is by no means the whole picture.

It is no wonder that Britain still boasts among the worst cancer survival rates of any country in Europe. At the cancer care summit in November 1999, Britain was famously described as having a third world level of cancer care. Other countries in Europe spend far more per head of population on cancer drugs than the UK does. According to a report in the *British Medical Journal*, chemotherapy spending in the UK works out at only 95p per head, compared with £3.31 in Italy and £6.24 in Germany, and the Royal College of Radiologists reports that the number of patients waiting for a dangerously long time for treatment has doubled in two years. The number of patients starting radiotherapy within the Government target of four weeks since their consultant recommended it has fallen from 68 per cent. in 1998 to 32 per cent. in 2001. The author of the report, Dr. Nick James of Birmingham university's institute for cancer studies, has said that patients are dying while they wait, due to widespread failure to meet waiting time targets. According to the royal college's report, waiting times for radiology are rising in all parts of the UK, apart from Wales and Northern Ireland.

The average wait rose from 5.1 weeks in 1999 to six weeks last year. However, as evidenced by my constituent's experience in the Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS trust, there are huge regional variations. It is particularly bad in the south-east—I believe that there was a debate earlier today about the funding and resourcing of health care there. Rather than confront the appalling situation head on, Ministers have consistently tried to hide behind other, more flattering, statistics. When questioned in the House of Commons on 6 March concerning this genuine crisis in radiology, the Prime Minister immediately fell back on referral statistics for surgery, rather than face up to the difficult issues of chronic waiting times for follow-up treatment, particularly radiology.

Sadly, the Government's prioritisation of cancer has done little to improve the care of cancer patients. In the recent study by the Royal College of Radiologists, 21 per cent. of lung cancer patients who were curable when diagnosed were found to be incurable by the time that treatment began, and it was found that, on average, patients' tumours tripled in size while they waited for their radiotherapy to begin. The same report also chronicled doctors complaining that they had to lie to patients because, although they knew of drugs that could help sufferers, they also knew that they could not afford them.

Whereas 20 per cent. of breast cancer patients in Europe receive drugs to alleviate the side effects of chemotherapy, in Britain only 5.9 per cent. do. Cancer patients in the UK have their chemotherapy doses reduced to avoid the onset of neutropenia—which reduces protection against infection—in order to ensure that they do not need the expensive drugs required to counteract it. A study by doctors at Addenbrooke's hospital in Cambridge showed that 32 per cent. of breast cancer patients receive sub-optimal treatment as a result of the rationing.

Results collected by the recent World Health Organisation survey are expected to show that as many as 10,000 lives could be saved each year in the United Kingdom by raising cancer care to the European Union average. But cancer is not the only area that is affected by chronic waiting lists. More than five years on from that modest 1997 pledge to reduce in-patient waiting lists by 100,000, that famous Labour pledge remains broken. According to the January figures, more than 1 million patients are still waiting for treatment, despite unprecedented attempts to massage down the figures, including the creation of waiting lists to get on to waiting lists.

Pressure from Whitehall to reduce headline figures at all costs found its nemesis at the end of last year when the National Audit Office exposed a record of what it called "deliberate manipulation" of waiting lists over four years at hospitals throughout Britain. The NAO report found that one in five of 300 hospital consultants who were interviewed said that they had frequently prioritised patients not according to medical need, but to meet waiting list targets. Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS trust put only urgent patients on waiting lists and offered appointments at short notice or when patients were on holiday.

One of my constituents in Bexhill had a similar experience. She was left perplexed and angry after she had filled in a form for treatment at the Conquest hospital in Hastings last autumn, only to be promptly offered treatment in the one specific period that she had ruled out while she took a long awaited week's holiday abroad. St. Bartholomew's hospital was reported as having amended patients' records to make it look as though they had been treated on time. The BBC reported that more than 6,000 patients were affected. The NAO said that the condition of many

"may have deteriorated during the wait."

Figures released last week, on which I hope we can rely, showed that more than 36 per cent. of NHS trusts still had patients waiting for more than 15 months for in-patient treatment. I have spoken a great deal so far about the plight of cancer patients, but that is by no means the only area that is affected. In advance of the debate, the Patients Association provided me with information from its report on NHS ophthalmology waiting times. It found that, in the United Kingdom as a whole, only 1 per cent. of authorities and boards can offer patients a routine appointment with an ophthalmologist within a month.

The average waiting time throughout the United Kingdom for routine referral to an ophthalmologist is three to six months, during which time a patient's eyesight can seriously deteriorate. Furthermore, the report found many cases of the waiting time governed not by clinical need, but by trivial indicators such as postcodes. In March 2000, it was reported that the number of heart bypass operations fell for the first time in 25 years as a result of a shortage in intensive care and recovery beds. At the time, Mr. Jules Dussek, president of the Society of Cardiothoracic Surgeons, speaking on Radio 4, said:

> "This kind of operation is not one you can wait for...there is a risk of dying while waiting."

He said that doctors were twiddling their thumbs while waiting for the necessary beds to be made available.

A recent survey found surgeons operating at 25 per cent. below usual rates. In 2000, the average surgeon carried out 170 coronary artery operations compared with 250 in 1995. What should the Government do to drive down the dangerous and unacceptable level of waiting lists in Britain? First, they should have the honesty to acknowledge their failure to make real headway over the past five years and cease hiding behind selective targets that do not tell the whole story. Karol Sikora, the professor of cancer medicine at Hammersmith hospital where radiotherapy waiting times currently stand alongside those in Brighton and Maidstone at three months, told *The Observer* on Sunday 3 March:

> "Waiting times are getting worse, but because of the government spin, expectations are getting so much higher."

Secondly, the Government should give doctors and surgeons greater autonomy to tackle clinical priorities. They should stop imposing artificial targets to flatter Labour's selective election promises. Thirdly, the Government should address the chronic regional imbalance in waiting times. My constituents are routinely referred to either the Conquest hospital in Hastings, Eastbourne district general hospital, or the hospitals of the Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS trust. All those hospitals face an average occupancy of about 95 per cent.—way above the Government's optimum occupancy of 82 per cent. No wonder waiting lists in the south-east, and particularly East Sussex, are spiralling.

The Government's cash for change programme offered some temporary relief from regional bed blocking, but I understand that it expires at the end of the month, and there is no sign of further funding to replace it. I should welcome a comment from the Minister on the future of cash for change. Most of all, the Government need to change the way in which the NHS works. Ministers are still running that vast organisation on lines that would be only too familiar to its founders in post-war Britain. The working habits of Britain have moved on, but not those of the Whitehall-dominated NHS.

[Mr. Gregory Barker]

People are dying because they cannot get the necessary treatment in time, yet right across the health service valuable equipment procured at great expense to the taxpayer—equipment for which there is huge demand—sits idle at weekends and in the evenings. In the 21st century we can do our supermarket shopping 24 hours a day and our banking round the clock. Shops and services are increasingly available on Sundays, but our hospitals close promptly at 5 pm on a Friday. We can go to Tesco at the weekend and can change our direct debits out of hours, but we cannot get life-saving medical treatment. Too many hospitals close for all but emergency treatment at 4 pm at the end of the week.

My constituent with breast cancer had the misfortune to require treatment shortly before Christmas, just as the system was beginning the big seasonal shutdown. Although the rest of Britain is able to cope with the flexibility of the demands of the 24-7 consumer—evenings, weekends and bank holidays—the NHS seems stuck in a 1940s time warp. It is time to throw open the doors of the NHS and allow patients round-the-clock access to vital equipment and services. The Prime Minister told the country in 1997 that it had just 24 hours to save the NHS, but as Labour approaches its sixth year in office, waiting lists are worse and the number of trained medics coming into the system is failing to rise to match the needs of today's NHS.

I do not doubt the Minister's sincerity in wanting to improve the NHS, but until the Government have the guts to admit their failures and confront the scale of the problem in an honest and transparent way, patients will continue to suffer.

1.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Yvette Cooper): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Barker) on securing a debate on NHS waiting times, which is clearly an important issue not just for his constituents but for people throughout the country. Surveys of public opinion have repeatedly shown that waiting times are a key concern of NHS users. We recognise that concern, and as part of the commitment to building a modern NHS it is important that access to services becomes faster and more convenient. Reducing waiting times is a main priority for the Government and lies at the heart of the NHS plan.

The Government have already made significant progress in reducing waiting times for secondary care, and, as part of the NHS plan, the maximum in-patient waiting times will fall on a staged basis in the next few years to reach six months by 2005. Similar reductions are planned for out-patients too. Most out-patients are already seen within six months. By the end of March that will be an absolute requirement, and by the end of 2005, the maximum waiting time for a routine out-patient appointment will be halved from more than six months to three months. Under those new guaranteed maximum waiting times, patients will continue to be treated according to individual assessment of clinical urgency.

Two things are needed to improve waiting times. Capacity must be increased, and the NHS and its processes must be reformed. To increase capacity, additional investment in the NHS is needed. That is why the Government have put record levels of additional investment into the NHS during the past few years, and we must continue to do that.

The East Sussex, Brighton and Hove health authority was given £596.7 million for the current financial year, which is a 5.8 per cent. increase in real terms and an 8.4 per cent. increase in cash terms. Overall, investment has doubled during the past few years, compared with the historical average increase in investment. That is because, historically, the NHS has been underfunded; it has had a legacy of long-term underfunding, and it needs additional investment, which it is now receiving.

Additional investment is not the only necessary measure. The way in which the NHS provides care must also be reformed. The hon. Gentleman raised concerns about cancer care. The key issue with regard to that is to shorten waiting times at every step along the way, and to ensure that patients have access to top-quality care. The Government have drawn up the first national cancer strategy—"The NHS Cancer Plan". It is a 10-year plan, and it is part of the NHS 10-year plan. For the first time, we have a national strategy to deal with cancer all the way through from prevention, to diagnosis, to treatment, to palliative care.

With regard to waiting times for cancer care, the key issues concern not simply the time to in-patient treatment, as they do in some other areas. For cancer sufferers, it matters how long one has to wait to see a specialist and to undergo diagnostic tests, and how long one has to wait for different stages of treatment. This information has not previously been gathered in the NHS—previous Governments have not done that—and targets on the whole cancer process have never previously been set. It is important that that has now happened, as part of the NHS cancer plan, because we need to improve the cancer care that people receive throughout the country.

That requires improving the information that we gather on cancer care. It also requires improved investment and reform. There will be extra capacity for cancer services and extra cancer specialists—by April, there will be 428 extra cancer consultants, compared with April 1999. There will also be new cancer equipment—27 new MRI scanners, 66 new CT scanners, and hundreds of extra new pieces of breast cancer equipment. We must continue to increase capacity with regard to specialists and equipment.

It is also necessary to reform the way in which people are provided with cancer care, and that is why the cancer collaboratives were established. They have been doing impressive and innovative work, by reforming the way in which care is provided and by focusing on patients and their needs. For example, the cancer collaborative in west London has cut the diagnosis time for prostate cancer from 20 weeks to 14 days, simply by changing the way that it provides the service. Wirral hospital has halved the waiting time for treatment for prostate cancer. On average, since the cancer collaboratives were introduced, there has been a drop of two and a half weeks in waiting times for treatment.

The overwhelming majority of cases that are urgently referred to specialists are seen within two weeks. I welcome the hon. Gentleman's endorsement of the increase in the speed of referral, but I wish to impress upon him that that was not easily achieved. Huge improvements have been made as a result of considerable work by not only specialists, but GPs and support staff throughout the country. He is right to say that it is essential that people are seen speedily. It is also essential that they are diagnosed speedily, and that we speed up time to treatment. That is why we introduced the new target for the time taken to see a specialist, and it is why we are also gradually introducing new targets, stage by stage, for every other section up to treatment.

New targets for times to diagnosis and treatment are already being introduced. From last December, there has been a maximum one-month wait between urgent referral from a general practitioner to treatment for children with cancer and patients with acute leukaemia and testicular cancer, and a target for women with breast cancer of a maximum one-month wait from time of diagnosis to beginning of treatment. We need to improve treatment times across the board, which is why we put in place new targets and extra investment. It is not possible to do that without extra investment in capacity.

The hon. Gentleman asked about radiotherapy. From the beginning of the cancer plan, we had particular concerns about radiotherapy. The number of therapy radiographers is inadequate, and we need to improve facilities. Considerable work has been going on to try to improve difficult circumstances. The number of patients referred for radiotherapy has increased rapidly during the past few years following the establishment of specialist cancer teams. Radiologists have increased by 14 per cent. since 1997, and we are increasing training places for therapy radiographers at universities. Training places increased by 62 per cent. between 1996-97 and 2001-02, and by 2003-04, the projected increase will be up 120 per cent. over 1997. The numbers are increasing, but we need to go further.

We also need to consider different skill mixes in trying to improve and speed up treatment. Different skill-mix programmes are already being piloted, including the creation of a new grade of assistant practitioner, perhaps through vocational routes. The pilots continue in 10 centres, and early indications are positive.

Huge additional investment is being made in radiotherapy facilities, with replacement and additional linear accelerators being brought into operation. However, there is much to do, and we need to go further.

The hon. Gentleman referred to cancer treatment. For the first time we have national guidelines on treatment and drugs as a result of the work of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence. Improving cancer treatment in our 10-year plan needs extra capacity and extra reforms.

The hon. Gentleman was full of complaints and laments about the NHS and cancer care, but his diagnosis and prescription were fundamentally lacking. Throughout the country, there are NHS patients who are receiving excellent care. However, it is also true that many patients wait too long for their treatment. We do not have sufficient capacity, and we need to keep increasing it. We need to continue the reforms that are making excellent progress in some areas of the NHS, and spread them nationwide.

In his diagnosis, the hon. Gentleman quoted Karol Sikora, who has said that he wants more people to pay privately for cancer care. I believe that we should provide free care according to need, not ability to pay. If the hon. Gentleman recognises the need for extra investment in cancer services and across the board to improve capacity, he needs to say where those resources should come from. The Government have set out a major programme of investment and reform not only for cancer but across the board. I hope that he will support that and the extra investment in cancer care, and the measures being taken to continue to increase resources for the NHS. If he does not, he will need to say how improvements in cancer care should take place and where he expects the additional resources to come from. For most people who suffer from cancer, it is simply not an option to pay for their own cancer drugs or treatment. The cost of providing cancer care for an individual is extremely high, and it would be morally wrong to expect cancer patients to have to pay out of their own pockets rather than receive care on the NHS.

The hon. Gentleman is right to say that waiting times are important. They are clearly more important in cases of cancer and coronary heart disease than in other areas, and that is why we made those the clinical priorities.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the need to increase the number of coronary heart disease operations. The number of revascularisations increased substantially between 1995-96 and 1999-2000—from 34,000 to 41,000—and in the first 10 months of 2000-01, more than 45,000 procedures were performed. Revascularisation is an important, life-saving procedure, which is why we have put extra money into increasing the number of operations.

National Asylum Support Service

1.30 pm

Mrs. Helen Clark (Peterborough): For more than a year, I have been concerned about aspects of the organisation and operation of the National Asylum Support Service, especially in my constituency. I sought this debate because I am concerned that problems remain, despite many measures already taken or proposed by the Government. Only yesterday, Harmesh Lakhanpaul, director of Peterborough's racial equality council, told me that, in his opinion, many problems are worse.

The local authority in Peterborough estimates that approximately 2,000 asylum seekers live in Peterborough. NASS accepts that estimate, although that took some time to establish. I emphasise that it is only an estimate, because it is impossible for the council or NASS to determine exactly how many asylum seekers there are, who they are, where they have come from and where they live. That has nothing to do with the asylum seekers themselves but everything to do with the system that sends them to the city, and the reasons for that go to the heart of the problems that I wish to debate today.

The first problem that we encountered in Peterborough, was the misinformation or lack of information concerning how many asylum seekers were to be dispersed to the city and when. Sadly, extreme language was used, promoted and published by certain individuals with a narrow and politically motivated agenda. I am sure that colleagues on both sides of the House can imagine the scenario: words such as "floods" and "swamped" were used to describe the refugees' potential impact on local services.

My office attempted to clarify the position with a NASS official on the telephone, and I was assured that no decision had been taken concerning dispersal to Peterborough. I wrote to the local paper, the *Peterborough Evening Telegraph*, to set the record straight. Fortunately my letter was not printed; because the following day the council heard that the first contingent of people was due to arrive shortly. Throughout the following months, I wrote to the Home Office several times suggesting that, at the very least, stakeholders such as local Members of Parliament should be kept informed of NASS decisions. Much more is necessary, but I shall return to that later.

Another fundamental flaw in the system is that county councils such as Kent, Essex, Cambridgeshire, and Lincolnshire, and London boroughs such as Westminster, have taken advantage of the relatively low rents in Peterborough to house asylum seekers sent to their areas. Once housed in Peterborough, it becomes the responsibility of the local authority to provide health education and other social support services.

Although NASS advises that it is best practice for local authorities to inform destination authorities that they are housing asylum seekers in their area, that does not always happen and there is no legislation to enforce it. Furthermore, when asylum seekers are housed in private accommodation, the local authority has found it impossible to obtain details of their names and identities. Private landlords have not been willing to share information on asylum seekers that they accommodate, and have challenged the local authority's need to know. Private landlords are required to identify properties being used to house asylum seekers but local authorities have no powers to prevent their use.

Local authorities cannot influence where asylum seekers are housed or ensure that appropriate facilities are locally available. Those include public transport, which is often expensive, language classes and interpretation services. Many asylum seekers are highly skilled and trained but need locally available language tuition and language support to access other services. Peterborough has a relatively large private rented market, and there has been a knock-on effect on rents. That creates problems for those moving on once asylum claims have been determined. They have to start to look after themselves, albeit with support from benefits.

I recognise that the Labour Government have done much to improve systems for dealing with asylum seekers, which were in utter disarray when we inherited them in 1997. In fact, they practically ground to a halt with a massive backlog. In April 1997, it took 20 months on average to make a decision, yet the Tory Administration planned to cut more than 1,000 posts at the immigration and nationality department. Following the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996, councils in London and the south-east faced huge financial burdens as they struggled to support those making asylum claims from within the UK.

The new Labour Government substantially increased the human and other resources of both the immigration and nationality department and the Immigration Appellate Authority. They tackled the problem of unscrupulous, often unqualified, immigration advisers, and in 1999 they set up the centrally administered NASS to provide an integrated system of support for asylum seekers. It was to be based on enforced dispersal to the regions, and most subsistence support was to be supplied in the form of vouchers. NASS was due to take over support functions from local authorities next month, but the period has been extended to April 2004—a further two years.

Last October, the Government announced the results of two internal reviews of NASS that acknowledged the hitherto "poor service"—their words—provided to asylum seekers. The combined report of the two reviews acknowledged real problems with the system and made many specific recommendations to ensure that in future NASS would offer

> "a better service to asylum seekers and other stakeholders".

Those included the replacement of the much-criticised vouchers with a more robust but less socially divisive scheme that involved the piloting of asylum reception centres from late 2002 and administrative reforms of case-management systems.

Only last month the White Paper "Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain" on nationality, immigration and asylum matters was published, and comments on it are due next week. I have read it carefully, and it seems to contain very little that will substantially improve the operation of NASS. I am not alone in that estimation. Expectations that vouchers will be replaced with a smartcard that delivers subsistence by automated credit transfer have been disappointed. From 8 April, vouchers exchangeable for cash at post offices will be issued, but the system will use existing NASS delivery mechanisms.

The new asylum accommodation centres due later this year are unlikely to provide lodging and support for more than a small percentage of asylum seekers at any one time—3,000 out of a total of 100,000, according to the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux. That means that for some time to come most will continue to be supported under the existing NASS-administered dispersal-based scheme. For all those reasons, it is still highly relevant and necessary to debate the inadequacies in NASS, which are causing continuing problems for local authorities, host communities and, most importantly, asylum seekers. We should also suggest ways in which the system might be improved through a more fundamental re-organisation of NASS.

Last month, NACAB published a report entitled "Process Error: CAB Clients' Experience of the National Asylum Support Service". It is based on the day-to-day advice work of citizens advice bureaux. The report describes serious shortcomings in the administrative performance and accessibility of NASS. Asylum seekers and advice workers—I would add Members of Parliament, too—experienced serious delays and extreme difficulty in contacting NASS officials.

Since April 2000, when NASS began operating, citizens advice bureaux have dealt with increasing numbers of inquiries from NASS-supported asylum seekers. Many people needed help contacting NASS to obtain their full entitlement to subsistence support, others to resolve accommodation problems. Some, having been granted refugee status or other leave to remain, had been left in limbo between the NASS system and the mainstream benefits system. Cases described reveal families left for days or even weeks without the means to buy food and other necessities.

The report quotes an adviser, who said:

> "We have spent hours on the phone to NASS trying to resolve what should be straightforward matters. For NASS-supported asylum seekers, most of whom have limited English and little cash for phone calls, the system is totally inaccessible."

I am sure that NACAB will submit evidence for the Government's White Paper, because citizens advice bureaux often provide services that should be provided by NASS.

What needs to be done? Peterborough city council, in its excellent briefing to me, which I have sent to the Home Secretary, advised that

> "communication and consultation must be greatly improved;"—

I emphasise the words "and consultation"—

> "secondly, local authorities must be obliged to declare their support for asylum seekers to other authorities when placed out of their area. All private sector landlords accepting asylum seekers must declare names and addresses on a register held by the relevant local authority; benefit agencies must appoint a liaison officer to work with local authorities and private landlords to resolve and expedite claims; additional grants for move-on accommodation and support services should be made to local authorities on the basis of resident asylum seekers. £100 is suggested. This should not be made available to local authorities placing asylum seekers out of their area".

Why should they cash in?

> "Finally, there should be a national forum for the control and direction of NASS. Local authorities, health authorities and the police should be represented with the power to make recommendations on this body."

Those ideas would make a great improvement, but, sadly, I have received absolutely no response to the suggestions from the Home Office, despite commissioning the briefing specifically for the purpose, and sending it to the Home Office on two separate occasions.

NACAB suggests a more fundamental reorganisation of NASS. The White Paper sets out plans already under way to decentralise NASS operations, thereby creating a service that is more responsive to regional issues. The Government propose that more resources should be deployed regionally and existing resources should be used more effectively. The move-on period will be extended from 14 to 21days for asylum seekers receiving a negative decision and from 14 to 28 days for those who are granted refugee status or exceptional leave to remain. However, as the Refugee Council and NACAB pointed out, the White Paper provides little detail about how that will be achieved.

I want to put on the record some specific proposals made by NACAB and the Refugee Council: NASS should be expanded, decentralised and regionalised in order to provide a responsive and accessible local service; NASS should establish adequate counter or drop-in services for supported asylum seekers—staff providing those services will need appropriate language skills; performance targets should be set and published for each main aspect of NASS's administration of the support system and those targets should be adequately monitored, which will require effective case management and recording systems; at local, regional and national levels NASS must be appropriately managed to ensure that all its performance targets are met; and NASS must establish effective stakeholder groups locally and nationally to enable communication with all partners including the citizens advice bureaux and local authorities.

Councillor Harmesh Lakhanpaul, of Peterborough's racial equality council, and, no doubt, the Refugee Council, would also enter a plea for more resources, another stream of funding, to support refugees—asylum seekers whose claims have been accepted—who have a right to education, health and social services but who still need additional transitional help, especially in such matters as language classes. However, strictly speaking, that is outside my brief today.

All new immigrants need help of many kinds to get to grips with a strange culture. However, almost by definition, asylum seekers have additional problems, which result from the situations in the countries that they have left behind. The Government have made good progress to ensure that they receive a better welcome today than hitherto, and they promise to do more. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will take on board the serious recommendations by some of the major players in the delivery of the improved policy and that she will include them in the forthcoming evaluation of responses to the White Paper.

NASS was an improvement, but it needs more fundamental reform than appears to be intended. I reiterate that the principal needs are closer collaboration and local counter services. Obviously, resources are always limited, and I am not advocating the establishment of dedicated NASS outlets throughout the country; 70 to 80 should be sufficient to cover the main dispersal areas. In other places, a regular

[Mrs. Helen Clark]

NASS clinic in the local benefits office would be a possibility. Surely some of the cost would be met by greater efficiency elsewhere in the NASS system.

No one would countenance the idea of the Department for Work and Pensions closing local benefits offices and operating from a central office, or the Foreign and Commonwealth Office closing its foreign embassies and doing all its business from Whitehall. The same should apply to NASS.

To date, the experience of asylum in Peterborough has been miserable for all concerned. I hope that this Adjournment debate will mark the beginning of a fresh approach that will benefit not only my constituency, but everywhere else in the country.

1.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Angela Eagle): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mrs. Clark) on securing this debate on an important subject, which has clearly concerned her and her constituents for a while.

First, I shall give some facts about the asylum seekers who are supported in Peterborough and the rest of the east of England region, in which Peterborough is one of the main towns. As of 31 December, the National Asylum Support Service was supporting 320 asylum seekers in accommodation that it had booked in the whole region. There were 280 asylum seekers in NASS-supported accommodation in Peterborough and 30 in Ipswich. Ten so-called disbenefited asylum seekers were also being supported in the region. We do not accept the figure of 2,000, therefore, and I am not sure where my hon. Friend got the idea that we do.

The amount of accommodation available to NASS in Peterborough would allow us to house hundreds, but certainly not thousands, of asylum seekers, so I can assure my hon. Friend that any worries that may have surfaced in the local media about the imminent arrival of thousands of new asylum seekers are misplaced.

Unfortunately, until now—this may explain some of the confusion—local authorities have had to provide information only for the number of support weeks for which they wish to claim. My hon. Friend will recall that that interim scheme was put together rapidly after a series of adverse judgments in the High Court on the Conservative Government's approach, which was to ban anyone who had not applied for asylum at a port from public support—a ban that the courts overturned. The interim scheme was organised by local authorities and had to be drawn up at very short notice. That is why we do not have the names and addresses of those in the scheme.

We are, however, undertaking an audit whereby we want local authorities to give us addresses instead of the number of support weeks for asylum seekers for which they are claiming Government grant. We hope that once the audit has finished, we will be much better able to establish precisely how many people are in particular areas because they were placed there under the interim scheme. Again, as my hon. Friend should know, the scheme is organised not by NASS, but by local authorities.

In Peterborough in the financial year 2000-01 there were claims for 3,436 support weeks for single adults and 1,458 support weeks for families. We cannot say accurately what that means in terms of the true number of asylum seekers that Peterborough was supporting, for the reasons that I have just explained to my hon. Friend. However, we can make assumptions. If, for example, we assumed that those support weeks were allotted for people who stayed in the area for a year, that would give a figure of 66 single adults. The large numbers that have been bandied around in the local press are therefore fairly wide of the mark. Following the audit, we should be in a much better position to establish not only the NASS numbers—which we can do with great accuracy—but the numbers in interim schemes.

I hope that that will comfort local Members who have been told that there are far larger numbers of asylum seekers in their areas than our figures show. We should be able to reconcile such discrepancies. As for future demand for accommodation in Peterborough, it has been made clear to my hon. Friend in correspondence that we have no plans to send another 2,000, or any other large number of asylum seekers, to Peterborough— certainly not without its co-operation.

My hon. Friend also raised the issue of the NASS review and some of the changes to administration systems. I would be the first to acknowledge that when NASS was set up, under great pressure and with rising numbers, it did not always get dispersal right. Peterborough has had some experience of that. I will not defend everything that happened in the early days of NASS, but things are getting better and there have been major changes both in practice and in administrative systems. The issues involved in dispersal are being dealt with, and under a new system, cash chits rather than vouchers are being given to people. From 8 April they will be able to cash them in at the local post office.

We are also considering how to regionalise NASS to allow far more local problem-solving. Once reporting centres are up and running, NASS officials will regularly visit people who have been dispersed to ensure that everything is working well. When the induction centre process comes in—all the information on that is contained in the White Paper—it will enable us to spend time at the beginning of asylum seekers' claims explaining far more fully and effectively than we have been able to do in the past how the process will work, and who they should contact if things go wrong. I hope that a lot of the confusion to which my hon. Friend alluded in her speech, which occurred a year or so ago when the system was beginning, will be managed down to a much more acceptable level.

NASS aims to have good co-operation with local authorities. We work with the local authority [illegible] consortiums, most of which provide accommodation for NASS-supported asylum seekers, and all of which aim to co-ordinate the input of local services and support for asylum seekers. A national consultative group for the consortiums meets regularly and is chaired by a senior NASS official; any concerns can be raised there for referral back to NASS headquarters. I hope that there will be feedback loops that my hon. Friend will have plenty of time to use if particular issues arise in the Peterborough area.

The private accommodation providers for NASS are required to consult the relevant local authority when they have more than six bed spaces, and we seek to develop a way of dealing satisfactorily with consultation on smaller properties. As at the start of the NASS scheme, we will also consult regional local authority consortiums about proposals for further cluster areas. My hon. Friend's suggestion that there could be large-scale swapping of personal information on asylum seekers and on where they live would fall foul of the Data Protection Act 1998. I hope that we can find ways of consulting on practicalities for local service provision without compromising the confidentiality of those who are claiming asylum, so that we can continue to comply with our duties of confidentiality. There are ways of doing that.

My hon. Friend asked about counter services. We do not intend to set up such services as part of the regionalisation of NASS. I hope that she will recognise that some of the improvements that I mentioned earlier, such as outreach and more local problem solving, will address some of the problems that have been experienced in Peterborough. We hold effective discussions with stakeholder groups, and we are currently consulting them about the terms of reference and the composition of a national asylum supporters forum. That would be another welcome feedback loop.

My hon. Friend mentioned some issues concerning the White Paper. She said that there was disappointment that the smartcard—I think she was referring to the applicant registration card—that will be used to pay cash was not going to be in place. This morning I moved the regulations to abolish vouchers. Everyone currently on vouchers will begin to be paid in cash, initially using the same distribution system as vouchers, via post offices. That will cause the least disruption to systems that are already in place, and existing asylum seekers already know the ropes by now. That will all happen from April.

We hope that the applicant registration card, which is being issued even as we speak, will have been issued to all NASS asylum seekers by September. We certainly hope that we can begin to use some of the more secure features of that card as a form of identification and a mechanism for paying cash. Again, that will be done through post offices, perhaps even before September for those who have an existing card. I hope that my hon. Friend will welcome the rapid progress in that area. We abolished vouchers five months early to enable the transition from the current voucher system to the new cash-based system to run more smoothly. I can assure my hon. Friend that we will ensure that our administrative systems are robust enough to deal with it.

I do not want to spend the remaining four minutes going through the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux report and the criticism of past performance on a point-by-point basis, although I am happy to let my hon. Friend have some of our response to it. We recognise that there were teething problems with NASS when it was first set up and that performance has had to be raised. We are considering what more we can do about that.

For example, NASS has just published, on the immigration and nationality directorate website, contact and phone numbers for all its sections. People who wish to contact NASS can now do so more effectively. A dedicated voucher inquiry helpline has been in place since early last year. Asylum seekers who have been left without vouchers, which did happen at the beginning of the process, can now usually get emergency vouchers within 24 hours, and within a maximum of 48 hours those problems are rectified.

In the last few months NASS has reduced by 70 per cent. the backlog of problems arising after initial allocation of support. The backlog is now equivalent to two days' intake. There have been some substantial improvements in the way in which NASS works. Clearly, the key to increasing the efficacy and effectiveness of the new system will be the role of induction centres. Instead of being put into emergency accommodation, people will be put into induction centres for between one and seven days. They will be taken through the process and told about where they are going, and where they can access what will then be cash payments. There will be a much more managed system. I hope that my hon. Friend will recognise that these changes substantially improve the administrative systems that we originally set up.

There were complaints about the £50 supplementary payments, which were often late. We now normally deal with those within two days, which beats NASS's target of five days. My hon. Friend will see a substantial increase in the effectiveness of NASS. That ties in with the more managed approach that we are taking with the induction centres. Accommodation centres are being trialled. It has always been clear that the 3,000 places are a trial. If the trial is successful we will consider extending accommodation centres to take more people. Clearly, until then it is important that we improve the effectiveness of NASS, and I hope that my hon. Friend will recognise that we are doing that.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 13 March 2002

[SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

Sudan

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

9.30 am

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): During this season of Lent, hundreds of my constituents and many thousands more across the two counties of Wiltshire and Dorset, which comprise the diocese of Salisbury, have been lobbying their Members of Parliament about the situation in Sudan. The link between the diocese and the Episcopal Church of Sudan was established by Bishop George Reindorp in 1972, working with people such as Ted Bickersteth, who served there as a civil servant for many years. That link has developed and prospered and is now under the chairmanship of Bishop Peter Hullah of Ramsbury.

In this short debate, I have three objectives. First, I hope to establish beyond doubt that the United Kingdom has a moral responsibility to work for peace and the restoration of stability and prosperity in Sudan. Secondly, I hope to establish exactly who in our Government is in the lead on Sudan policy, and what Her Majesty's Government and our allies propose to do. Thirdly, I hope to make the case for self-determination for the people of Sudan, both north and south.

The world is focused on the war against terrorism, preoccupied by the situation in Afghanistan, mesmerised by the prospect of renewed military action against Saddam Hussein in Iraq, staggered by the violence in the middle east and horrified by the situation in Zimbabwe. However, by far the biggest killing fields of recent years, the worst humanitarian disasters and the greatest forced displacement of people are to be found in Sudan.

Nobody knows exactly how many people have been killed or driven out of their country. Best estimates suggest that between 1.5 million and 3 million people have been killed during the 40 years of civil war, and between 3 million and 5 million Africans have been driven out of their homes in southern Sudan. There are some 4 million internally displaced persons—more than anywhere else in the world. A million more have dispersed into neighbouring countries. Some 30 million people live in northern Sudan, and about 16 million in southern Sudan. Northern Sudan is Arab, southern Sudan African. Northern Sudan is the seat of a militant Islamic Government. Southern Sudan is the heartland of the Christian faith and the animist tradition.

Why did Britain get involved in the first place? We were never threatened by the people of Sudan. There was then no mineral or other natural resource to exploit. We did it to protect our interests in Egypt and to stop the French expanding east of the Nile watershed. That culminated in the Fashoda incident, when General Kitchener moved south down the Nile into Sudan, defeated the Mahdists and claimed the town of Fashoda, now called Kodok, for the Government of Egypt. The French withdrew. Thereafter, Sudan was administered by the British, who set up a condominium with Egypt.

The British recognised the effective split of the country into northern and southern interests and, through a system of indirect rule, left the administrative and judicial functions to agents of the traditional tribal authorities. That lasted until 1 January 1956. On 20 December 1955, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Harold Macmillan, made a statement to the House of Commons:

> "The Sudanese House of Representatives yesterday passed a Declaration in favour of independence ... Her Majesty's Government, therefore, after consultation with the Egyptian Government, have issued a statement welcoming the Declaration by the Sudanese Parliament."—*[Official Report*, 20 December 1955; Vol. 547, c. 1857.]

Meanwhile, in the House of Lords, the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, the Marquess of Reading, made an identical announcement. For the Labour party, the Earl Jowitt said:

> "We should also convey to them"—

the Sudanese—

> "our hope that if we can in any way at any time help them, Her Majesty's Government will be only too ready to do so."

For the Cross-Benchers, Lord Rea said:

> "The Sudan, of course, has always been in a particular relationship to this country, a very favoured and rather affectionate relationship."

The Marquess of Reading responded for the Government, saying that

> "any assistance which they may ask from Her Majesty's Government will be most willingly given."—*[Official Report, House of Lords*, 20 December 1955; Vol. 195, c. 364-65.]

A moral responsibility for the future of Sudan was undoubtedly established.

As part of the campaign in the diocese of Salisbury, and part of Christian Aid's campaign, constituents have asked me to write to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry about oil exploration and extraction in Sudan. I await a reply. Meanwhile, I have corresponded with the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw); the Secretary of State for International Development; and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development, whose most recent letter, although extremely helpful, referred me to the hon. Member for Exeter.

It is, therefore, with some surprise and great delight that I see that another Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane), will respond to the debate. He is warmly welcome, and I know that we can count on his professionalism to provide us with the answers that we seek. I hope that he will, for a start, tell us who is now leading the Government's response. Is it Baroness Amos, in the House of Lords?

During the 1990s, Sudan's relations with the international community suffered because of its links with terrorist groups such as the al-Qaeda network and Egypt's al-Islamiya. In 1996, the United Nations Security Council passed resolutions 1044, 1054 and

[Mr. Robert Key]

1070, demanding that Sudan end all support to terrorists. The United States Government designated Sudan a state sponsor of terrorism and imposed a trade embargo. By the end of 2000, however, Sudan seemed to be making progress. After 11 September 2001, its Government condemned the attacks on the USA, and terrorism in general. On 28 September 2001, the UN Security Council lifted the 1996 resolutions. The US embargo remained in place, but the President announced a new initiative.

There is no doubt about the commitment of our Secretary of State for International Development. She has visited Sudan and convinced the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary that Britain must take a lead. The Prime Minister recently announced the appointment of a UK special representative for Sudan, who will be answerable jointly to the Secretary of State for International Development and the Foreign Secretary. A dedicated team, drawn from both Departments, will support the special envoy, Mr Alan Goulty, who is head of the middle east desk at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. He was our ambassador to Sudan and is deeply knowledgeable about the country, and we wish him well. We also wish the Government every success in working with the Government of Sudan, other Governments and, in particular, the people of southern Sudan to find a way through this tragic crisis.

On 6 September 2001, President Bush announced the appointment of Senator John Danforth of Missouri as America's envoy for peace in Sudan. The President said:

> "We're committed to bringing stability to the Sudan, so that many loving Americans, non-governmental organizations, will be able to perform their duties of love and compassion within that country without fear of reprisal."

Jack Danforth is a former United States Senator and an ordained minister. In accepting the President's commission, he said:

> "I am prepared to deal constructively with both sides of the conflict, the government of Sudan and the SPLA."

He has been as good as his word, and I congratulate him and the Swiss on brokering a six-month ceasefire in the Nuba mountains.

However, I say this to Senator Danforth and the Prime Minister: the UN resolutions, the sanctions, the aid money from US and British taxpayers, the voluntary contributions of international humanitarian agencies and the deaths of millions of people will all be in vain if, in pursuing the war on terrorism and for justice in the world, the USA and Great Britain turn from Afghanistan and towards Iraq without so much as a glance at Sudan. Indeed, if we do not help Sudan to find its way back to the table of civilised nations, terrorism will continue to use the country as a safe haven and evil will triumph. Death and destruction will carry on in southern Sudan.

Many people are calling for Sudan's oil industry to be closed down, at least until after the war. I understand that view, but I am not convinced that it is the answer. Existing extraction should continue, but with UN agreement and supervision, so that revenues are used exclusively for humanitarian purposes. We would certainly expect any arrangements to be a great improvement on those put in place for Iraq.

So, what is the policy? Are the Government of Sudan part of the "axis of evil"? Last week, a man from Juba told me that Osama bin Laden had been seen there. He said that people in the south regard the regime in Khartoum as a terrorist Government. The mujaheddin are certainly in the area, and they are unmistakable. I met them face to face in Bosnia when I was an election observer for the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe. The facts of the daily situation are clear. As President Bush said of terrorism only last Monday:

> "These facts cannot be denied, and must be confronted".

Last week, some hon. Members present had the privilege of meeting Archbishop Paulino Lukudu, president of the Sudan Catholic Bishops Conference, and Paride Taban, Bishop of Torit in south Sudan, at a packed meeting of parliamentarians in Portcullis House. They told us that the Government of Sudan's agenda is to impose Islam and Sharia law on the whole of Sudan.

It is clear that the message from the Government in Khartoum is perceived by the people in the south to be totally uncompromising. Those people believe that the Government in Khartoum say that Christians in the south should convert to Islam, flee their homeland or wait to be killed, usually by the Antonov bombers or helicopter gunships that are such a familiar and terrifying part of their lives.

Last Saturday, the Bishop of Salisbury kindly invited me to his house to meet Archbishop Joseph Marona, Primate of the Episcopal Church of Sudan. What a brave and charismatic Christian he is. He explained to me that it is imperative for his people that there be an end to the fighting, the construction of basic infrastructure such as water supplies and roads, the introduction of medical and educational services, and then a plebiscite on self-determination.

On 3 March, the World Council of Churches convened a meeting of the Sudan Ecumenical Forum at Campion house, Osterley, near Heathrow airport. As a result, the Sudanese Churches have issued a detailed statement on the background to the right to self-determination, the mounting consensus for self-determination and the basis for peacemaking through the self-determination process.

The Osterley statement urges the parties and stakeholders to abide by their commitments and enact the referendum law, which should fix a firm date for a free, fair and internationally supervised referendum. That should be agreed within not more than two years. If agreement cannot be achieved, people should be entitled to exercise the right to self-determination. In other words, if no agreement is reached, the lack of agreement itself should trigger the process of self-determination, not only for the people of the south, but for other Sudanese people.

Meanwhile, President al-Bashir of Sudan has been put on the spot. He is now confronting a test of his seriousness about peace. Should he fail to decide in favour of peace, or fail to impose his will on his Government and army, the prospects for peace will diminish. If that happens, my aspiration is that the

UN swiftly becomes involved. The international community will be challenged to propose serious strategies to protect civilians in the war areas.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): The hon. Gentleman has described the situation and the conditions for the peace process clearly. Does he agree that one of the biggest issues is who benefits from the oil in southern Sudan?

Mr. Key: Yes, of course. I shall refer to that key point, which the hon. Lady is right to mention.

The UN should suggest strategies to protect civilians, and those should not include the supply of weaponry to escalate the conflict. They might include the United States identifying safe havens and no-fly zones.

I have given the Minister notice of five questions, which I ask on behalf of not only my constituents, but people of good will around the world. This may be only an Adjournment debate in Westminster Hall, but the Minister's answers, the whole debate and all my correspondence with Ministers will be available shortly through the internet on my website, www.robertkey.com.

Will the United States, Great Britain and all our allies against terrorism consider the death and dispersal of the African people in southern Sudan in the same way as the plight of the marsh Arabs and the Kurds in Iraq? Will the British Government, with or without the US, go back to the UN and seek international agreement on a new UN resolution to condemn the Government of Sudan and impose new sanctions on the al-Bashir regime, including a freeze on further development of the oil industry? There should be no new investment, exploration or extraction until the bombing, scorched earth displacement and starvation have stopped.

Will the UN insist that revenue from existing oil extraction in Sudan be redirected from Government arms purchases to infrastructure development in the south—water, shelter, health care, farming, roads and education? There is a huge opportunity for the oil wealth of that nation to be shared between north and south. In addition, will the British Government insist on the establishment of UN peacekeepers, military if necessary, in southern Sudan to guarantee the safety of a new international humanitarian relief effort, and will the UN set in train the political processes that will lead to self-determination for the people of southern Sudan? No one could have put it more concisely than President Bush on Monday. Speaking of the consequences of terrorism, he said:

> "Our coalition must act deliberately. Inaction is not an option".

9.46 am

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): I congratulate the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key)—perhaps he would prefer to be known as robertkey.com—on obtaining the debate. It is extraordinary that, over the years, so little attention has been paid to the continuing bloodshed and disasters in Sudan. We should say a word of gratitude to Anglican and Catholic priests and others, and to the charities that have constantly tried to raise the issue. A few years ago, an Anglican minister spent a week fasting in Whitehall to draw attention to Sudan's plight.

As the hon. Gentleman explained, that country of some 25 million people has lost at least 2 million and possibly 3 million killed in the warfare, and about 4 million are internally displaced—refugees in their own land. It is a country of at least 25 different tribes or nations that has experienced continuous civil war since 1983. There were other wars before that and 40 internal conflicts over tribal rights, such as those to water, are also going on. One suspects that the Government in Khartoum, whose main interest seems to be spending what money they have on armaments, are deliberately encouraging the tribal conflicts by supplying arms to those who are interested in keeping the warfare going.

It is becoming a familiar story throughout Africa and in many parts of the world that, where the stomachs are empty, the weapons are shiny and new. Sudan's Government stated that the recent incident in which a helicopter fired on a queue of people waiting for food aid was a mistake. I assume that that means that it was the wrong queue; I do not know what the intended target was. That is just one small example of completely gratuitous bloodshed. It has nothing to do with any aim of that Government or of anyone else, but it is part of the eternal tragedy that causes that nation such immense suffering.

I shall not detain hon. Members, but I must draw attention to the optimism that now exists thanks to the brave words of President Mbeki and initiatives from the rest of the world, especially the New Partnership for Africa's Development, which he introduced. He talked about a future for Africa that we would all like to believe in, but, in the light of recent experience, we are depressed about the prospect of achieving it.

We must give attention to the issue, both in Parliament and in the country, and many hon. Members have repeatedly tried to raise interest in it through Foreign Office questions and early-day motions. Hidden calamities have taken place in East Timor and in Cambodia, when the world was not looking, and it was a matter of cold luck that the world noticed what was happening in Ethiopia. It just so happened that Michael Buerk had a weekend off and a spare camera crew, so he went on an excursion to Ethiopia. The moving film that he produced roused the conscience of the world.

Sudan is virtually unknown on the political landscape and the landscape of public opinion. There would be no reaction if one mentioned Sudan, but an immediate reaction if one referred to tragedies that are taking place even further away, but which seem to happen in the corner of our living rooms because the television cameras draw our attention to them. However, because the interests and nostrums of the news media are different from ours, a series of tragedies has been largely ignored by the public and by the Government.

Perhaps there is a reason for that. Some young, ambitious foreign correspondent from one of our national newspapers might say to his editor, "We must do something about Sudan and print an article. Give me 10 minutes to explain what is going on." By the end of the 10 minutes, the editor, confused by the history and the complexity of events, would turn away and say, "I am publishing a newspaper, not an encyclopaedia." That is one main reason for that impenetrable country—both geographically and because of the alien nature of the situation there—being largely ignored.

[Paul Flynn]

I make one suggestion. Perhaps the Foreign Office should consider intervening in a special way, because the agenda is controlled not by the Department for International Development or the Foreign Office, but by the perception of the press and the attention given to the situation. I am not saying that there is any malign reason behind that, but certain areas of the world interest us because we understand them, and few people understand the continuing disasters in Sudan. Should not the Foreign Office be obliged to draw attention to the situation and to provide publicity? Should it not have its own camera teams? Should it not be saying, "There are terrible things happening in the world. We are dealing with the ones that MPs and others bring to our attention, but we know that probably one of the worst continuing crises is taking place in Sudan, which is forgotten and ignored."?

Should not there be an obligation on the Department for International Development and others not to react to the situation as it is presented to them, but to draw attention to it and make a film for television, as Michael Buerk did, to ask, "What are our priorities? Are they what is before the public eye or those of need?" That would be a worthwhile intervention.

It is good to see several MPs in the Chamber—for one debate on Sudan, there was not a single Member of one main party here—and good to see that interest in that country is gathering. I hope, however, that it has resulted not because of oil or because the only superpower in the world regards Sudan as a suitable place to fight out battles between the two opposing camps that are currently developing in the world.

In his final remark, robertkey.com referred to inaction. There is inaction that one likes to see, because there is such a thing as stability in the world. When the President to whom he referred came to power, there was stability between North Korea and the rest of the world. Rapprochement was being built up between North Korea and South Korea, but the new President effectively wrecked that.

Iran has changed its policy substantially over the past five years and it was moving closer to becoming an acceptable member of the family of nations. The Iraqi situation was relatively inert. Some 10 years ago, Iraq was belligerent, threatening and making weapons of mass destruction. It was as dangerous then as it is now, possibly more so.

In relation to the so-called axis of evil countries, therefore, there is an advantage in having stability in the world. The great danger of saying that inaction is not a possibility is that we are likely to replace a dangerous but stable situation with a highly unstable, perilous one.

I conclude by begging the Minister and Parliament to consider the dreadful history of Sudan, which seems to be a country filled with endless tragedies.

9.55 am

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) on introducing the debate. He is the lead Member in the diocese of Salisbury, which has put tremendous emphasis on raising public awareness of the plight of all people in Sudan. In my constituency, half of which lies in the diocese of Salisbury and the other half in Winchester, the parish of West Parley and the parish of Ferndown have been in the forefront of the campaign to raise public awareness.

The Rev. Charles Booth, rector of the parish of West Parley, has sent me several letters, as have some of his communicants, about the problems in Sudan. In a typically Christian spirit of generosity, they write of their concern for all the peoples of Sudan, regardless of faith allegiance, whose lives are blighted by the civil conflict. They established Ash Wednesday, which was 13 February this year, as a designated diocesan day of action.

There is widespread public concern, not only because of the civil conflict and the number of people being massacred and persecuted, but because of the increasing evidence that some of that is religiously motivated. Christians are writing to me in growing numbers to say, "We are a Christian country. Why are we not standing up for Christians who are being persecuted worldwide on a much larger scale than Muslims?" From the figures, we can see that as many as 100,000 people a year, over 20 years, may have been massacred in Sudan because of their religious beliefs.

One would have thought that, at a time of increased worldwide awareness of and concern about religiously motivated conflicts, the conflict in Sudan would be top of the political agenda. Unfortunately, it is not top of the political agenda in the Department of Trade and Industry. As my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury said, he and I have sent a large number of letters to the Secretary of State. If the matter is important to her, I am sure that she would have responded, and the fact that she has not done so is disappointing. She and her officials must have known about this debate. Normally, by convention, Ministers seek to clear their correspondence on issues being discussed in the House so that people have the chance to consider their response.

Yesterday, I was lucky enough to draw No. 18 in the ballot for oral questions, but sadly my question was not reached and not answered orally. I received a written answer, however, drawing my attention to the fact that the Secretary of State for International Development visited Sudan in January and that the Foreign Secretary's representative was going there this month. I would have hoped, in the light of the undoubted efforts being made by senior Ministers in Sudan, that they would do more to inform the House and the people of this country about their assessment of the situation. We may have a volunteered statement from the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on her visit, and that of many others, to the Doha summit, so why can we not have a volunteered statement from the Secretary of State for International Development when she returns from Sudan?

It is vital that the issue be raised higher in public awareness. The diocese of Salisbury motivated my hon. Friend and me and to participate in this debate, which shows how ordinary people can influence affairs of state in this country. I hope that this is not the end of the process, but the start of a major debate and the raising of public awareness about an outrageous situation. The persecution of black African Christians threatens to continue.

Dr. Tonge: I appreciate all that the hon. Gentleman says about the persecution of Christians, but we should remember that many people in southern Sudan are of the old animist religions. They, too, are God's children, and we should remember their suffering.

Mr. Chope: I agree with the hon. Lady on that issue. That is the view of my Christian constituents, who have written to me about the matter. We are concerned about all the consequences of the civil conflict in Sudan—the enormous loss of life and the displacement of people.

A six-month ceasefire may have been negotiated in the Nuba mountains, but it is by no means clear whether it is being carried into effect. As with all such things, our problem is not knowing what sanctions will be imposed if those commitments are not kept. There seemed to be a quick willingness after 11 September to lift some sanctions affecting Sudan, but we must consider the question whether the major world powers have been taken for a ride by President al-Bashir of Sudan.

I shall say no more, because I hope that we shall have plenty of time to listen to the Minister's response, which is what the people really want to hear. They want to know what their Government are doing about the problem.

10.1 am

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): It is a pleasure to take part in this exceptionally important debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) on the admirable way in which he introduced it, and I agree with every word he said. As chair of the all-party group on Sudan, I have been applying regularly for such a debate, as have others, so I pay tribute to his ability in succeeding. I shall visit his website to see whether I can learn how better to manage the procedures of the House.

It is important that we debate Sudan today because there are hopeful signs, but above all because of the desperate and dreadful circumstances there. As we speak, the war rages. It has been going on for at least 35 of the past 46 years. The debate is fortuitous also because the all-party group will visit Sudan shortly after Easter. We all look forward to going to north and south Sudan, and to Kenya, to speak to people based there about their perceptions of the situation. We shall need a certain sense of humility and a desire to learn about, discuss and observe what is going on. Then, we must come back and make ever more forcefully the points that we believe need to be made in respect of the Government's involvement in Sudan.

One might ask why particular Members of the House have an interest in Sudan. The hon. Member for Salisbury displayed his interest and told us of his connections with the admirable work of the diocese of Salisbury. What others have said is absolutely accurate: one would not gain a good understanding of the situation in Sudan by reading the papers. The media cover the desperate circumstances of people living in Sudan about as regularly as they deal with the possibility of there being life on Mars. For most of the media, Sudan is about as far away.

I am interested in Sudan and became involved because of a constituent who came to me as a refugee from that country. He was an asylum seeker, seeking refuge from torture, oppression, imprisonment and the death of members of his family. He has become a colleague—he works with me in Parliament—and a friend. Lokiden Modi Kenyi is a member of the south Sudan civic forum. Once he gained a certain interest in the circumstances of his country, he assiduously introduced me to his colleagues at that excellent organisation.

We have a huge Sudanese diaspora in this country, and one in eight of all displaced people in the world are of Sudanese origin. The vast range of people from northern and southern Sudan living in this country whom I have met impressed me with their bravery, integrity, commitment to their country and desire to return there. It can be heartbreaking to hear their descriptions of how this country has helped them, although they are desperate to return to their own country and to have what the hon. Member for Salisbury rightly refers to as self-determination. A referendum on self-determination is at the heart of an overall deal that could create conditions for peace, development, increased respect for human rights and justice in Sudan.

We have already heard the facts: about 2 million people have died in the past 18 years as a result of fighting or its consequences; generations of children in Sudan, particularly in the south, have never had sustained opportunities to access basic education, health care, clean water or adequate food; and 4.5 million people have been driven from their homes. Those are desperate circumstances and they should command our attention.

The hon. Member for Salisbury is right that this country has a moral responsibility towards the people of Sudan. Under British colonial rule from 1898, we fused north and south Sudan, creating an amalgamation of territory and people. In 1956, we finally let them get on with it, and we are seeing the consequences now. It is clear that there is a direct need for this country to become further involved in any way it can to help to resolve the appalling circumstances in Sudan.

There is a link to 11 September, as Sudan was Osama bin Laden's haven before he transferred to Afghanistan. If we do not deal with the barbarous circumstances in countries such as Sudan, we know the consequences for countries such as the UK and the United States, which, before 11 September, comfortably assumed and complacently hoped that they were insulated from them. We must engage much more with the peace process and recognise the need to develop both respect for human rights, justice and democracy and a referendum on self-determination in Sudan.

There are signs that we are making progress. We can see them in the number of people from Sudan who are making their way to this country, the ecumenical forum that has been referred to in recent weeks and visits from, among others, a previous Prime Minister of Sudan, Sadiq al-Mahdi, the leader of the Sudan People's Liberation Army, John Garang, and the Governor of Khartoum. The Danforth initiative has been extremely important, as has the visit by the Secretary of State for International Development, who addressed a packed

[Mr. Hilton Dawson]

meeting of the associate parliamentary group on Sudan a few weeks ago on her visit and her hopes for peace there.

Many of the 70 or so Members from both Houses who are in the group were present, and well over 100 Sudanese people packed into a Committee Room, desperate for knowledge and eager to hear of any prospects of peace. The Sudanese people whom I have met hold the Government in the highest regard for wanting to engage further with Sudan, and the Sudanese people in that Room were pleased by what the Secretary of State had to say. Since 11 September, our Prime Minister has engaged with Africa and the new Africa-led economic policies for African development, and Alan Goulty has been appointed special envoy to Sudan. Such developments give us hope that we can make great progress.

According to a Christian Aid report, the Sudanese Government gain $1 million of oil revenue a day. Coincidentally, $1 million a day goes to fund their armed forces and involvement in the war. Sudan has about 2 billion barrels of oil reserves, mainly in the south. That tremendous resource could be used to aid the country's economic development and to improve its education services and health facilities. British companies are involved in exploiting the oil, as are Swedish, Canadian, Malaysian and Chinese interests.

Our Government have a moral responsibility to become further engaged in Sudan. A peace process and a referendum on self-determination would be in the interest of all its people, who could see the benefits of oil and be given debt relief and further development aid. By joining the community of nations, from which they are excluded, they could play an important part in the desperately needed development of the continent of Africa. The boundaries of their country could be decided by democratic mandate rather than colonial imperatives. They could be part of a country that respected all religions, whether Islam, Christianity or traditional African religions, without seeking to impose one religion on all the people.

The Government should use the levers available to them much more effectively. British investment in Sudanese air traffic control systems—they support airfields from which Antonovs, helicopter gunships and other instruments of oppression operate—is a disgrace. Although there is a case for development aid, especially in some southern parts of the country, I am not sure that the aid from the European Union, especially for the northern parts of Sudan, helps the cause of bringing everyone to the peace table. I am sure that more pressure could be exerted through the Department of Trade and Industry on oil interests in Sudan and allied countries.

The Government have an important role to play in Sudan. The circumstances are desperate, and Sudan is one of the most difficult countries in the world to develop. There is, however, hope for the future, and I look forward to the Minister's response.

10.15 am

John Barrett (Edinburgh, West): I congratulate the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) on initiating the debate. As the hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) said, we cannot simply follow where the media decide to send their cameras, when countries are in the news today, or are politically sexy, so everybody cares about them. The hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) asked why people were interested in Sudan—but not one constituent has contacted me about it, and I have had no correspondence about the well-being of people in Sudan since I was elected last year. It is our duty as Members of Parliament to discuss issues and countries that the media ignore, and to encourage them to follow up relevant stories. Issue and events are no less serious because they do not happen to be in the news.

One such event, which was described as a mistake, took place recently. Twenty women and children were killed at a World Food Programme drop. Survivors said that one gunship circled overhead while another opened fire, hovering so low that the crowd could see the gunner's face. Rockets were fired into the drop zone and into a nearby village, while those who ran for cover were machine-gunned. It was the second attack on a WFP aid distribution in 11 days. Had such an attack been made on British or American citizens, there would have been a huge outcry, and calls for military intervention. The number of people killed is not too dissimilar to the number of American soldiers who died in Mogadishu—an event that had ramifications around the world.

People are hardly aware of the problems in Sudan. As has been said, a camera crew in Ethiopia opened the eyes of the world. We should therefore congratulate the hon. Member for Salisbury for raising the issue here today. One advantage of debates in Westminster Hall is that everyone present is interested in the subject. As a new Member of Parliament, I must say that that is not always the case in the main Chamber.

Today, I would like to hear that Britain can and will play its part, that inaction is not a possibility and that we shall work in partnership with our European allies and through the United Nations. It is also imperative that there are observers on the ground to see what is happening. There have been stories—I do not know whether they are true—about slavery, and about children in Sudan and bordering areas being abducted to serve in the military. It is important that we find out exactly what has happened so that we can concentrate on the issues that must be dealt with.

The appointment of the special representative is welcome, but Britain cannot make progress alone, and we must work with others. An end to the hostilities is obviously a top priority, but there are also people who have no food in their bellies, and it is our responsibility to spread the word about such issues as much as possible. We must pressurise the media, so that people at home and abroad are more aware of the problems out there.

10.19 am

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): I join others in paying tribute to the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) for bringing this issue to the attention of the House. I also pay tribute to the Bishop of Salisbury and to dioceses and parishes across the country for keeping the subject alive very effectively; without them, it would have disappeared without trace. Indeed, it was my church—St. Anne's on Kew Green—and a fellow parishioner who worked for Christian Aid, that helped me to go to southern Sudan three years ago, six or seven months after the famine. The media paid attention to the famine—they always pay attention to dire events, but never to anything less extreme.

Ever since I went to Sudan, I have been tabling questions, trying to call debates and having meetings, but without getting very far. I share the hon. Gentleman's frustration with the "Not me, guv" attitude in the Foreign Office and the Department for International Development. One hopes that that attitude has come to an end with the visit of the Secretary of State for International Development. I saw her yesterday and she was obviously enthusiastic and determined to find a solution to the problem.

I shall describe what I saw and experienced on my visit three years ago. The situation has not changed since then—that is what is so awful. I went to Turelei in Twic county in the Bahr al-Ghazal area, which suffered the worst of the famine. It is difficult to describe the poverty in which the people of that area lived. They had straw huts and straw stockades around groups of huts—until raiders from the north came and burnt them down, which is a regular occurrence. I suppose that it is lucky, in a way, that the huts are built of straw, because it is easy to put them up again. Everything that those people possess, including their animals, cooking utensils and any clothing that they may have, disappears during those raids. They have nothing.

In the little enclave where I stayed for two days and two nights, there were two huts, two cows, a few dogs, a goat and about 30 human beings, but although the people there were treating honoured guests from the British Parliament, there was hardly any food to eat. We had a little bit of dried fish, because the floods had just subsided and they had managed to catch some fish. Southern Sudan is often flooded for half the year and arid for the rest of the year, so the only chance of getting protein is when the floods come. There was also sorghum wheat bread, which is inedible to people with western tastes, as it scratches and hurts when one swallows it. Apart from the okra soup, which is awful—I do not recommend it—that was about it for the food.

Those people still faced starvation a year after the famine ended. For example, the women told me that they were desperately worried because they were no longer menstruating. I introduce that subject because it is interesting to me as a medic. Girls who suffer from anorexia nervosa, which is enforced starvation, do not menstruate after a while. The women in southern Sudan had been starving so long, through none of their own fault, that the same thing happened to them. That shows how starving they are.

Things have not changed. The people of that area live on the edge of survival, they are bombed by the north, and when the floods go down, raiders come on the wonderful train that runs from the north to a place called Wau in southern Sudan, full of Marahaleen armed to the teeth. Those are unofficial paramilitaries of the Sudanese Government, who are not paid but are allowed to loot, take slaves and destroy, everywhere the train stops. When I was there, the news came through, "The train has started moving—beware, the attacks are going to start again." That is a terrible situation.

Three years ago the SPLA—the Sudan People's Liberation Army—was fighting the Sudan People's Democratic Front, so there was civil war in southern Sudan. Thankfully, a peace agreement has been brokered between those two forces and there is much better co-ordination of activities in southern Sudan—but, boy, are those people tired of war. That terrible situation has been going on since 1956.

In the area that I visited security has improved, but the problem has shifted to western Upper Nile, where the oilfields are. As we have heard from some hon. Members, the situation is repeating itself there, with a scorched earth policy. The oil is flowing, but at what cost?

Mrs. Annette L. Brooke (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): Does my hon. Friend agree that oil is one of the biggest obstacles to the peace process?

Dr. Tonge: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. Nothing is more important than what is done with the oil. As the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) said, the revenues are being used to make war when they should be making the people of Sudan comfortable, well off, well fed and well housed. Instead, they are just making things worse, as the excellent "Scorched Earth" document published by Christian Aid showed.

One of the peace initiatives brokered by Senator Danforth was to bring peace to the Nuba mountains. That is great news for the people there, but it has released the soldiers on both sides to go to western Upper Nile and swell activities there. There are so many problems surrounding oil, and I am sad to say that British firms, such as Weir Pumps in Scotland, are involved in the extraction of oil. I wonder what advice the Government have given them.

There have been some initiatives. The Intergovernmental Authority on Development process, which has not yet been mentioned, was much scorned. When I was in Turelei I met a group of men called "the intellectuals". They told me that the IGAD process was useless—just a talking shop for politicians. They said, "Politicians are like monkeys: the higher they climb up the coconut palm, the more backside they expose."

Senator Danforth has been involved with some other initiatives. He thought that it was important to protect civilians from military attack, and called on the Sudanese Government to do so—but attacking civilians around the oilfields is one of the strategies of the Sudanese Government. As the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre knows, that is what the Government do to drive people from the area in order to get at the oil. So there is no success on that front, and we have already heard about the accidental attack on the food queue in Bien on 20 February.

Senator Danforth also set up a commission to investigate the question of slavery as between the south and the north, as well as the subject of child soldiers, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, West (John Barrett). Some NGOs have been involved in redeeming slaves, but when I was in Sudan there was much worry about those activities, because it was felt that a good business was being developed involving taking slaves, selling them back to

[Dr. Tonge]

Christian Solidarity Worldwide and then using the money to buy arms for soldiers. The international community must investigate that.

Aid has been mentioned, but it is no good giving aid to the Government of Sudan in the present circumstances because the aid does not go to the people in the south. As I have said until I am blue in the face, southern Sudan is a very big area. At times parts of it are at peace, and some education must be provided in those areas. Generations of children are growing up without any education. I was told that all they need is the odd teacher, some slates and some chalks. They can hold schools under trees, and do not need schoolrooms or fancy equipment. That would be so valuable and would keep what children are left occupied, because one of the problems for children in war is that there is nothing for them to do, as well as nothing for them to eat.

Human rights observers are needed. We need monitors in the Nuba mountains to monitor the ceasefire and ensure that the war in that area has really stopped. We need safe havens for civilians. Southern Sudan is a big place and there should be internationally monitored safe havens where people can go while the horrible situation is sorted out.

The biggest problem of all, which has been mentioned by many hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, West, is the sharing of oil. An accommodation must be reached between the north and south of Sudan on who owns the oil and who benefits from it.

Last week the all-party group on Sudan met John Garang, who is an engaging man and the leader of the SPLA in southern Sudan. I did wonder how often he visits southern Sudan, but he is clearly trying hard to pursue a peace process. He thinks that the two problems are oil and the fact that the south do not want Sharia law imposed on them—they would prefer self-determination. Time and again we come back to the point that the self-determination process is prevented by the problem of oil. We also met bishops from southern Sudan, who seemed depressed. They said:

> "John Garang and the Government of Sudan come to the UK to talk peace whilst at home they prepare for war."

On my wrist I wear this old bracelet made of cartridge cases—the only freely available commodity in southern Sudan. It was given to me three years ago by a woman in Turelei, and I was made to promise that I would keep it on my wrist until Sudan had peace. I have a horrible feeling that I shall go to my grave wearing it, if the Government do not pull out all the stops and get a peace process going in Sudan.

10.31 am

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) for securing a debate of special importance to all hon. Members. He went into great detail, and all those in his constituency who take an interest in Sudan, and anyone else who heard him, will be impressed by his mastery of the issue.

The civil war in Sudan has been raging for many years, at a terrible cost to human life and in human suffering. It has brought destruction and poverty to an already economically vulnerable country, and has raged for too long, apparently unnoticed or—even worse—deliberately ignored by too many in the international community.

The only hope for that blighted country is a ceasefire followed by a determined internationally supported drive for peace. I pay unqualified tribute to the churches in the south-west and their friends in Sudanese churches for championing such an important agenda for peace. The impetus that they have created will serve to advance a cause that will save the lives of many thousands of Sudanese in years to come. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury has received several letters from his constituents as a result of that link, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), who has taken a close interest in the issue and is firmly committed to championing an agenda for peace in Sudan, has received letters too.

The civil war has too often been neglected by Governments and the media. It is seemingly little understood, and perhaps some have thought it easier to ignore. I could not disagree more. We have a moral duty to do what we can, and if we have any interest in regional stability we should clearly see the political imperative to act.

The many attempts to simplify the conflict in the Sudan and characterise it as a religious war between a Christian south and a Muslim north fail to address the causes of the underlying tensions and conflict. Economic issues that revolve round the distribution of resources, concerns about exclusion from the political process, desires for self-determination or at least inclusion, and religion, all play a part in creating a complex mix of motivations and tensions. The concentration of power and wealth in the hands of small competing groups of elites—as can be seen in other countries—has deepened the resentment and the economic, political and religious divides in the country.

An underlying problem in finding a solution is the multiplicity and shifting nature of each group's agenda. On one hand there is the Government—the National Islamic Front under President al-Bashir—and on the other there is the National Democratic Alliance, the largest component of which is the Sudan People's Liberation Army. Each group has its own agenda, be that dominance of the country and exploitation of oil revenues or independence and secession from the state of Sudan as we see it now.

Into that mix can be added other groups, including, importantly, the Churches. Every one of those groups must be willing to participate in a peace process in good faith and be willing to work on reconciliation and building a better future for the country. At the moment none of the warring parties seems committed to the cause of peace, except when it feels that its fortunes are on the wane. We must all work to change that outlook. The sustained concentration of an international effort and negotiations is needed.

One of the great problems to be overcome in attempting to create a successful peace process is the lack of unity of purpose and co-ordination—and a degree of that must be achieved. At the moment, various sporadically active peace initiatives are under way. The Intergovernmental Authority on Development—IGAD—process, which has already been mentioned, and the Egyptian-Libyan efforts are just two of the most notable. Although the intention of such initiatives may be worthy, they often end up competing with one another, allowing the warring parties the opportunity to play them off against each other while no genuine progress is made towards peace.

An extra-regional negotiator of international stature is required to take the lead and become an over-arching influence, bringing together the various initiatives currently being pursued. Co-ordination and involvement by all interested parties, internal and external, is essential. The appointment by President Bush of former Senator Danforth marks an important step forward by the United States in recognising that it has a role to play in conflict resolution in Sudan.

I particularly welcome our Government's appointment of Mr. Alan Goulty as special envoy to Sudan. In Mr. Goulty we have an able, knowledgeable and dedicated diplomat, who we all hope will be able to play an important role in creating and moving forward a peace process. It is reassuring that the Government have been able to find such an able envoy in our diplomatic service and have not felt the need to look outside it. His seniority and skill ideally equip him for the task. For the sake of the many whose lives are at risk, we wish him well. We urge the Government to give their continuing support and attention to his efforts. I hope that the Minister will confirm that they will not just dump him in it and leave him to get on with it.

I do not intend to suggest a detailed prescription to remedy Sudan's ills, which I must leave to those better informed than I. I shall make a few observations, however, on which I am sure the Minister will comment. In the first instance, a ceasefire, or at least a moving apart of the two warring factions, is required. Any subsequent deal must be constructed to incorporate mechanisms to share the country's wealth and oil revenues equitably. I shall come on to those in a moment. It should build a secular democratic Sudan and allow religious freedom. Any negotiations should closely and carefully examine the various suggestions being made about a referendum on independence, self-determination for the south, or a federal solution allowing each region much autonomy in law making. I do not presume to advocate any one of those solutions at this early stage in the process, but they seem to form the agenda that matters.

In passing, I must mention the attack that the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) made on the idea of air traffic control. Things are bad enough already. Every country needs infrastructure, and the thought that planes would be bumping into each other would do nothing for Sudan's international reputation. It was a mistaken attack, although I accept that the hon. Gentleman believes that the system is used for military purposes only. It is not; it is also used for civilian purposes, and people will not fly to Sudan if they do not have confidence in the infrastructure that keeps them safe.

Mr. Dawson: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman recognises that there is a huge problem if those control systems are being used to aid the repression of, and the attacks on, civil populations that we have heard about.

Mr. Duncan: Yes, but I think that the hon. Gentleman is attacking the wrong target.

I would be failing to present the whole picture if I did not touch on oil exploration and development in Sudan. As everyone in the Chamber admits ,the revenues that that industry generates and their use cannot be divorced from recent developments in the country. The NIF Government see oil as the factor that will give them the decisive advantage in the war against the NDA and the SPLA. Development of the proven oil resources in Sudan began in about 1999, and the Government's expectation was that the resulting revenues would allow them to purchase a significant enough military advantage to secure victory. On the other hand, the SPLA has focused its campaign on damaging the oilfields as a means of hitting the Government's revenues.

There are some—we have heard their argument today—who have called for international pressure on the Sudanese Government to stop oil production altogether and stop the development and exploration of the fields. They point out that essentially, oil is fuelling the war. Although I fully appreciate that view, I suggest that we should focus instead on bringing pressure to bear on the Sudanese Government and the oil companies to channel the revenues raised from oil into education and health rather than armaments. Effective mechanisms to monitor the use and equitable sharing of those revenues should form part of any peace deal.

Cutting oil revenues altogether would only be a step towards the creation of equal misery. What is the point of that, when distributing the wealth responsibly would be a much better option? The revenues from oil represent the best hope for Sudan's long-term prosperity and a means by which it could lift the condition of its people. We should be wary about irresponsibly undermining that potential. In fact, the oil in Sudan generates an impetus for peace. First, the keenness of the Sudanese Government to secure access to western markets for their oil means that they are working to end their isolation and build better international relations. Being receptive to a peace process is an important aspect of that. Secondly, so long as the Government have income from oil, they do not, we hope, need to have recourse to alternative income from terrorist or extremist groups, as happened during the 1990s.

The churches of the south-west, through their strong links to churches in Sudan, have done a great service in drawing attention to that country at such a crucial time. Where the current British Government have—until now—stood back a bit from taking an active role, the Church has been energetic and focused. It is encouraging that the Government are now according this issue a much higher status, and it is important that they work with the Churches and all the parties to the conflict to advance the agenda for peace. A co-ordinated determined international approach has the potential to lead to peace in a war-ravaged country, and we must seize the opportunity that the current international situation has opened for us.

10.43 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Denis MacShane): It gives me great pleasure to speak in this debate, and I thank the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) for introducing it, because the issue is important. The contributions by my hon. Friends the

[Mr. Denis MacShane]

Members for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) and for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) as well as those by the hon. Members for Christchurch (Mr. Chope), for Edinburgh, West (John Barrett) and for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) have all been valuable—and they will almost certainly be read on robertkey.com, which will now be my morning internet turn-on. They will also be available on the parliamentary website. The contribution by the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) was most valuable as well. I thank him for the tributes that he paid to Alan Goulty and to the quality of Foreign Office diplomats, who are fewer in number than in many other countries of comparable size, and deliver a big bang for their not very significant bucks. We should be proud of their contribution.

This time last week I was speaking about international policy matters at a church hall in Roundhay, Leeds. Although many of my hon. Friends in other Departments spend more and more of their time travelling overseas, as a Foreign Office Minister I am spending more time travelling in the United Kingdom, explaining the importance of international engagement to our citizens. While I was there, a Mr. Peter Riaak sent me a note asking why the British Government were not intervening to stop the civil war in Sudan. I was able to tell him that I would send him a copy of the *Hansard* record of this debate, because Sudan is a major parliamentary issue. I should also like to place on record our thanks to those who have consistently raised the issue in another place. If hon. Members care to read the House of Lords *Hansard*, they will see the replies from my noble Friend Baroness Amos, the lead Minister on Africa in the Lords, who takes the matter very seriously.

That reflects the Government's commitment to engaging with Africa. The Prime Minister recently visited that continent, and the cynical sneering condemnation of his commitment in a large number of our right-wing newspapers—and, I have to say, by many commentators from the left—was deplorable. That cynical indifference to the Government's commitment shames all our political chattering classes and those who spin the cobwebs of comment in the name of the London elite.

The New Partnership for Africa's Development, NEPAD, is an important step forward, and the Government are fully committed to seeing that it works. There is a window of opportunity for peace in Sudan, and hon. Members are right to say that the UK has a major role to play in ensuring that that opportunity is seized. Last month my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary announced the appointment of Alan Goulty as the new UK special representative for Sudan. Mr. Goulty has served there twice, most recently as ambassador, and he will report to both the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for International Development. We are setting up a dedicated unit in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which will be staffed by officials drawn from both the FCO and the Department for International Development. That is part of our contribution to ensuring that Sudan is taken seriously.

The hon. Member for Rutland and Melton, who spoke for the Opposition, referred to the need for Sudan to develop as a secular democracy that respects religious freedom. That is profoundly important in today's world, in which we see great clashes between people animated by faith. Everybody of faith believes that whatever they are doing, whether it is missionary work or whether—at times, alas—it is moving to the extremes of protest that can lead to violence, they are doing it in the name of some greater divine being. It is right for the House, which formed its parliamentary strength by defeating the divine right of anybody in authority to speak on behalf of the nation, to say that secularism in international affairs is of prime importance.

Although I join in paying tribute to the Churches, I ask them, too, to remember the need for secularism. Some years ago, as a Back-Bench MP, I was invited to go to Sudan on a trip paid for either by the Sudanese Government or by people associated with Muslim organisations. I refused, because as a British MP I did not want to be beholden to any particular faith or religion—and, while paying respect to all the Churches and faiths in our multi-faith country, I shall continue to stress the need for secularism in foreign relations in my work as a Minister.

Mr. Goulty will engage with all parties to the conflict in an effort to promote the case for peace. The UK will continue to support the Intergovernmental Authority on Development peace process because it is the best chance to bring an end to the civil war through a negotiated settlement. As an active member of the IGAD partners forum, we will step up our efforts to revitalise the IGAD initiative, which both parties to the conflict have agreed to negotiate. We shall also work closely with the Kenyan Lieutenant-General Sumbeiywo, the new IGAD special envoy, who visited London for discussions on Sudan in January.

To answer a point raised by the hon. Member for Salisbury, I should say that the IGAD declaration of principles foresees self-determination for the south, but we should also bear in mind the fact that an absolute fundamental principle of the African Union—formerly the Organisation of African Unity—is that there should be no redrawing of the borders of Africa. We must take that into consideration, but many arrangements allow greater autonomous control over regions, people and communities under an overall Government who permit people to have a sense of controlling their own destinies.

As many hon. Members have said, the new British Government commitment to Africa, and particularly to Sudan, was reflected in the visit by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development from 6 to 11 January—as she is known to the whole world as Clare, for the sake of abbreviation I shall refer to her familiarly as Clare from now on. She was the first British Cabinet Minister to visit Sudan for more than a decade, and peace was at the top of her agenda. Clare discussed the peace process substantively with a full range—

Mr. Duncan: Order, order.

Mr. MacShane: Clare discussed the peace process substantively with a full range—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. John McWilliam): Order. The hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) is quite right. Members of the House must be referred to by their titles or constituencies, not by name.

Mr. MacShane: Then I shall have to refer to "my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood, the Secretary of State for International Development". If my affection ran away with me and left the full parliamentary protocol and rules behind, I beg to apologise, Mr. McWilliam. I am occasionally a mouthpiece for what I really think, instead of behaving according to the full parliamentary rules. I hope that the House accepts my apology.

Dr. Tonge: Perhaps it would be quicker to refer to SID—the Secretary of State for International Development.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The correct shortened version is "the Secretary of State".

Mr. MacShane: All those whom the Secretary of State met admitted that they had a responsibility to engage in serious negotiation, and said that there was now a window of opportunity. She stressed that we stood ready to play our part and press the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army to set out their key requirements for a just peace. She also emphasised the potential economic benefits for all, and the United Kingdom's readiness to engage in development if stability can be achieved.

There has been progress in Sudan this year. We are working closely with the United States special envoy, Senator John Danforth, and his efforts are a marvellous example of United States multilateralism, engagement in the poorest part of the world and a commitment by Washington to nation building. We should pay tribute to President Bush's wise decision to commit multilateral nation-building energy on behalf of his Administration. Senator Danforth held talks in Berne in January with the Sudanese Government and the Sudan People's Liberation Army, with the aim of achieving a ceasefire in the region of the Nuba mountains. We are delighted that the parties reached an agreement under which civilians will be allowed to move freely within the region currently held by the SPLA. Demilitarised zones will allow the Nuba people access to fertile land, and humanitarian assistance will be allowed to enter the region by air.

I suggest to my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre that air traffic control systems are like systems of traffic lights. The idea that any country would benefit by not having roads or traffic lights is not sensible. We should be careful about patronising African countries that want to buy the best air traffic control systems.

The Norwegian general who will head the joint military commission helping to monitor the ceasefire has just made a recce visit to the Nuba mountains and we look forward to reading his report. It will be crucial to ensure that the monitoring mechanism is up and running by the end of this month. We are heartened, too, by the agreement of warring parties not to target civilians, and we stand ready to play our part in monitoring the agreement. I hope that the hon. Member for Salisbury will be heartened to know that part of the motivation for the Nuba mountains ceasefire agreement was to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid, much of which comes through Kenya and is provided by Churches and Church-linked NGOs. Those monitoring the agreement, whether they are UN-mandated or not, will help to guarantee the safety of the humanitarian effort.

We are concerned about the humanitarian crisis in Sudan, particularly in the south, and continue to urge all parties to give all possible help to the UN and NGOs to ensure speedy delivery of humanitarian assistance. However, the only long-term answer to the suffering in Sudan is a peace settlement that will allow the people to rebuild their lives. Peace in Sudan must remain a priority.

In response to the question asked by the hon. Member for Salisbury, I can tell him that we do not believe that the civil war—it is a civil war, as Mr. Peter Riaak of Leeds pointed out to me last week—is analogous to the situation in Iraq. There is fighting on several fronts, and several parties are involved. Our aim is to support efforts to stop the fighting and to work with international partners to mitigate the awful consequences of the conflict where peace has been broken.

We are concerned about the human rights of all in the Sudan, regardless of their ethnic or religious background, and we regularly urge all sides in the civil war to respect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms. That is reflected in the Foreign Office's annual human rights report. There is no doubt that many Christians and many of other faiths have suffered, and many have been killed, as a result of the civil war. We make representations to the Government of Sudan about individual cases as well as more general issues, and we have a very active ambassador who gets out and about in that country and who is a great credit to the diplomatic service.

We urge all sides in the civil war to respect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms, and fully to respect international law. We stay in close touch with Churches in the UK and in Sudan that are working in the north and the south of the country. One of those is the diocese of Salisbury, to whose work I pay tribute. Christians have specific concerns, but thousands of them are able to worship freely each week. The picture is a mixed one. Religious freedom was one of the main topics of discussion at the EU-Sudan dialogue meetings, chaired by our ambassador, in the latter part of last year. As Members have heard, only last week the Sudan ecumenical forum brought together the Sudan Council of Churches, the New Sudan Council of Churches and other Christians. I pay tribute to their work.

The EU-Sudan dialogue deals with some of the issues that the hon. Member for Salisbury mentioned: peace, relations with neighbours, terrorism, democratisation and human rights, including the issue of slavery. We believe that the Government of Sudan have made progress in improving relations with the country's neighbours and in adopting an acceptable approach to counter-terrorism. Progress in the peace process has been disappointing, as many hon. Members have said. However, there has been some progress on human rights and democratisation. The Council of Ministers, or Cabinet, is more broadly based and less dominated by the military. Sadiq al-Mahdi, the former Prime Minister and leader of the opposition Umma party, is now back in Khartoum and has been able to resume political activity. Newspapers are permitted slightly freer expression of political opinion. I have no illusions, but we should not ignore the progress that has been made.

[Mr. MacShane]

Abduction is a key issue to which we pay particular attention. At this year's meeting of the UN commission on human rights, the EU sponsored a resolution—

Mr. Duncan: Before the Minister finishes his speech, will he comment on oil and say whether production should continue?

Mr. MacShane: The EU sponsored a resolution on Sudan that set out our concerns about the violation of human rights. We want the Government of Sudan to continue to work with the Committee for the Eradication of the Abduction of Women and Children, which was set up in 1999.

Mr. Duncan: What about oil?

Mr. MacShane: There has been much publicity about oil. My firm view is that Sudan needs more investment, more material prosperity and greater distribution of the wealth generated by its resources. Stopping oil investment and making Sudan poorer cannot be an answer. The DTI gives no particular promotion to British oil companies, but we advise all companies to take into consideration concerns about the political and human rights problems in Sudan.

The final answer must be the continuing international engagement of Britain, Europe and the United States. The Government are pledged to that policy, and I am deeply grateful to hon. Members for making their points in this important debate.

Energy Review

11 am

Dr. Desmond Turner (Brighton, Kemptown): I hope that this is the beginning of a major national debate on "The Energy Review" document. I congratulate the Government on bringing the review to the House and to the nation. It is a wide-ranging and in many ways impressive document, but it is not without flaws. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister for Employment and the Regions, who is substituting for my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy today, will not take too much offence if I criticise it. My criticism is well meant.

Life will be made easier if I begin with the parts of the report with which I wholeheartedly agree. The review recommends that Britain should reduce domestic energy consumption by 20 per cent. between now and 2010, and by another 20 per cent. between 2010 and 2020. We will make a significant contribution to future provision if we achieve that degree of energy conservation and reduce energy need by approximately one fifth. Energy conservation is, appropriately, known as the fifth fuel, because it is just as good as power generation.

By a happy coincidence, the energy saving target of 20 per cent. by 2010 is almost identical to the target of 30 per cent. between 1996 and 2011 set in the guidance issued under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995. Unfortunately, that guidance is not statutory, and the implementation of that target is not a statutory duty of local authorities, so it is not surprising that some local authorities take their energy authority role more seriously than others. Performance varies accordingly: some excellent authorities have reported savings of 15 per cent., some have reported as little as 0.003 per cent., and others have not bothered to report at all. It is clear that the 30 per cent. HECA target will not be achieved under the current legislation, and nor will the target set out in "The Energy Review" unless we do something about it. The Minister will agree that there is a strong case for achieving that target.

I therefore proposed a new private Member's Bill—the Home Energy Conservation Bill—that would make the achievement of energy conservation targets set by the Secretary of State the statutory responsibility of local authorities. That would ensure the delivery of home energy conservation targets, on which the report and my Bill are in perfect harmony. Our objectives are the same, so I hope that the Government will maintain their support for my Bill and help to bring it to a successful conclusion. I appreciate that the Minister here today has no direct involvement with my Bill, but I remind him of comments made by the Energy Minister to the House of Lords European Union Committee in January. He said that energy conservation was going to form a significant plank of the report, and added:

> "I take the point very seriously . . . we will be setting targets which will result in very significant increases in building standards so as to reach the targets we are setting."

I am happy with that expression of intent, but making new buildings or modifications comply with new building regulations is unlikely to make a sufficient contribution to energy conservation to achieve the national target. It is vital to address the energy conservation capacity of existing stock: we should remember that half our existing stock was built before 1914, does not have a cavity wall in site, is ineligible for the existing home energy efficiency scheme, and cannot take advantage of most of the energy conservation measures already in place. That issue must be revisited. The Minister for Employment and the Regions is strongly interested in energy conservation and I would appreciate his support for my Bill, which is an instrument already at hand to deliver one of the key recommendations of "The Energy Review".

I agree with the report that achieving large reductions in carbon dioxide emissions by moving to a low-carbon energy economy is a major challenge—one to which we must rise if we are to ameliorate climate change. Thanks to the legacy of 18 years of Conservative misrule, we now have a liberalised energy market, so achieving such a step change is a major test for the Government. It is achievable, provided that some of the recommendations of the report are amended. We are planning for the next 50 years and succeeding generations will judge us on what we do now.

The UK has four non-carbon options available for the generation of large-scale electricity. Setting photovoltaics aside—I shall not address the whole spectrum of energy provision in the report, because I do not want to take up all 90 minutes—

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): Thank God!

Dr. Turner: I value my hon. Friend's support.

I shall concentrate on the four non-carbon options that can generate large quantities of electrical power—the nuclear option and the three renewable energy sources—wind, wave and tide, in which the UK is uniquely rich.

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): I know that my hon. Friend is not a photovoltaics enthusiast, but I wonder why he sets them aside. Our competitors give vastly greater sums in direct Government support to that fledgling industry, with considerable success. Is not the lack of investment the main reason for setting photovoltaics aside? If we had the political will, we could change that.

Dr. Turner: I am not setting photovoltaics aside because I am opposed to them in any way. I am simply dealing with ways in which to feed large quantities of power to the grid, which is not a role identified for photovoltaics. They will have a valuable future role in embedded generation, perhaps through photovoltaic roofs of our houses, and I agree with my hon. Friend that the Government should support the photovoltaics industry in this country. We do not disagree; it is simply that I do not want to take the whole 90 minutes of debate for myself.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): Is the hon. Gentleman tempted to include biomass and biodiesel as renewable sources of energy? Not only could they provide large amounts of energy, but they have the potential to help rural communities at the same time.

Dr. Turner: I was going to mention biomass, although I am not a great fan. I can see some downsides. I am only a simple scientist and cannot understand the argument of supporters of biomass who say that it will reduce CO_2 emissions: that strikes me as being on the same level as the argument for perpetual motion; it does not stack up. Biomass would increase CO_2 emissions, and the question of potential toxic emissions would remain, as would considerations of cost. To the best of my knowledge, biomass has not yet achieved anything close to commercial costings. It may have a role, but it is not as simple as the hon. Gentleman suggests.

The report mentions the reasonable concern that the United Kingdom's response to energy problems should not place it at a competitive disadvantage. The report uses the currently low generating costs of coal and gas as cost comparators, but they might not provide the most accurate guideline, because coal and gas prices are artificially low now and they not likely to remain as low in the foreseeable future. The report is also less than even-handed in assessing the relative contributions that the nuclear and renewables options can make. Surprisingly, it recognises that the costs of generation by nuclear fission with current reactor technology are too high to be commercially viable.

Dr. Gibson: Will my hon. Friend comment on the recent pronouncements of the Government's chief scientific adviser, Professor David King, who has come out on a pro-nuclear platform? Does he regard that as a conclusion or a contribution to the debate?

Dr. Turner: It is unusual for me to disagree with the chief scientific adviser, but I do on this occasion. He was premature in making those statements on nuclear power. He must have read the report and accepted its conclusions without too much consideration. His statements were not a valuable contribution.

Current cost of nuclear generation is about 5p per kW, which is at least double the current baseline range. Even that figure is not a reliable estimate, because the nuclear industry has a long history of obfuscating the real costs of generation. To this day, one cannot be certain that costs include provision for decommissioning, waste disposal and so on. Remembering that, in the good old days when nuclear power was new, the Government said that electricity would be too cheap to meter, one must take anything that the nuclear industry says about costs with several tonnes of salt.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): On the costs of the nuclear option and the uncertainty around it, does the hon. Gentleman agree that it would help if the Government came to a decision about how they will manage waste in future? That would enable costs to be quantified and the debate to make progress. Does he agree that the Government should fix a policy for managing nuclear waste, above or underground, so that the engineers can get on with the work?

Dr. Turner: I agree entirely. Nuclear waste disposal is a problem that we have to tackle, whether or not we allow a new chain of nuclear stations to be built. It is inescapable.

The report describes nuclear power as a "mature technology"; it has had 50 years to develop, so that is not a surprising conclusion. However, it looks to future

[Dr. Turner]

design developments to produce reactors with lower generating costs: a range of 2.5 to 4p per kWh is quoted. To achieve such costs involves extremely improbable operating assumptions that the nuclear industry has not met in its entire history. The putative costs are probably unreliable and unachievable.

Dr. Iddon: Does my hon. Friend agree that environmental as well as financial costs should be taken into consideration? One of the advantages of the nuclear industry is that it does not produce any carbon dioxide.

Dr. Turner: I thought that I had made my views clear, but I shall reinforce what I said. The only reason I am even discussing the nuclear option is because it does not lead to CO_2 emissions.

We must remember the awful history of the early 1980s. Research into renewables, in which this country then led the world, was stopped, and more nuclear capacity was built. It is reasonable to suggest that to maintain the nuclear option, the possibility of renewables was set back 20 years. This country was ahead in wind power, but Denmark stepped in and took over world leadership. Wave power was coming along nicely, but it was stopped dead in its tracks and only now is it reaching the point it had reached 20 years ago. If we are not careful, the nuclear option could be developed at the expense of renewables. Although nuclear power stations do not emit CO_2, genuinely renewable options would save just as much CO_2 and be completely sustainable.

The other argument from the nuclear industry centres on jobs. I do not want to put anyone out of a job, and for the foreseeable future the nuclear industry would have jobs for all its personnel just cleaning up the mess, let alone doing anything else. I would hate jobs in an obsolete 20th-century industry to be saved at the expense of generating far more jobs in a sustainable, 21st-century industry.

Another principal feature of nuclear power is its use to solve intermittency problems to provide baseline load. It has been argued that it is necessary to replace sufficient nuclear power plant to serve that purpose, but tidal energy has the potential to do the same thing. One of the beauties of tidal streams as an energy source is that they are completely predictable; they run at sufficient strength in any given place for 23 hours of the day. The variation in the times of tides around the coasts means that in most places there is always energy at any given time. Furthermore, the grid can handle it very easily, as ScottishPower plc stated in evidence to the Select Committee.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Turner: I have given way so many times that if I do so again I shall take time from other hon. Members.

The most baffling feature of the report is that although it recognises the enormous power-producing potential of marine renewables—wave and tide—it makes little reference to them thereafter, save to suggest that although they might be making a major contribution by 2050, but they will be making only a small, unspecified contribution by 2020. The report does not explain why, but perhaps one can assume that that is an assessment of what might happen if the market were left alone to decide the progress of renewables, with little or no Government intervention.

It is clearly convenient for those arguing for a new generation of nuclear plants to have an apparent energy and carbon dioxide saving gap until 2020. That would fit nicely with the suggested option of having renewed reactors by that year. I venture to suggest that that is an attempt, conscious or otherwise, at a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is a simple fact that we would not have a network of nuclear stations had the matter been left to a purely commercial market. Those stations, and the national grid system that links them, were built with public investment by a nationalised industry, just like the stations in France and other countries. As the report admits, pure market operation would not produce any more nuclear build: some Government assistance would be essential if any more nuclear stations were to be built in Britain.

The report's allegedly neutral stance towards different alternative energy sources does not bear close examination. There is a massive carbon dioxide-free energy source waiting to be exploited off our shores. The report refers to 100 tWh of electricity from offshore wind and 700 tWh per year from wave and tide. Given that our current electrical generation is 360 tWh per year, it is clear that we have more than twice the resource that we need to supply our entire electricity generation needs. However, the report does not suggest how we might reasonably foster that.

The report also makes no allowance for cost reductions that will arise naturally from development and commercial exploitation. It quotes costs for marine renewables of 4p to 8p per kWh, but that is for almost pre-commercial demonstration machines, and similar costs by 2020 are assumed, which is absurd. We have only to consider the history of wind generation, the costs of which have decreased remarkably as it has been exploited. The same will inevitably happen with wave and tidal generation. Given that we also have all the lessons from the wind industry, the development and exploitation time scale for wave and tide could be much quicker. I can see no valid reason why, with sufficient encouragement, wave and tide could not make a massive contribution by 2020, such that there would be no case for new nuclear build.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): In the light of what he has said, does my hon. Friend agree with all the submissions from the non-governmental organisations that one way to achieve his objective would be to have targets that are far tighter than the current ones? We could use the tighter targets as stepping stones towards the energy consumption and production goals he mentions.

Dr. Turner: I agree that we should have tighter targets. Indeed, I was going to advocate that, because I believe that they would be achievable and would have precisely the effect that my hon. Friend describes. I hope that the Government will resist the blandishments of the nuclear industry, which is seeking the same favourable treatment as renewables. The nuclear industry has a history of doing anything to perpetuate itself.

I find the Government's reticence in the face of the enormous potential of renewables curious, to say the least. When £120 million was announced for renewable energy research and development last year, only £5 million was allocated for marine renewable projects. That is derisory in view of the massive potential of that source. There is another way in which marine technologies need help for rapid development: as well as research and development and start-up costs, there is the problem of grid connections. The main grid does not reach the remote areas where the best power generation sites are located. If early commercial sites have to bear the cost of building grid connectors, it would be a huge barrier to development based on pure market considerations.

If there is to be large-scale renewables generation in the UK the Government have to grapple with the modernisation of the grid. The current grid is an obstacle to future development of any source except nuclear power, in which plant will be sited next to old plant where the grid was built at public expense—in effect, yet another subsidy for the nuclear industry. The report virtually ignores that problem. I suggest that

> "substantial upgrading of the national transmission system will not be needed in the short-to-medium term",

but that sounds like another self-fulfilling prophecy. There will not be large-scale renewables because the grid connections are not there, but those connections are awfully convenient for nuclear stations.

The report appears to give equal weight to several future generation technologies such as photovoltaics, combined heat and power, clean coal, biomass and municipal waste incineration. However, none of those has the potential to produce enough power to run the country, although together they could make a contribution. Only photovoltaics guarantee no CO_2 emissions, and all are either more expensive than marine technologies or have other serious downsides, such as the potential for toxic emissions with waste and biomass, and the fact that in waste incineration the material burnt is precisely the stuff that should be being recycled. A consideration totally ignored in the report's contemplation of the continued massive use of fossil fuel reserves is that they will assume increasing importance as chemical feedstock, and so will become too precious to burn.

I hope that the Government listen carefully to the responses to the report before they finalise their policy. If they follow the guidance of the report without question, they will favour the renewed use of nuclear power at the expense of genuinely renewable and sustainable technologies, yet the use of those technologies has to be the ultimate goal, and the sooner it is achieved, the better. The report contains a bias that is not justified by the evidence and must be seriously re-examined.

The achievability of any renewables target is hugely influenced by the political will behind it. I am convinced that it is possible to achieve far more than the 20 per cent. by 2020 envisaged in the report. There are clearly technological obstacles to overcome, but they are much less problematic than the task that the Government should be taking on, which is achieving a planned, low-carbon energy economy in a liberalised market. It would be the biggest challenge ever for new Labour, but the prize for success would be gigantic.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. John McWilliam): Order. I have no power to impose time limits on speeches, but a large number of hon. Members have written in and even more are trying to catch my eye. I appeal to hon. Members to be brief so as to enable as many as possible to speak.

11.29 am

Bob Spink (Castle Point): I did not intend to speak today, only to listen and learn. I will make a short contribution as so many other hon. Members want to speak.

I am in favour of replacing nuclear with nuclear because it is right and inevitable that we should do so. Nuclear power in Britain is very safe, and it has been safer than many of the alternatives for many years. If, however, we are to do that we should make sure that we use the best possible plant and equipment. I am therefore disappointed that the Select Committee on Science and Technology, whose Chairman is staring me out, has decided not to take the opportunity to go round the world to see the latest reactors, research and plant. I hope that we can find time to do that soon to allow us to advise the House.

The bottom line is that if we were to replace nuclear with nuclear, we would increase the total waste that must be managed in Britain by a very small overall percentage. That would enable us to avoid known, serious and certain damage to our planet from CO_2. I rest my case on those remarks.

11.30 am

Dr. Ashok Kumar (Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner) on securing the debate, but that is where that sentiment stops because I find myself on the other side of everything he had to say about nuclear power.

The report is timely. For the first time we are looking at our energy supply in the UK in terms of the next 40 or 50 years. For many years we have relied on fossil fuels with no thought of either the future or the health and environmental implications of our energy industry. The executive summary, which is on page 5 of the report, simply states:

> "The future framework for energy policy needs to address all three objectives of sustainable development—environmental, economic and social—as well as energy security."

The review has let us down on that fundamental point. The future of nuclear power is missing from the PIU recommendations. It is addressed in the report, but it is not included in its recommendations.

My hon. Friend criticised the Government's adviser on energy matters, Professor David King, for giving his support to nuclear power. Professor King has joined the debate, and he has given his opinion, which it is important that a senior person in his position should do.

[Dr. Ashok Kumar]

I welcome his remarks, which on this occasion concur with mine, and I am happy that he has given his support and has reminded us of our responsibilities.

The Select Committee on Trade and Industry, of which I am a member, also produced a study on the security of energy supplies, which concluded:

> "It is essential that there be no further delay in Government decision making: the Government should make a clear statement on the future of nuclear energy as quickly as possible."

No such decision was reached in the PIU report.

Sir Robert Smith: The hon. Gentleman did not say the way in which the Government should make that decision.

Dr. Kumar: Yes, I know. I am trying to draw the Minister's attention to that recommendation, which the Government should examine.

It is incredible that one of the most important current and future power sources, nuclear power, has been dismissed out of hand. It is seen as a last-resort technology. The report recommends keeping the nuclear option in order to compensate for the failure of other technologies.

Mr. Colin Challen (Morley and Rothwell): One of the remarks—I shall not say conclusions—in the report is that if all the costs of nuclear power were internalised and subject to market forces, it would simply not be economically viable. We should seek economically viable sources of electricity generation.

Dr. Kumar: I recommend to my hon. Friend a European study that undertakes a cost analysis of nuclear generation. I shall come back to that, but I am conscious of time.

I return to the report's main safety, environmental and economic concerns. Of course there are safety questions here, as with every major industrial process. Risk is presented in everything that we do, however important it is. As a practising engineer before I entered the House, I regularly calculated risk in industrial processes. That was the nature of my job. Safety is an important issue, and it is part and parcel of making calculations and judgments, but the knee-jerk reaction of those who are against nuclear power is always that safety is serious and important. We recognise that. I also recognise that dealing with nuclear waste is a serious problem, which must be solved, whether new nuclear plants are built or not. The Government and we as a country must address it.

The Trade and Industry Committee report recognises, as the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown said, that the difficulties involved in the storage of radioactive waste are no longer seen merely in technical terms. I want to raise environmental concerns.

Dr. Iddon: I should like to put on record the fact that Professor King's support for the nuclear industry, like mine, revolves around wanting to move from fission, which produces much disposable waste, to fusion. In the minds of the industry's scientists, we are now only a generation away from nuclear fusion. Is that not an important reason for keeping the nuclear industry alive?

Dr. Kumar: I agree wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend, but I recognise that difficulties reside in the public's reluctance to accept the safety of various techniques. Suitable sites for the storage of waste material need to be found; we cannot duck public anxieties on that matter.

I am aware that Greenpeace, other environmental groups and hon. Members feel strongly about the importance of the environment. I was horrified with Greenpeace's reaction to the review. On the nuclear option, its website says that the review

> "leaves the door open for a wave of dangerous new nuclear power stations",

which proves my point. I am sure that no one setting up an installation does so intending to create a dangerous one. That happens because of the nature of the process—a process that deals with hazardous materials.

Those opposed to the nuclear option on environmental grounds have to weigh up difficult issues.

Dr. Desmond Turner: My hon. Friend says that one of the difficulties of the nuclear industry is that it involves a hazardous process and hazardous materials. Does he agree that that, by definition, is not the case with renewables?

Dr. Kumar: I agree with my hon. Friend, but we have not at this moment in time developed the technology for renewables. Although I admire his support for that great future ambition, we must recognise what is providing electricity at the present, whatever the process.

Joan Ruddock: When will the perceived energy gap arise? Will my hon. Friend quantify that gap, and is that his justification for nuclear power? He is arguing about safety and environmental factors, but to conduct the overall energy review we must know the needs of the nation. Does he agree with the report's finding that there will have to be public subsidy if the perceived gap is to be closed?

Dr. Kumar: I believe in the nuclear option that my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) mentioned. I do not have any objection to renewables and other developments, but they would not be ready in time because the technology that is required would still be in a primitive state in 20 or 30 years' time. Nobody can take that risk because the lights will go out. Hon. Members should remember what happened in California. In order to ensure that that does not happen, we should remember that this technology works.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Dr. Kumar: Many hon. Members wish to speak, so I want to bring my remarks to an end quickly.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): We want more.

Dr. Kumar: The hon. Gentleman says he wants more, but I am just trying temporarily to settle the score for nuclear power. It is crucial that those who argue the environmental case recognise that we have an obligation to deal with global warming, and there is a powerful case for nuclear power assisting us in that. It is no good harping on about our commitment to Kyoto. We ignore at our peril a known technology that works. I believe strongly in nuclear power as a technology for generating electricity on a large scale because it deals with greenhouse gas emissions. It is a sector that we need to protect because if we do not, we will undermine our commitment to a treaty that the Deputy Prime Minister signed a few years ago.

The economics issue has been mentioned. I recognise that it is one of the hardest issues on which we must square the circle. ExternE, a European funded study of energy costs, concludes that on a gross basis, nuclear power is one of the cheapest forms of energy presently available, but we must consider issues other than the price. Skilled personnel are required to maintain such installations, and the capital costs are significant because of the aforementioned safety provisions. The PIU report says that the nuclear option will be left open for years to come, but the difficulty is in maintaining the necessary skill base to operate any future facility. The outlay for new nuclear facilities is significant and companies are reluctant to invest such sums in an industry that is not recognised by the Government as having a clear, lengthy future. The review states:

> "Because nuclear is a mature technology within a well established global industry, there is no current case for further government support."

Without Government backing, verbal or financial, the future of nuclear power is uncertain.

Mr. Chaytor: Is my hon. Friend arguing the case that nuclear ought to be part of the permanent solution to climate change, or is he endorsing the statement from the chief scientific adviser that nuclear has a role as a temporary stopgap until the full development of a renewable energy industry?

Dr. Kumar: I am arguing that nuclear has an important role to play at the moment. It provides 21 per cent. of our electricity, and is an important sector. It is important that we maintain it to meet our Kyoto obligations, and to provide electricity. It plays a part in meeting our environmental targets. We should not take the risk of not being ready in future when all plants could be decommissioned. We must prepare for alternatives.

Ms Walley: Will not continuing to subsidise the nuclear industry prevent the emergence of new renewable energies, so that we may never have alternative sources of energy? The Government's response to the energy review must take that up.

Dr. Kumar: I am asking for the Government to make their intentions clear so that companies know where to invest. It is important that the Government come down on one side or the other. Plants take 10 to 15 years to build, and hon. Members will recall that the Sizewell B inquiry took many years—rightly, because important issues had to be addressed. The Government must make up their mind and state their intended direction. European countries such as Germany are to phase out nuclear power. If we are to maintain it, a course that I would support, the Government need to give a clear response. The report ducks that issue.

I remain committed to nuclear power, and that puts me in a minority on this side. I am glad to have taken part in this debate, which was secured by my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown. Always, we have been on the same side and, for the first time, we find ourselves on opposite sides.

11.46 am

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): The hon. Member for Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East (Dr. Kumar) tried to score a goal for nuclear energy, so I shall make a break down the flank for an alternative scenario and suggest a way in which we could meet this country's obligations by 2050 through the use of alternative energy resources. None the less, our nuclear output provides a stopgap, and no one is asking to close our nuclear power stations overnight.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the report ducks some issues. Never was a document better named: it is only a "review" of the current state of play, and offers little intelligent guesswork about where we might be in 10 or 15 years as regards renewable technology. He is also right to say that it does not address where nuclear technology could take us in that period. That puts the onus on the Minister to come up with some answers. Until we answer such questions, we will not be able to move forwards.

To my party, our parliamentary group and me, nuclear power is not a long-term option. The royal commission on environmental pollution recognised that there were at least two scenarios in which nuclear power did not need to be an option to meet our Kyoto obligations. I could not accept nuclear as a realistic long-term option until several issues were resolved to my satisfaction and to that of the public. One of those issues, which is higher on the agenda than ever before, is terrorism and the fear of a terrorist attack on a nuclear power station. Another is nuclear power's less than wonderful history of record keeping, reporting, openness and accountability, which does not engender faith in the industry's future.

How will new nuclear power stations take shape? We are told that there is a new design—I must tell the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) that it is based on fission, not fusion—but how will it work and can it be trusted? Storage and decommissioning must also be addressed. We already have a storage problem and there is no point adding to it. My concern is that more nuclear power production in this country would merely add fuel to the debate on recycling nuclear materials, mixed oxide fuel plants, and other dangerous technologies.

Finally, it is important to ensure that the cost of nuclear power is internalised to the industry. The hon. Member for Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East referred to an EU report which I have not seen; however, I have seen the "Annual Energy Review". It is clear from attempts to find ways to internalise costs that the best solution is wind power. It costs half as much as nuclear power, which is an expensive way of generating electricity.

We do not need nuclear power to meet our Kyoto obligations. Last week the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry intimated as much in a statement made in

[Mr. Simon Thomas]

response to questions from me and other hon. Members. It is important to confirm that and I should be grateful if the Minister did so this morning. The Kyoto treaty takes us to 2012 and we must look beyond that, but we do not need nuclear power to meet our immediate obligations.

Bob Spink: I believe that there is a misunderstanding. The hon. Gentleman said that he did not want the nuclear industry to be switched off, but that is what will happen unless the Government have the courage to make a decision to continue the nuclear industry so that the gap can be filled. If renewables and nuclear energy proceed sensibly, they will develop and there will not be a gap. As both forms of technology develop, we can make informed decisions, but unless the Government make a decision to support the nuclear industry, there will be a switch-off.

Mr. Thomas: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's last point and I am sorry if I misled him about my point of view. A switch-off is what I want, but I do not want that to happen overnight. I want it to be phased and natural. I want current nuclear energy production to come to a natural end. My position is the same as the Green party, with which my party is allied at EU level.

Events in Germany show a wonderful way forward. I recently visited Germany as a member of the Environmental Audit Committee. I want to give a positive description of how we could move forward with renewables.

Mr. Chaytor: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the key issue is that it would be irresponsible to allow new build in the nuclear industry before the problem of radioactive waste management is resolved? We face costs of £85 billion to deal with the existing stockpile of radioactive waste. Surely that should be solved before we consider new nuclear power stations?

Mr. Thomas: I agree absolutely, but I shall not go further down that route.

Germany has agreed to a phased, natural end to its nuclear power and is looking for ways forward. The Environmental Audit Committee looked at renewables during its visit. There is a gap in the future scenario: the German Government are not sure where all their energy will come from in 2050, but they are prepared to take a leap in the dark and to bridge that chasm by investing heavily in renewables. They have made that decision without great regard to the cost implications, in common with decisions in the 1950s and 1960s to invest in nuclear power.

The German Government estimate that they will derive one quarter of their energy needs from wind, and 36,000 people are already employed in the wind energy industry. That is a significant number of jobs with only 3 or 4 per cent. wind energy production. If production reaches 25 per cent. of need, more jobs will be created. It must be emphasised repeatedly that phasing out nuclear energy should not and must not lead to job losses in constituencies with nuclear power stations. We need investment now in renewables technology, using the high-level engineering and other skills that are used for nuclear power to achieve that aim.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): If we are to achieve the investment needed—not only from project developers but from the supply chain industries that will create the jobs—to make the most of renewables such as offshore wind, industry must have confidence in the sector. That will require not only the renewables obligation and capital grants but a single, comprehensive, joined-up authorisation system. At present, there is no single point of contact. People have to deal with the Crown Estates, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Defence. Onshore wind has been knocked back by the planning process, and we must overcome that to achieve full confidence in investing in offshore wind.

Mr. Thomas: I have some sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's comments, but local public participation must remain part of the decision-making process. I will address his points in a moment, but I wish to make progress so that I can finish in reasonable time.

Germany has invested heavily in alternative energy sources: for example, biomass is on the agenda. The hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner) is not too happy about biomass, but it has a neutral carbon cycle—we can argue about that another time—and would have a huge beneficial effect in helping rural areas to overcome the results of changes to the common agricultural policy regime. Germany has also invested heavily in hydrogen research. Security and intermittency of supply are problems with some renewables. Hydrogen is a very good carrier of energy and, if we can overcome storage problems, it becomes even more attractive.

There is clear under-ambition in the review. We are aiming for 20 per cent. renewables by 2010, but that could easily be doubled with current technology, a bit of will and a bit more investment. A target of 30 or 40 per cent. for renewables—not only wind but the whole range of renewables—is achievable in this country and should be the target of any Government who want seriously to address climate change issues. Incidentally, such a renewables target would produce the amount of electricity that nuclear now produces—about 80 to 90 tWh annually.

The hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) mentioned consents policy. There is certainly a problem. On the Opposition day last week, the Scottish National party initiated a debate on consents policy for nuclear power in Scotland. It became clear that if the Government made a strategic decision to site a new nuclear power station in Scotland, it would be built, whatever the Scottish Parliament said. The situation in Wales is even worse. The relevant power in section 39 of the Electricity Act 1989 has not been devolved to the National Assembly. As a result, it has no say on any development, including renewables, over 50 MW in Wales. The decision about a large 60 MW wind farm at Cefn Croes in my constituency, which will be the largest wind farm in England and Wales—perhaps the largest in the United Kingdom—was made by the Minister for Industry and Energy alone.

Although I support wind energy and agree with the decision, it has left a sour taste in the mouth. We have an Assembly that decides planning matters, yet decisions are taken directly by the Department of Trade and Industry without involving the Assembly. There is increasing concern in Wales that nuclear energy will be foisted on the people of Wales. Hon. Members may be aware that in 1982—20 years ago last month—Wales declared itself nuclear free; it was the first country to do so. Such a decision would be received very poorly in Wales.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Simon Thomas: No, I want to conclude.

The Minister must address the issue, because last week the Economic Development Committee of the National Assembly backed out of an ambitious 4 tWh target for renewables in Wales and left the country without a strategy. We have an energy review but no strategy for energy or renewables in Wales. I hope that that Committee and the Welsh Executive will get their act together and that the DTI will consult them. Germany identifies at federal level the sites that may be suitable for the production of wind energy, then lets local bodies get on with it. Wales is one of the most energy-rich parts of the United Kingdom, but we have identified no sites that may produce wind and wave energy and have made no effort to involve the local community in those decisions.

As the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pointed out, people oppose new wind farm developments; no doubt, they will oppose offshore developments in the same way, as they are not part of the planning process from the start. I advocate a fresh view, as there is huge potential in Wales for developments such as a tidal barge on the River Severn and the proposed offshore wind farm in north Wales. Those developments would meet huge energy needs, but they are not free of environmental cost. Local communities and the whole of Wales must be involved in those decisions.

I have an alternative vision of where "The Energy Review" will take us. In 10 years, we should have doubled our target on renewable energy output, achieved the aims of the Home Energy Conservation Bill, and established an interconnector along the west coast so that we can bring wind and wave energy from energy-rich areas to energy-dependent areas. I hope that Wales will benefit from the economic development of those energy-rich areas. Offshore wind will develop much more quickly, as it has better potential than onshore wind to achieve those targets. I hope that we will see a real strategy for wind energy development in Wales, and the final death of the nuclear power industry in the United Kingdom.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. David Amess (in the Chair): Order. I am advised that speeches have been long, with the exception of the speech made by the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink). That is a tragedy, as many hon. Members still wish to speak and we must conclude the debate soon. I ask all hon. Members to be as brief as possible.

12.2 pm

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): Thank you, Mr. Amess.

I have made clear my support for the development of offshore wind energy in this country, but while the green lobby and the nuclear lobby slug it out, we must keep our eye on the decades immediately before us and ensure that we squeeze every drop of our oil and gas from the UK continental shelf. The Government's Pilot initiative is to do just that, and I hope that the Minister will confirm that that is still their priority.

When gas was discovered in the North sea 35 years ago, people said that it would all be gone in 20 years. They are still saying that. The resource might last longer, but we cannot be sure. The key is innovation, which is linked to keeping costs down. I am therefore concerned about anything that imposes greater costs on the industry. The regulator Ofgem—the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets—has produced proposals on gas balancing which ILEX Energy Consulting, a reputable company, says will cost the industry £3.5 billion. Will the Minister comment on that?

We need independent regulators in any market, but we must take care to avoid proposals that undermine the Government's Pilot initiative. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to take note of the recommendation made in the PIU report that Ofgem should conduct a proper cost-benefit analysis of its recommendations. Lord Haskins and the Better Regulation Task Force made that recommendation last year. I urge my hon. Friend to speak to the Minister for Industry and Energy to insist that Ofgem takes note of those two recommendations so that we can squeeze every last drop of oil and gas from the North sea for as many years as possible.

12.4 pm

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): I shall make a few points briefly. First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner) on initiating today's debate.

"The Energy Review" gets the nuclear issue about right, but we need to continue the debate and support further research into new nuclear generators. Some interesting suggestions have come out of research in South Africa and Canada, for example, and I support such research. Other hon. Members have flagged up the fact that the nuclear industry has received considerable support—far more than the renewables industry. It is right that the review focused on that and recommended that Government now accelerate the development of the renewables industry as the most important priority for energy in the next five years.

There are several system issues which have been touched on only briefly. My hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown talked about the need for the energy network to be upgraded. We must recognise that the energy system in this country is predominantly designed for big power plants rather than the small ones that CHP and renewables inevitably offer. I was struck by the fact that a wind energy developer who wanted to build a wind farm on the Isle of Wight faced a £1 million bill for the upgrade of the network—needless to say, that wind farm has not been built. "The Energy Review" recognises some of those issues, and further detailed work in the Government's response—the coming White Paper—will be needed before we know how to solve some of the problems.

[Mr. Gareth R. Thomas]

Another interesting comment in the review is its description of inertia in the energy system. Further incentives are needed to encourage the delivery of renewable energy across the system. Perhaps as part of a review of the Barnett formula or the funding to regional development agencies, there should be a performance-related element that depends on whether areas, regions or nations meet their obligations on their contributions to renewable energy. I note the comments of the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas), but, regrettably, the National Assembly for Wales has blocked or held up many sensible wind farm developments, and I suspect his party of being part of the problem rather than the solution.

Turning to the institutional reforms advocated in the review, I welcome the suggestion that the Carbon Trust and the Energy Saving Trust merge to provide a clearer non-governmental response. I welcome the proposal at long last to establish a sustainable energy unit. I have long championed the idea of a sustainable energy agency, but I will settle for a unit if that is all that that can be achieved in the first instance. I hope that the Minister will confirm the Department of Trade and Industry's strong support for such an initiative to accelerate the process.

On planning, there is a frustration about the delays in grants for renewable energy options. In a speech to the parliamentary renewables group last week, the Minister for Industry and Energy said that two-thirds of renewables applications granted under the non-fossil fuel obligation process have not happened because of difficulties with the planning system. The Government should re-examine how we can speed up decision making in that process, although industry should be more innovative in introducing renewable energy applications. I commend National Wind Power for its innovative scheme to reward communities and farmers who have wind-farm applications on their sites.

Focusing briefly on CHP and renewables, I look forward to the much-delayed CHP strategy. The industry is worried about companies that were keen to develop CHP initiatives moving out because of market conditions. I look forward to hearing the Minister clarify how best to respond to that threat. I hope that the Treasury will quickly offer full exemption under the climate change levy to all CHP plant.

Catherine Mitchell, a member of "The Energy Review" team, speaking at the same parliamentary renewables group meeting last week said that

> "economic regulation should be technologically neutral".

To be frank, Ofgem has not been as supportive of the renewables industry as it should have been. Until recently, it did not engage with the impact on the renewables sector of new electricity trading arrangements. I hope that we will soon see either a change of personnel at Ofgem, or the necessary legislation to require it to take sensible positive action.

One criticism of "The Energy Review" is the absence of any attempt to cost progress in the renewable energy sector. I strongly endorse the call for more funding for research and development, particularly for renewables. The review failed to deal with micro-renewables, particularly solarvoltaics and the importance of encouraging groups of individuals, farmers and local authorities to build up renewable capacity in their communities.

I welcome "The Energy Review" and commend the Government for their willingness to engage with the recommendation made by the royal commission on environmental pollution to establish a 50-year programme to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. "The Energy Review" is clearly part of that process and I look forward to reading the White Paper, which will develop the debate further.

Mr. David Amess (in the Chair): Order. The Minister has generously cut his winding-up time from 10 to six minutes, so I advise the two Opposition spokesmen to share the available time.

12.12 pm

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): Thank you, Mr. Amess. I shall gallop through discarding notes and not following all the by-ways trodden by the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner). I agree with much of what he said—nuclear power is unprofitable, unpopular and unnecessary—but confronting all his arguments would require a longer debate. I hope that the Minister will take with him from this morning's proceedings recognition of the need for a much wider and sustained debate in the main Chamber to cover the key issues.

"The Energy Review" is welcome, if somewhat overdue. We look forward to hearing, today and in future, about how the Government will confront and respond to the issues. It is crucial to find new ways of generating electricity and better ways of conserving energy. The Energy Saving Trust has set targets of a 12.5 per cent. reduction in domestic energy use by 2010, which should be easily achievable, and 25 per cent. by 2020. I fully endorse the targets, the achievement of which would greatly improve people's quality of life in the home, turn economic costs into benefits, and reduce carbon emission and consumption. Those goals can be achieved almost entirely through regulation, without the need for primary legislation or much head scratching. It can be done through building regulations, fully implementing HECA and ensuring that appliances make efficient use of electricity in the home.

A great political paradox has been illustrated again this morning. We have been fighting over one or another source of energy, which is a necessary debate, but we can probably do more to reduce carbon emissions by tackling energy use than by changing the method of generation. We spend much political energy fighting to reduce transport use, and arguing about nuclear and renewables but we do not invest in reducing the energy used in the home and in industry. That is what we should be doing.

I am delighted that the Government have recently—at long last—introduced the renewables obligation, although I have some criticisms of it. I want an escalator beyond 2010 because long-term signals will encourage this country's renewables industry to make strides and to achieve the same success as the renewables industry has scored in Denmark and will soon score in Germany. Finally, I hope that the Minister will respond to this debate by promising a longer one in the near future.

12.15 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner) for initiating the debate, although to start off the debate on the right fight would have required a statement in the House and a full debate in Government time when the PIU report was published. I suspect that the Government regret that that did not happen.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East (Dr. Kumar) on his measured and sensible approach to nuclear energy. I hardly dare intrude on the Labour party's private grief about the technology, which was exhibited in full Technicolor, but his contribution underlined the importance of having a serious and well-informed national debate on these issues. I congratulate the hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) on making an extremely important point about Ofgem, to which I shall return. The Minister for Industry and Energy is somewhere in—or possibly above—the North sea with Shell, extracting that final bit of oil and gas, but it is a pleasure to see the Minister for Employment and the Regions in his place; he is a fine substitute.

Mr. Blizzard: I believe the Energy Minister is celebrating the award of an important contract to a British contractor. Does the hon. Gentleman share my disappointment that BP awarded the first important contract on the Clare development, for which we have waited many years, to a Norwegian contractor?

Mr. Key: I am an internationalist and I do not wish to intervene in the commercial decisions of Britain's great oil companies.

The Conservative party greatly welcomes the review. We are fortunate to have such liberalised energy markets, in stark contrast to other European nations, especially France and Germany. I hope that this weekend in Barcelona the Government will continue to put enormous pressure on France and Germany to stir their stumps and wake up to the opportunities that await their consumers if only they will liberalise and not cling to the 19th century habits that they love so much. It is all very well EDF buying up London Electricity, infrastructure and energy companies throughout Europe, but not if it denies consumers back home the benefits of the liberalisation that it is so keen to exploit using lots of lovely soft French taxpayers' money.

"The Energy Review" should focus our minds on the really important elements of the debate on UK energy demand. The objective must be to provide the energy we need at the optimum price, to ensure security of supply, to achieve environmental objectives, balance and flexible sources, and to reduce energy waste in production, transmission and consumption. We do not start with a clean slate; we have an historic legacy of coal and town gas, and a distribution system—the national grid—designed to link coalfields with heavy steel industries in major cities, all of which have historic costs and expensive externalities.

If we are to be honest economists, or just ordinary consumers, we must recognise that there are externalities in all energy production. On the cost of the mooted west coast interconnector, the report, instead of coming up with the figure of £400 million to £600 million, says that it would cost £2.3 billion to provide a proper interconnector for wind farms in the Outer Hebrides. That should make us all sit up and think more clearly. We must spend more time considering CHP and energy from waste. The Government say that there are legal constraints, but they have the legal levers in their hands and can change things. It is also all very well talking about Denmark and Germany, but we could do anything if we charged the consumer Danish prices. It would be easy-peasy to talk about introducing lots of lovely clean electricity generated by wind or whatever we liked if we charged the consumer twice as much.

The other great trap into which we might fall if we are not careful is to regard the debate as a dogfight between renewable energy and nuclear energy. We should recognise from the start that the two are not mutually exclusive, but complementary. We should listen carefully to what the nuclear industry has to say and not confuse the disposal and clean-up of waste from previous generations of nuclear technology, based on the country's defence needs 50 years ago, with what might be achievable with new generations of technology. In particular, we can look two generations ahead to pebble bed technology, which could make an enormous contribution and which we should not write off at this stage.

Renewable energy technology is not an option but a necessity. I agree with the Government's chief scientific adviser, Professor David King, that we should consider replacing old nuclear power stations with new nuclear technology, for the best possible reason. I also agree that the Government must give the nuclear industry a clear signal, one way or another. Given the long lead times involved, if the Government fail to make an early statement on the future of nuclear energy, that will be as good as saying no, and the option will be closed.

We must consider the planning procedures for major national infrastructure projects, which the Government have addressed. Special parliamentary procedures already have precedents—not only in the Transport and Works Act 1992, but in various road schemes—by which decisions have come to Parliament. I recall the Okehampton bypass decision, the Lyndhurst bypass debate and so on. We must have a properly informed debate, because much of the effort we put in offers enormous future benefits.

As the hon. Member for Waveney pointed out, "The Energy Review" should give consideration to current bottlenecks. On gas, I draw the Minister's attention to the problem of entry capacity at St. Fergus, and to the problem of wet gas in the north North sea and dry gas in the south North sea at Bacton. One problem faced by the industry is the auction that has been going on at St. Fergus since 1999. Every six months the regulator changes the methodology because he claims that the system is "gameable"—in other words, because people can guess what the new system will be, they try to outwit it. Game theory is important. The problem is that discussions have been continuing with the industry for almost a year. There may be an opportunity to consider moving back to long-run marginal cost models instead of the six-monthly auction model.

[Mr. Key]

The move to shorter balancing, which Ofgem proposes, is important. The UK has a 24-hour balancing system for gas; Ofgem wants to reduce that to four to six-hour balancing. That would mean extensive new metering for producers, shippers and consumers, and ILEX Energy Consulting has calculated that the consequences of shorter balancing could be a 3.5 per cent. price rise for domestic consumers of gas. What is the benefit in having a regulator if he puts the price up to satisfy his whim? There is also a disincentive to new entrants. The Dutch and the Germans are returning to a long-run marginal cost system, with 24-hour balancing. The hon. Member for Waveney is right to say that Ofgem has not done a cost-benefit analysis.

To be fair to the Minister, I must conclude. We warmly welcome this debate. We must consider all options in an open and sensible way and not rule out anything. We must not allow our prejudices to rule our minds, and in that spirit I look forward to the next six months of debate until the Government produce their White Paper.

12.24 pm

The Minister for Employment and the Regions (Alan Johnson): I am an unworthy substitute called from the DTI subs' bench. My hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy is busy being industrious and energetic sanctioning a gas field off Scotland.

"The Energy Review" makes a valuable contribution to the debate on how best to meet our long-term energy requirements. It is important to make it clear that it is not a Government report, but a report by the PIU to Government, and we need to consider its recommendations carefully.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner) said that he hopes that this is the start of the debate. He has had the historic opportunity to kick it off, as this is our first debate since the report was published. He also asked that we should not simply follow the guidance in the PIU report. We will consult widely and today's debate today will form an important foundation stone of that process. My hon. Friend said that he was a "simple scientist", but I think that that might be contradiction in terms. He was a very eloquent scientist putting forward his arguments today.

As part of the consultation, we will look closely at two relevant parliamentary reports: the Trade and Industry Committee's report on security of energy supply, published on 7 February and "How secure are we?" the report of Sub-Committee B of the House of Lords European Union Committee, published on 12 February. Those reports are timely and valuable in signalling Parliament's views about energy issues and indicating where the White Paper should focus. The Trade and Industry Committee has produced 48 conclusions and recommendations. There is a strong emphasis on network and infrastructure investment, and recommendations about the future use of economic instruments and regulation to achieve environmental objectives.

Dr. Desmond Turner: May I recommend that the DTI also take into consideration the recent Science and Technology Committee report on wind and tidal energy?

Alan Johnson: I was just coming to that report, of which we will take full cognisance. In another important contribution, the House of Lords has been conducting an inquiry into the European Commission's Green Paper on security of energy supply. That is another important contribution.

Trends in energy markets have been comparatively benign in recent years, and our energy policies have worked remarkably well with the grain of those markets. We are currently self-sufficient in energy, with our gas and electricity prices among the lowest in the G7 countries. We have diverse sources of supply from coal, gas and nuclear in power generation, and a small but growing contribution from renewables, and we are on target to meet our Kyoto commitments at the end of the decade. However, as the report argues, we cannot and should not be complacent: tough challenges lie ahead. The UK will become increasingly dependent on imported oil and gas.

The Californian crisis has highlighted the importance of getting the incentives for new investment right. The report concludes that the introduction of liberalised and competitive energy markets in the UK has been a success and should provide the cornerstone of future policy in the UK and internationally. It argues, however, that new challenges require new policies and that the policy framework should address all three objectives of sustainable development—economic, environmental and social—as well as security.

The report recommends that promoting energy efficiency and renewables should be the immediate priorities of a low-carbon energy policy. In renewables, we start from a very low base: they provide slightly less than 3 per cent. of our electricity supply. We have therefore set a challenging target of meeting 10 per cent. of electricity supply from renewable sources by 2010. There is a great deal to be done to achieve that target and we are introducing a range of robust measures. The report strikes the right balance: it stresses the potential for renewables, but recognises that nuclear energy, which provides around a quarter of UK electricity, offers a low-carbon electricity source that is larger than other plant options. The report also mentions the role of coal.

My hon. Friend Member for Brighton, Kemptown asked about his Home Energy Conservation Bill—indeed at one point I thought he was moving it. The Government supported that Bill on Second Reading, and we will continue to support it. We are at the start of an important process and I am happy to have heard the views of Opposition Members and my hon. Friends. Although the debate needs to be much fuller, my hon. Friend has made a great start by initiating it this morning.

Cetacean Bycatches (South-West)

12.30 pm

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): The debate is timely, because record numbers of dolphins and porpoises have been found washed up on the beaches of Devon and Cornwall since January, and also off the coast of France. I pay tribute to Lindy Hingley, the founder and co-ordinator of Brixham Seawatch, who has monitored dolphins and other creatures for the past 12 years in the western approaches. She claims that the numbers are the worst that she has known.

Since January, more than 120 cetacean carcases have been found washed up on the beaches of Cornwall, Devon and Dorset. The carcases are also found in greater numbers on French beaches, where more than 800 have been washed up in the same period. That is more than 30 times the toll described as normal for this time of year. Scientists tell us that those washed up constitute only 1 per cent. of the total deaths, and that 20 to 30 animals can be caught at any one time.

The extent of deaths can also be shown by an increase in the numbers of rotting carcases found in the nets of beam trawlers and scallop dredgers. Conservationists and mammal experts blame the deaths on huge mid-water trawlers, and warn that the common dolphin could become extinct in the area within a decade. Some argue that a decade is a long time, and that the dolphins could be extinct in the area well before the end of it. In post mortems by the Institute of Zoology at London zoo, death has been proved to be a result of bycatch. The arrival of pelagic—mid-water—trawlers also coincides with the washing up of huge numbers of dead dolphins, porpoises and whales.

The dolphins are believed to be caught because of the high level of mackerel, the dolphins' favourite food, that heads up the western approaches to the English channel, and the predatory bass that feed on the mackerel. The bass are chased by nearly 15 teams of pair trawlers with nets that stretch between two vessels, that reach down to 30 fathoms and that are towed for eight hours or more. The trawlers hoover up everything that they come across, as do the more than 30 mackerel-fishing pelagic ships, which have trawls in the water for more than an hour.

Dolphins live in large family groups of up to 100. They can become bycatch victims when they engage in a feeding frenzy. The fish have been caught in the net, and the dolphin thinks, "Goody goody, here's a meal." It jumps into the net and is stuck there enjoying the food, but forgetting that it needs to pop up for air. When it tries to do so, it is too late. It cannot escape and dies an horrific death. Dolphins require oxygen. They can survive under water for a maximum of 10 minutes, but the nets stay submerged for hours. The dolphins panic when they realise that they are trapped, which shuts their air holes. They can then spend between 15 and 20 minutes trying to fight their way out of the nets, before they eventually suffocate.

Common dolphins are protected by schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and by annexes I and IV of the European Union habitats directive. It is illegal for fishermen to put a net into the water if they know that protected dolphins are near their vessels. Given the sonar equipment currently used by fishermen, deaths can no longer be attributed to accidents. Anyone who thinks that they are purely accidental should ask why numerous carcases have been punctured, cut up or chopped in half before being thrown overboard in the hope that they sink to the bottom of the sea. Evidence also shows that cetaceans have been speared while still alive and that they have bled to death.

Given the evidence of illegal activity, we must ask why there has been no attempt to prosecute those who perpetuate the carnage. Researchers who have studied the size of sea bass have seen evidence of dolphins being caught in large numbers. Even if that evidence cannot be used to prosecute, why can it not be used to press for action and to persuade the EU to prosecute offenders of all nationalities? Is the Minister prepared to increase researchers' powers so that they can inspect foreign boats?

The Government have considered deterrents, but they are considered ineffectual for mid-water trawls. The Government have said that they will test new nets with special top openings that allow snared dolphins to escape, and trials will take place in March and April. It is claimed that such nets have been used successfully in New Zealand, but they were used to protect sea lions. Sea lions are not dolphins; they are significantly smaller, more flexible and more able to manoeuvre their way out of nets.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): The hon. Gentleman mentioned sea lions, but he will be aware that it is not only cetaceans that are caught in British waters and elsewhere; birds, too, are found in bycatch. He may also be aware that the wildlife and countryside link marine charter, which was launched just before Christmas, has called for a national bycatch response strategy and action plan to reduce bycatch of protected species to levels that do not threaten their conservation.

Mr. Sanders: That would be welcome, but I fear that action is more urgently required in the case of dolphins.

The second point about the tests on the nets is that they will take place in March and April. The season runs from September to March, so the tests will come right at the end and will not provide a true reflection of the catches that are made when the maximum number of dolphins are in our waters.

If the trials work, however, when can we expect the nets to be in use in all vessels? That could be several years down the track. Will their use be mandatory or optional in Britain and the EU? What will the Government do if the trials fail? Frankly, I think that they are a distraction from an urgent issue.

Any action must be multinational, because targeting British boats will only move the problem, not solve it. Awareness of the issue must be raised in the EU, and member states must be persuaded that joint action is needed to tackle the situation. The EU is gathering evidence on different scientific, technical and economic aspects of the issue and is prepared to propose amendments to fisheries legislation to improve the protection of cetacean populations. By the time that happens, however, there may be no cetaceans left in our waters to protect. What steps are the Government prepared to take to raise awareness of the situation within the EU and, more importantly, to pressure it to act?

[Mr. Sanders]

Vessels with smaller engines cannot carry large trawls and have no problems with cetaceous bycatch, because smaller trawls have different mesh sizes. A dolphin immediately knows when it has swum into the net because of the change in water pressure, and it can get out before it runs out of air. By contrast, there is no change in water pressure with the larger trawls, so the dolphin realises that it is trapped and panics only when it needs to go up for air.

Andrew George (St. Ives): My hon. Friend makes a strong case for urgent action. He has concentrated on pair trawling. The Department has identified a problem in that sector. However, does my hon. Friend agree that although there is not yet any proof that industrial trawling for animal feed is responsible, neither has that been disproved? There has not been sufficient research to demonstrate whether cetaceans are being caught in that type of fishery.

Mr. Sanders: My hon. Friend is right. Large factory vessels, many of which are not registered in member countries of the EU, could be a significant part of the problem. Whatever action I propose within the EU would have to apply also to those countries outwith the EU where factory vessels are registered.

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): Mr. Chairman, or Mr. Amess, this is an important debate and I am delighted that the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) has secured it. Whatever the Minister says, the test is Europe. Unless Europe enforces—against the French in particular, which has never been done in the past—we are crying in the wind. Would the hon. Gentleman agree that that is the kernel of the problem?

Mr. David Amess (in the Chair): May I tell the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) that I am content to be called by my own name, so long as it is not abusive.

Mr. Sanders: My neighbour, the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen), is right. There is a problem in France, which has seen far more bycatch on its beaches than we have, in that the French Government do not recognise that there is a problem. My hon. Friends and I are approaching the French ambassador to see whether we can have a meeting. We shall let the hon. Gentleman know if one occurs, and I hope that he will be able to accompany us in order, through the ambassador, to put the case directly to the French Government. Would the Minister support a ban on pelagic vessels of over 500 horse power, including pelagic pair trawlers, if necessary? Such a ban would need to be introduced at EU level, as the boats mainly come from other parts of Europe, and it would solve the problem overnight.

The danger is that nobody knows how many dolphins are left. If we do not take action quickly, there might be none. Those of us who have the advantage of living in the south-west know the dolphin as a friend that comes to visit us in the late summer and through the winter. I represent an area that includes one of the most beautiful natural bays in the world, and I am sure that my hon. Friends will agree that the sight of dolphins off Brixham, Paignton and Torquay is a pleasure for those who live there and those who visit the area. The tragedy is that if we do not act now, we may have had our last visit from those magnificent creatures—and we never had a chance to say goodbye.

12.44 pm

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): I am sorry that I am not the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), who has a distinguished record in this area and has been involved in a lot of the negotiations mentioned by the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders). If he were not, unfortunately, out of the country, he would have responded to the debate, and he will certainly take careful note of what has been said.

The hon. Gentleman, and other hon. Members who used the debate for lengthy and well-prepared interventions, rightly drew attention to the concern felt in their constituencies about the large number of dolphins being washed up on the beaches in the south-west, and I am aware that the hon. Gentleman has corresponded at some length with my hon. Friend on the subject. I need not stress that we share those concerns, but if we are to find solutions to the problem, we need to know exactly what is causing it. The hon. Gentleman is entirely convinced of his arguments, and I understand their force. Post mortems have shown that the majority of cetacean strandings are caused by fishing activity.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the work of the sea mammal research unit—the SMRU—at St. Andrew's university. That unit has done a good deal of work for my Department, and it recently isolated the fact that the dolphin casualties attributable to fishing in the western channel seem to be down to the offshore bass fishery. There does not seem to be much doubt about that. The SMRU has had observers on vessels fishing for anchovy, blue whiting, herring, mackerel, pilchard, sprats and bass, but dolphin casualties have been observed only in the bass fishery. That research has shown a zero response for all the others, but there were more than 50 cases in respect of bass. The evidence appears to be convincing.

Andrew George: Would the Minister be prepared to read out more of the figures? What I have seen of the Department's work suggests that many more observations have been made of bass than of other fisheries. To what extent has the Department investigated the operations of the industrial trawling sector?

Mr. Meacher: We have certainly been looking at the allegations made about industrial fishing, and I shall come to that point later.

The hon. Member for Torbay referred also to mackerel, but the overwhelming evidence is that it is the offshore bass fishery. The bass fishery is not unique to British vessels. This year, only four United Kingdom vessels, all from Scotland, have taken part in that fishery, while 40 French vessels have worked in it.

The hon. Gentleman made the specific point that the huge bulk of boats working in the Channel are from other member states. For that reason, they are outside the jurisdiction of UK wildlife legislation. That is why my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary has approached the Commission. The route to action is through the Community.

The question was raised whether industrial fishing was responsible for cetacean fatalities. In the Channel, Danish and other vessels fishing for horse mackerel are called industrial, even though some of the catch is for the table, and allegations have been made this year that the vessels are covering dolphins with other fish in their fish room or their nets. The SMRU's monitoring work has not included those vessels. Inspection of those vessels by fishery protection officers did not confirm those allegations. The fishery is international, and, under the rules of the common fisheries policy, we cannot require French vessels to stop working it. We are keen to do something. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary has pursued the matter with the EU Fisheries Commissioner, Franz Fischler and Mr. Glavany, who, until recently, was the French Minister. He has written explaining the hard evidence that we have, which is compelling, and urging the Commission to set up an observer programme to broaden the information available. He has stressed to the Commission that urgent EU action will soon be needed, and he has also made those remarks directly to the French Minister.

I am glad to report that Commissioner Fischler sent an encouraging reply, which indicates that he shares the concern of people in the UK and agrees on the need to act at Community level where there are problems. That is helpful.

On the subject of inspecting foreign boats, which the hon. Gentleman raised, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary has called for a co-ordinated observer programme because we currently have no powers to place observers on foreign vessels. Again, we must make sure that that is undertaken via the Commission.

Mr. Steen: As I see the Minister is running short of paper, perhaps I could put a question to him.

Mr. Meacher: I am not; but the hon. Gentleman can go on.

Mr. Steen: Am I right in concluding that the Government are on the side of those who want to save the dolphin and do not want the massacre of those animals to continue? If that is the case and there is an international problem, am I right in presuming that the Minister believes that the answer can be found only through the European Commission? Furthermore, will he tell us—I am sure that the hon. Member for Torbay would appreciate it as much as I would—the timetable for making progress, and say whether there is anything that we modest Back Benchers can do to accelerate the process?

Mr. Meacher: Of course we are on the side of those who want to stop the fatalities. Quite apart from the popularity of the dolphin, we would want to stop the unnecessary destruction of any mammal. We are taking action, but if the hon. Gentleman wants to know how quickly action will be taken at EU level, I should tell him that I have spent five years trying to discover the answer to that question in relation to all sorts of matters.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary is a redoubtable and veteran campaigner on these matters, and we must rely on him to push for action. We are certainly not dragging our feet and want to see action this year. Indeed, what I shall say about the trials will be some indication of that.

Having discovered where the main problem lies—there is no difference between us on that—we have set about trying to find a practical solution. The expert advice is that the inclusion of separator grids in fishing nets may be the answer. That adaptation allows the dolphins that swim into nets to escape. With the full co-operation of UK skippers—we must give them credit for this—the adapted gear will be tested at sea under commercial conditions during March and April. The hon. Member for Torbay said that those are not necessarily the best times for testing the gear. There is no reason why testing should not continue, but we need to get on with it. After that, the bass fishery for this season will have come to its natural end.

The hon. Member for Torbay asked me about the mackerel fishery. SMRU research points to the bass fishery, rather than the mackerel fishery, although I note what the hon. Gentleman said. We believe that separator trawls are the answer. They may be equally effective for mackerel nets, and that can be tested.

Mr. Sanders: The problem with separator trawls is that the catch itself may escape. If the dolphin cannot escape but the fish are escaping, that is no help to the fishermen. I come back to the fact that the dolphin is different from the sea lion. Contingency plans need to be in place in case the trials fail—otherwise, it could be too late.

Mr. Meacher: I take both those points. Of course, the fish may escape. However, the scheme is being carried out with the co-operation of United Kingdom skippers and it is of credit to them that they are prepared to do the trials and test the results. Naturally, it would be a serious problem if the method had serious consequences in terms of loss of the main catch.

The work on separator grids is important, as it offers the possibility of a solution that will protect dolphins and—if the tests work and the fishermen are prepared to use the method—allow them to continue in pursuing the bass fishery. However, we must wait to see what happens.

Some have said that separator grids are not the answer. The hon. Gentleman referred to New Zealand fisheries tests with sea lions. The truth is that we cannot know whether the method works until it has been tried and tested under the commercial conditions that exist in the relevant fisheries. We know that separator grids work in some Norwegian fisheries and have been tried with sea lions. I agree that the sea lion is a mammal of different dimensions from the dolphin, for example. We need to try out the gear and tune it to discover whether it works in our conditions.

One way or another, an urgent solution is needed. There is every reason to suspect that the trial work on separator grids will succeed in developing a version that will work effectively in our conditions but, if they are not successful, nothing should be ruled out—including fisheries closures.

[Mr. Meacher]

An allegation was made that fishermen are illegally killing marine mammals. It is not an offence to cause the death of a cetacean as an incidental result of a lawful activity, such as fishing, or to kill a seal to protect catches of fish or fishing gear. I do not believe that fishermen are deliberately killing cetaceans, and I do not think that hon. Members have suggested that. It is significant that fishermen are co-operating in current research into mitigation methods.

Mr. Sanders: I was merely saying that, with modern sonar equipment, fishermen could not claim that they did not know that they might possibly catch dolphins. In that sense, they know when they are catching dolphins, but why do some fishermen then feel it necessary to cut them up and hide the evidence?

Mr. Meacher: I take that point, but I thought that the suggestion was made that fishermen were killing cetaceans deliberately. The hon. Gentleman seems to be saying that fishermen should be aware that that could be the result, and take account of that fact.

The point was not raised, but I want to say something about porpoises, because they present different problems from dolphins. Porpoises concentrate on feeding on the sea bed and get caught up not by the trawls used for bass but in fixed gear used for hake and other species that live on and near the bottom. Again, the sea mammal research unit has done considerable work on that topic for my Department, with the fullest co-operation of the fishermen—indeed, it could not have been done without their co-operation. The most likely solution seems to lie in attaching pingers to the headlines of the nets. We are now in the final stages of working with pingers on Celtic sea nets. We have obtained a pattern of pinger that is much more fisherman-friendly. Once the detailed application of that gear has been ironed out, we will be better able to argue for the Commission requiring the application of that technology to the fleets of all member states working in fixed-net fisheries.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Torbay for raising this important issue. Like him, we want to see urgent action. I am sure that my hon. Friend the fisheries Minister will continue to co-operate closely with him to reach the result that we all want: the preservation of cetaceans from accidental and unintended bycatch.

Diabetes

1 pm

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak about a serious health issue that has never received the recognition that it deserves. Some 1.5 million British people of all ages, races and backgrounds have been diagnosed with diabetes and their lives are impaired and sometimes dramatically shortened by it. That figure does not include the further 1 million people with the condition who live their lives undiagnosed.

Treatment of diabetes is an urgent issue, as is the implementation of the Government's national service framework for diabetes, which is due to be published this summer. I wholeheartedly support the Government's intention to develop that national service framework. I was encouraged by the comprehensive scope of the document "Diabetes National Service Framework: Standards", published in December 2001. It was a welcome acknowledgement by the Department of Health of the importance of diabetes and its prevention, and of the distressing complications that many diabetics face, such as blindness, kidney disease, heart disease, angina, strokes, foot problems leading to amputation, and difficulties in pregnancy.

Such conditions, coupled with the devastating fact that diabetes can shorten life expectancy by as much as 30 per cent., and in the context of a projected increase of people with diabetes to 3 million by 2010, mean that diabetes is a problem that should be at the top of the health agenda. However, it is not. Simply, diabetes is a condition in which the body cannot turn the food that people eat into the energy that they need to survive. That is usually because of type 1 diabetes, in which the body does not produce the hormone insulin, or because of type 2 diabetes, in which the body does not produce enough insulin or the insulin that it produces does not work properly. There are other, much rarer forms.

The human cost of diabetes is devastating because it can seriously damage other parts of the body. In the United Kingdom, it is the leading cause of blindness in people of working age. It is a leading cause of end-stage kidney failure and of lower-limb amputation. If they have diabetes, people's chance of having a stroke is two or three times greater and their risk of heart disease two to five times greater. In ethnic groups in which the incidence of diabetes is higher—partly for genetic reasons and partly because of lifestyle—there is even more chance of such complications.

Estimates of the precise financial cost of diabetes vary, but according to one study, it accounts for £1 in every £10 of the annual national health service budget. That represents a total of £5.2 billion a year, or £14,245,367 a day—something like £165 every second. Diabetes has a huge impact on the NHS, and the costs are set to grow substantially because, owing to sedentary lifestyles and increasing obesity rates, the number of those with diabetes in the UK is likely to rise dramatically during the next decade and beyond.

Hon. Members will have seen and been alarmed by recent media coverage of the first cases of type 2 diabetes found in white children in this country, accurately reported as highly disturbing evidence of the threat to health posed by increasing obesity in the developed world. The potential long-term impact on those affected of what can only be described as a time bomb, and the extra burden on an already overburdened NHS, are frightening.

For too long, politicians from all parties have failed to take diabetes seriously. Last year, however, 375 MPs signed a Diabetes UK pledge calling on all politicians to begin to deliver on diabetes. The Government have listened: the 12 standards contained in the document cover the complete life cycle of diabetes from prevention and the prevention of complications for those with pre-existing diabetes to the management of complications once they are identified. If the 12 standards are implemented properly, the prospects for those with diabetes in the UK will undoubtedly improve, and the Government will have made a significant public health policy achievement. However, the document will be no more than tantalising paper if they are unable to support those charged with implementation with new money.

Although we are all acutely aware of the colossal and competing pressures on the Department of Health's budget and accept that many positive steps can be taken without throwing money at problems, there is a danger that the national service framework for diabetes will be unable to raise standards of care across the country without extra dedicated resources. As other comparable service frameworks have received dedicated funding to support their implementation, will the Minister take the opportunity to guarantee dedicated funding for the national service framework for diabetes? If she is unable to do that at this stage, will she provide further information on the Department of Health's time scale for decisions about the funding of the national service framework?

There is certainly a need for extra investment. The Audit Commission's report, "Testing Times: A Review of Diabetes Services in England and Wales", published in April 2000, found:

> "The prevalence of diabetes and the cost of providing services are likely to increase dramatically over the next ten years. Services are already under considerable strain, and little is taking place in the way of strategic planning."

A continuation of the status quo could have a devastating effect on the national health service, which is already under severe pressure from diabetes and its complications. That burden is due to rise because an ageing population with increased rates of obesity will inevitably translate into an increase in the number of people with type 2 diabetes in years to come.

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): I first declare an interest as an insulin-dependent diabetic. Is the hon. Lady aware of the "missing million" campaign run by Diabetes UK, which estimates that 1 million citizens in the United Kingdom have that condition but have not yet been diagnosed? Screening is one part of trying to identify those people, but the consequence would be an increase in the bill for treatment. We need to track down the missing million.

Siobhain McDonagh: I am aware of the missing million. As a London MP, I am specifically concerned that a substantial proportion of those 1 million people will be based in London, given the higher prevalence of diabetes among people from the Asian and Afro-Caribbean communities. A parliamentary answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Stewart) showed that the Government accept that as many as 1 million people may have type 2 diabetes without yet knowing it.

The longer people with diabetes go undiagnosed, the more likely they are to develop life-threatening and debilitating conditions such as heart disease, stroke, kidney failure, blindness and lower limb amputation. On average, people have type 2 diabetes for between nine and 12 years before it is diagnosed, the devastating effect of which is that more than a third and perhaps as many as half of them are already showing signs of complications when it is diagnosed.

The Government are aware of the need to identify people with diabetes early, and I urge Ministers to tackle the problem of how those people are to be identified early enough to prevent the onset of complications. A screening programme that targets people who are subject to a high risk of developing type 2 diabetes would help to provide a structured identification process. Opportunistic screening is clearly not working because the Government have accepted that an estimated 1 million people have diabetes but do not know it. Given that the costs of screening are lower than the costs of dealing with the problems resulting from undiagnosed diabetes, there must be a strong and urgent case for reviewing the way in which we screen for it, particularly in London where levels are reckoned to be 10 times the national average.

We must surely rethink the way in which we educate people about the risk of diabetes. I should be grateful to know whether the Minister will look into those pressing issues after the debate. The national service framework for diabetes provides a wonderful opportunity to address the nightmare scenario of a future NHS proving unable to cope with the financial and human costs of diabetes. Expectation among patients and healthcare professions is extremely high, and has perhaps been raised by the delay of the implementation of the national service framework, which was initially due to begin in April 2002.

The 12-month delay came as a blow to diabetics and health care professionals. Will the Minister guarantee that there will be no further delays to publication of the crucial implementation strategy document, and confirm that it will be published in summer 2002, as she announced last December?

The Government must ensure that the months during the build-up to publication of the delivery strategy are used to the full to ensure that the momentum for raising standards for diabetes care is maintained. The requirement for all primary care trusts to undertake a local assessment of diabetes service provides the opportunity to prepare fully for implementation. The Government must ensure that once it is published, there is local ownership of the service framework, by health care professionals, and patients. I am aware of concerns that the standard document does not place enough emphasis on the need for partnership in service planning, or involving people with diabetes, despite the Government's stated priority to build

> "partnerships and co-operation . . . between patients, their carers and families and NHS staff".

[Siobhain McDonagh]

Given that the delivery strategy is due to be published in September, well in advance of the implementation date of April 2003, what do the Government intend to do to encourage preparation for the national service framework between now and then?

Given that people of south Asian origin are six times more likely to develop diabetes than Caucasian people, and that Afro-Caribbean people are four times more likely to do so, I would like to assure ethnic groups in Mitcham and Morden—I am an honorary member of the Asian Diabetic Support and Advice group there—that they will be fully consulted on and their needs incorporated in the national service framework.

User involvement in service delivery and decision-making has to be central to support empowerment. That is the only way to bring about the more patient-centred NHS that the Government are building. Local diabetes service advisory groups exist throughout most of the UK, and they can help in that process. Those groups bring together managers, health care professionals from primary and secondary care, people with diabetes and commissioners to advise on diabetes care. The fact that such care cuts across so many parts of the system requires that joint planning and integration are facilitated through joint working and local advisory groups. If supported and recognised, they provide the means of carrying out that planning.

The cost to the NHS of treatment of diabetes and its complications is immense. Substantial financial investment to support the national service framework could deliver savings in the future—I appreciate that every hon. Member who has an Adjournment debate about health makes that point, whatever the disorder might be. To demonstrate the need for Government to find comprehensive funding, Abacus International's recent report "Diabetes: the Problems, the Issue, and the Future" found that for every £1 spent on such treatment, £1.38 would be saved on complications.

I began by welcoming the fact that politicians have started to take diabetes seriously, and to listen to such eminent figures as Sir George Alberti, president of the Royal College of Physicians, who commented on the Abacus report that there is as

> "urgent need to move diabetes up the agenda, alongside coronary heart disease and cancer for the sake of individual sufferers and the public purse. Early and effective implementation of the National Service Framework, properly resourced, is critical".

The national service framework standards document suggests that the Government are committed to tackling growing health concern. Translating those good intentions into delivery on the ground will require the promotion of user involvement in local planning and delivery, an increase in staffing, and a commitment to providing financial resources.

The implementation of the national service framework for diabetes provides an unprecedented opportunity to improve standards of screening, diagnosis, prevention, management and care. It will transform the lives of millions of British people, and pave the way for better future lives. That opportunity may not come again for a generation. Now is the time to deliver for those with diabetes.

1.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Yvette Cooper): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) on securing a debate on the important issue of the treatment of diabetes. I welcome many of her points, and I agree that this is a great opportunity to make substantial steps in improving care for those with diabetes.

I pay tribute to the work of Diabetes UK, which will hold its annual professional conference tomorrow. It has done considerable work for those who suffer from diabetes. It has raised awareness of the condition and has worked with health professionals and the Department of Health on the national service framework.

My hon. Friend is right that diabetes is a serious and complex condition that can result in a raft of debilitating complications and increase the risk of developing other diseases, including coronary heart disease, stroke, kidney failure, impaired vision, lower-limb complications, and additional risks in pregnancy. She is right that those with diabetes die sooner—on average, by more than 20 years if an individual has type 1 diabetes, and by up to 10 years if he or she has type 2 diabetes.

Diabetes can have a profound effect on people's lifestyles, relationships, work, income, health, well-being and life expectancy. My hon. Friend is right that it also has a significant impact on health and social services. It has been estimated that around 5 per cent. of total NHS resources and up to 10 per cent. of hospital in-patient resources can be used for the care of people with diabetes. Those with the condition are twice as likely to be admitted to hospital, and, once there, their stay is likely to be up to twice the average.

Around 1.3 million people have diagnosed diabetes, and evidence shows that it is becoming more common as lifestyles and life patterns change, even among children. My hon. Friend made it clear that the burden of diabetes does not fall equally. Significant inequalities exist in the risk of developing diabetes, in access to health services of quality, and in health outcomes. For example, type 2 diabetes is up to six times more common in people of south Asian descent, and up to three times more common in those of African and African-Caribbean descent, than it is in the white population. Mortality and morbidity are also affected by socio-economic deprivation. Such serious inequality issues must be taken into account.

The Audit Commission report, "Testing Times", highlighted unacceptable variations in the standard of diabetes service provision. It found some excellent areas of good practice in which staff worked across sectors to improve patient care. However, such examples were not widely shared across the NHS, and considerable improvements can be made. Those variations and gaps in the organisation and quality of diabetes services prompted the Government to announce the development of the national service framework for diabetes in England.

The number of national service frameworks that have been announced has been limited. Only a limited number of conditions and areas have been identified for those frameworks, such as mental health, coronary heart disease and the cancer plan. The frameworks have tended to concentrate on generic approaches, such as those for children and long-term conditions, and one for older people is already in development. The identification of diabetes for a national service framework was a significant step for the Government and the NHS because it stated the importance of diabetes and the issues that must be addressed.

As my hon. Friend said, standards for the national service framework were published in December. The delivery strategy will follow later this year so that implementation can begin next year. The standards document provides the first set of national standards on the treatment of diabetes for the NHS. They cover prevention, identification of those with diabetes, empowering those with diabetes by improving self-care, and clinical care for adults, children and young people. They also address managing diabetic emergencies, care of people with diabetes during admission to hospital, issues surrounding diabetes in pregnancy, and the detection and management of long-term complications. Considerable supporting information has been made available on the internet, and that includes suggested service models, performance indicators, proposals for practice-based registers and information on diabetes research. We welcome comments on the diabetes national service framework.

My hon. Friend is correct in saying that we intend to publish the implementation plan during the summer, and we have set up an implementation group to consider it. The group will work openly with a wide range of stakeholders to provide information on the strategy of the diabetes national service framework to ensure that implementation is manageable and sensibly paced and that it can be fully delivered during the 10 years of the programme and reflects the key priorities for those with diabetes and for the health professionals involved in their care.

I take on board the points made by my hon. Friend concerning partnership with those with diabetes to consider the care, education and joint planning of services. Those matters are being considered by the implementation group, and I shall ensure that it is fully aware of the points raised by my hon. Friend.

The implementation group is chaired jointly by Professor Mike Pringle of the Royal College of General Practitioners and Dr. Sheila Adam, director of policy at the Department of Health. The group includes two people with diabetes as well as members of the medical, nursing and allied health professions, NHS management and Diabetes UK. The implementation group is keen to hear the views of people with diabetes, those in the NHS and health care professions, and other interested parties on the priorities for action, the time scale for implementing different standards and what the priorities should be during in the first few years of the national service framework. A strength of the framework is that it has worked hard to involve all those who deliver the service or use it. Its purpose is to provide the care that people want and need. Another strength is that it covers all aspects of care, including prevention and treatment. My hon. Friend is correct in saying that problems may arise when there is insufficient integration of the different aspects of care.

The delivery strategy for the national service framework will set out the action to be taken by local health and social care systems, including milestones, performance management arrangements, service models, and national underpinning programmes to support local delivery. We have established a research advisory committee with the Medical Research Council and Diabetes UK to review current diabetes research in the United Kingdom and to identify the priorities for new research.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence is developing clinical guidelines for type 1 and type 2 diabetes and is appraising a number of new technologies. We welcomed NICE's publication last week of the first two guidelines in its type 2 diabetes series, which cover diabetic retinopathy and diabetic renal disease. A diabetes information strategy is being developed because it is important to ensure that the right information is resourced to implement the national service framework. It will set out a vision for the information infrastructure, systems and services and what needs to be done to deliver it.

We have also set up a long-term conditions care group work force team to take a national overview of the challenges of delivering services to the diabetes national service framework standards and to identify innovative ways in which the skills and competencies needed in the work force can be delivered.

My hon. Friend mentioned the time scale for introducing the national service framework and publishing the implementation document. We must take account of the changing roles and responsibilities of NHS organisations and staff and recognise the current pressures on the NHS, especially in primary care but also in hospitals. That is why the decision was taken to have a proper debate on and examination of the implementation process once the standards had been published in order to engage closely with patients and clinicians and ensure that we can deliver the national service framework to the standard that we all want.

Developing the national service framework in two parts in that way will enable us to engage the NHS, partner agencies and those with diabetes more closely in planning and managing the framework's implementation. That is why publishing the standards in advance of finalising the milestones gave us an opportunity to be far more inclusive in developing the implementation programme. We aim to have a fuller process of communication and of raising awareness and agreement about priorities and practical implementation.

My hon. Friend mentioned resources. The national service framework implementation process will need to take account of resources currently being considered for the future of the NHS as part of the Government's spending review for the next three years. She will understand that it is not possible for me to pre-empt that or the discussions that will take place as part of the implementation group's work. However, I assure her that those matters will be considered not only in the light of discussions on the spending review and long-term investment plans for the NHS, but as part of the detailed discussions on the implementation time scale and milestones.

[Yvette Cooper]

It is important to bear in mind, as my hon. Friend is aware, that we are investing considerable additional resources in the NHS across the board. As we shift power to the front line, primary care trusts will increasingly have to take responsibility for joining up their resources around the person and not simply around individual diseases. The national director for primary care is leading an important project to look at implementation across the national service frameworks to ensure that we deliver milestones properly and that the right investment is in place.

In the meantime, we are keen to avoid a planning blight in diabetes services. One reason for setting out the standards was so that primary care trusts and the health service could be aware of the direction in which the national service framework would go. We have also asked primary care groups and trusts to undertake a baseline assessment of population need and service provision so that they are ready to begin implementation of the national service framework next year. We shall shortly publish a template to support that task. Those already planning and investing in local diabetes services on an ongoing basis can take account of the broad direction in the standards document.

Other work in progress supports the broad thrust of the diabetes framework, including four of the first wave of pilot training courses in self-management, under the expert patients programme, which cover diabetes. The Minister of State, Department of Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), who spoke at the Diabetes UK annual professional conference, will say more tomorrow about the expert patients programme and its application to diabetes. NICE will evaluate patient education models for diabetes and issue guidance next spring.

We must take account of work that is changing and redefining traditional professional roles and boundaries. Two pilot sites of the changing work force programme, in Luton and Peterborough, are helping health and social care organisations to redesign staff roles and cover diabetes services.

My hon. Friend will be aware that much work progressing across the Government on the prevention of ill-health also applies to diabetes, including tackling obesity and improving nutrition and physical activity among children, as the prevention of diabetes is important too.

Diabetes is a serious condition but the future need not be bleak because evidence shows that the onset of type 2 diabetes can be delayed or even prevented and effective management of the disease can increase life expectancy and reduce the risk of complications. The diabetes national service framework builds on those foundations. As my hon. Friend said, the framework provides an important opportunity to improve patient-centred care delivered in partnership for those suffering from diabetes.

Aggregates Tax

1.30 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I am grateful for the opportunity to bring an important issue before the House. Five years ago, the Government issued a statement of intent on environmental taxation. The principle was simply stated:

> "Over time, the Government will aim to reform the tax system to increase incentives to reduce environmental damage. That will shift the burden of tax from "goods" to "bads"; encourage innovation in meeting higher environmental standards; and deliver a more dynamic economy and a cleaner environment, to the benefit of everyone."

I support the Government in their attempts to protect the environment; it is in putting that principle into practice that the issues become complicated. Although I support the Government's principles, I cannot support an illogical tax that does not live up to the basic dictates of the Government's statement of intent.

Next month a so-called environmental tax will come into effect that will do little for the environment and bring nothing to the Exchequer. An environmental tax that has a neutral effect both on the environment and at the Treasury is a strange anomaly. If the story stopped there, it would simply be a case of a costly government exercise that will achieve little or nothing. Unfortunately, it does not stop there; for all its environmental and Exchequer neutrality, the aggregates levy is not a neutral tax. It will be disastrous for the quarrying and construction industry; it will drive small operators out of business, further hurt rural economies, decrease the international competitive position of domestic industry, and increase the cost of public works construction projects.

From next month, the aggregates levy will tax virgin aggregates at £1.60 a tonne, a rate that is three to four times the profit margin of many quarry operators. The figure is four times the tax in Sweden, six times the tax in Denmark, and more than 20 times the tax in France. The Government say that the tax will better reflect the real cost of aggregates extraction, but that "real" cost was arrived at by the fascinating exercise of asking people how much of their fictional money they would part with to close local quarries.

The £1.60 rate is made even harsher by the fact that it will be a flat-rate tax on an industry whose prices vary widely. The effect is that the price of primary aggregates in Scotland will rise by 40 to 50 per cent. as opposed to a more modest rise of 12 to 16 per cent. in the south-east of England. The aggregates levy is in effect a poll tax on chuckies and is perhaps the most anti-Scottish taxation measure since the poll tax.

The effect of that blunt instrument, which taxes all quarries the same regardless of differing environmental practices or product prices, will be to drive many small quarry operators out of business. As industry expert Leslie Campbell wrote, large aggregate producers

> "will be better placed to pass on the rise in the cost [of the levy] than the independent producer. These smaller specialist companies will find it harder to increase their prices to customers. Their margins will be squeezed and some could leave the market."

The Quarry Products Association predicts more than 10,000 job losses from the tax throughout Britain, more than a quarter of which will be in Scotland. The British

Aggregates Association similarly predicts the loss of 2,750 jobs in Scotland, split between the quarrying industry and related industries such as mechanical engineering, fabrication and plant hire.

Those job losses are the first-order effects of the aggregates levy, but there will be second-order economic effects about which we should be equally worried. A net effect of the new tax will be to increase the cost of construction projects, which will sometimes lead to decreased construction activity. I wish that we were debating the tax theoretically and looking forward to the imposition of a tax that had not yet hit us. However, the House can consider a real example of a jeopardised construction project.

The breakwater project in Peterhead bay in my constituency has been heralded as a huge economic opportunity. The breakwater would limit the effects of severe weather and allow trade all year round in the port. Port officials have worked diligently to secure funding for the project, which may give Peterhead the safest deep-water port in the whole of Scotland. The Peterhead bay authority recognises the substantial gains that the project would bring, and has planned to invest £10 million in the breakwater. The rest of the funding for the £20 million project will come from loans and grants.

That investment in Peterhead's future is projected to attract at least £40 million in follow-on schemes, and to generate 360 permanent jobs. However, the future of the project hangs in the balance, thanks to the aggregates levy. The bay authority must grapple with an extra £1.9 million as a result of this chuckie tax. The Minister should note that, in contrast, the bay authority will receive a benefit that amounts to £800 from deductions in national insurance charges. The authority requested help from the Scottish Executive, which unfortunately offered none. The community is already suffering a decline in its fishing industry, the rundown of RAF Buchan and several factory closures. It now stands also to lose one of the largest civil works projects in north-east Scotland.

The Government surely cannot have legislated for that sort of sustainable economic growth, nor can they have intended the imposition of this tax to have such an impact. As I said, this vital project is about coastal protection and marine safety. Almost all the aggregates used will be non-machine crushed and will be provided by a local quarry a few miles away. It is inconceivable that the project was an intended target of the aggregates tax, and I hope that the Minister will consider the unintended consequences of his proposals for my constituency.

The choice would be more difficult if we were trading such job losses for substantial environmental gains, as we would be faced with the competing need to protect industry and our natural resources. The irony of the situation, however, is that we are courting economic loss without a corresponding environmental gain. The plain fact is that the aggregates tax will do little, or nothing, to improve or protect the environment. The Government has conceded that the opportunity to switch to recycled aggregates is small.

The British Geological Survey's report of 2001 and the 2000 survey by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions of construction and demolition waste show that even if the maximum amount of hard waste were recycled, that could, at most, substitute only 1 to 2 per cent. of virgin aggregates. Even if that number were doubled, and the calculations of the Government's advisers were wrong, the effect would still be marginal. Nor is it clear whether a reduction in the demand for virgin aggregates would be a good thing. If recycled aggregates are carted across great distances to construction sites, the pollution associated with aggregates would increase, not diminish. We must anticipate that that will be likely when the small quarries that usually service local projects are closed.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): My hon. Friend mentioned the project in Peterhead. Is he aware of the impact of the tax on road building throughout Scotland? Local authorities use 40 per cent. of the aggregates used in Scotland. In my constituency, Angus council will face an additional cost of £2 million for the urgent dualing of the notorious A92 road.

Mr. Salmond: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Scotland will suffer disproportionately from the aggregates tax, as it has a large land area and a small population in comparison with more crowded areas such as the city we are in at present. If we include the national insurance rebate, the aggregates tax overall will put an additional £20 million into the economy of the south-east of England, but that sum will be drawn from the economies of rural England, Scotland and Wales.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): The hon. Gentleman's mention of Wales brings me to the point that I would like him to consider. The community council of Old Radnor in my constituency expressed its concern about two local quarries: the Strinds at Dolyhir and Gore quarry. I understand from parliamentary proceedings on the aggregates tax that the Government considered having a rebate for quarries that operated environmentally friendly practices. Are the Government still considering that possibility?

Mr. Salmond: I do not know if I can say what is in the mind of the Minister. We will have to wait a few minutes for that, but the hon. Gentleman has put his finger on an important point. One would have thought that the best way to devise a tax on aggregates would be to consider the environmental damage caused by aggregates and different systems of production. One could consider the impact on the sea and air, and where quarries have good environmental practices, introduce a tax that was graduated and targeted. This flat rate levy will be full of serious economic consequences that are not desired by, I suspect, the Government or, I know, the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams).

My hon. Friend the Member for Angus (Mr. Weir) made a very good point about the road-building programme in Scotland. Such concerns cast great doubts on the efficacy of the new tax. Further practical concerns should encourage the Minister at least to consider a delay in the introduction of the levy. As of this moment, a mere 18 days before implementation, the Government have not yet published the final guidelines for compliance of the tax. Even if those guidelines were published today, quarry operators would have just over two weeks to implement the new rules—a full two and a

[Mr. Salmond]

half months less than 12 weeks that the Government's own guidelines recommend for giving businesses time to comply with new legislation. The Minister must tell us why the Government are breaking their undertakings to industry on compliance.

Ambiguity remains about the phased introduction of the tax in Northern Ireland and how it will work there. The Government have rightly acknowledged the disastrous effects that the levy could have on quarries in Northern Ireland. I wish that they could have seen that the problem is not unique to Northern Ireland and exists in the other countries of the United Kingdom. We are still waiting to see how that delay will take shape and what it will mean for businesses, both in Northern Ireland and elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

As we debate the matter today, it is worth noting that industry representatives have been arguing their case in the courts. My understanding is that the matter will go to a full hearing and may result in a full judicial review. It is likely that that will be the start of a long process. Again, that shows the huge uncertainty in which the Government have placed the industry, a mere matter of days before their target date for implementation.

In closing, I should like to return to the Government's declared principle of environmental taxation and their desire to

> "deliver a more dynamic economy and a cleaner environment, to the benefit of everyone."

The aggregates tax does not give us a cleaner environment, but it will have decidedly damaging economic effects. I urge the Government to delay its introduction until a thorough examination of the environmental and economic consequences can be conducted. We must delay so that we can make this new tax fair to rural communities, fair to Scotland and fair to communities such as Peterhead where major public works projects hang in the balance.

1.44 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): The choice for debate of the aggregates tax by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) is welcome. He gives the Government the opportunity to restate our position on the tax and our support for it and to re-affirm our commitment to sustainable development on the day on which we shall publish a report on our achievements over the past year in delivering on our sustainable development targets.

The aggregates levy has been developed over an extended period and in close consultation with the industry. As I listened to the hon. Gentleman's analysis, I did not recognise the tax that has been so widely consulted on and welcomed by those who are concerned about our environment. Hon. Members, including the hon. Gentleman, have had ample opportunity to debate the principle of the tax over the years. He pays lip service to that principle, but we are putting it into practice. He and his party should put their commitment to the environment where their mouths have been these many years.

Independent research clearly shows that the process of extracting aggregates imposes significant environmental costs in the form of noise, dust, visual intrusion, loss of amenity, and damage to biodiversity. The hon. Gentleman and those of his constituents who live near quarries recognise that there is a cost to the environment, and they are required to pay it. With the tax, we seek to internalise the externality and incorporate the cost of environmental degradation into the price of aggregates—no more and no less.

Mr. Salmond: I am sure that my constituents who face the loss of economic opportunities will be pleased to know that the Government are internalising the externalities. The project that I described, which will be furnished by a local quarry, a mere five miles from the harbour, has support throughout my constituency. Why should that project, which involves transporting non-machine crushed aggregates a few miles to the harbour in a safe and economically processed condition, be subject to the levy, or is that an unintended consequence of the Government's position?

Mr. Boateng: The aggregates industry generally supports the extension of the levy to include uncrushed rocks of the sort that will be used in Peterhead. It believes that the tax should apply to all forms of aggregate equally. If I may use a rather unpleasant and hackneyed expression, the industry seeks a level playing field, which is precisely what we have provided. That is another indication of the way in which the Government have consulted and listened to the industry.

The levy, which is to be introduced in April, is designed to address the problems of dust, noise, visual intrusion, loss of amenity and damage to biodiversity by incorporating the costs of environmental damage into the price of aggregates. That will allow the market to determine efficient and sustainable levels of consumption.

The concept of internalising the externality is not unknown to the hon. Gentleman. Indeed, he is well aware that that lies at the heart of all fiscal responses to environmental degradation.

Mr. Salmond: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Boateng: No. The hon. Gentleman and his party must consider whether they support the use of fiscal responses to environmental challenges. If they do not, that is their position, but if they do, they will need to recognise that internalising the externality is what a fiscal response to an environmental challenge is all about. I give way to the hon. Gentleman so that he can make his and his party's position crystal clear.

Mr. Salmond: Will the Minister focus on the project? I have explained the clear environmental benefits: coastal protection, marine safety and economic opportunity. Will he specify the environmental damage of the breakwater project? If he cannot, will he say why he is imposing a £1.9 million tax on it and jeopardising the project?

Mr. Boateng: The hon. Gentleman knows better than that. He distorts the argument on the aggregates tax, which is the subject of this debate, by focusing on a particular project in his constituency. He knows that every tax will have its impact, and this tax is on aggregates. If a particular project utilises aggregates, it will pay the tax. That is the nature of such a tax. I do not want to particularise the general arguments to a specific project, save to say that on the advice available to me, his estimate that the additional costs are about £1.9 million is excessive.

However, that is not the point. We are debating a tax that is not a revenue-raising measure. The hon. Gentleman used that argument as if the tax were somehow defective. It was never presented as a revenue-raising measure and is neutral in that respect. All businesses will benefit from the 1 per cent. cut to employers' national insurance contributions, while areas affected by quarrying, including his constituency, will benefit from an annual £35 million sustainability fund. I did not hear a word from the hon. Gentleman about that fund, which was disingenuous of him. He knows well that his constituency and others will benefit from the fund.

Environmental damage affects us all, wherever we are in the United Kingdom, but for local communities affected by quarrying, the problems are more acute. The sustainability fund will provide funds to minimise demand for virgin aggregates and reduce the local effects of aggregate extraction. The devolved Administrations, including that in Scotland, have been allocated their share of the fund through the Barnett formula and will make their own decisions in the usual way about how to spend it. To suggest, as the hon. Gentleman did, that the tax is somehow anti-Scottish is an absolute travesty. That distorts both language and sense, because the tax is no such thing.

Mr. Salmond: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Boateng: No, not again. I look forward to continuing the debate with the hon. Gentleman. It is an important topic, but he must give credit where credit is due for a tax that has been designed in close consultation with industry. The process has meant that industry has able to inform the decisions that have been made in bringing the tax to its present point and that the aggregates industry has had an opportunity to affect the tax's development. A point was made about the start date of the levy, and the general guide to the levy was issued on 14 January. We have published a list of reliefs on the Customs and Excise website, as well as providing drafts of the general regulations to the industry through the Customs consultative group. There has been extensive involvement and, on that basis, the fears raised by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan are not justified.

Mr. Roger Williams: Does the Minister agree that a flat-rate tax is a blunt fiscal instrument for achieving environmental objectives?

Mr. Boateng: No, it is entirely justified in the circumstances. The research and the consultative process justify that approach. Discussions with the industry and with environmental groups have enabled us significantly to improve the levy. The definition of aggregates has been changed to capture materials that have not been crushed. Further improvements will be made in this year's Finance Bill and the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan and his colleagues will have another opportunity to reflect then and to make further exchanges—

Mr. Salmond: Could I have an opportunity now?

Mr. Boateng: Not at the moment.

The definition of aggregates now includes rock that has not been subject to an industrial crushing process. Various means are available for producing aggregates from rock: crushing is not always necessary as some quarries sift the rock produced by blasting and need only to crush the largest pieces. The change will ensure both the equitable treatment of all quarries and full realisation of the environmental benefits of the levy.

An interesting point about green quarries was raised in an intervention on the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan by the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams). We were initially attracted to establishing whether some relief could be provided. After informal consultation with the relevant businesses—quarry operators and others—we decided that technical problems affecting the delivery of the principle at a differential rate would not justify such a measure. The tax still provides significant scope to bring real benefits to the community through recycling and using other waste products.

The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions estimates that 10 million tonnes of construction waste could be recycled—a real challenge that will bring real benefits. The levy is already providing an incentive for businesses to examine alternatives such as china clay waste and slate and to develop glass and tyre waste in aggregate mixes.

Mr. Salmond: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Boateng: All that suggests that the measure will make a real contribution—

Mr. Salmond: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. David Amess (in the Chair): Order. We cannot have two hon. Members on their feet and it is clear that the Minister is not giving way.

Mr. Boateng: All that suggests that the measure will make a real contribution to the environment. I hope that the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan will, after a period of mature reflection, come to see the real benefits to the people of Scotland, England and Wales—and, indeed, of Northern Ireland—that the introduction of a revenue-neutral levy will provide. It is designed to promote better use of waste material and to assure communities affected by quarrying that those purchasing the product of those operations should pay a price that reflects the environmental cost. All in all, it is a carefully researched measure, implemented only after full consultation. I thoroughly commend it as an important contribution to the cause of sustainable development.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 14 March 2002

[SIR MICHAEL LORD *in the Chair*]

Health and Safety at Work

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

2.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Dr. Alan Whitehead): I welcome this afternoon's Adjournment debate on Government policy on health and safety at work, because it gives us the opportunity to discuss in depth the progress of various initiatives and the work that remains to be done.

The Government are committed to the health and safety of workers. That is why the Deputy Prime Minister launched "Revitalising Health and Safety" in June 2000, which successfully provided much needed impetus to improve occupational health and safety. The debate gives us an excellent opportunity to set out what progress has been made and examine health and safety policy that we need to prioritise and further promote.

Immediately following the introduction of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974, there was a dramatic reduction in workplace fatalities and injuries, but, over recent years, health and safety improvements have levelled off. Every year, more than 1 million people are injured at work, and approximately 2 million suffer from ill health caused by work. Last year, tragically, 295 workers were killed due to work-related activity. That is unacceptable, and the human cost is immeasurable.

The economic burden of health and safety failures runs to almost £18 billion a year. Exposure to asbestos is one example, and I am pleased that my Department will use its pneumoconiosis compensation scheme to make payments to those affected by the recent Fairchild judgment. We are discussing with colleagues in other Departments what further action can be taken in the long term and we await the appeal to the House of Lords by those affected by the judgment.

Health and safety in the workplace is a central moral idea. Workers should be able to expect to return from work in the same condition that they went. However, action to improve health and safety is not only a moral imperative—the cost of which falls on employers—but an investment for employers.

I am aware of the competitive nature of business, but health and safety management must be a fundamental component of good business management, increasing productivity and, therefore, competitiveness. That is why the Government decided to increase the resources of the Health and Safety Executive. We provided an additional £63 million following the 1998 comprehensive spending review and added a further £45 million in December 2000.

The extra resources over the past three years have allowed for an overall increase in HSE staff, including 120 inspectors. I am sympathetic to many issues raised in the Prospect campaign for additional resources, especially more front-line inspectors, but, for good reasons, demands on the HSE will always outstrip the resources that are immediately available. The Health and Safety Commission will bid for resources in the 2002 spending review and the Government will consider its proposals carefully.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): HSE funding is important, so I must tell my hon. Friend why I hope that he will look sympathetically at the need to increase resources. I recently dealt with a case in which the HSE would not directly investigate a gas explosion that injured three people in my constituency. Indeed, the whole community could have been killed had things gone more seriously wrong. The HSE said that it could not investigate because, among other things, it was investigating another gas explosion, which killed someone three miles away. That kind of rationing is not acceptable.

Dr. Whitehead: My hon. Friend makes a strong point about the need to investigate accidents and to inspect workplaces regularly. To some extent, those aims may be set against each other, and priorities should be set in a way that ensures that both are met. That is a question not only of ensuring that additional resources are available, but of giving priority to increasing the number of inspections. The HSE has done that. Indeed, the number of inspections has gone up to cover 10 per cent. of workplaces. The priority programme introduced by the HSE provides for resources to be concentrated in a way that enhances inspections and the availability of inspectors.

My hon. Friend, of course, is right about resources, which is why the bid has gone into the 2002 spending review. The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has carefully considered the bid and fully supported its submission to ensure that the HSE obtains the necessary resources over the next spending period.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): My hon. Friend says that more than resources is involved, and I accept that. Will he tell the House whether he envisages introducing further legislation? I ask because my constituent, James Browne, has campaigned tirelessly to get to the bottom of why his son, Neil, was killed in February 1995 while working as an electrical contractor. Mr. Browne believes that his son's employer should have provided better training, which could have prevented his son's death. Will my hon. Friend consider whether further legislation is needed on, for example, the responsibility of big companies in that regard?

Dr. Whitehead: My hon. Friend also makes a strong point. He suggests that some people firmly believe that legislation is required to take forward several items on the health and safety agenda, and the tragic case to which he refers may strongly underline that view. Indeed, "Revitalising Health and Safety" makes several proposals for legislation, including clarifying the courts' sentencing powers for health and safety offences; introducing fixed penalties for some health and safety offences; enabling private prosecutions in England and Wales without the consent of the Director of Public

[Dr. Whitehead]

Prosecutions; clarifying the law on the health and safety responsibilities of directors and senior managers; and removing Crown bodies' immunity from health and safety enforcement.

The document therefore identifies a range of possible issues for new legislation, which we are examining. There is no final view on which will be brought forward, because several involve other aspects of Government business and other Departments. However, when parliamentary time is available, we intend to legislate on a number of issues raised by "Revitalising Health and Safety" and the subsequent responses.

The document contains a long-term strategy with strong emphasis on working in partnership. For the first time, targets will be set for the health and safety system. Those include reducing the number of working days lost per 100,000 workers from work-related injury and ill health by 30 per cent. by 2010; reducing the incidence of fatal and major injury accidents by 10 per cent. by 2010; reducing the incidence of work-related ill health by 20 per cent. by 2010; and achieving half those targets—a milestone—by 2004.

The targets must be considered in the context of what has been achieved so far. The 1974 Act has stood the test of time and we see no case for major reform, but the strategy in "Revitalising Health and Safety" makes a number of proposals for amending health and safety legislation. We may be able to legislate on some areas sooner than others. In the meantime, we shall continue to work with the HSC and the HSE under existing legislation to deliver improved safety in the workplace.

The setting of targets by "Revitalising Health and Safety" has been a catalyst. It is encouraging to see the private sector committing itself to delivering its own targets, which contribute to the national effort. So far, 25 traditional industry sectors have done so, with a further eight to follow suit. Trade unions and local authorities have made a significant contribution in each of those sectors, demonstrating the true partnership approach that the "Revitalising Health and Safety" initiative needs to succeed.

Many sectors have set targets that go beyond the initiative. It is right that industries and organisations that currently perform badly, such as construction, should deliver health and safety improvement beyond the national targets. Setting targets in the food, paper, rubber and quarry industries has shown that they can motivate management, employees and trade unions to work together to change their approach to managing health and safety.

The HSC decided that it needed to prioritise and focus resources and efforts on areas where major improvements are necessary if the targets are to be met. It selected eight priority areas: three sectors—agriculture, construction and health services; and five hazards—falls from height, workplace transport, musculo-skeletal disorders, stress, and slips and trips. The hazards occur in industries where large numbers are employed, the incidence of injury or ill health is high and we have the levers to achieve change and success in combating those hazards. We are only nine months into the programmes and it is too early to tell from the accident figures how successful they are likely to be, but the HSC is confident that its work is progressing satisfactorily.

In October last year, we had the second Working Well Together conference, which reviewed progress in delivering the action plans agreed at the February construction summit called by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, when he was Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions. The message is that a huge culture change is needed in the construction industry if fatalities, injuries and ill health are to be reduced. That requires greater client involvement, more partnership down the supply chain and improved competence at all levels. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and I have asked the HSE's chief inspector of construction to report to us regularly on the progress that industry is making. We are determined to achieve improvements, particularly in the construction industry.

The priority programme for agriculture was severely disrupted by the foot and mouth epidemic, but most restrictions have been lifted and inspections and safety awareness days are being resumed. By the end of March, several thousand self-employed farmers and workers on family farms will have attended free safety awareness days.

Workplace transport accidents are also an issue. On 15 January, I had the pleasure of launching the HSC discussion document, "Preventing Workplace Transport Accidents". It seeks views on the matter and will eventually influence HSE activities and inspection programmes. About 70 people die every year in workplace transport-related incidents. Significant improvements can be made in that area, as they must be made on the railways.

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): I appreciate that the debate is about health and safety in the workplace and the prevention of accidents, but may I raise with the Minister a transport incident that occurred in my constituency? A lorry shed its load, two elderly people were killed and three cars were written off. The insurance company that covered the vehicles said that there was no claim on it because the vehicles did not collide and the company dealing with personal liability said that there was no claim on it because the lorry was incorrectly loaded and overweight. Surely there is a loophole here. Does my hon. Friend agree that something needs to be done? How many lorries and other vehicles run about illegally on our roads every day, with the potential to kill and maim?

Dr. Whitehead: My hon. Friend's point goes to the heart of the issue of workplace transport priority, which has been put forward by the HSC. There has always been an issue as to what constitutes workplace transport—that is, transport around the workplace—and what is transport that goes from the workplace but is not in it.

There has been a specious divide between the position of a driver who sheds a load or causes injury while driving around the workplace—that comes under one regime—and one who drives through the gate, goes round the corner and sheds the load as a direct result of some requirement of part of his working day, which comes under a different regime. The recent Dykes report, which I have discussed with Mr. Dykes, points out that a third of all fatalities on the road are work related—people are involved in fatal accidents while going about duties that they are required to do by their employers.

The incident that my hon. Friend mentions concerned a lorry that was involved in just such an accident. I have discussed the issue with the HSE and we have looked at how matters concerning workplace transport and transport relating to the workplace can be better combined. It is important to pursue that further if the cause of workplace health and safety is to be advanced. Improvements relating to workplace transport can be extended to the railways, and the HSC has published today a progress report on part 1 of Lord Cullen's inquiry. It is vital to exert maximum pressure to achieve the necessary safety improvements.

I could list many achievements from each of the eight priority programmes, such as the publication of revised guidance for employers on work-related stress that was launched in June 2001, the back in work initiative, slips and trips road shows around the UK and identification and sharing of good practices in patient handling in the health service. The newest and arguably the greatest challenges, however, lie in occupational health. They are often in industries that are not regarded, at times by their managing directors, as ones in which accidents in the workplace occur. Overwhelmingly, the main concerns about conditions in such offices and other places where people use computers relate to so-called musculo-skeletal disorders, or MSD; effects on the joints, tendons and muscles; and the effects of excessive stress.

Britain needs a healthier and more productive work force. The Government are determined to reduce health inequalities, whether attributable to work or otherwise. That involves preventing workers from being made ill and ensuring that those excluded from work though sickness or disability—about 2.3 million of them—are rehabilitated as quickly as possible. Furthermore, the workplace is a strong setting for delivering information to help people to lead a healthier lifestyle. That opens up exciting possibilities.

The wider agenda requires a new approach that reaches out to attract national commitment. The cultural change needed cannot be achieved by Government regulation alone, although that has its part to play. We must convince everyone involved of the positive benefits of tackling the issues, including bottom-line financial benefits, and make it easier for them to tackle those issues. The recent cross-Government strategy, "Securing Health Together", is aimed at that. It is one of the planks of "Revitalising Health and Safety".

Partnership is vital to success. I am pleased that many of the initiatives involve industry, employees and the trade unions together. The joint Confederation of British Industry-Trades Union Congress initiative, "Creating Partnerships for Prevention—Joining Up Health and Safety", is an excellent example of different and innovative approaches. A more joined-up approach in the Government to bring the main health and safety elements—fire safety, building regulations and occupational health and safety—into one directorate has contributed to partnership and working together.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): On the question of joined-up government, is the Minister aware of "Undermining Construction", a report produced by the Union of Construction Allied Trades and Technicians? It makes it clear that the Treasury and the Inland Revenue, by encouraging false self-employment, contribute to the number of accidents in the building industry. Does he agree that that number of accidents would be reduced drastically if he convinced the Inland Revenue and Treasury to be much tougher on that issue?

Dr. Whitehead: Consideration of several aspects of the construction industry is important. It had and still has a poor health and safety record in terms of ensuring that those employed in it are properly protected. As my hon. Friend knows, certain practices could be said to have contributed to that record. It is important to recognise that the recent Government-led initiatives to bring elements of the industry together begin to point the way to ensuring that health and safety is taken seriously at the centre as an element of employment. It will be an important step forward if, as a result of that, better consideration is given to the way in which people are employed in the industry, thereby facilitating health and safety.

An issue for the construction industry and many other industries is the presence and operation of safety representatives. The case for such representatives and employee involvement more broadly is already well made, but the body of evidence for their efficacy keeps growing. Recent research published by the HSE, in a document called "Employee Involvement in Health and Safety: Some Examples of Good Practice", shows that companies that ask employees for their views on health and safety issues can cut down on accidents.

I must thank the Learning and Skills Council and the TUC, working with the HSE and my Department, for their efforts to put in place arrangements to fund and provide training for safety representatives. I look forward to positive results from the initiative.

It is also important that we recognise that the primary responsibility to manage risk effectively and provide healthy and safe workplaces rests ultimately with employers, and company directors in the example of large organisations. The HSE guidance, "Directors' Responsibilities for Health and Safety", was published last summer following a consultation that elicited an excellent response from unions, employers and other organisations.

Bill Callaghan, the chairman of the HSC, and I have written to the top 350 companies in the country to remind them of the challenge to set out their policies and targets for improving health and safety performance and to record their achievements in their annual reports. That is an important initiative and we shall report on its progress shortly, and on those companies that have yet to respond to it.

The challenge applies equally to the Government. All Departments are being encouraged to publish their health and safety performance in their annual reports,

[Dr. Whitehead]

and to assign health and safety responsibility to a senior official at a level equivalent to that of director. It is important to keep the pressure on. Although a lot has been achieved to secure improvements in the health and safety system, there is still a long way to go before we meet those challenging targets in 2010.

Our next major milestone is reaching the 2004 targets. I am confident that we are on track to achieve that. On 29 May, we are holding a conference entitled "Take Action" to review progress on target setting and to name and acclaim good practice. I am confident that, working in partnership with the HSC, the HSE, employers and the unions, the Government will face the challenges and deliver the targets we have set ourselves.

Mr. Davidson: The Minister says that he is willing to name and acclaim those companies that contribute to implementing Government policy. Is he willing to name and shame those companies that do not?

Dr. Whitehead: My hon. Friend may have picked up on my reference to the letter that has been sent to the top 350 companies in the country. I am minded not only to acclaim companies that have responded to the initiative, but to ensure that those companies that have not are identified. It is important to do both.

I recently visited a quarry in Telford that won an award from the industry for its health and safety record. It was apparent from the working practices that the management, the work force and everybody involved in the company treated health and safety as a central concern. That was reflected in terms of the number of fatalities and injuries there, in an industry that is inherently dangerous. It has difficult working practices and a historically high injury rate.

It is right that that company was named and acclaimed, because it not only has an exemplary safety record, but it makes a good living, partly because it is pre-eminent in health and safety practice. That means that its employees need fewer days off work and it suffers fewer shutdowns because of injuries on the line. Workers stay with the company for a long time, because they value their positions.

That company is doing well as a result of its very good health and safety record. It is right to name and acclaim, but it is also right to identify those that shamefully neglect health and safety as a way to secure cut-price profits or to get through the working week. They are damaging not only the health and safety of their workers, but their own prospects, so it is important that we both acclaim and shame.

Mr. Lloyd: That is helpful and I agree with the Minister, but does he agree that there is still a missing dimension to the process? Although it is good to name and acclaim, because that encourages the health and safety culture, and good to name and shame, it is also important to prosecute. Prosecuting and giving penalties—those are inadequate and should be raised—are an important way to send the message that good firms have nothing to fear from the new health and safety culture, but rogue firms do.

Dr. Whitehead: Yes, it is important in HSE practice to take measures that may end in prosecution, if appropriate. The HSE recognised that it should investigate more reported cases, and the amount of firms investigated has risen from 6.7 per cent. to about 10 per cent. Some of those investigations will result in prosecutions, and an increased number have been undertaken. However, stop notices or improvement notices may be put on a company, which will ensure that it improves without preventing it from doing business.

We should proceed with a combination of approaches, including prosecution, notices, naming and shaming and naming and acclaiming, where appropriate. The HSE has a good record of managing its approach to inspection, enforcement and prosecution and using the weapons at its disposal.

The health and safety of people at work is fundamental to successful business. I described one business in which the health and safety of the workers made a vital contribution to productivity and profit. Firms should not only comply with health and safety law, but go a stage further and make a thoroughgoing commitment to a better working environment. That is the attitude that "Revitalising Health and Safety" wants to engender and which will serve us well as we debate the subject.

I welcome the debate and look forward to hearing hon. Members' views on the issues to which I have referred. I hope that together we may ensure that the health and safety agenda is put on the map for future years.

3.2 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): I am grateful to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Again, this Chamber gives us the opportunity to debate matters for which there is little time on the Floor of the House.

We shall hear speeches from Labour Members, who will cite individual cases and, thereafter, call for health and safety legislation to deal with them. We all respect the fact that 1 million people killed and injured in the workplace, which is the figure that the Minister quoted, is 1 million too many. However, he rightly set out the case that making legislation too onerous and burdensome and gilding European legislation makes United Kingdom firms uncompetitive and forces them out of business. Those who lose their jobs will certainly suffer health and safety problems, and the country will have to put up taxes unnecessarily.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, but I have a lot of issues to cover and I shall not give way many more times.

Mr. Clapham: I want to pick up the hon. Gentleman on his point about the profitability and competitiveness of British industry in relation to health and safety legislation. Is he aware that the British deep mining coal industry is the safest in the world, has the most stringent safety legislation and is the most competitive in Europe?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but legislation is not necessarily what creates good health and safety regimes. Everyone who has an interest in health and safety should promote it through their firms, but excessive legislation is not always needed as support.

We should bear it in mind that proper risk assessments must be made. We should ask, "What is the risk involved and do we need legislation?"

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I shall give way once more, and that will be the last time.

Roger Casale: Of course some companies will introduce proper health and safety measures to protect their work force in the absence of legislation, but we need legislation to promote best practice everywhere.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: We have had all-embracing legislation since the 1974 Act was passed. Of course, where issues arise, it may be necessary to change the law, but as I shall show when I cite some European directives in a moment, we are going too far in the direction of "nanny state knows best." There used to be a maxim that sensational cases make bad law, and it is unrealistic to call for legislation every time something goes wrong.

I want to raise three issues. The first is based on a representation that we received from the Engineering Employers Federation. The second, which has been brought to our attention by Calor Gas, relates to charging. The third is white asbestos. There is concern that the HSE is, in some cases, unaccountable and that its remit to maximise profits does not recognise commercial realities, which I shall illustrate in a moment.

The Government have proposed possible legislation to introduce a category of corporate manslaughter and an offence of corporate killing. The EEF says:

> "We are concerned that parts of the Government's proposals could have the opposite effect, with undertakings vesting responsibility for health and safety in just a few people and making individuals and companies reluctant to share information."

It continues:

> "There is a danger that making individual managers personally liable for the offence of corporate killing will lead to . . . scapegoating . . . The definition of corporate killing requires more explanation. In particular, it is unclear what is meant by 'management failure'".

The EEF goes on:

> "The freezing of company assets is inappropriate and would act as a major deterrent for organisations to enter a guilty plea . . . We have serious reservations concerning HSE's expertise to investigate and prosecute these proposed new criminal offences."

Hon. Members of all parties are concerned that we are increasingly passing legislation that turns a civil matter into a criminal offence. Having a criminal record is serious, and the Government should think carefully before they make more civil matters criminal offences. The EEF says that the correct way forward is for employers to work in partnerships, which the Minister mentioned.

The EEF welcomes some new Government proposals, such as placing a duty on local authorities to give the HSE information about enforcement. It welcomes the proposal to give the HSE access to National Assembly for Wales and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs data. Above all—a matter of concern to this House—it welcomes the removal of Crown immunity from the Palace of Westminster.

The EEF cites the burden of European directives, in particular four proposed directives on vibration, noise, optical radiation and electro-magnetic radiation, saying that the vibration directive is of particular concern to manufacturing industry. The limit value—the point beyond which exposure would become criminal—is set too low, so that many everyday processes will be criminalised. The EEF says that the directive also contains requirements to limit exposure to whole-body vibration:

> "The little research that has been done in this area suggests that these EU requirements, if adopted, could lead to significant limitations being placed on working hours of tractor, construction plant drivers and many others."

We are worried that some of those EU regulations are not properly thought out or researched and not based on hard fact.

The second issue relates to the remit of the HSE. The HSE is required to maximise receipts. That was brought to our attention by Calor Gas, which is a leading supplier with 11 sites rated top tier and 23 sites rated lower tier. It has operated in the United Kingdom since 1935 and has never had a fatality at any site. In March 1999, the Government introduced a new, more burdensome system of charging for HSE inspections, safety reports, assessments and enforcement. Under a subsequent comprehensive charging review, the cost to the company will be £250,000 more than under the old regime—the Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazards Regulations 1984. The new regime is the Control of Major Accident Hazards Regulations 1999.

The company believes that it is being unfairly treated. It has storage capacity for 849 tonnes of liquefied petroleum gas and employs 86 people. The health and safety report that must now be made will take approximately 800 hours. The oil industry has storage capacity for 12.5 million barrels and 300 employees. Its health and safety report will take only 325 hours. Calor Gas believes that that is unrealistic.

The company is particularly concerned that it referred the cost of the extra time spent on the health and safety report to the appeal body, but did not receive a satisfactory answer. It was told that the HSE has no real interest in keeping the cost competitive. It seems totally wrong that the HSE can demand a report with no democratic accountability or proper appeal mechanism. That is a case ripe for the involvement of the European Court of Human Rights.

The company says that the charges fail the better regulation principles of proportionality and transparency, are not predictable and provide a perverse incentive to prolong work by the HSE. The charges cannot be challenged impartially and independently, although that principle is enshrined in the Human Rights Act 1998.

[Mr. Clifton-Brown]

The third and most serious issue concerns white asbestos. There is a new European directive—there always is—and the Minister said in a letter to my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Surrey (Virginia Bottomley) on 12 March 2002:

> "The European Commission directive 1999/77/EC requires marketing, supply and use of white asbestos to be banned throughout the European Union by 1 January 2005. All other types of asbestos are already banned. Many member states, including the UK, have introduced a ban in advance of that date. The UK ban came into force on 24 November 1999, apart from a few very limited time based exemptions. It does not apply to asbestos, which was in use before that date."

The Government, not content with gilding that particular lily, put out to consultation a requirement that all public and commercial buildings must be surveyed for asbestos and a proper management regime put in place. That is perfectly reasonable for blue and brown asbestos, but the jury is out in the case of white asbestos—*[Interruption.]* If hon. Members listen for a minute or two, I shall allow them to intervene.

Numerous parliamentary questions have been tabled by Conservative Members and the Government always rely on scientific evidence in the papers of Professor Peto and Professor Doll from 1985-95. They examined the deaths at the Turner and Newall factory at Rochdale, which Labour Members know well, and by linear extraction only estimated from that hotspot that the number of deaths throughout the country would be 3,000. They were unable to allocate those between brown and blue and white asbestos. Indeed, it has emerged that Turner and Newall used only white asbestos after 1945.

One might think that that makes the case on white asbestos, but Dr. Alan Gibbs, a Cardiff histopathologist, discovered from electro-microscopy that no lungs of people who died from mesothelioma contained white asbestos fibre. That has been accepted by the HSE. He is not a statistician who has taken a hotspot and linearly extrapolated from a graph or any other theoretical material. He is a medic who has examined lungs, and he has not found that a single death from mesothelioma—the cancer caused by blue and brown asbestos—involved white asbestos.

Mr. Lloyd *rose—*

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon) *rose—*

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Hang on. Labour Members need to be patient.

Dr. Gibbs published that evidence in a 1995 paper for the Medical Research Council and the Institute of Environmental Health. The Government also rely on evidence from Hodgson and Denton, but they are two statisticians employed by the HSE, and they took the same evidence from the Turner and Newall factory. If the Peto and Doll evidence is flawed, so is that of Hodgson and Denton.

The Americans take the matter seriously. They have examined evidence from scientists all over the world, and they have downgraded their health and safety regulations in relation to white asbestos. After the 11 September tragedy, it was estimated that 40 tonnes of white asbestos were released into the atmosphere by the collapse of the world trade centre. The Environmental Protection Agency publicly advised that there was no danger to the public. If the American EPA gave that advice after 40 tonnes of loose white asbestos fibres had been released into the atmosphere, something must be wrong with the thin evidence on which the Government are relying.

Mr. Dismore: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: If hon. Members are more patient, I shall allow them to intervene.

White asbestos has a totally different chemical composition from blue and brown asbestos. Blue and brown asbestos are iron silicate, whereas white asbestos is magnesium silicate and is similar in composition to talcum powder. Every one of us breathes in 2,000 fibres a day.

Dr. Whitehead: Wrong. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that talc is similar to white asbestos, as coal is similar to diamonds? In respect of the properties of white asbestos and talc, one is fibrous and the other is not. That is the fundamental difference, which the hon. Gentleman appears not to take into account.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: We can all make such ripostes. White asbestos is classed by the European Union as a class 1 carcinogen, but so too are hot alcoholic beverages and nickel compounds such as the euro.

Mr. Dismore: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: No. I have just given way to the Minister. We need to examine the scientific evidence in an open and impartial way. I call on the Minister to do that.

What will be the effect of regulations that are based on—let us face it—flimsy scientific evidence? If any damage to buildings is occurring, all asbestos must be removed. It is estimated that that will involve a survey of 1.2 million buildings, at a huge direct cost to the taxpayer. A range of common building products, such as asbestos cement and artex sealing, will be included in the survey and any degradation to such asbestos compounds will mean that they will have to be removed. It is estimated that compliance costs to the country will be between £1.2 billion and £8 billion, although a recent written answer stated that it will be £4.8 billion, and, under the Government's revised guidance to allow amortisation over 50 years, it might be reduced to £3.6 billion. Whichever the cost, those are big numbers.

Commercial costs may be much bigger because many property experts predict that if a building is more than halfway through its commercial life, it is cheaper to demolish it. We have already heard stories of cowboy operators who remove asbestos illegally and dump it illegally with no record of where it is kept or of the type of asbestos that it is.

Mr. Dismore: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I want to make it clear—then I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman—that I am not arguing that the regulations should not apply to blue or brown asbestos, which are killers because they are carcinogens. White asbestos is in a different category.

Mr. Dismore: Prior to coming to the House, I practised for 20 years as a personal injury lawyer. I dealt with quite a few asbestos cases, including some in which people were only ever exposed to white asbestos. The last case with which I dealt before I was elected to Parliament, for example, concerned an engineer who was involved in the original commissioning of the Bankside power station, which is now the Tate gallery. He was exposed only to white asbestos, and he contracted mesothelioma. If it did not come from white asbestos, where did it come from?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman—this is a bit gruesome—had that person's lungs analysed. If he did, I should be interested to receive the details. We are all fallible. I presented the information that is coming to me. If the lungs were analysed and if white asbestos fibres were found to have caused the mesothelioma, it would, of course, be useful evidence. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will give that evidence to the inquiry for which I shall call.

It is interesting that the hon. Gentleman should pop up and make that intervention, as we are seeing an increasing number of litigation lawyers advertising that they deal with asbestosis claims; the legal bills are rising all the time. If such claims are based on flimsy scientific evidence, it is another cause for concern.

It is not only the property industry that is concerned, and it is not only the legal industry's costs that are mounting; insurance costs are also mounting hugely. Sun Alliance recently published its six-monthly profit figures, which had declined from £459 million last year to zero this year. Although its report says that that was partly due to 11 September, it also states that asbestosis claims were the biggest single cause.

Mr. Clapham: Asbestosis?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I said asbestosis.

The latest cause for concern—this is the European Union putting its oar in again—is that Directorates-General III is trying to classify white asbestos cement, which is encapsulated, as being the same as loose blue asbestos. That will further escalate costs, but such cement is not dangerous. The Government have admitted that asbestos is not dangerous when it is encapsulated within a building material. If such a measure were enacted, a licence would be required to remove white asbestos and to dispose of it.

Furthermore, there are accusations within the EU that the commercial companies producing alternative products are pushing that legislation. In asking the Government for an independent inquiry, I challenge them on whether the alternatives are safe. One of the main alternatives is cellulose, a fibrous product, which I understand has not been tested as a carcinogen. It has certainly not been compared with white asbestos.

Hon. Members have tried to intervene on me and some of the information that I have been given may well be wrong. None of us is infallible, but whatever the rights or wrongs, I hope that the Minister will realise that this is a highly serious issue involving billions of pounds of compliance costs, which may be unnecessary.

Mr. Dismore: And thousands of lives.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Perhaps the cost is thousands of lives; who knows? There may be better ways to deal with the problem. The problem, and those who believe that white asbestos is not a problem, will not go away. The official Opposition are today calling on the Government for a full inquiry, to which I hope the Minister will agree, to allow all the evidence to be presented and evaluated.

I do not want to denigrate safe health and safety practices, but in all our businesses, including this place, we should look for better practices in health and safety in order to reduce injuries and deaths in the workplace. It is not always a case of more inspectors, more legislation and gilding European legislation. We need to look sensibly at the problems, the risk assessment and how that risk can be minimised. Even when we leave the Chamber and cross the road, there is a risk. There is a risk present in most things that we do in our daily lives, but we cannot legislate for everything.

3.24 pm

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): I shall respond briefly to a couple of points made by the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown). His speech amounted to a discussion of re-legitimising the use of white asbestos, which he referred to as almost the equivalent of talcum powder. He disputed the scientific studies, but his case certainly could and would be disputed. The characteristics mentioned by my hon. Friend the Minister in his intervention are relevant.

The argument advanced by the hon. Member for Cotswold was almost the same as the one that we heard for years about smoking. That industry used the excuse that the scientific evidence was flimsy. The hon. Gentleman makes the same argument for those who want to bring back white asbestos. As for his point about not making civil offences into criminal offences, a lot of people's lives have been lost and are being lost due to negligence or deliberate malpractice. That warrants being treated as a crime and should even result in imprisonment for those who bring about such loss of life.

Whatever happened to the Conservatives' deterrence theory? If there is no penalty, there is no incentive for employers to improve their practices, and there is more loss of life as a result. I thought that the Opposition's approach to a most serious debate that involves many people's lives was disappointing.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Harry Cohen: Very briefly.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I should like a chance to clarify what I said, as I believe that the hon. Gentleman misunderstood me. My point was not that there should not be penalties. For some of the more serious offences, there should be very severe penalties indeed, perhaps involving heavy fines and even imprisonment. That is different from imposing a criminal penalty for what is

[Mr. Clifton-Brown]

essentially a civil matter. A criminal penalty, as the lawyers on the Government Benches will know, involves someone's character being stained for the rest of his life.

Harry Cohen: For the victim, an offence means the loss of his life or serious injury. I hope to see the hon. Gentleman and his party join me in the Lobby, when we have the opportunity, to vote for introducing an offence of corporate manslaughter.

Mr. Davidson: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way before he has made progress on his own speech. Does he agree that anyone listening to the Opposition could form the view that the Tory party had become a subsidiary of the Canadian white asbestos industry? The Opposition seem to be much more exercised by that matter than anything else. Does my hon. Friend share my regret that the Opposition spokesman said nothing about construction and did not have a word to say about false self-employment? It must be said that the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) was doing fine until he spoke.

Harry Cohen: My priority, which should be Parliament's priority, is victims and their families. That is the basis on which we should take action.

I welcome the debate. I sought an Adjournment debate on the same topic for a considerable while. I welcome the Government's commitment to health and safety at work, which my hon. Friend the Minister spelled out. I should say at the outset that the Union of Construction Allied Trades and Technicians, the trade union of the construction industry, gives a regular donation to my political party and that I am on its panel of parliamentary advisers. That is not a vested interest on my part, but a common interest. My concerns for health and safety—such as getting asbestos banned—predate that arrangement with UCATT.

Death and occupational sickness in the construction industry are running at high levels. Deaths are at their highest for a decade. Fatalities have reached more than 100 a year for the first time in a decade, bringing the total for the past 10 years to 921. The construction industry, with 7 per cent. of the British work force, accounted for nearly 36 per cent. of all industry fatalities last year. Workers in the construction industry have the highest rate of working days lost due to work-related injury, at 650 days per 1,000 workers.

A report by Amey Vectra to the Health and Safety Commission estimated that ill health cost the construction industry £760 million per annum. At the CBI conference, its director-general, John Cridland, pointed out that

> "sickness absence cost United Kingdom businesses £11 billion a year which, when the cost to Government of statutory sick pay and welfare payments to the long term sick is added, rises to £23 billion."

That is the extent of the cost of occupational ill health.

That cost is worst of all in the construction industry. In February 2000, at a summit organised by the Deputy Prime Minister, the Government put much emphasis on improving health and safety. Several targets were set to reduce the incidence of fatalities in major industries by 40 per cent. by 2004-05, and by 66 per cent. by the end of the decade. Targets were also set to reduce the incidence of cases of work-related ill health by 20 per cent. by 2004-05, and 50 per cent. by the end of the decade, and to reduce the number of working days lost per 100,000 workers from work-related injury and ill health by 20 per cent. by 2005, and 50 per cent. by the end of the decade. That was welcome.

There was an October follow-up conference to revitalise the health and safety action teams, but I fear that the Government did not have the same enthusiasm at that conference as they had in February. Since then, the employers' organisation, the Construction Confederation, has engaged in what looks like backtracking from the pilot scheme that was set up in the construction industry. It has moved away from that pilot project, which shows the resistance and recalcitrance of the construction industry employers in that regard. We can no longer rely on them to make improvements voluntarily. The Government must seriously consider placing requirements on those employers, if the targets are to be met. That is vital, as are enforcement penalties if the employers do not meet the targets.

The situation in London was detailed in the *Daily Hazard* of November 2001. It pointed out that in the previous year, 33 people were killed at work, and 16 of them were construction workers in London. The magazine added:

> "Yet there was no increase in enforcement action. Prosecutions and convictions in London and the south east were at roughly the same level as for the last five years and enforcement notices were at their lowest. London courts are handing down the same average fine for health and safety offences as in 1998, just over £5,000"

That outlines the situation.

I have another example, from *The Big Issue*, which states:

> "Brian Knight . . . a steel worker, killed in 1998 in a fall at London's Imperial War Museum. An inquest jury returned a verdict of unlawful killing."

The fact that the case was not taken forward by the Crown Prosecution Service highlights serious inadequacy in our criminal justice system. The article in *The Big Issue* continues:

> "Almost 30,000 workers suffered serious injuries at work, but only one in 20 were ever investigated."

That shows the shortage of inspectors. The health and safety trade union document "Prospects for Safety" quoted an anonymous health and safety inspector who said:

> "The workload is so overwhelming you don't know where to start. It is soul destroying. I have no sense of making any difference."

That is shocking.

Other quotes indicate that inspectors do make a difference. For example, one inspector says that when he goes on site, helmets are immediately put on. Inspectors make a difference, but one can understand how soul-destroying their work load is.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): We all have great concerns about any death, particularly in the construction industry. A significant amount of large-scale construction takes place in my constituency. However, it strikes me as bizarre that only one in 20 accidents that result in injury are investigated, according to the hon. Gentleman's quote. I simply cannot believe that. I ask that he investigate further and provide full information to the Minister. Clearly, there are obligations on any employer, particularly in the construction industry, to ensure that there is a full report, and the Health and Safety Executive is brought in if there is a serious accident leading to fatality.

Harry Cohen: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. I will not follow up on it, as other hon. Members will not have a chance to speak. However, it is clear that there are not enough inspectors for the many accidents that occur. That is the central point. They do not do nearly as many inspections as they would like to do.

Insufficient money has been allocated. "Prospects for Safety" states:

> "HSE did not receive the full amount it bid for and, in reality, it is not getting any more money."

It goes on to give figures. There is a relatively small increase, which comes about because of what the HSE charges the nuclear, rail and offshore sectors. The document continues:

> "HSE is merely being allowed to spend more of what it expects or hopes to receive from the new regime for charging duty-holders to process their safety cases."

The Government are not putting enough money in, and "Prospects for Safety" comments:

> "The Health and Safety Executive should be given at least £35 million extra each year in real terms so that it can:
>
> Double the number of inspectors so each workplace is inspected at least once every five years;
>
> Inspect each new workplace in the first year of operation, rather than five or 10 years down the line, if at all;
>
> Invest in scientific expertise to research and develop procedures and devices of benefit to health and safety at work;
>
> Provide professional forensic support by scientific staff to back up HSE investigations into deaths and injuries at work, similar to that available to the police."

That would be £35 million well spent.

I shall summarise what needs to be done. There must be new regulations for control of asbestos at work. Workers should have the right to know where the asbestos is, and a trade union representative should be involved in the management of that risk. A campaign for corporate accountability has been launched. Its membership includes bereaved people, the TUC and others. It calls for legally binding safety duties on individual company directors, a new law on corporate killing, a substantial increase in the number of health and safety inspectors, a power for union safety representatives to serve provisional improvement notices and many other changes.

The Government must take action. In particular, a new corporate manslaughter offence must be included in the next Queen's Speech and enacted in the next Parliament. There must be no Crown immunity for this place or any other. For example, the Army got away with reported deaths because it claimed Crown immunity. Let us get rid of that, but get many more health and safety inspectors and more cash in the system. We could start with an extra £35 million.

3.39 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): This is an extremely important and serious subject, though perhaps not politically glamorous. It is well worth debating.

The Government appear to be trailing some of their ideas for legislation, which we will doubtless consider shortly. Their ideas have been trailed twice already in the Queen's Speech, and I hope that we see some action before long. As the Minister frankly acknowledged, health and safety is a deteriorating problem. The figures given to me by the TUC show that in almost every major sector of employment last year, the number of major accidents increased.

There is a paradox that I do not understand—I came to the debate today partly to help me understand it. We are getting two contradictory messages. The first message is that our system of health and safety enforcement is extremely weak. According to my figures, only one in 12—rather than one in 20—major accidents, including serious accidents such as amputation, are investigated externally. That should answer the question of the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field). Of the cases that are investigated, only one in 10 results in a prosecution, and in those prosecutions, the average fine is about £5,000, which is ridiculous for a large company. We have a regime which, on many levels, seems to be lax, accommodating and tolerant of accidents.

The second message is a complaint, which the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) tried to make and which I hear every time that I speak to business, about red tape and regulation. When I ask for examples, almost all concern health and safety. How do we reconcile those two factors? I shall come back to how we might reconcile them, but first I want to discuss some issues concerning legislative change.

The big question is corporate killing. In the light of past experience, where it has been almost impossible for the Crown Prosecution Service to launch prosecutions under involuntary manslaughter provisions—the most topical is Railtrack—there is a clear need for a change in legislation. That would attract wide support in business. I was surprised when the hon. Member for Cotswold referred to the Engineering Employers Federation paper, because he read it selectively. One line that he did not read puts a totally different light on it. The EEF said:

> "We therefore support the introduction of a new offence of corporate killing in principle".

In fact, most responsible employers would have no problem with such an offence, because in many respects they are subject to the threat of imprisonment already. People in a small company that is not public can go down for manslaughter. Those involved in aspects such as food safety can go to prison. The Scottish butchers who sold contaminated meat that led to a food poisoning epidemic a few years ago went to prison. This is not a new principle, and most businesses would accept that the most heinous cases should result in criminal penalties.

The problem, which is much more subtle than the hon. Member for Cotswold allowed for, is how we can couch the legislation so that the people who are prosecuted in the big companies are the real offenders and not scapegoats. We can all envisage a situation in a big company in which a relatively weak member of the

[Dr. Vincent Cable]

management team is given the health and safety job, or the company is told that it should have a token woman or member of an ethnic minority in a management position, so it gives them the safety job. Those would be the people who go down if there were a prosecution. Such scapegoating could happen, so the legislation should be careful to avoid it. That is a subtle point, which relates to legislative drafting, not to the principle of corporate killing.

Another issue for legislation concerns statutory immunity for Government. I did not hear that point mentioned, although the Minister read through his list rather quickly and I may have missed it. Why are the Government not subject to the same rules as the private sector? If a senior civil servant is responsible for health and safety in a Government building and, as a result of extreme negligence, another civil servant is killed or seriously injured, why should the civil service not be subject to the same scrutiny and penalties as the private sector? There is no moral or other justification for Crown immunity in the civil service. Many private businesses would accept tough standards of health and safety if they believed that the Government applied the same rigour to themselves as they demand of them.

The Minister spoke about all the targets that the Government are setting. During parliamentary questions, I asked how many Departments are setting themselves proper targets for reducing sickness, but I did not receive a satisfactory answer. Are the Government asking the Health and Safety Executive for help to reduce sickness, as they expect the private sector to do? The Government must lead from the front, not set prescriptions for business.

The Minister spoke about penalties. In many respects, penalties in relation to health and safety are hopelessly inappropriate and trivially small. I did not understand the Minister's point about fixed penalties. That almost reduces health and safety to a parking offence. Token fixed penalties are not appropriate. Serious abuses incur large and painful penalties that are proportionate to the injury and reflect the resources of the company involved. I am not sure how a fixed penalty regime helps enforcement. Perhaps the Minister will explain.

I did not hear the Minister mention rehabilitation. Will he say whether the new legislation will encourage rehabilitation—an aspect in which British industry does so badly? In Sweden, one in two injured employees eventually goes back to work, with the help of the company. In this country, the figure is only one in 10. Trade union research suggests that only one in three British companies has a policy to help with rehabilitation. Will the legislation contain a provision to bring pressure to bear to make rehabilitation part of a company's duty?

Will there be provision for strengthening the position of workplace representatives? A few weeks ago, workplace learning representatives were given enhanced status under new labour legislation. Will those provisions be extended to safety representatives who are crucial for the improvement of safety consciousness? I am talking not only about union representatives. I do not know how many hon. Members received the submission from St. John Ambulance, but it argues that the ability to respond to industrial accidents improves enormously if there are trained first aiders in every workplace. St. John Ambulance asks whether something can be done by example, if not legislation, to give first-aiders a greater status in the labour force. I hope that the legislation will address those issues.

I refer again to the apparent paradox of relatively weak enforcement and businesses constantly telling us that they suffer from over-regulation and red tape. I am sure that the increased number of inspectors do a useful job. Much of their work is unspectacular. It is not about penalising or pursuing companies, but about prevention and advice. All that is useful. However, companies often tell me that the number of powers that the HSE has to enter industrial premises has risen from 150 to 300 in the past 20 years. Many inspectors operate independently. As the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen) said, they may be under a lot of pressure. However, they often work in an entirely unco-ordinated way. One hears stories—some may be apocryphal but sound plausible—that an HSE inspector enters a premises and demands that a floor be laid in the interests of safety, and a few weeks later another says that it should be taken up under a different safety provision.

Such duplication and confusion in the inspection system is a major bugbear. No doubt the Minister has considered the matter before. There should be a designated single inspector who looks at a company in the round, particularly small businesses. Clearly, a careful approach would be needed, because if one inspector were allocated to one company for a period of years, unhealthy relationships could develop. A system is needed that makes it much simpler and easier to implement companies' regulatory obligations.

The second specific question about enforcement concerns risk assessment and cost-benefit analyses, which the hon. Member for Cotswold spoke about. I have one good example of that which, if it is true, is an appalling reflection on the system. It was brought to my attention about a year ago by an organisation called the British Compressed Air Society, which represents a group of companies that deal with pneumatic equipment. It was concerned about a rather technical but important area of industrial safety: whole body vibrations through equipment. Arm vibrations and the problems of pneumatic drills are a separate issue.

Apparently, the British authorities, either in the Department or the HSE, prepared their own regulation, which they then took to the European Union to turn into a European directive. They did not consult the industry or the unions: they acted within the industrial safety machinery. Once they had obtained European approval for the directive, someone in the British Government decided that a risk assessment was needed. That was carried out and it was concluded that the costs of the new regulation would exceed the benefits by a factor of seven. Costs of billion of pounds would now be inflicted on the industry, quite unnecessarily. As the industry explained, it could meet the Government's objectives with a proper risk-bases approach. It could adapt the equipment in a way that met the objectives. However, the Government pressed ahead. They had got European approval and the directive is now in the process of being implemented.

I hope that the Minister can confirm whether that story is true. If it is, and there is no reason why the BCAS should have told me an untruth, it illustrates the extraordinarily cumbersome way in which the Government deal with regulatory problems, the lack of prior consultation with both sides of industry and the fact that they either do not carry out a risk assessment or ignore its findings. There are some important lessons to be learned.

The debate is narrowly constructed around the issue of health and safety at work. As health and safety is part of a wider culture, it is probably appropriate to refer to the news stories this morning about how the recommendations of the Cullen and Uff reports have not been implemented. In the Cullen case, 20 of the 40 recommendations that were accepted by the then Secretary of State have never been implemented. Only one in five of the Uff recommendations have ever been implemented. As the Minister has a responsibility for railways, as well as for health and safety, perhaps he can explain to us what has gone wrong. Is it a failure of the companies? Is a failure of Government? Why is the safety culture that we want industry to take seriously not being applied in an area that is of enormous public concern?

3.54 pm

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): May I say to the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) that John Monks's investment in speaking at the Liberal Democrat spring conference certainly paid dividends. I recognised the TUC brief all the way through the hon. Gentleman's speech. I agreed with much of what he said, but I did not go along with the idea that no woman or black person could be in charge of health and safety. That may be a difference between Labour and Liberal Democrat Members.

The most remarkable speech that we have heard so far was that from the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown). I was astonished that, although he conceded that there were problems with health and safety, he did not talk about them and offered no solutions, even ones that might be different from mine. He talked instead about retrenching the health and safety regime, but if the Conservative party has nothing to add to the debate other than a request for existing legislation to be retrenched, it is out of touch with the needs of modern Britain.

Even now, we see Tory Members of Parliament leaping up and down and becoming highly agitated about industrial disputes. However, Parliament and the country must recognise that, although 500,000 days were lost last year through industrial stoppages of all kinds, 6 million to 7 million days are lost every year through injuries at work or health breakdowns for occupational reasons. The scale of health and safety need is massive, compared with the issues that have preoccupied the Conservative party for a generation.

It is about time that we realised what that problem means, as it results in a loss of efficiency in industry and a huge cost to the nation. My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen) quoted the figure of £23 billion, I think. It is interesting that one of those who drew attention to that figure was the deputy director-general of the CBI. The issue concerns not only employees, but all of us and how we develop the safety culture that we need.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. Gentleman has slightly misrepresented what I said. I am very concerned about any aspect of health and safety where people are injured or killed. No one condones that in any way. The Opposition are not against health and safety legislation, but we want good, well targeted and, above all, necessary legislation. That does not prevent us from criticising the Government when we think that they have got things wrong.

Mr. Lloyd: I do not disagree. Indeed, I found the hon. Gentleman's speech interesting. He was effectively saying that the Conservative party is in favour of health and safety, but we cannot afford too much of it. That is radically different from what even the CBI says.

I do not want to dwell on the hon. Gentleman's speech, but he made another two astonishing points. One was about not criminalising civil offences. If I drive my car recklessly or carelessly, however, there is no circumstance in which that would not be considered a criminal offence, because I have put the safety of my passengers, my fellow citizens and myself at risk. The idea that we can do that in the workplace and it should be only a civil offence is barbaric. It takes us back to the baronial rights that I thought even the Conservative party had gone beyond.

The hon. Gentleman is equally wrong about white asbestos. He said that insurance companies were concerned about massive payouts, not for mesothelioma—although that is a dreadful form of cancer—but for asbestosis. The hon. Gentleman may have doubts about the mesothelioma-causing properties of white asbestos, but I hope that he has none about the asbestosis-causing properties of white asbestos. If he has, he is sadly wrong.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Again, the hon. Gentleman has misrepresented what I said. I did not say that there would be no circumstances in which criminal sanctions should be invoked in health and safety legislation; I said that there was an increasing tendency for the House to pass legislation in which criminal sanctions are involved in essential civil matters. That is totally different from what the hon. Gentleman said.

Of course there will be people who contracted mesothelioma—a dreadful disease that leads to a dreadful death—from blue asbestos and brown asbestos, and there should be proper legislation and proper compensation where workers have been proven to contract it. However, that is different from saying that the scientific evidence—at least the evidence that I have been given—shows that white asbestos is as dangerous as blue or brown asbestos.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Edward O'Hara): Order. Before we proceed, I must point out that some interventions are at the limits of tolerance. Many hon. Members want to catch my eye. I appeal for co-operation in limiting interventions so that as many Members as possible can contribute to the debate.

Mr. Lloyd: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall not give way again to the hon. Member for Cotswold, who is a nuisance.

Asbestosis is not a bag of laughs in any circumstances: it is an extremely unpleasant condition. Beyond any doubt, it is caused by asbestos, including white asbestos.

[Mr. Lloyd]

The key factor in health and safety is the culture. Firms that set out to achieve a high standard of health and safety can do so. For many years, the chemical firm DuPont ran a 100 per cent. non-accident regime. The staff, from the management right the way through the work force, tried to achieve that goal, and the company did what it set out to do. All firms should follow that example. We need to examine how best to develop that culture.

I was pleased to hear the Minister emphasise the need for partnership. If full partnership across the work force—from top management down to the bottom—were ever needed in any aspect of corporate life, it must be in the creation of a health and safety culture. I strongly endorse the suggestion of examining the role of the safety representative. There remains a gap in respect of the right of properly accredited safety representatives—usually sensible people—to stop the job when it becomes dangerous. Some jobs, especially in the construction industry, can be incredibly dangerous, yet the work force may not have the protection of automatic dismissal when the safety representative finds an unsafe regime. We do not develop a safety culture as we should.

Several hon. Members referred to the need for proper sanctions for corporate killing. The gap in the law is huge. It is years since the Herald of Free Enterprise and Ladbroke Grove incidents, but we are still discussing whether prosecutions should take place. There must be proper sanctions and, for the most heinous crimes, people should go to jail. In any other walk of life, killing people or putting lives at risk is considered so serious that those responsible are put in jail with no compunction. The comparison with motor offences is immediate and obvious.

It is now 18 months since consultation on the White Paper closed. That involves another Department, but I ask the Minister for joined-up government. The message should go out that we want suitable legislation in the next parliamentary Session.

I should like to say a few words about the Health and Safety Executive. Many dedicated people make good things happen and spend their careers trying to improve the culture and climate of health and safety. The Health and Safety Executive remains significantly underfunded. I was pleased to hear what the Minister said about the bid. Perhaps it is up to Back Benchers to pressurise the Treasury to ensure the success of that bid. The Health and Safety Executive has to ration funds, mainly because it does not have the resources to pursue prosecutions. Last year, 1,500 prosecutions out of a total of 2,000 were successful. That can be seen as good or bad: prosecution is not the only way of making progress, but it can be important in extreme cases. We must bring transgressors before the courts, but not enough of them are being put in that position.

The courts let the Health and Safety Executive down by the penalties that they impose. The accurate figure for fines is not just below £5,000 across the board, as we should not include large fines of £100,000 or more. A simple calculation of what someone would be paid by an insurance company for losing a finger shows that an employer is asked to pay less than an insurance company. That cannot be right. It is not a practical deterrent.

Many other hon. Members want to speak, so I shall conclude. I am grateful to the Government for this debate. The subject may not be glamorous, but it is massively important, so I congratulate the Minister. He said that the newest and possibly greatest challenge is occupational health, but there is nothing new about the issue. Ever since the old nursery rhyme "Pop goes the weasel" was written, we have known that occupational hazards kill our fellow citizens. Occupational health is a new challenge only because we have not attended to it before. It is, however, an enormous challenge and we must get it right, because otherwise we are taking part in the brutal slaughter or the erosion of the health and quality of life of many of our fellow citizens. That cannot be just.

4.5 pm

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd), and promise that I will not jump up and down on the subject of industrial tribunals. He has seen me do that too often and too recently, so I shall behave myself on that issue. I am aware of the time and will attempt to be brief, but I wish to preface my remarks with an apology, because I may not be able to stay for the whole of the debate.

Many hon. Members have said that health and safety is vital to all our constituents. I am sure that all hon. Members have had tragic cases brought to them, some of which involve negligence, some are genuine accidents and some are due to poor working practices. Fortunately, the record of Conservative and Labour Governments is generally good on this issue. During the last 10 years of Conservative government the number of fatalities halved to 249 in 1997. Clearly, that is still too many, but it compares well with the 1,310 fatalities in Germany in the same period. Good progress has been made, and the Labour Government elected in 1997 inherited a generally good situation, although not across the board.

The Government plan to pursue further changes. In December 2000, they announced a new health and safety Bill, and we await action on that. I welcome the intentions that underlie the "Revitalising Health and Safety" programme, although the Minister will understand that I am not thrilled at the prospect of another Government 10-year plan. I hope that it does not suggest a lack of urgency on the part of the Government on what are important issues.

Several guiding principles must be followed when shaping health and safety legislation or developing initiatives. One of those is the test of reasonableness. I suspect that, in the past few days, we have all reminded ourselves of the 1974 Act. The important opening principle set out in that Act is that all employers should provide, as far as reasonably practicable, a healthy and safe workplace. That test of reasonableness is critical, because it seeks to balance definable risks against the practical actions necessary to minimise risk. I am wary of suggesting that risk can be completely eliminated.

We must get the balance right, or we risk ending up with silly extremes that undermine the whole argument for health and safety. A case was brought to my attention recently that involved a man who was refused a job because he was too tall. A misinterpretation of the regulations led to concern that he would damage his back. I am sure that all hon. Members are familiar with similar cases, and I do not wish to involve the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris) in a debate, but I am sure that no such concern would apply to me.

We must avoid extreme cases. Yesterday, an announcement was made in Brussels of the introduction of the physical agents vibration directive. Although we await the final details of the directive, as I understand from some of the reports, if it were to be enacted as it stands someone using a road drill could not do so for more than 47 minutes in a working day. Clearly, such a situation would be unacceptable. I cannot imagine how the Government would ever get their road building programme under way.

Mr. Clapham: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Prisk: I will not give way because of the time pressure.

I am aware of the potential cost of the directive. Can the Minister confirm that the cost of implementing it would be between £3 billion and £4.8 billion, as the HSE has set out? Will he tell us if and when the Government intend to enact the directive? I believe that there is a maximum three-year period. Do the Government intend to enact it as it stands, or will they review its proposals? Can the Minister guarantee that the Government will not try in any way to gold plate or enhance the nature of the directive, if and when it is implemented? Gold plating, to which several hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown), have referred, is an important and worrying matter that we must bear in mind. We must ensure that regulations are not disproportionate to the risks involved.

Another principle of good health and safety initiatives is that legislation should set minimum standards. If we are over-prescriptive in our legislation, or if the standards set are unrealistically high, that can be counterproductive and undermine good will. That good will is essential, because without it, the ability to create a culture that embraces the idea of a healthy and reasonably safe working place is undermined. That is why I welcome the partnership approach in some of the Government's initiatives.

I am a chartered surveyor by profession, so the construction industry is familiar to me. The working well together initiative is a good example of active partnership in a sector that needs much work. However, only with leadership from within the industry can such initiatives succeed. I hope that the Minister will agree that work by organisations, including the National Federation of Builders, is helping to provide that important leadership.

I ask the Government to recognise the need to ensure that the regulatory burden is appropriate and, in particular, to have due consideration for small businesses. Last year, 4,642 new regulations were implemented, which could represent a considerable burden for small businesses. In framing health and safety legislation, I ask Ministers always to bear in mind the problems of the smallest firms, especially those with less than 10 employees.

On that note, I welcome the publication of the Government's regulatory reform action plan, with its proposals to reform the complex fire and safety legislation. At present, there are some 120 different measures relating to that. I am pleased to see plans for consolidation, but that is only the beginning. There is much, much more to do.

My final point on the framing of Government policy for health and safety legislation is to stress that there is no such thing as absolute safety. We should always make that clear. Accidents will happen, as hon. Members have said. They happen in the workplace and elsewhere. It is important that neither the legislation that we pass nor the language that the HSE and Government use encourages the belief, even inadvertently, that we can create absolute safety and somehow insure against all risks. I genuinely believe that that could encourage people to be less careful, which, ironically, would be counterproductive to what we are trying to do in the first place.

The United Kingdom under both Labour and Conservative Governments has a generally good record. Creating healthy and relatively safe workplaces is very important. I call on the Government, in developing their policies, to ensure that they recognise the test of reasonableness in the measures that they introduce and in their implementation. They should accept that legislation should establish minimum standards, and that good will and voluntary good practice are just as important as legislation. They should also ensure that they never encourage a notion of absolute safety, because if they do, they will undermine their good intentions.

4.14 pm

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I declare an interest as I chair the all-party group on health and safety, and the Union of Construction Allied Trades and Technicians sponsors my constituency party. I also want to thank the Minister for his hard work in ensuring that interim measures were introduced to pay compensation under the Pneumoconiosis etc. (Workers' Compensation) Act 1979 to people suffering from mesothelioma cancer, who are awaiting next month's hearing in the House of Lords. That was an important development.

I want to refer briefly to construction, but I shall avoid going over ground that has already been covered. I shall also discuss the need for an increase in the number of Health and Safety Executive inspectors. Finally, I want to talk about the role of the trade union safety representative, which needs to be enhanced. Before I do that, I want to refer to a couple of points, one of which was made by the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) and the other by the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk).

I refer the hon. Member for Cotswold to several recent reports, one of which was from the interim chemical review committee, which is a committee of the United Nations environment programme. It suggests that all forms of asbestos should be subject to international trade controls to eliminate the risk

[Mr. Michael Clapham]

associated with the material. Studies in France and Japan suggest that white asbestos is clearly a carcinogen. It may not be as dangerous as blue and brown asbestos, but none the less it presents a danger.

The hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford referred to the new directive, which is likely to come in, to protect people who use vibrating equipment. Has the Minister considered gold plating that directive? There are already 113,000 claims registered by men who are suffering from vascular and neurological damage from using vibrating tools in the mining industry. If the hon. Gentleman were to come and sit with me on a Saturday morning at my surgery, he would see men whose fingers are like four white stubs. They come to see me about the arrangements for paying compensation. We must ensure that that directive is effective. If it is to be effective, the Minister needs to consider its application carefully.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen) stated that there have been 105 deaths in the construction industry in the past year. As he knows, the Deputy Prime Minister was so shocked by the appalling statistics covering the construction industry in the past 10 years that in February 2001 he arranged for a construction summit, which resulted in an action plan being drawn up to be applied to the industry. It would have involved all partners, but unfortunately the Construction Confederation has withdrawn from that partnership. A number of pilots were to have been set up across the industry, but the Construction Confederation has for some reason decided to withdraw its participation. Will the Minister try to persuade that body to become involved again and get the pilots back on track, because they present a real opportunity to take positive action? We should take a radical look at the construction industry and consider how we can persuade employers, unions, the HSE and insurers to work together to ensure that we attain a culture in which the number of accidents in construction is cut.

I turn to the argument for an increase in the number of health and safety inspectors. I take note of the Minister's comments on the bidding process. The strategic plan for 2001-04 includes the projection that the issuing of notices and prosecutions will increase by 14 per cent. and 10.5 per cent. respectively. However, the HSC data for 2000-01 show that the HSE is likely to fall short of its projections. If that were to happen, it would be because there were too few inspectors.

I refer the Minister to the campaign being conducted by Prospect, the trade union that represents health and safety inspectors. It calculates that, for an extra £35 million, the number of inspections could be doubled. At present, a factory works unit can expect a visit from an HSE inspector once every 10 years, but the extra investment would cut that by half. I ask the Minister to consider the serious proposals that Prospect has made, and the possibility that we could double the number of inspections for that outlay.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the inspections should be targeted at those companies that have a bad health and safety record, so that if there were a serious breach of health and safety, the company could be inspected every six months or every year? If there were no serious breach, a company could be inspected every three or five years. Does the hon. Gentleman think that that might be a constructive approach?

Mr. Clapham: We certainly need to ensure that there is service right across the industry. The HSE may consider how it could ensure that a company with a bad record was inspected more regularly than others, but we would still need across-the-board inspections. We should leave the HSE to draw up its agenda for dealing with companies with a worse record.

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. Friend is right in saying that we must have universalism. Advice is needed in the agricultural sector, as it is a dangerous sector in which to work, although it is not always recognised as such. However, the most important issue relates to occupational health, which concerns long-term chronic illness and death, rather than injuries. That is why we need universal inspection.

Mr. Clapham: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. While we are speaking about occupational health, I refer the Minister to the fall in the number of people covered by occupational health schemes. I read somewhere recently—I regret that I cannot remember the reference—an article containing statistics provided by the Government's chief medical officer. It stated that, in the past 25 years, the number of people covered by occupational health schemes has fallen from 52 to 32 per cent. That is why we need more inspectors. I hope that the Minister will take that on board. We do not want a repeat of the problem that afflicts my constituency and all mining areas, where cases of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease have resulted in 177,000 claims being registered. In my constituency, we have the highest rate of disability anywhere in the country. That is the legacy of the coal mining industry.

I believe that occupational health schemes should be plugged into teaching hospitals and universities. The coal mining industry had an occupational health scheme that was second to none, but it failed to link up with teaching hospitals and universities to ensure that longitudinal studies were undertaken. As a result, tens of thousands of men left the industry each year due to disability. The occupational health scheme never drew the connection between the numbers leaving and chronic bronchitis and emphysema. It is important that where schemes operate, they are linked to teaching hospitals and universities.

I now turn to the announced role of the health and safety representative. Health and safety legislation brought many improvements. One of the best improvements was the trade union health and safety representative, who was trained and was able to ensure that risk in the work place was mitigated. We now need to consider carefully how we enhance that role. My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) suggested that trade union safety representatives should be given the right to stop the job. Trade union representatives in Australia already have that right, and it would be a step forward in tackling some of the current difficulties in United Kingdom work places, particularly in construction.

When the Minister considers new legislation, will he bear the railways in mind? The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) referred to the rail industry. There is concern about drivers' hours, which are not covered by European regulations because they were excluded from the original directive. The new directive introduced in 2000 could be extended to cover them. Will the Minister consider that carefully? I am told that the 1994 regulations that apply to train drivers and their hours are not suitable. Train drivers work long hours, and Lord Cullen made reference to that when he reported on the Ladbroke Grove accident. Will the Minister consider extending the new directive to cover train drivers' hours?

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before we proceed, it may help those present if I indicate that I intend to call the Minister at 5.20. Hon. Members can see how many of their colleagues want to contribute, and may tailor their contributions accordingly.

4.29 pm

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): I confess that it is with a certain amount of trepidation that I stand to say a few words. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) has been a regular jousting partner of mine in the Standing Committee on the Proceeds of Crime Bill—I am not sure that it has been an equal contest. He came to me first thing this afternoon and said: "Well, it is health and safety. Are the Tories in favour or against?" I would like to think that he was only joking, because we clearly take such matters seriously. I will canter through what I was going to say in a few minutes because I appreciate that many other hon. Members want to have their say.

One difficulty with health and safety is that it is all too often trivialised. Today's front page of *The Daily Telegraph*—not natural reading for Labour Members—makes great play of the EU directive on physical vibration. Perhaps I am being flippant, but considering the state of London's roads, at times I would be grateful if workers were at their drills for as long as 47 minutes in one day.

I take on board the comment by the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) that health and safety is a major issue that has affected the mining industry. I hope that it will not be trivialised, but raised in importance. I agree with the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) who said that too often insufficient resources are put into the enforcement of rules and regulations, particularly for the planning side of local government.

I was grateful that the Minister recognised that the private sector has an important role to play in partnerships. The construction industry is particularly important, and I have already made it clear that it is a big industry in the Cities of London and Westminster, where we have an unacceptable number of fatalities.

Next door to the offices that I occupied when I ran a business before entering Parliament last June was a large construction site—indeed, those who have recently travelled two or three miles eastwards will have seen that much of the City of London is a construction site. Two or three high-profile accidents on that site led to fatalities, and I talked to safety representatives about what had happened.

There seemed to be no real evidence that consultancy status had had a particular effect. The problem was that relatively young construction workers who were on drugs or had been drinking fell from great heights to their deaths. I do not want to trivialise the issue, and I accept that management should have ensured that employees were not putting themselves at such risk.

Risk is an inherent part of daily life, and we cannot reduce it to nil. It is difficult for hon. Members, but particularly for Labour Members, to fully appreciate that accidents will happen, some of which will be fatal. Related figures on risk have been put into statistical terms for the rail industry, which has been given the prospect of enormous investments in new and innovative safety schemes. Inevitably, the railway industry—I am not attaching blame to the Government for this—must take a sensible view on risk, because all modes of travel have risks. A certain number of deaths per 1 million passenger miles is inevitable. That is not to say that great care should not be taken; many recent incidents on the railways have been due to individual driver error or human error.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) hit the nail on the head when he talked of the importance of common sense in examining all health and safety issues. As I said, prior to entering Parliament, I ran a small business—an office business with a dozen staff. I was worried about the level of over-regulation. I was one of two directors and we moved office on three occasions during my seven or eight years there. On each occasion, small-scale internal works were carried out in the offices, and health and safety officials had to visit our site several times to sign bits of paper. At one point, we put a kitchen in for the good of employees, and we had to have a health and safety inspection.

I had no objection to health and safety inspections or the bureaucracy that went with them. However, such inspections in tandem with payroll costs and further regulations cause great difficulty for a small business. I tried to quantify how much of my time as a director was taken up by Government regulations. It was about 10 or 15 per cent., plus time spent dealing with payroll and VAT issues. That is of great concern.

I would like to think that I was a model employer, and that most of my former employees would be happy to agree with that thought. However, it is easy to see that such a burden falling on the shoulders of a director in a relatively small business—perhaps even smaller than the one that I was trying to run—could cause real problems with profitability, particularly if the economy began to slow down.

Mr. Davidson: The hon. Gentleman may or may not have been a model employer, but he certainly is a model Tory. I asked, half in jest, if the Tories were for or against health and safety, after listening to the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown). It is clear that they are against it, because the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field), whose greatest risk is detergent burn from laundering cash, has not accepted that rules and regulations must be made in considerable detail. Otherwise, employers cheat; they

[Mr. Davidson]

often cannot be trusted to be decent and to abide by rules. In such circumstances, bad employers benefit to the disadvantage of good employers.

Mr. Field: I am very sorry that the hon. Gentleman has such low regard for employers. I think that the overwhelming majority of businesses are run entirely in the right way. If the hon. Gentleman feels that strongly about private employers, why is he not pushing much harder to ensure that Crown immunity is withdrawn? Clearly, the same concerns should apply to the public sector.

I appreciate that time is getting on. I shall wind up with this last thought, which is slightly outside the issue of health and safety at work. Many of the new norms for health and safety at work may apply to the private property rental sector. If we are to encourage affordable housing in London for the public sector workers who may require it, there is a risk that a significant number of the directives that apply to businesses will also apply to, and be gold plated in, the housing rental market. I hasten to add that I have no interest whatever in that market, but a private Member's Bill is being introduced. I look forward to hearing the Minister's reply to the debate.

4.37 pm

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): The hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) should not be duped by an individual piece of scientific or medical work. Some people still believe that the earth is the centre of the universe, that AIDS is not caused by a virus and that adult cells are better than stem cells.

We do not know how much blue and/or brown asbestos people have been subjected to, and we do not know whether they are an important part of the etiology of mesothelioma. I revere the odd dissident, but the balance of evidence is that white asbestos is involved in the etiology of mesothelioma. One must accept a consensual basis of science and medicine; that is what most people put to the test. For example, I know that the triple vaccine is much better than the single vaccine at preventing infection. We must not be fooled by the odd individual piece of work. Indeed, it is not the chemistry but the shape of the particle that is important, so there is no need to refer to chemistry. It is how the crystal is formed and shaped and its needle-like properties that induce health problems.

In the interest of allowing other Members to speak, I will make just one or two quick points about health and safety. Some people think that we are lucky not to be living in the age of the industrial revolution, and that we no longer have six-day weeks, 13-hour shifts and child labour, but I am not sure that such conditions do not still exist in many areas of the country. Seventy-one per cent. of people who fill in forms in workplaces report ill health due to their work. I am prepared to believe that their irritability, fatigue, sleeplessness, back pain and individual problems are related to their workplaces.

The social class basis of ill health and accidents persists. It has been the same since statistics were first calculated. Those who live in deprived areas, who have low-paid work, who live in poverty conditions, who work in the areas of the country where jobs require low skill or low industry, suffer more ill health—and so do the children. That statistic has not changed, whether it is for cancers, accidents or whatever. People in social class V are less advantaged than those in social class I. It has always been like that, and whenever politicians and trade unionists suggest changing health and safety conditions, business always screams blue murder and fights the improvements inch by inch, whatever they are.

The Government must treat health and safety much more seriously. They have committed themselves to tackling health inequality. The gaping divide between the health of those who are well off and those who are poor—we now call them socially excluded—is still part and parcel of Britain today, and it must be eliminated. Many new problems are appearing in British workplaces. Stress and mental health problems are starting to appear. Musculo-skeletal disorders have been mentioned. Violence and fooling in workplaces is a major problem, due to bad management. The organisation and downsizing of companies is edging many workers towards breaking point. We still overwork in this country. We still have the longest hours in the European Union, and we do more work for less pay. Sickness absence and suchlike problems are combined with unhealthy workplace practices.

Occupational health services are unevenly distributed. They are common only in large, unionised workplaces, with 96 per cent. of the health sector, but only 48 per cent. of education and 35 per cent. of the voluntary sector covered. Not all occupational health schemes offer the same services. Surveys suggest that although most offer first aid, proactive work such as health surveillance is offered by only half, and only a third offer advice about the prevention of injuries. Occupational health services are more often involved in disciplinary matters than in rehabilitation. That means that they are busier trying to get rid of people who suffer ill health than helping people back to work. The TUC is calling for a legal requirement that employers should have such a rehabilitation policy as part of their safety policy.

Occupational health should feature much more in the education and training of doctors. All doctors will come across people whose health has suffered due to their work. The HSE has been working with the General Medical Council to get more occupational health work in the curriculum for doctors, and I hope that medical schools will help in that. It is beginning to have some success. I welcome those developments, and I urge the GMC to adopt the proposals forthwith.

A more holistic and proactive approach could be taken to occupational health. I highlight that fact with some recent research on violence and mental health care. Violent attacks might be a special case in terms of health and safety, but as the violence task force recently pointed out, that problem is more prominent than was thought. It affects not only mental health workers, but social workers, care assistants, the police, medics, teachers, parking wardens, staff at benefit centres, and even Members of Parliament. Workers in call centres comprise one in 50 of the British work force, and they complain of frequent verbal abuse.

A clear holistic and proactive approach to the problem has been taken up by the nursing unions and nursing councils. They have become involved in assessing the prevalence of the problem. The training of staff, the design of buildings, the analysis of NHS policies and the identification of risk factors all feature in that report. It found an amazing fact, which I quote from the report. An anonymous person says:

> "Throughout my 25 years in the health service I have probably been involved in about 40 fire drills—but I've never experienced a fire! I've been on about eight resuscitation study days, but I've never had to resuscitate anybody!"

However, she says that she is subjected to violence at least three times a week in her workplace—the South London and Maudsley in-patient mental health unit.

I urge the Government to consider the new problems that are emerging with occupational health and with the new diseases. Some issues involve more than hard hats—sad as the problems in the mining industry are and difficult as it has been to achieve the present legislation to deal with them. We must continue to work on those issues, but in any health and safety initiatives we must recognise and do something about the new diseases and health problems.

4.45 pm

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): I welcome the debate. If anyone had any doubt about the position of the two main parties, they had only to listen to the constructive speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) and the disgraceful speech made by the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown). If the Opposition are serious about becoming closer to the trade unions, his speech was not the way to go about it.

I shall focus on fatal accidents and corporate manslaughter. Before I became a Member of Parliament I was a personal injury lawyer—I suppose that I still am, as I am a partner in a firm, but I have not had any cases since I was elected. My constituency is sponsored by the GMB. During my professional life, I represented many families bereaved by avoidable accidents. Coincidentally, the first fatal case that I dealt with fell on the same day as the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 came into effect, 1 October 1978.

The fatalities with which I was involved—the deaths of individual employees, motorists and pedestrians—usually went unremarked in the press. However, the feelings of loss and the sense of injustice suffered by the victims' families were the same as those of people whom I helped who had lost loved ones in major incidents such as the Zeebrugge ferry disaster or the King's Cross fire.

During my investigations, I inspected what was left of King's Cross tube station three days after the fire. Nothing that I had previously experienced could have prepared me for the sights and smells of the fire's devastation. As I took statements from victims, distraught relatives, firefighters and tube staff, and as I sat day after day through the 93-day public inquiry and repeatedly heard of the failure of the senior management of London Underground, it struck me as outrageous that neither the company nor any of its managers would face criminal proceedings for the 31 deaths. That was because of the inadequacy of the criminal law.

The same problem prevailed after the Zeebrugge ferry disaster. In his inquiry report into the disaster, Mr. Justice Sheen said:

> "All concerned in management, from the members of the board of directors down . . . are guilty of fault. From top to bottom the body corporate was infected with the disease of sloppiness . . . The failure on the part of . . . management to give proper and clear directions was a contributory cause of the disaster."

The prosecution in that case also collapsed because of the same inadequacies of the criminal law. Those inadequacies have been highlighted recently by railway disasters such as the Ladbroke Grove rail crash.

It is not only the headline-grabbing fires and rail crashes that concern me. In the past 10 years more than 3,000 people have been killed at work, and hundreds of members of the public have met their deaths due to corporate neglect. Last year there was a 32 per cent. increase in the number of fatal accidents at work. Public confidence in industry and in the enforcement authorities suffers when the perpetrators of serious accidents escape prosecution on a technicality, rather than having their culpability tested in court to the same standards as apply to a private individual on a charge of manslaughter.

Only three companies have been successfully prosecuted for manslaughter. OLL Ltd. was prosecuted for the Lyme Regis bay disaster. The second case involved Jackson Transport, a young employee of which was drenched in a deadly chemical when wearing only a boiler suit. The third was in August, when a construction worker fell from the barn that he was building, where he was working with no safety equipment whatever. The company suffered a £25,000 fine, and that was the end of it.

Those three convictions expose the absurdity of the law of corporate manslaughter as it stands. Corporate guilt rests entirely on someone being able to prove the individual guilt of a senior company officer. However reckless or grossly negligent the company as a whole, it will escape conviction if no individual person—no "controlling mind" of the company—can be found guilty of manslaughter. The law is thus biased against small "one-man band" companies, in which it is easier to identify the individual manager or director to blame. Large companies escape because the accident is due not to the fault of an individual, but to the collective failure of the company's management systems. The bigger the company, the less chance there is of a successful prosecution.

I believe that only imposing duties on the most senior officers of a company will ensure that safety is given the same priority as profit. Safety awareness, and the great responsibility that it entails, should lie with those at the top—the chairman and chief executive—not with the employees, such as train drivers or ships' crews, who are always put up as the fall guys.

In 1996 the Law Commission recommended proposals for reform. When we were elected in 1997 an interdepartmental working group was set up. On 1 February 2000, the Select Committee report on the Health and Safety Executive recommended that the Government introduce legislation on corporate killing as soon as possible.

On 18 April 2000 I introduced a ten-minute Bill with a threefold purpose. It would have created a new criminal offence of corporate killing when the conduct of a company's management fell far below that which could reasonably be expected. Secondly, if a company were

[Mr. Andrew Dismore]

convicted of corporate killing, the court would not only have been able to punish the company severely, it would have had the power to order the company to put right the failings that had caused the death. Thirdly, it would have imposed on the senior management of the company—its chairman and managing director—an overarching responsibility for the health and safety of its work force, and, equally importantly, that of the public. When companies kill, it would have put their directors in the dock to answer for their actions and failings. If convicted, they would have faced not only the full rigours of the law, but the equally important power of the court to order them to put matters right for the future.

This is not about bashing responsible companies, it is about promoting safety. Most companies do a good job, and look after their employees and the public properly. However, some do not, and they use loopholes in the law to escape their just desserts. After I introduced that Bill, I received a letter from a Home Office Minister, who said that the Government accepted the principles behind it and confirmed that the Government would deliver—they were aware of the need to reform the law, and the Bill had added to their desire to do that.

In May 2000 a consultation paper was issued, containing many excellent suggestions. However, it would not have penalised directors for personal liability, other than by disqualification. That was a serious weakness in the proposals. The consultation ended in September 2000. Of the 166 responses, only one employer organisation was opposed to the new offence; everybody else was broadly in support. I was pleased to see the commitment on page 33 of our general election manifesto last year that:

> "law reform is necessary to make provisions against corporate manslaughter."

I tabled a question after the election and was told in June 2001 that the Government intended to publish final proposals as soon as they had completed consideration of the responses to the consultation. They were determined to bring forward clear and workable legislation that would hold undertakings to account for serious wrongdoing and would legislate as soon as parliamentary time allowed. In November 2001, I was again told that legislation would be introduced as soon as parliamentary time allowed.

Two days ago, I was told that since the end of the consultation period the working group had met three times and had had informal meetings, no further meetings were scheduled and its report was expected soon; we might expect to see a digest of responses published shortly. There was no reference to legislation as soon as time allowed. I hope that the Minister will confirm that that was an oversight.

It is six years since the Law Commission published its proposals in March 1996. The subject has become such a popular and important topic for discussion that it is even on the A-level law syllabus now. It is a year and a half since the end of the consultation, and in that time hundreds of people have died at work because of the failings of businesses that kill their employees—and their customers as well—instead of providing the services that people are entitled to expect.

The longer it takes for legislation to be introduced, the longer it will be before senior directors take their responsibilities seriously, and the more people will die. If we are to prevent further tragedies such as the Hillsborough disaster, the Clapham, Southall or Paddington train crashes and the Bradford City, King's Cross or Piper Alpha fires, tough new laws must be introduced, fast.

4.53 pm

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West): This has been an interesting debate. It has also been educational, not only in terms of the very positive contributions from Labour Members, but because Opposition Members, particularly Conservatives, have a very old fashioned view of health and safety at work. They appear to believe that health and safety are in opposition to profit, but that is not the case. In the modern work force, those two things go together. Progressive employers know that if their employees are off sick the company is not making a profit. In the modern work force, employees are not only the most important asset of a company, but highly trained and hard to replace, because unemployment under the Labour Government is so low, especially in the south-east.

Might I presume to educate Conservative Members, particularly the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown)? When the hon. Gentleman referred to white asbestos—I am aware that *The Daily Telegraph* has been running a campaign on the issue—he talked only about mesothelioma. He appears not to know that asbestos—blue, brown or white—can also cause lung cancer, pleural plaques and asbestosis.

The hon. Members for Cotswold and for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) referred to the recent European Union talks on vibration and the pending directive, and the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford seemed very surprised that the directive could lead to a 47-minute-a-day maximum for somebody using a road drill. I dealt with thousands of cases of vibration white finger before I was elected last June, so I know about vibration, and that limit is not at all unrealistic. My recollection is that in scientific terms the threshold is 2.8 ms^2, which is a measure of the vibration. Often, when that threshold is taken into consideration, the time limit for use comes down to well below an hour.

I want to talk about insurance, particularly employers' liability insurance—a subject on which I hope the Minister and his colleagues can help me, either today or later. A scandal has been brewing in the insurance industry, particularly over asbestos liabilities, which were also mentioned by the hon. Member for Cotswold. Some insurance companies are crying the blues about having to pay out for asbestos claims. They took the premiums, but now they do not want to pay out, and the Government have had to set up the financial services compensation scheme as a kind of industry pool. Labour Members, and Conservative Members, too, I think, will know about the fiasco of Chester Street Holdings, which was a stitch-up by Iron Trades Insurance. Because of that episode, the taxpayer had to bail that company out to some extent, and set up the industry body.

We need an employers' insurance bureau like the motor insurance bureau. The financial services compensation scheme applies only when the employer and the insurer have gone bust. It does not, as I understand it, apply when the employer did not have any employers' liability insurance, or the insurance company could void the policy, or the policy could not be traced. Such gaps will become increasingly apparent in asbestos cases because of the length of time—the gestation period—between when a person worked for a company and when their first symptoms emerge, which can be anything between a minimum of about 14 years and a maximum of about 40 years. We need proper records.

In that vein, I urge the Government to consider changing what limited companies and other organisations have to include in their annual reports. For example, in their annual return to Companies House, limited companies should include details of their employers' liability insurance and their public liability insurance so that subsequent claimants could find out who the insurers were.

In the annual return companies should also name the officer responsible for health and safety. That officer should remain responsible until Companies House is notified otherwise, so that should that officer leave the company, the onus would be on him to ensure that the records were amended. That would allow private or HSE prosecutions of an individual, leading either to imprisonment or to heavy fines.

We need a nominated individual in companies, and each company should include in its annual return an annual safety audit. I urge that on the Government. The inclusion of the insurer's details, the name of the officer responsible for health and safety, and an annual safety audit should cover not only limited companies but all firms, partnerships and bodies corporate in both the private and the public sectors—and the Crown.

I welcome much of what has been said today, and what is in the papers published on this issue by the Government, particularly on corporate killing. I also salute the excellent speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) on that subject. Sadly, he probably has more experience of that than any other Member of Parliament.

I welcome what the Government are saying about imprisonment, because if employers realised that they might be imprisoned, that would give health and safety legislation some teeth. That sanction should be more frequently used, alongside heavier fines. I also welcome what the Government are saying about extra money for the Health and Safety Executive, and the fact that a bid is being made in this year's spending round.

I urge the Government to continue putting their own house in order as regards the health and safety of Government employees. According to the TUC brief, few Departments have yet set targets in line with the national targets set out in the "Revitalising Health and Safety" initiative for reducing the number of major injuries, occupational illnesses and the resulting sickness absences. Perhaps the Minister will disclose more about that at the conference on 29 May.

I have some sympathy with the position adopted by the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford about our health and safety legislation. It needs to be simplified, and I urge that on the Minister and his colleagues. However, simplification should not weaken the legislation but strengthen it. I broadly agree with the hon. Gentleman's proposition—although perhaps not on the detail—that some of the complexities of health and safety legislation can be counterproductive.

I often use the analogy of the video remote control of 10 or 12 years ago. It had about 100 buttons, but because it was so complex, people would use only four of them. The video companies got smart to that and started producing controls with only [illegible] buttons, and people now use six of them. The relative rate of use has increased massively, but so has the absolute rate. People use it more because it is easier. That is the sort of simplification that we want in health and safety legislation, because private and public sector employers would know more clearly where they stand and would be more encouraged to implement and follow it to help prevent the industrial diseases and ill health that plague our economy.

5.1 pm

Mr. Tom Watson (West Bromwich, East): As my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris) said, this has been an instructive debate. We now know that the Conservative party has no intention of introducing new health and safety legislation should it have the chance, and we have also learned that it has little understanding of the conditions faced by thousands of people in the workplace.

My hon. Friend identified an often overlooked aspect of health and safety—work-related accidents on the road. Such accidents have claimed a dramatically high number of lives and the figure is on the increase. The facts are startling. More than 1,000 people die every year in work-related road accidents in company cars or commercial vehicles. That is more than the number of people killed in all other workplace and industrial accidents. Statistically, company car drivers are the worst motorists. Last year almost one in three was involved in an accident, and they are significantly more likely to have been involved in a road accident than any other group of drivers.

It is not surprising that overburdened workers are putting their lives at risk on the roads. The RAC motoring report for 2002 found that the pressures of modern workplace life and the constant lack of time tempt drivers into unsafe driving habits. Three quarters of company car drivers make telephone calls while in their cars. More worryingly, 16 per cent. of them admit that they are always put under pressure by their bosses to drive to meet deadlines. More than 1 million company car drivers admit to falling asleep at the wheel during the past year—so much so that they have to make a conscious effort to stay awake.

The statistics demonstrate the financial incentive for companies to change. The average cost of repairing a company car is £750, and it is nearly £1,400 for a van and £4,500 for a commercial vehicle. Those figures take no account of the cost of lost productivity and employee time. Whether they are the employers of some of the country's 400,000 taxi drivers, the nation's half a million heavy goods vehicle drivers or the owners of the 2.5 million company cars, the responsibility on British firms is clear.

As the Minister said in his opening speech, the Government are committed to health and safety at work. We have a legal infrastructure. I believe that we

[Mr. Tom Watson]

do not need to change the legislation; we need instead to change company culture. With 90 per cent. of businesses not taking action on the health and safety of their employees on the road, we need a wide-ranging comprehensive overhaul of attitudes towards off-site health and safety.

The current voluntary approach means that few companies take action to tackle the problems of safety that affect so many of their employee drivers. Many companies hire staff without giving any thought to managing their risk of accidents, beyond a cursory glance at a driving licence. Fewer than one in five drivers at work has received any training in safe driving or health and safety. The RAC, whose expertise stems from its role as an employer of some 3,000 fleet drivers, with a 1,200-strong patrol force, runs risk assessment and driver training sessions to improve the safety of its drivers. Its drivers are deemed to be at work from the moment they enter their vehicles, and health and safety obligations are applicable from the moment that the engine is switched on.

I admit to hon. Members that I am about to take part in a similar driver safety test at the RAC headquarters in Bestcot in the west midlands, not too far from my constituency, so when I have completed that, I may be able to offer hon. Members a few tips for driving home to their constituencies after weary debates on a Thursday afternoon.

Research shows that businesses with high awareness of health and safety issues also tend to have a better road safety record, so if the general standard of a company's health and safety ethos can be raised, measures aimed at preventing accidents on the road are also more likely to be implemented. The Minister mentioned sectoral targets. Perhaps we should consider trying to establish some voluntary targets for road safety throughout industry.

It should no longer be acceptable for a company's health and safety obligations to begin and end at the reception desk or factory gate. Reducing work-related road accidents will be a win/win situation. Society will benefit from an increase in general levels of road safety and fewer instances of personal tragedy, and business will benefit from reduced losses and increased productivity.

5.6 pm

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): I start by declaring an interest because my trade union, the GMB, supported my campaign and supports my constituency party. As my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen) rightly said, the interest that I am declaring is really a common interest rather than a vested interest, because we all have an interest in raising standards of health and safety.

It was interesting that my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Watson) mentioned long car journeys at the end of the parliamentary week. One of the advantages of being a London MP is that we do not have to make those long trips, which are very dangerous for many hon. Members. We should consider many aspects of what goes on at the House of Commons from a health and safety point of view—not just the hours, but the mice that run around in the restaurants. I wonder what the Health and Safety Executive would say about that.

That is not a flippant point. If we are to show that we are committed to health and safety, which is about setting standards, we must demonstrate that those standards apply across the board. Conservative Members have been somewhat tested today. Every time anyone intervened on the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown), he seemed to move on to a different line of argument. If Conservative Members are so committed to health and safety, why have certain issues been neglected for so many years, not least in the Palace of Westminster?

This is an issue about standards—standards that not only protect people at work, but improve quality, and so can boost profitability as part of a sustainable approach to developing a modern economy in the years ahead. In determining those standards, we should fully involve the trade union movement. There should be no retreat from the progressive raising of those standards, but we should also recognise that to do that requires a proper level of funding. That is why I have written to the Minister on behalf of my trade union, the GMB, to call for more funding for the HSE, and why I am calling for such an increase now.

In the few remaining minutes, I want to put forward a second argument in favour of increasing funding to the HSE. Like many Government agencies, the HSE relies on a charging regime to generate some of the revenues that it needs to carry out its work. In some cases, the charging regime operates unfairly and can distort or deflect from the HSE's priority of protecting the work force. In recent years, executive agencies and quangos have been pushed towards being more market-oriented. That trend was inherited from the Conservative party. Some have been privatised, while others have been pushed towards the market and appear so to relish that new freedom that they are more interested in making money than in carrying out their public duties. Although I greatly admire the work of the HSE, we must closely examine how the charging regime operates in practice.

I want to comment on the new tighter charging regime and the control of major accident hazards, and I listened carefully to representations from Calor Gas on how that regime applies to it. I do not have time to provide full details of the Calor Gas case, but we must ensure that the HSE operates in the public interest, especially in relation to its charging regime. I will write to the Minister about this case, and I look forward to his reply.

The charging regime is important, as it boosts HSE revenues, but there should be clear criteria for judging whether such regimes operate in the public interest. One such criterion should be predictability. Another criterion should be transparency, which is important in any approach to better regulation. As I will set out in my letter to the Minister, the current charging regime as it applies to Calor Gas fails on both those criteria.

There is also a danger that a charging regime for inspections introduces a perverse incentive. There may be cases where the HSE attempts to inspect and report more than necessary simply to make charges. I do not cast aspersions on any individuals in the HSE, but that general tendency may well be there. We certainly see similar examples in the way in which parking tickets are issued in parts of Westminster. Adding a profit motive can distort the HSE's key priorities of protecting the work force and ensuring public safety.

The Health and Safety Executive also runs its own disputes panel. Given the new human rights legislation, we must consider whether that is fair or whether it is better to have an independent critical examination of disputes.

Will my hon. Friend say when there is likely to be a comprehensive review of charging, and can he assure us that parties who are not subject to the overall duty to maximise receipts will undertake that review? Will he also ensure that the review will result in a charging system that does not carry the perverse incentive to prolong inspections unnecessarily, and that there will be a system of independent benchmarking of the Health and Safety Executive's work? Will he review the unsatisfactory disputes panel procedure, which at first sight appears to be a breach of human rights? An independent, impartial tribunal might be the effective antidote to the distorted priorities of maximising receipts. As I said, the Health and Safety Executive's overriding priority should be to protect and safeguard the interests of the work force. That is they way to secure the public interest in the longer term.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I must declare that I have entered my interests in the Register of Members' Interests as I am a chartered surveyor. I do not believe that what I have said today impinges on that in any way, but I make that declaration for the sake of clarity.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That point of order is duly noted.

5.15 pm

Dr. Whitehead: As declarations are the order of the day, I should put on the record my constituency development agreement with Unison.

This has been an interesting and useful debate. It has been informed by several Members who have a deep knowledge of the subject, a commitment to the furtherance of health and safety and an understanding of the issues that we face. I am grateful to those Members for their comments, which when the record of the debate is read will be seen as a substantial contribution. It will be difficult to respond in detail to all the questions that have been asked, but I shall be happy to write to hon. Members if I cannot cover particular matters. I imagine that that will result in lively correspondence.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): Will the Minister include me in the correspondence? I represent Grangemouth, where the test case for the charging of Calor Gas took place. The changes affecting the Health and Safety Executive would impact greatly on the work force in my constituency.

Dr. Whitehead: My hon. Friend may wish to write to me on that matter. As charging has been mentioned, I should say that the Government intend to review the operation of the charges once they come in, especially in connection with the Control of Major Hazards Regulations 1999. Indeed, a review is under way and will report shortly on the effect in several charging areas. I imagine that that will inform the efficacy of the charging regime. The HSE is not under any injunction to maximise profits or income. The purpose of charging is to recover the costs of inspection, not to make a profit, and the charging regime is enjoined to work on that basis.

There is no doubting the role of health and safety in improving people's quality of life. Everyone has the right to carry out their job in safety, and we have heard different examples of the misery that health and safety failures can cause workers and their families, and the accidents that occurred, but which could and should have been prevented. We have heard about concerns that have perhaps been neglected hitherto, including accidents involving employees engaged in transport activities out of the workplace. My hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Watson) paid particular and informed attention to that issue, which is an important part of health and safety although the accidents do not happen in the workplace.

I emphasised that it is not only workers who benefit from good standards in health and safety, but employers too. I opened the debate by noting that proper health and safety systems are not a financial burden for businesses, but an essential investment. We must be clear that good health is good business. Partnership, as the hon. Members for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) and for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) said, is an important element in ensuring that good employment practice and health and safety go hand in hand. Good standards in health and safety contribute to competitiveness by ensuring that there is a fit, available and motivated work force, preventing the economic and social exclusion of families, minimising the costs of accidents and lost working time, and promoting productivity and competent management.

I recognise that a key message from the debate is the clear responsibility of Government to enforce standards where necessary and appropriate. That point was emphasised in different ways by my hon. Friends the Members for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham), for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen) and for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) among others. Enforcement is a powerful deterrent, and is crucial to deal with those who flout the law and commit the most serious breaches.

Earlier this year, the Health and Safety Commission published its revised enforcement policy, which has been designed to achieve an effective balance in what enforcers do. I support that approach. I am pleased that HSE inspector numbers have increased to deliver on the commitment to secure compliance outlined in the HSC and HSE strategic plan.

In the short time left, I shall deal with some of the specific points that were raised. It is not true—the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) suggested that he had information on this—that the United Kingdom Government initiated the new European Union directive on vibration. However, I was involved in discussing elements of the directive, and we have ensured that it works proportionately and provides measures that fully protect the work force and ensure that exposure over time and various other factors are taken into account. The discussions, particularly

[Dr. Whitehead]

between the Commission and the European Parliament, and the resulting directive, have been a good method of ensuring that an area that was scandalously neglected is now protected.

I think that my hon. Friends the Members for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris) and for Barnsley, West and Penistone mentioned the effects of white finger and people who are effectively paralysed as a result of exposure to whole-body or other forms of vibration, such as hand-arm vibration, in their working life.

I regret that the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) did not concentrate on the issues that I thought he might have discussed. He spent quite a lot of time talking about white asbestos. I suspect, although I have no concrete evidence, that the information that has informed the debate on white asbestos that a number of Conservative Members have recently taken up arose from several reprehensible articles that recently appeared in *The Daily Telegraph* under the byline of Christopher Booker. I suspect that the hon. Gentleman may have used some of that information, among other things, to cast doubt on the independence of certain studies of the effects of white asbestos exposure.

There is overwhelming scientific evidence that white asbestos poses a significant risk to the health and safety of those who are exposed to it, including a risk of mesothelioma, albeit not to the extent that blue and brown asbestos do.

Mr. Lloyd: I am troubled because there seems to be an impression that mesothelioma is a serious disease, whereas asbestosis is a minor, throwaway condition. For the benefit of the debate, will my hon. Friend confirm the fact that asbestosis is a cruel, crippling and vile condition?

Dr. Whitehead: Yes. I could not describe asbestosis more exactly than my hon. Friend has. Exposure to white asbestos, and indeed all forms of asbestos, produces not only mesothelioma but asbestosis. Moreover, when one is dealing with white asbestos it is almost impossible to be sure that it is just white asbestos, because it is almost always contaminated with elements of blue and brown asbestos. The idea that one can treat it as if it were talcum powder is fanciful.

What sticks in my throat about that campaign are the aspersions that it casts on the independence of those making claims about the effect of white asbestos on health and safety. The information for Mr. Booker's articles comes from a Mr. Bridle, who happens to be a representative of the Asbestos Cement Product Producers Association in the UK, which claims to have representatives in 17 countries and links with the Asbestos Institute in Canada. Mr. Bridle is not exactly an independent witness in his own right.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The Minister talks about independent scientific advice, but I have already pointed out that two of the individuals on whom he relies heavily for his answers are employed by the HSE. There is a wide body of scientific opinion throughout the world on this matter. I have already mentioned that the Environmental Protection Agency in America has reduced its health and safety requirements for white asbestos. Whatever the rights and wrongs of the case, will the Minister accede to my request this afternoon to have an inquiry into the whole matter?

Dr. Whitehead: The hon. Member may be aware that there have been a number of inquiries around the world. Although one or two individuals are pursuing inquiries and claim that white asbestos does not have a significant effect on the health and safety of those exposed to it, the scientific evidence overwhelmingly indicates that white asbestos, although less potent—

Mr. Clifton-Brown: What evidence?

Dr. Whitehead: Some of the reports that the hon. Gentleman has quoted do not say quite what he thinks they say about exposure to white asbestos. The overwhelming weight of scientific evidence clearly shows that white asbestos has an effect. I believe that the action that we have taken on white asbestos is right.

My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone and the hon. Member for Twickenham talked about roving safety representatives. I am happy to confirm that the innovative pilot on worker safety advisers is now getting under way; it was slightly delayed by the withdrawal of the Construction Confederation. I am pleased that other construction companies have come forward so that the pilots, which I believe will produce a great deal of information about the effect of worker safety advisers, will now take place across a full range of sectors of industry, including construction.

A number of hon. Members, including my hon. Friends the Members for Norwich, North and for Barnsley, West and Penistone, raised issues of occupational health. The Government's occupational health strategy was outlined in "Securing Health Together", which was launched in July 2000. It stated that employers should be fully aware of opportunities for rehabilitation, and the targets for reducing ill health and ensuring that people do not lose days at work but can return to work after rehabilitation. That is an important element of the occupational health regime, which is sometimes regarded as less important than safety. I regard the two elements of health and safety in the workplace as equally important.

A number of hon. Members also referred to staffing and new legislation. I mentioned in my opening remarks that our aim is to ensure that funding for appropriate staffing is available to the HSE. It is good that 111 new inspectors have been recruited recently. With more inspectors, and an increasing number of reports following inspections, we are ensuring that resources are used well. I hope that they will be used well in future.

Mention was also made of corporate manslaughter legislation. As a result of the responses to the consultation paper, the Government certainly intend to look closely at that complicated and sensitive issue, to get it right. Hon. Members asked whether directors should be scapegoated. It is important that they are not scapegoated in that way, and that legislation does not cause that to happen. The Government still aim to have legislation on the statute book as soon as parliamentary time allows—

It being half-past Five o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 4 March 2002

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Departmental Expenditure

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 18 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 508W, on departmental expenditure, whether the figure provided was net of the additional annually managed spending that was incurred because of the refinancing scheme; and if she will make a statement. [38307]

Ms Hewitt: The savings figure quoted in my answer of 18 January 2002 was net of the additional annually managed spending that was incurred because of the refinancing scheme.

The capital spend, together with interest, will be recovered through future loan repayment flows to ECGD.

Capita

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much public money Capita-administered schemes within the Department have paid out since 1997–98. [38383]

Ms Hewitt: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many contracts the Department has with Capita; and how much they are worth. [38382]

Ms Hewitt: Central records indicate that there are currently three live contracts with Capita with a total value of £43,785.

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the contracts that have been awarded to the Capita Group by the Department. [39339]

Ms Hewitt: Such historical information is not held centrally and can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

LNM Group

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she received from other Ministers requests for advice in connection with the attempted acquisition of Sidex by the LNM Group. [37935]

Ms Hewitt: I received no such requests.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what policy objectives were furthered by her predecessor's visit to India to discuss the purchase of Air India by LNM Holdings. [39204]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The objective of my right hon. Friend's visit to India in January 2001 was to further strengthen the bilateral trade and investment relationship between the United Kingdom and India.

Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 24 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1059W, what the cost of refurbishing each Ministerial private office was in each year since May 1997. [37898]

Ms Hewitt: The costs of refurbishing the ministerial private offices, since May 1997, is set out in the table. All costs are inclusive of VAT.

Financial year	*£*
1997–98	12,605
1998–99	16,780
1999–2000	—
2000–01	6,571
2001–02	4,500

EU Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the European Union directives and regulations relating to her Department that have been implemented in each of the last four years, specifying *(a)* the title and purpose of each, *(b)* the cost to public funds of each and *(c)* the cost to businesses of each. [39128]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested is not held centrally and would involve disproportionate cost to produce. Regulatory impact assessments are produced for all proposals, including those originating in European legislation, likely to impose significant costs on businesses in the UK and are generally made available in the Libraries of the House. We do not hold information on the costs to public funds of implementation.

Dams

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list applications for export credit guarantee for dams, indicating the stage each application has reached. [39519]

Ms Hewitt: There is one current application for ECGD support for dams.

Project	*Stage reached*
Yusufeli (Turkey)	Awaiting information on environmental and social impacts of the project before further consideration of the application

No decision has been made by ECGD. ECGD cover will only be considered if key impacts—including social, environmental and human rights factors—are properly addressed and if the financial risk is acceptable.

External Consultants

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations, who previously held contracts with the Department won new contracts at *(a)* the culmination of the existing contracts and *(b)* after a period of inactivity with the Department in each of the past five years. [38719]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* This information is not held centrally and could not be provided except at disproportionate cost.

Steel Industry

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of over-capacity in the global steel industry; and if she will make a statement. [38844]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* There is no precise estimate of global over-capacity as this can vary considerably according to the basis on which it is assessed. Estimates vary widely from under 80 million tonnes a year to over 200 million tonnes a year.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received about the future of the Nova Hut steel plant in the Czech Republic. [39667]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* I receive representations from many groups eager to press their case.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions officials and Ministers in her Department have had with LNM Holdings about the future of the Nova Hut steel plant in the Czech Republic. [39668]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* Ministers and civil servants meet many people as part of the process of policy development and analysis. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the Ministerial Code, the Civil Service Code and Guidance for Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists. Some of these discussions take place on a confidential basis, and in order to preserve confidentiality, it is not the normal practice of Governments to release specific details of specific meetings with private individuals or companies.

Enterprise Grants (Coalfield Areas)

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many bids under the Enterprise Grant scheme have been made by businesses within the former coalfield area of south Derbyshire since 1999; and what the value was of grants awarded. [39419]

Alan Johnson: Since the scheme start date in January 2000 GOEM has received four applications from business in eligible wards within southern Derbyshire. The total value of grants awarded is £70,000.

Telecommunication Services

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her latest estimate is of the percentage of UK households and businesses able to receive ADSL telecommunication services. [39627]

Mr. Alexander: Oftel's broadband brief published in February 2002 states that 60 per cent. of UK consumers and businesses are within the area of a DSL enabled exchange, and that 90 per cent. of those can obtain ADSL services with current technology. In addition, cable networks pass approximately 50 per cent. of UK households, providing an alternative route to broadband.

Knowledge Transfer Initiatives

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the value and effectiveness of regional knowledge transfer initiatives. [38520]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* My Department sponsors a number of targeted programmes which seek to help business access and use knowledge gained from research in British and overseas universities and research and technology organisations. We also provide support to help the science base grow its capability to interact with business and realise the business opportunities offered by science. For example, the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF), which incorporates the earlier Higher Education Reach-Out to Business and the Community Fund (HEROBC), has incorporated a regional assessment alongside other criteria.

As the earliest HEROBC projects have only been running for just over two years it is still too soon for full evaluation. Early indications suggest that these initiatives are helping to improve the capacity of higher education institutions to carry out knowledge transfer.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the value and effectiveness of knowledge transfer initiatives sponsored by her Department. [38510]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* My Department sponsors a number of targeted programmes which seek to help business access and use knowledge gained from research in British and overseas universities and research and technology organisations. We also provide support to help the science base grow its capability to interact with business and realise the business opportunities offered by science. Each of these programmes is evaluated on a regular basis and, if necessary, the programme may be amended or terminated if it fails to achieve its targets.

I am presently conducting an intensive review of the totality of business support within DTI which will further ascertain whether there is scope for improving the effectiveness of all our programmes, including those dealing with knowledge transfer. The results to date indicate that business end-users are broadly satisfied with the aims and effectiveness of knowledge transfer programmes but that there is scope for reducing their number to reduce confusion and to increase critical mass of the major programmes.

Press Releases

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many press releases were issued by her Department *(a)* between 1 May and 31 December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive. [40039]

Ms Hewitt: The DTI issued the following number of press releases in these years:

	Number of press releases
1997[1]	572
1998	1,064
1999	1,064
2000	873
2001	739

[1] 1 May to 31 December

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people were employed in a press or public relations function in her Department on 1 January in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000, *(e)* 2001 and *(f)* 2002. [39945]

Ms Hewitt: The number of Press Officers was as follows:

	Number of press officers
1 January 1997	20
1 January 1998	17
1 January 1999	24
1 January 2000	25
1 January 2001	23
1 January 2002	23

Waste Goods

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the effect of the waste electrical and electronic equipment directive on the illegal disposal of waste goods; and if she will make a statement. [38124]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

The directive on waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) is still in draft. We are currently at Common Position stage, and for this reason we have not yet made any such assessment.

The directive requires distributors to take back waste electrical goods free of charge to the end user. This take-back provision may be in-store, on delivery or through an alternative arrangement, eg kerbside collection. Furthermore, the directive requires members states to ensure that users are given necessary information about the return and collection systems available to them and about their role in contributing to re-use, recycling and other forms of recovery of WEEE.

We therefore believe that the directive will make a positive contribution to increasing the amount of waste electrical goods recovered and recycled and we see no reason to anticipate an increase in the illegal abandoning of WEEE in public places.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

Equal Pay

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Minister for Women if she will make a statement on her policy towards gender pay inequalities in the context of paragraph 27 of the Laeken conclusions. [39633]

Ms Hewitt: In paragraph 27 of the Presidency Conclusions of the European Council meeting in Laeken on 14 and 15 December 2001, the Council noted with interest the list of indicators of gender pay inequalities. This Government are fully committed to reducing the gender pay gap and therefore support the indicators proposed in the Belgian Presidency's report.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Crown Prosecution Service

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what research has been undertaken to address the observations made in Cm3960, summary of the report, paragraph 19, concerning the downgrading of crimes. [35960]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 14 February 2002]:* Sir Iain Glidewell noted statistical evidence showing that charges are sometimes downgraded. He found no evidence that downgrading happens when it should not; but he recommended that the Inspectorate should examine cases of downgrading during inspections and research into the reasons why charges are downgraded.

Following publication of the report the CPS Inspectorate (which has subsequently become independent of the CPS, reporting directly to the Attorney-General), has regularly devoted a section of its biennial reports on all CPS areas to downgrading of charges and the application of common charging standards agreed between the police and the CPS. In his Annual Report for 1999–2000, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector noted that in some 22 per cent. of cases to which charging standards applied the police had selected inappropriate charges. In almost all cases, the inspectors agreed that the CPS had then applied the charging standards correctly, usually to downgrade but sometimes to upgrade the charge.

In the recently published "Review of the Criminal Courts of England and Wales", Sir Robin Auld refers to this research as part of the justification for recommending that the CPS should assume from the police a greater responsibility for determining the charges at the outset of criminal proceedings.

TREASURY

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) in how many cases *(a)* Customs and Excise and *(b)* a bailiff has distrained possessions for failure to pay the climate change levy; what was the value of goods distrained; and if he will make a statement; [38576]

(2) in how many cases Customs and Excise has commenced criminal proceedings for fraud involving the climate change levy; [38573]

(3) how many penalties have been imposed to date in respect of the climate change levy for *(a)* failure to produce information and records, *(b)* failure to preserve

records, *(c)* ceasing to carry out taxable supplies and *(d)* failure to render returns and otherwise comply with the regulations; [38584]

(4) how many registration penalties in respect of the climate change levy have been imposed; [38583]

(5) how many non-resident payers of the climate change levy have received a penalty for failure to submit a request to appoint a tax representative; [38577]

(6) in how many cases Customs and Excise has imposed a five per cent. penalty for *(a)* under declaration and *(b)* over claiming credit in respect of the climate change levy; [38575]

(7) in how many cases Customs and Excise has imposed penalties for evasion of the climate change levy. [38574]

Dawn Primarolo: No penalties have been imposed, possessions distrained or criminal proceedings commenced for failure to comply with the legal requirements governing climate change levy. This reflects our commitment to improve compliance through education rather than by penalising with enforcement action during the introduction of the levy.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what assessment he has made of the impact of the climate change levy on the British plastics industry; [38589]

(2) what review he has carried out of the compliance costs to British industry of the climate change levy in the light of experience since 1 April 2001; [[illegible]617]

(3) what steps he has taken to consult *(a)* business organisations and *(b)* individual companies about the impact of the climate change levy since its introduction. [38588]

Dawn Primarolo: As part of the normal process of contact with business, the Chancellor and the Treasury ministerial team have met with a variety of business organisations and individual companies since 1 April last year, and have heard a variety of representations on tax, including climate change levy, and on other matters.

The levy package is expected to be broadly revenue-neutral for both industry and the service sector as a whole. However, the effect on any individual company or sector will depend on a number of factors, including their level of energy efficiency, use of renewables and CHP, and the extent to which they make investments which qualify for enhanced capital allowances.

The levy was developed in close consultation with business, and many of the proposals put forward during that consultation are reflected in the final design.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what representations he has made to the European Commission; and what evidence he has submitted to their investigation into the climate change levy dual fuel use exemption; [38610]

(2) if he will make a statement in the *(a)* scope, *(b)* progress and *(c)* expected timetable of the Commission's investigation with the climate change levy double fuel use exemption. [38609]

Dawn Primarolo: The UK has presented a strong case backed by robust evidence to the European Commission in support of the climate change levy dual-use exemption. We continue to press the Commission strongly for an early and favourable decision in the matter.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he plans to extend liability for the climate change levy to *(a)* voluntary aided schools, *(b)* foundation schools and *(c)* city technology colleges. [38585]

Dawn Primarolo: Eligibility for exemption from the climate change levy (for fuel for domestic or non-business use by charities) mirrors eligibility for the reduced rate of VAT on fuel and power. Exemption from the levy for voluntary aided schools, foundation schools and city technology colleges therefore depends on their [illegible] charitable status. There are no plans to change this.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement setting out the Government's intentions concerning the relationship between enhanced capital allowances available for energy-saving technologies under the climate change levy and the enhanced capital allowances for tackling climate change and improving air quality which are proposed under the Green Technology Challenge. [38562]

Mr. Bo[illegible]: As part of the climate change levy package, the Government introduced a scheme of enhanced capital allowances (ECAs) for investments in qualifying energy-saving technologies. The Green Technology Challenge consultation revealed strong support for offering ECAs on a wider range of energy-saving technologies. As stated in PBR 2001 the Government propose to introduce further ECAs in this area and these will be incorporated into the existing ECA scheme.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what assessment he has made of the impact on the British lime industry of his decision to withdraw the exemption from the climate change levy for fuel used in kilns; [38606]

(2) what the reasons were for the Government's decision to withdraw the exemption from the climate change levy for fuel used in lime kilns; [38607]

(3) what assessment he has made of the impact of the climate change levy on the competitiveness of the British lime industry. [38608]

Dawn Primarolo: Energy used in lime kilns is currently treated as being exempt from the levy. This concession has been agreed to last for a period of four years, and reflects a misunderstanding before the start of the tax that energy was being used for non-fuel purposes. When tax becomes chargeable, the fuel used in lime kilns will be eligible for 80 per cent. levy discounts.

The climate change levy only became operational in April 2001, so it is too early to assess its impact properly.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many applications for registration for the climate change levy have been received by Customs and Excise. [38581]

Dawn Primarolo: 269 climate change levy registration requests have been received by HM Customs and Excise.

Pension Annuities

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to reform the pension annuities system. [38348]

Ruth Kelly: For some time the Government have actively encouraged innovation in the annuity market to improve benefits for customers. As a continuation of this, the pre-Budget report on 27 November announced its intention to publish a consultation document on increasing flexibility and competition in the annuity market.

This consultation document, called 'Modernising Annuities', was issued on 5 February and is intended to stimulate discussion on annuity issues. The consultation period will run until 5 April and the Government will then consider the responses carefully before deciding how to proceed.

Fuel Fraud

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) when the present levels of civil penalty for oils frauds were introduced; [38552]

(2) what plans he has to increase the levels of civil penalties for oils frauds. [38551]

Dawn Primarolo: Civil penalties for all excise regimes, including oils, were introduced in the Finance Act 1994. Penalties are imposed for regulatory breaches, or failures in the duty of care.

As stated in the document "Tackling Indirect Tax Fraud" I have asked HM Customs and Excise to consider the imposition of tougher penalties, including civil penalties, against those engaged in the supply of fuels for illicit purposes, or for those found using those fuels in road vehicles.

VAT (Housing Developments)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what plans he has to end the zero-rating for VAT of new building on greenfield sites; [38571]

(2) if he plans to undertake research into the impact of removing the VAT incentive to develop greenfield rather than brownfield sites. [38570]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government keep all taxes under review and any changes are announced as part of the normal Budget process.

Incinerators

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his policy is towards the possibility of a tax on incinerators. [38567]

Dawn Primarolo: There are no plan for an incineration tax. The Government will consider the (scope of the) taxation of waste in the context of the Performance and Innovation Unit waste review.

Landfill

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if it is the Government's policy that the landfill tax should continue to be revenue-neutral. [38569]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government have introduced the landfill tax escalator, which increases the rate by £1 per tonne each year until 2004. Despite the escalator, receipts from the landfill tax are lower than the value of the 0.2 percentage point cut in employers' national insurance contributions that accompanied the landfill tax.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he intends to begin formal consultation on a replacement for the landfill credit scheme. [38568]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government will launch a consultation paper shortly on the future of the landfill tax credit scheme, including potential transition arrangements.

Tobacco Smuggling

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his latest estimate is of the percentage of UK cigarette consumption in 2001–02 accounted for by smuggled cigarettes. [38536]

Dawn Primarolo: No estimate is available.

Research and Development Tax Credit

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if it is his policy that the proposed scheme for a research and development tax credit for larger companies should incorporate environmental criteria. [38572]

Dawn Primarolo: The objective of the proposed tax credit is to raise the level of research and development in the UK, leading to improved competitiveness and quality of life. Qualifying expenditure will include environmentally beneficial research and development.

Departmental Events

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the *(a)* conferences, *(b)* seminars, *(c)* workshops, *(d)* exhibitions and *(e)* press conferences which have been sponsored by his Department and which took place on non-departmental premises in each of the last four years giving the title, purpose, date and cost of each. [34304]

Ruth Kelly: Records are not maintained centrally. Information in the format required could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the statutory instruments issued by his Department in the last 12 months, indicating *(a)* the purpose of each and *(b)* the cost of each to (i) public funds, (ii) businesses and (iii) individuals. [36227]

Dawn Primarolo: The Treasury, HM Customs and Excise and the Inland Revenue made 168 instruments in the 12-month period up to January 2002. Many of the instruments introduced were of a routine nature, for example approving annual fee increases. The HMSO SI Registrar (Siregistrar@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk) can provide a list of statutory instruments which have been issued by individual Government Departments. Instruments which have been originated by Departments but eventually made by the Privy Council are only listed under the Privy Council Office.

The costs associated with regulatory proposals are considered at the policy development stage. A regulatory impact assessment is completed for regulatory proposals unless there are no or negligible costs. HM Treasury, HM Customs and HM Inland Revenue have produced 19 final RIAs in this period. These are available from the House Libraries and are available on departmental websites.

Aviation Insurance

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to review the operation of the Troika excess premium scheme for airport insurance. [36865]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Troika scheme, which provides temporary replacement third party insurance for aviation terrorist risks, charges premiums in accordance with European Commission guidelines. The guidelines are reviewed at monthly meetings of a European Commission ad hoc group on the market for aviation insurance. The guidelines have set premiums for insurance for airports under member state schemes at 33 per cent. of the premium charged under the primary policy to which insurance premium tax (IPT) applies.

At the last ad hoc group meeting on 15 February, a decision was made not to change the guidelines, so the premiums charged to airports remain unchanged.

Anti-terrorism Campaign

David Cairns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the cost to the UK of participation in the campaign against terrorism. [25417]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I refer my hon. Friend to the answers given by the Minister of State for the Armed Forces on 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1133–34W, which set out the level of MOD spending on Afghanistan.

VAT Registrations

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what methods he uses to assess whether legitimate traders applying to register for VAT are being unduly inconvenienced by checks carried out by HM Customs and Excise. [38630]

Dawn Primarolo: Customs work to a Charter Standard for the processing of applications for VAT registration. This requires Customs to process 95 per cent. of properly completed applications within 15 working days of receipt. As at January 2002 (latest data compiled), the Charter Standard for processing VAT registration applications was being achieved.

Customs selectively apply extended checks aimed at identifying fraudulent applications. These cases are monitored on an individual basis to ensure a balanced approach between facilitating business and protecting the revenue.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of checks carried out by VAT registration centres were carried out manually in the last year for which figures are available. [38603]

Dawn Primarolo: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the target times to complete and process VAT registrations and deregistrations are; and how many applications to register and deregister and what proportion of all such applications are dealt with within those time scales. [38598]

Dawn Primarolo: Customs work to a Charter Standard to process 95 per cent. of properly completed applications for VAT registration within 15 working days of receipt.

In the current financial year to the end of January 2002, Customs received 169,082 applications for VAT registration and achieved the Charter Standard.

Customs received 127,725 applications for deregistration in the same period. There is no Charter Standard for deregistration processing although it is Customs' policy to deal with these promptly.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

GAVI

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress has been made in research and development of new vaccines for developing countries since the Global Alliance for Vaccination and Immunisation was set up. [38105]

Clare Short: GAVI is expected to begin funding research later this year. In the course of developing its strategy for investing in vaccine research, GAVI has prioritised research into vaccines against diarrhoea, pneumonia and meningitis. Reasons for the choice of these three include (i) the burden of disease and potential positive impact of an effective vaccine on child health; and (ii) the likelihood that investment would culminate in availability of effective vaccines against these diseases within five to seven years.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans have been made by the international community to continue to supply vaccines when Global Alliance for Vaccination and Immunisation funding ceases. [38107]

Clare Short: The GAVI partnership provides financial support through a separate entity, the Vaccine Fund. Countries that receive Vaccine Fund support for new vaccines or to improve their vaccine delivery systems are expected to provide plans for financial sustainability to the GAVI Board at mid-term. The financial sustainability plan, which must be endorsed by the Ministry of Finance, sets out the country's long-term strategy for ensuring funding from internal and/or external sources when Vaccine Fund support for the country's immunisation programme ceases.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress has been made by GAVI in vaccination rates broken down *(a)* by country and *(b)* by disease. [38109]

Clare Short: Although GAVI has made rapid progress since its inception two years ago, it is still too early to provide the information requested. To date, 64 of the

74 countries eligible for GAVI support have applied, and applications from 53 of these countries have been approved.

If the countries approved to date implement their proposals as planned, the number of infants receiving routine immunisations (against tuberculosis, diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis and polio) will increase from 54.6 million in 2000 to 77 million in 2007; over the same period the numbers vaccinated against hepatitis B will increase from 14.5 million to 59 million, the numbers vaccinated against *Haemophilus influenzae* type B will increase from 39,000 to 6 million, and the numbers vaccinated against yellow fever will increase from 78,000 to 1.9 million.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Elite Sports

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what action she has taken following the Elite Sports Funding Review published in August 2001. [39762]

Mr. Caborn: The Elite Sports Funding Review chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) identified over 40 recommendations, the large majority of which are for the Sports Councils and National Governing Bodies of sport to take forward. The Review was discussed at the Sports Cabinet on 31 October, chaired by the Secretary of State. The Cabinet beings together the Sports Ministers and chairmen of the Sports Councils from each of the devolved Administrations. At the Cabinet, the Sports Councils accepted and are now implementing the overwhelming majority of the recommendations. My Department is considering the remaining recommendations which would require additional funding in the context of the current spending review.

Rugby Funding

Andy Burnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of 7 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1117W, on lottery support for rugby league and rugby union, how many applications have been made to the Sports Lottery Fund by rugby league and rugby union clubs; and what percentage were unsuccessful. [37192]

Mr. Caborn: 380 applications including 313 under the Awards for All programme have been received from rugby league clubs of which 62 per cent. were unsuccessful, and 776 application including 465 under the Awards for All programme have been received from rugby union clubs of which 50 per cent. were unsuccessful, since the start of the National Lottery.

Community Sport (North-west)

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the Minister for Sport's answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 435, to the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston, on Community Sport (North-west), if she will publish her plans to restructure Sport England to improve regional performance. [39848]

Mr. Caborn: In terms of delivering and supporting sport development through revenue programmes, guidance and advice, Sport England regional offices are well placed to take a strategic lead locally. DCMS is currently completing the second stage of the quinquennial review of Sport England, which included a specific element relating to Sport England's regional role and structure. I have discussed the review's emerging findings with the new Chief Executive of Sport England and with Sport England's council members, with a view to implementing the recommendations on Sport England's regional presence as promptly as possible.

Sport England

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had with *(a)* the Central Council for Physical Recreation, *(b)* sports governing bodies and *(c)* the UK Sports Council about the future structure of Sport England. [39699]

Mr. Caborn: DCMS is currently completing the second stage of the quinquennial review of Sport England, in which we are looking at its strategic management function, its regional role, and the way in which it carries out partnership working and forges alliances. This stage of the review was taken forward by a series of working groups which included representatives from Sport England, national governing bodies, local authorities, and other stakeholders, including the Central Council of Physical Recreation and the UK Sports Council.

WORK AND PENSIONS

New Deal

11. **Mr. Kevin Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment his Department has made of the effect the new deal has had on long-term unemployment in Doncaster, North. [36335]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Since 1997 in Doncaster, North, the number of long-term unemployed people has fallen by 85 per cent., and the number of long-term unemployed young people has been cut by 83 per cent.

Our welfare to work initiatives have helped in this success. The new deal has helped over 900 young people into work in Doncaster, North. And the Employment Zone and Action Team for Jobs which operate in my hon Friend's constituency have between them helped over 1,000 of the most disadvantaged jobless people in Doncaster into work.

I will be visiting the Doncaster Employment Zone on 7 March to see its work for myself.

Housing Benefit

13. **Linda Gilroy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action he is taking to help pensioners to get the housing benefit to which they are entitled. [36338]

Malcolm Wicks: This April will see the introduction of the Pension Service, bringing with it a more streamlined and seamless benefit claims process for all pensioners, including those claiming housing benefit. And from April 2003, we will no longer ask them to make a repeat claim for housing benefit every year.

Changes to housing benefit to support the introduction of the Pension Credit in April 2003 will mean 1.9 million pensioner households will get more help, or help for the first time, through housing benefit.

Pensions

14. **Mr. Wiggin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to review the pensions regulatory regime. [36339]

Mr. McCartney: Last year I asked Alan Pickering to review the pensions regulatory framework. He will report in the summer of 2002.

At the same time we will have the report being prepared by Ron Sandler. Thereafter, we shall publish proposals on which we will consult, which will build on the reforms we have already made to reduce the regulatory burden and complexity, to ensure that both Government and employers can support saving for pensions and to ensure we have in place the right measures to build better pension provision.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to reduce the level of advice and information on pensioner benefits available at social security offices. [37521]

Mr. McCartney: None.

Jobcentre Plus

15. **James Purnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to enable the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service to work more closely together. [36340]

23. **Mrs. Ellman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the introduction of Jobcentre Plus. [36349]

36. **Mr. Jenkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of customer reaction to Jobcentre Plus. [36362]

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to improve the quality of service offered at jobcentres. [36336]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: At the end of this month, the Employment Service and those parts of the Benefits Agency that deal with people of working age are being brought together to form an entirely new organisation, Jobcentre Plus.

Jobcentre Plus will provide, for the first time, a fully integrated and work-focused employment and benefit service. The new service will gradually be rolled out to the whole country over the next few years.

56 Jobcentre Plus pathfinder offices have already opened. These have received an overwhelmingly positive response from both individual customers and employers.

Services (Jobseekers)

16. **Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the introduction of touch-screen services for jobseekers. [36341]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We have just completed the installation of over 9,000 Jobpoints across our entire network of Jobcentres. Early evaluation has shown that Jobpoints are encouraging jobseekers to look at a larger range of jobs across wider geographical areas and apply for more jobs.

Jobpoints are increasing jobseekers' prospects of moving into work and helping them to do so more quickly.

Hospital Downrating

17. **Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on deductions from pensions of pensioners admitted as in-patients to hospitals. [36342]

Mr. McCartney: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 778W, in which I said that as previously promised we have considered carefully the impact of the current rules which reduce certain benefits paid to pensioners and people of working age after six weeks of hospitalisation. The downrating of benefits preserves the principle that the state should not make double provision. It also recognises that a substantial number of people leave hospital before six weeks.

However, we also recognise that people have on-going financial commitments while in hospital, and although we consider the six week rule strikes a fair balance between what the state should provide financially and the provision individuals should make for themselves, we have nonetheless decided to extend the period before benefits are downrated by a further seven weeks to the 13th week stage. This will mean that people previously affected by the six week rule will be able to keep their benefits untouched if their period of stay in hospital is under 13 weeks.

We will introduce this change to coincide with the introduction of Pension Credit.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his policy is towards the incomes of pensioners while they are in long-term hospital care. [36350]

Mr. McCartney: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 778W, in which I said that as previously promised we have considered carefully the impact of the current rules which reduce certain benefits paid to pensioners and people of working age after six weeks of hospitalisation. The downrating of benefits preserves the principle that the state should not make double provision. It also recognises that a substantial number of people leave hospital before six weeks.

However, we also recognise that people have ongoing financial commitments while in hospital, and although we consider the six week rule strikes a fair balance between what the state should provide financially and the provision individuals should make for themselves, we have nonetheless decided to extend the period before benefits are downrated by a further seven weeks to the 13th week stage. This will mean that people previously affected by the six week rule will be able to keep their benefits untouched if their period of stay in hospital is under 13 weeks. We will introduce this change to coincide with the introduction of Pension Credit.

We have also taken steps to substantially increase the income of all pensioners. For example, we have increased the basic pension above inflation, we have increased the winter fuel payments, we introduced free TV licences and we have increased the amount of the minimum income guarantee and brought more pensioners within its scope by raising the capital limits. When Pension Credit is introduced in 2003, 5.5 million pensioners will be better off and for the first time pensioners will be rewarded, not penalised, for saving. At the same time further increases are proposed—above inflation—to the pensioners' tax allowance. When the State Second Pension is introduced in April 2002 18 million people, including carers, long-term disabled and low to moderate earners, will benefit. This is a substantial package of measures. These are real increases which make all pensioners better off.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much will be raised in each full year from 2003 by the revised hospital downrating rules announced on 25 February; what proportion will be attributed severally to *(a)* retirement pensions and *(b)* other benefits; and how many (i) pensioners and (ii) recipients of other benefits he estimates will still be affected. [39440]

Mr. McCartney: There will be no money raised by the revised hospital downrating rules, to be brought in from October 2003. It will be delivered at a cost to Government of approximately £40 million.

We estimate that up to 5,000 claimants of retirement pension are affected by the 13 to 52 week hospital downrating rule at any point in time. 4,000 claimants of other benefits are also affected.

Notes:

1. All figures are 2001–02 price terms.

2. Some pensioners will have both retirement pension and pension credit. Therefore there is a small amount of overlap in the number of claimants of retirement pension that will still be downrated, and the number of people claiming other benefits that are down-rated. This overlap will not be more than 2,000 people at any point in time.

3. The figures are for all income related benefits and retirement pension.

Pensions and Benefits

18. **Andrew Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he next expects to meet his Belgian counterpart to discuss pensions and benefits due to UK citizens. [36343]

Malcolm Wicks: Neither I nor my right hon. Friend have any immediate plans for a meeting.

Benefit Fraud

19. **Mr. Francois:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what targets his Department has set local authorities for benefit fraud prosecutions for 2001–02. [36345]

Malcolm Wicks: We have not set a target for the number of local authority prosecutions for 2001–02. Our policy is to ensure local authorities improve their performance in combating fraud across the board, from the outset of a claim and throughout its life.

Our new incentive scheme is designed to give clear rewards to local authorities who punish fraudsters with the full range of available penalties, including prosecutions.

Employment Assistance (Disabled People)

21. **Mr. Clapham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what support his Department is giving to help those with disabilities to get back into work. [36347]

29. **Mr. Gareth R. Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to help disabled people back into work. [36355]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We have introduced a range of measures to help people with disabilities secure work where they are ready and able to do so.

Our new deal for disabled people pilots helped over 8,200 disabled people into work. Building on that success we have now introduced a national network of job brokers.

We are making work possible for people with disabilities by removing benefit barriers. From April we are introducing new, fairer and more flexible work rules for people receiving incapacity benefit. We are making work pay through the disabled person's tax credit and the national minimum wage.

Jobcentre Plus offers disabled people making new or repeat claims to benefit work-focused meetings with a personal adviser so as to ensure they are aware of the help and opportunities available to them.

Employment Assistance

22. **Ms Dari Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to help people affected by large-scale redundancies to find work. [36348]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Through the Rapid Response Service, we are strengthening and expanding the help we can offer people affected by large scale redundancy. We have been developing the service in pilot areas since September 2000, and across all regions since April 2001. All the elements of the service will be in place next month, supported by a further investment of £6 million over two years.

The aim of the service is to support individuals, employers and communities affected by significant redundancies and help people make the transition into sustainable new jobs. The service will work closely with key partners in the local area, such as the Regional Development Agencies, the Learning and Skills Council and trade unions, to co-ordinate an immediate response to a significant redundancy.

Private Pensions

25. **Mr. Prisk:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what targets his Department has to increase private pension provision. [36351]

Mr. McCartney: As I said last November and again in January, we are committed to encouraging private saving to meet the long-term challenges of an aging population. And we remain committed. That is why we are introducing Pension Credit—making sure it pays to save; we have introduced stakeholder pensions—a secure and value for money vehicle to make private provision; we have launched a simplification review—to reduce the layers of regulation that increase costs; we will replace the Minimum Funding Requirement; and we are implementing the recommendations of the Myners Review; and that is why our pensions education campaign is driving home the message that saving now is the best way to guarantee security tomorrow.

Occupational Pensions

26. **Richard Ottaway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on changes in the level of provision of occupational pension schemes, with special reference to the guarantee of a pension based on final earnings. [36352]

Mr. McCartney: There has been a long-term decline since the 1960s in both the coverage and number of occupational schemes. Provision peaked in the 1960s. There is also a trend away from final salary schemes towards defined contribution arrangements, although by far the majority of scheme members remain in salary-related schemes. We welcome the fact that many employers voluntarily continue to provide pensions for their staff, whether it is through defined benefit provision or defined contribution provision.

The reasons for the long-term changes to occupational pension provision are complex. People are living longer. There has been a relative decline in the sectors that traditionally offer occupational pensions and an increase in self-employment. Lower expected stock market returns, ending of contribution holidays, and an increase in complexity of regulations imposed since the late 1980s have all contributed.

But the Government are acting. We are seeking better regulation through the simplification review; better products through the introduction of stakeholder pensions (with 637,000 individual sales within their first eight months) and the Sandler Review of personal investment products; and to reward saving through the Pension Credit.

Employment Assistance (Deprived Areas)

27. **Jeff Ennis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what help he plans to give to long-term unemployed people in deprived areas. [36353]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Our welfare to work initiatives are helping people into work in all parts of the country. The new deals have already helped well over 600,000 people into jobs.

We introduced Employment Zones specifically to help long-term unemployed people in deprived areas get and keep work. The 15 Employment Zones have already helped over 17,200 people move into work. We are in the process of extending the existing zones' contracts until March 2004, and are currently fully evaluating zone performance before deciding how to take the initiative further. The Doncaster Employment Zone, which is operating in part of the Barnsley, East and Mexborough constituency, has already helped over 590 people into work.

Action Teams for Jobs are also helping to tackle joblessness in the most employment deprived areas in the country. In their first year of operation they had helped nearly 16,500 people into work. Up to October 2001, Barnsley, Rotherham and Sheffield were covered by a single South Yorkshire Action Team, which helped 585 people move into work. In October 2001, following the extension of the Action Teams initiative, the South Yorkshire Team was split into two, with one Team covering Barnsley and Rotherham. Between October 2001 and January 2002, the Barnsley and Rotherham Action Team helped 63 people into jobs.

31. **Shona McIsaac:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to help people back into work in areas of acute social deprivation. [36357]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Our welfare to work initiatives are helping people into work in all parts of the country. However, we recognise that there are a small number of areas with acute labour market disadvantages.

In October 2000, we launched Action Teams for Jobs to help jobless people in the most employment deprived areas in the country into work. Action Teams give help tailored to the needs of the individual clients, developing innovative ways to help people overcome the barriers they face when looking for work. By the end of their first year of operation, Action Teams had helped nearly 16,500 people into jobs. In January we increased the number of Action Teams from 53 to 63, and are investing £122 million to fund the teams up to March 2004.

In spring 2000, we introduced 15 Employment Zones in areas of persistently high long-term unemployment. The zones have already helped over 17,200 people move into work. We are in the process of extending the existing contracts until March 2004. We are currently fully evaluating the performance of the zones before deciding how to take the initiative further.

Annuities

28. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to reform the annuity rule for pensioners. [36354]

Mr. McCartney: The Government issued a consultation document, "Modernising Annuities", on 5 February to stimulate discussion on annuity issues. The consultation will run until 5 April, and we will then consider the responses before deciding how to proceed.

As the Government have repeatedly made clear, it is important that pension funds built up with the support of tax relief are used for their intended purpose—that is, to provide pensioners with a secure income in retirement. Our intention is to ensure that people make well-informed and appropriate decisions when purchasing annuities, and that the annuity market is flexible and offers good value choices within that market.

Textile Workers (Sunderland)

30. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to assist with retraining redundant textile workers in Sunderland; and if he will make a statement. [36356]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Wherever redundancies occur, and in whatever sector, the Employment Service together with other key regional partners, will set up a task force to identify and provide the support needed by those affected. This can include help through the Rapid Response Service where appropriate.

The aim of the Rapid Response Service is to provide support for those affected by redundancy and help people make the transition into sustainable new jobs. The nature of the help provided by the service will be tailored to the needs of the individuals, the employer, and the local labour market concerned. This could include offering information and advice to those affected, facilitating retraining where necessary, or developing customised retraining programmes.

We have been developing the Rapid Response Service in pilot areas since September 2000, and across all regions, including the north-east, since April 2001. All the elements of the Service will be in place next month, supported by a further investment of £6 million over two years.

Pensions (Low-paid Workers)

32. **Brian White:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what support his Department gives to low-paid workers to build up pension entitlement. [36358]

Mr. McCartney: From 6 April, some 18 million employees will start to build up better state pensions when State Second Pension reforms SERPS. In particular people earning £10,800 or less will get at least twice as much as they would have done under SERPS, and anybody earning up to £24,600 a year will also benefit, whether or not they are contributing to a private pension. In addition, State Second Pension will allow some two million carers and a similar number of people with long term disabilities to build up an additional (2nd tier) state pension for the first time.

The minimum income guarantee already boosts the retirement income of nearly two million pensioners. We also estimate that around half of all pensioner households will be eligible for the Pension Credit when it is introduced in October 2003—on average pensioners will be better off by £400 a year with some getting up to £1,000.

Income-related Benefits

33. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the take-up of income-related benefits by pensioners. [36359]

Mr. McCartney: This Government want all pensioners to have a decent income in retirement and is committed to ensuring that those poorer pensioners who are eligible for the receipt of Minimum Income guarantee (MIG) can achieve their legal entitlement.

As a result of the national MIG take-up campaign launched in May 2000 there have been an additional 243,793 claims of which 127,371 have been successful providing these pensioners with an extra £20 a week on average. In total, over 1.7 million pensioners are now receiving the MIG, 3500 of whom live in the New Forest, East constituency.

We have produced a new leaflet that explains who is entitled to MIG and how to claim, launched the new 10-page claim form, and set up the MIG Tele-Centre. All of these measures make it easier for pensioners to understand their entitlement and make a claim.

We are following this up, and from October 2001 when a customer applies for their retirement pension those who are not already receiving MIG are asked a series of questions to identify if they may be entitled and encouraged to claim if they wish to do so.

We are looking at a number of options to extend this service so that a claim to MIG will be invited automatically following certain key life events, for example when a pensioner reaches age 75 or 80 or when another benefit such as attendance allowance is awarded.

We are also working in partnership with organisations for older people to improve access to benefits and take up of MIG.

Pension Service

34. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he expects the new pension service to come into operation. [36360]

Mr. McCartney: The pension service will be launched on 1 April 2002 and will offer an improved service for pensioners. It will be customer-focused and will give pensioners a modern, personalised, efficient service designed to meet their needs. It will also provide information for future pensioners to help them make decisions about their future pension arrangements.

It will comprise an improved local service nationwide which will operate in the community to provide face to face contact for pensioners.

The local service will also provide a visiting service and will support customers by working in partnership with voluntary organisations, local authorities and other Government Departments to provide a more joined up service.

This improved service will be rolled out over the next two years. In the interim, our customers will continue to deal with their existing social security offices.

The local service for pensioners in each Government Office Region will be located throughout that region. Support work for the local service in the north-east will be shared between the Stockton and Seaham pension centres.

Stakeholder Pensions

35. **Patrick Mercer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of stakeholder pensions have been purchased by his Department's target group. [36361]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not yet available, however, figures from the Association of British Insurers (ABI) state that around 640,000 stakeholder pensions had been sold up the end of December 2001 representing over £1 billion of new pension premiums. Over 310,000 employers had designated a stakeholder scheme for their workforce by that date; a compliance rate of about 80 per cent. achieved within three months of the requirement coming into force.

Stakeholder pensions have also helped to stimulate the wider pensions market. In 2001, new regular premium pensions business rose by 52.5 per cent. over the preceding year to a total of £2.4 billion. Over the same period, single premium pension business rose by 2.7 per cent. to just over £50 billion.

The aim of our long-term pension reforms is to give everyone access to a good value pension arrangement, so that they have the chance of a decent income in retirement. Stakeholder pensions are part of those reforms. Targets for a particular type of pension are not appropriate. The suitability of a stakeholder pension for any individual is a matter for them to decide in the light of their particular circumstances.

Equal Opportunities

37. **Mr. Crausby:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent studies he has undertaken to identify the obstacles facing women returning to work. [36363]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: A number of studies are carried out on behalf of the Department looking at families with children and specifically lone parent families. These studies have examined the obstacles faced by women and informed the development of initiatives like the new deals, which have helped nearly a quarter of a million women move into work.

The current Employment Bill will introduce further measures that will help mothers to balance their work and family commitments. This is good for parents, children and business.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he intends to reply to the letters to him dated 8 and 16 January from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. M. Willingham. [40325]

Mr. McCartney: I replied to my right hon. Friend on 1 March.

Retirement Age

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether he has considered plans to change the state retirement age from 65 years. [36523]

Mr. McCartney: No.

Capita

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list all contracts awarded by his Department to Capita since 1997, stating *(a)* start and finish date of contract, *(b)* value of contract, *(c)* description of work to be carried out, *(d)* evaluation mechanism for successful delivery of contract, *(e)* penalty charges for failure to deliver and *(f)* if penalty charges have been incurred; and if he will make a statement. [39982]

Mr. McCartney: Until 2000 most records for use of consultants were kept by individual projects and programmes, rather than centrally, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The available information is as follows.

Accommodation and Office Services (AOS)

(a) Start and finish dates:

AOS contract	*Start date*	*End date*
North-west coast and Greater Manchester	1 April 1999	Extended to 31 March 2004
Tyne Tees and Yorkshire	1 April 1999	Extended to 31 March 2004
West Midlands and Mercia	1 April 1999	Extended to 31 March 2004

(b) Estimated total value for the three contracts to 31 March 2004 is £112.9 million.

(c) Services provided under each of these contracts are:

Post opening

Typing

Secretarial

Shuttle bus management

Post despatch

Reprographics

Fleet management

Messengerial

Switchboard operation

Stationery ordering.

(d) The contractor is monitored against the standards of delivery stipulated in the contract. The contractor provides monthly reports detailing levels of service achieved. If the service level is deficient, service credits can be applied.

(e) and *(f)* There are no penalty clauses within the contract.

Winter Fuels Payments (New Rules)

(a) The initial contract was for one year from 5 May 2000 to 4 May 2001, with an option to run for up to five years—i.e. to 4 May 2005. To date there have been two one-year extensions—the current expiry date is 4 May 2003.

(b) Estimated value for the three years to 4 May 2003 is £16.1 million.

(c) Bulk issue of claim forms for winter fuels payments to potential customers, identified by the Department (as living within Great Britain); and provision of a helpline service to deal with inquiries and issue of forms to customers with potential entitlement from previous winters.

(d) and *(e)* Performance targets for service delivery were included in the contract, and liquidated damages set for failure to reach these targets. The detail of the targets set and the level of liquidated damages to be imposed for failure to deliver these are commercially confidential between the Department and Capita.

(f) To date, no liquidated damages have been imposed.

Recruitment Services

(a) 13 July 2001 to 31 December 2002.

(b) Some £600,000 in total.

(c) To provide the Department's Human Resource Services with professional, independent advice and recruitment services.

(d) and *(e)* A range of quality criteria and control mechanisms are included in the contract, with post exercise reviews of administration, value for money and charging regimes.

(f) Not applicable.

Working Age Specification Framework

(a) Initially let from 15 October 2001 to 7 December 2001, then extended to 31 March 2002.

(b) £139,443.

(c) Support to provide a framework to ensure that Working Age Group is focused directly on activities that best contribute to the targets for which it is responsible.

(d) and *(e)* Payment for defined products, to time and standard. Unacceptable deliverables/products can result in re-work to correct at no additional charge to the Department, partial acceptance and pro-rata payment or, finally, termination of the contract.

(f) None.

Consultancy support to Pension Credit Project Central Design Authority

(a) Let from 4 February 2002 to 12 April 2002.

(b) Maximum value £198,000.

(c) Consultancy support to assist in key design tasks.

(d) (e) and *(f)* As above.

User Tester to the Pensions Forecasting Project

(a) 19 November 2001 to 25 February 2002.

(b) £24,850.

(c) Capita analysed new business processes in order to establish their impact and any testing requirements.

(d) (e) and *(f)* As above.

Private Sector Led New Deal—Solihull

(a) 1 August 1998 to 15 November 2002.

(b) £500,000.

(c) Provide consultancy advice and support to the Employment Service locally.

(d) The contract sets out the services to be delivered and the key performance indicators that have to be met. The contract manager is responsible for assuring that the services captured within the contract are being delivered. The contract sets out the remedies for non-delivery of the services specified within the contract. Performance management is undertaken by the contract manager who is responsible for working in partnership with the contractor to improve the levels of performance. Where appropriate the delivery of performance is directly linked to outputs/outcomes so in such circumstances payment is only triggered when the agreed levels of performance have been met.

(e) and *(f)* The contract does not include provision for penalty charges and therefore none have been incurred.

Employment Services Estates Corporate Supply

(a) 6 May 1998 to 5 May 2002.

(b) £3 million.

(c) Advised on Jobcentre Plus pathfinder environment issues, acting as managing consultant for the Jobcentre Plus refurbishment programme in the Employment Services estate.

(d) (e) and *(f)* As above.

New Deal Next Phase (progress2work)—Birmingham North

New Deal Next Phase (progress2work)—Birmingham South

(a) Both run from 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2004.

(b) £238,000 each.

(c) Establishing pathfinders for the first tranche of progress2work, targeting unemployed clients disadvantaged through drug misuse.

(d) (e) and *(f)* As above.

Disability Marketing in the North-West

(a) 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2003.

(b) £168,000.

(c) Marketing support for the North West Disability Services.

(d) (e) and *(f)* As above.

Access to Work

(a) 1 April 2001 to 1 October 2001.

(b) £184,000.

(c) Review of the Access to Work processes.

(d) (e) and *(f)* As above.

New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP) Procurement Support

(a) 9 October 2000 to 22 December 2000.

(b) £127,000.

(c) Technical support during the NDDP procurement exercise.

(d) (e) and *(f)* As above.

(d) (e) and *(f)* As above.

Post Office

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what progress has been made since January on negotiations between the Post Office and its partners on the Universal bank. [36337]

Mr. Darling: Good progress continues to be made. I shall keep the House informed.

Accountancy Contracts

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will publish the *(a)* number and *(b)* value of contracts awarded by his Department to

(i) Arthur Andersen, (ii) Deloitte & Touche, (ii) Ernst & Young, (iv) KPMG and (v) PricewaterhouseCoopers accountants in each year since 1997. [34985]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested on the number of contracts let is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The information requested on value of contracts is provided in the table as follows:

Remuneration

£ million

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Arthur Andersen	0	0	0	0
Deloitte & Touche	2.4	2.4	2.8	10.7
Ernst & Young	1.9	2.7	3.8	0.98
KPMG	0.1	1.0	0.42	0.52
PWC	1.7	1.2	0.32	0.47

Figures relate to contracts awarded by the ex Department of Social Security up to the last full financial year for which information is available.

Arthur Andersen: the figures in the table relate to Andersen Worldwide, Arthur Andersen (AA) and not to Andersen Consulting which split from the Andersen Worldwide organisation in 1999.

Remuneration with Deloitte & Touche rose sharply between 1999–2000 and 2000–01 because, following competition, they were selected as a strategic partner for the Child Support Agency to assist in implementing Child Support Reforms. The increased remuneration reflects the increased work done under this partnership since late 1999, for example business process and organisational design and planning and IS/IT assurance.

Ernst & Young/CGEY. The consulting arm of Ernst & Young was purchased by Cap Gemini in 2000 to form Cap Gemini Ernst & Young (CGEY).

PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) was formed on 1 July 1998 as the result of a merger of the Price Waterhouse and Coopers and Lybrand organisations.

Jobcentres

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of jobcentres in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* Scotland are equipped with Jobpoint terminals. [36747]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* The rollout of Jobpoints across the network of Jobcentres will be completed by the end of February. Currently some 99 per cent. of Jobcentres in Great Britain, and in Scotland, are equipped with Jobpoint terminals. Jobcentres in Northern Ireland are the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Special Advisers

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on how many occasions since 1 May 1997 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; and if he will list the total cost, including (i) travel, (ii) accommodation and (iii) subsistence allowance, for each occasion. [37986]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* Between 1 April 2001 and 31 March 2001, special advisers in my Department did not travel abroad on any occasion. Information for the period 2 May 1997 to 31 March 2000 is already in the public domain. All travel by special advisers is undertaken in accordance with the rules set out in the ministerial code, and the civil service management code.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what targets he has set for reducing discrimination against older people. [36344]

Mr. McCartney: We are vigorously promoting the benefits of recruiting, training and retaining older workers as part of our Age Positive campaign and to help employers prepare for the introduction of employment legislation by 2006.

We have set ourselves a target of increasing the employment rate of people aged 50 and over. The new deal 50 plus has already helped 127 people move into work in the hon. Member's constituency. Our new Jobcentre Plus service will help all those people on benefits who want to find work, regardless of age. [One of the Jobcentre Plus pathfinders is near to my hon. Friend's constituency, in Livingston]. We are building on the success of the measures we have already taken which have helped increase the employment rate for older people in each of the past four years.

Action Teams for Jobs

Paul Goggins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement about the effectiveness of Action Teams for Jobs. [36329]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Action Teams for Jobs are helping to tackle joblessness in the most employment deprived areas in the country. Action Teams are performing well. In their first year of operation, they helped nearly 16,500 people into work—over 40 per cent. of participants.

As part of the extension of the Action Teams initiative last October, a new team was created in south Manchester, covering my hon. Friend's constituency. By mid-February, the team had already engaged with 167 clients.

DEFENCE

Nancekuke

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent assessment he has made of the *(a)* morbidity and *(b)* mortality records for workers at CDE Nancekuke in Cornwall; and if he will make a statement on the results. [34865]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has not conducted any investigation of the mortality of ex-members of staff at CDE Nancekuke since the 1970 report from the Registrar General that concluded that there were no excess deaths or any differences in the cause of death compared to the national population.

However, the MOD has looked again at the data compiled at about the same time on the morbidity of Nancekuke workers. I have concluded that although the quality of the available information is not sufficient to produce a definitive scientific paper, there was nothing to suggest an excess morbidity in ex-Nancekuke staff.

Military Bases

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures have been put in place to ensure the safety of US bases in the UK since 11 September 2001; and if he will make a statement. [38063]

Dr. Moonie: Security at Ministry of Defence establishments is kept under constant review. It is MOD policy not to disclose details of security measures.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent changes there have been to policy regarding MDP reserves being used to secure and protect military bases; and if he will make a statement. [38068]

Dr. Moonie: There are no Ministry of Defence police reserves, although there is an MDP Operational Support Unit (OSU) of 50 officers based at MDP Headquarters in Wethersfield in Essex. OSU officers continue, as before, to be used to enable MDP to meet exceptional demands to resources and to provide specialist skills as and where required.

BAE Systems Broach Penetrating Warhead

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the projected cost is of flight trials of the AGM 154c carrying the BAE Systems Broach penetrating warhead; and if he will make a statement. [38228]

Dr. Moonie: The AGM 154c (Joint Stand-Off Weapon) is a United States Navy Programme. As such, the Ministry of Defence has no visibility of the costs involved.

Atlantic Patrol Task (North)

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the length of the deployment of the Atlantic Patrol Task (North) to the West Indies was set at nine months. [38947]

Mr. Ingram: The length of the deployment of the Atlantic Patrol Task (North) is not stipulated as nine months. The Atlantic Patrol Task came into effect on 1 November 1998 to allow greater flexibility on how peacetime deployments to the Caribbean, South Atlantic and West Africa were managed. Since November 1998, the annual average cover by the Atlantic Patrol Task (North) in the Caribbean region has been nine and a half months.

Surface Combatant Maritime Rotorcraft

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his study into the Surface Combatant Maritime Rotorcraft capability; when the outcome will be made public; and what assessment he has made of existing helicopter designs. [38949]

Dr. Moonie: The Surface Combatant Maritime Rotorcraft project is currently nearing completion of its concept phase. During this phase we have identified a number of options that have the potential to meet the capability requirements when the Maritime Lynx goes out of service. A number of existing helicopter designs are potentially able to meet these requirements, including the Future Lynx proposal from Westlands Helicopter Ltd., and these will be considered further in the assessment phase. I expect to be able to make a further announcement about the next stage for this project later this year.

Apache Helicopter

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future use of the Apache helicopter in support of amphibious operations and the Royal Marines. [38946]

Mr. Ingram: Trials to determine the operating limits, and any modifications required, for the UK's WAH 64 Attack Helicopter to operate in a maritime environment are due to commence in early 2004. Decisions on the extent of the utility of the helicopter in support of amphibious operations and the Royal Marines will be informed by the outcome of the trials.

Berlin Plus Agreements

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress made in setting modalities to enable EU access to NATO capabilities within the framework of Berlin plus agreements. [38943]

Mr. Hoon: Work between the EU and NATO continues. We have made good progress towards agreement on EU access to NATO assets and capabilities, although arrangements are not yet finalised.

International Security Assistance Force

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions the Government have had with *(a)* the interim Afghan Administration and *(b)* other nations contributing to the International Security Assistance Force, concerning the possible deployment of ISAF to cities other than Kabul. [38952]

Mr. Hoon: We hold regular discussions with the Interim Administration and other contributing nations about the role of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), including proposals that ISAF might be deployed to cities other than Kabul. We continue to have questions about the practicality of such a deployment in current circumstances.

Exercise Tradewinds 01

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Royal Navy ships and nations were to have been involved in exercise Tradewinds 01; and what the purpose of the exercise was to be. [38948]

Mr. Ingram: The Atlantic Patrol Task (North) ship, HMS Sheffield, participated in the US sponsored exercise Tradewinds 01 between 26 April and 3 May 2001. In addition to UK and US forces involvement, the Regional Security Systems States (Barbados, Grenada, St. Vincent, Antigua and Barbuda, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia and Dominica) participated in the exercise along with Trinidad and Tobago. The main purpose of the exercise was to establish a framework for the Caribbean ground and maritime forces to conduct joint and coalition training.

Within this framework, the aim was to promote regional interoperability, enhance participants' ability to conduct small to medium scale operations in a multinational environment and to improve their ability to respond to disaster relief, search and rescue and law enforcement operations.

European Security and Defence Policy

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the concept of *(a)* a European Security and Defence Identity and *(b)* a European Security and Defence Policy. [38941]

Mr. Hoon: The European Security and Defence Identity was founded within NATO to enable European Allies to make a more coherent and effective contribution to the missions and activities of the Alliance. The European Security and Defence Policy of the European Union reinforces this work and seeks to improve European military capabilities.

DSACEUR

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what role Deputy SACEUR will play within the EU Military Committee. [38942]

Mr. Hoon: The EU Military Committee (EUMC) is formally composed of the EU Chiefs of Defence, who are represented on a permanent basis by Brussels-based Military Representatives. DSACEUR may be invited to attend EUMC meetings in view of his responsibilities for the European Pillar of NATO and his potential role in EU-led operations.

Afghanistan

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons aerial bombing raids are continuing in Afghanistan. [38499]

Mr. Hoon: The coalition remains committed to bring Osama bin Laden and other al-Qaeda leaders to account and preventing al-Qaeda from posing a terrorist threat in the future. Coalition aircraft are therefore continuing to support action by Afghan forces on the ground against the terrorists and their Taliban supporters.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to formulate an accurate assessment of the numbers of casualties in Afghanistan since 11 September 2001. [38498]

Mr. Hoon: I have nothing to add to the answer which I gave to my hon. Friend on 30 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 337W.

Research and Development

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on how much was spent on research and development last year. [39199]

Dr. Moonie: Ministry of Defence (MOD) spending on research and development is reported annually in Defence Statistics, published by the Defence Analytical Services Agency. The latest year for which figures are available is 1999–2000 when the MOD spent £2,345 million, inclusive of VAT.

QinetiQ

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the potential losses of expertise due to the division of DERA into QinetiQ and Dstl. [39194]

Dr. Moonie: The process of splitting DERA, into Dstl and QinetiQ, was based on the key objective to identify the functional requirements and capabilities needed by each organisation to achieve their future business goals. DERA and the Ministry of Defence experts worked closely together in late 2000 to identify which divisions, teams and individuals were required by which organisation, and the final division aimed to provide each organisation with skills that were both balanced and adequate to achieve sustainability.

The division into future-Dstl and future-QinetiQ operated on a "shadow" basis from January 2001, and QinetiQ plc and Dstl were formally created in July last year. Throughout, both organisations have continued to successfully meet the needs of their customers. We are confident that the PPP process, which is still ongoing, will strengthen links between military and civil technology and improve the transfer of bright ideas from the private sector and academia. This will strongly benefit the defence science base.

Both organisations are vibrant and attractive places to work, and continue to attract and retain high calibre staff in the face of growing competition from the civil sector.

STAR 21

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what input his Department is making to the deliberations of the European Union's Advisory Group on Aerospace (STAR 21); and when the Group is expected to make its recommendations. [39037]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* STAR 21 is an industry group set up under the auspices of the European Commission, with no formal involvement from the Governments of EU member states. Nevertheless, we are being kept abreast of the group's deliberations, and would anticipate being consulted on the group's findings and proposals. I understand that the group is hoping to report in the summer.

Armed Forces (Northern Ireland)

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the minimum garrison strength of the armed forces required to remain in Northern Ireland in the event of a total cessation of terrorism and the threat of terrorism within the United Kingdom from Irish Republican and Loyalist terrorist organisations. [40080]

Mr. Ingram: The detailed nature of the long-term garrison in Northern Ireland will require careful study taking into account practical factors which apply throughout the United Kingdom, such as training needs, facilities and availability of accommodation. Ultimately we would expect the number of regular service personnel permanently based in Northern Ireland to be about 8,000, a comparable number to those stationed in similar sized areas in Great Britain.

Saville Inquiry

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to receive a report on the circumstances leading to the loss of confidential information regarding the identity of the soldiers who are due to give evidence to the Saville Inquiry; what steps have been taken to *(a)* recover the lost documents and *(b)* offer protection to the soldiers and their families; and if he will make a statement. [40079]

Mr. Ingram: Inquiries by the police have revealed that a number of documents relating to the Bloody Sunday Inquiry were left outside barristers' chambers in London. There is no indication that any of these documents contained information regarding the identity of the soldiers, nor anything else that would affect the safety of them or their families.

The police inquiries continue and I am being kept apprised of their progress.

Tyne Class OPVs

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what armament will be carried by the Tyne Class OPVs. [40310]

Mr. Ingram: HMS Tyne will be the first of the three new River Class Offshore Patrol Vessels to be built. Each vessel will be fitted with one 20 mm BMARC KAA Gun and two 7.62 mm General Purpose Machine Guns. In addition, the crew will have access to small arms, including SA 80 Rifles and 9 mm pistols.

Warships

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from the Indian Government concerning expressions of interest to purchase HMS Invincible. [38950]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has received no representations from the Government of India concerning the availability of HMS Invincible for purchase.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how long the refit of HMS Vanguard will take; and what is the estimated cost. [40311]

Mr. Ingram: The refit of HMS Vanguard is scheduled to take around two and a half years to complete including trials and training. The total cost of the refit is estimated to be approximately £217 million including materials, but excluding the costs for any additional essential work identified during the course of the refit.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence at what standby notice HMS Sheffield will be available between 2003 and 2004. [40314]

Mr. Ingram: On current plans, HMS Sheffield will be held at Extended Readiness, commensurate with force levels endorsed within the Strategic Defence Review, from November 2002 until September 2004. Extended Readiness provides the flexibility to vary the notion of availability.

Type 42 Destroyers

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when each of the remaining Type 42 destroyers will be paid off. [40313]

Mr. Ingram: On current plans, the operational decommissioning dates for the remaining Type 42 destroyers in the Royal Navy are as follows:

Type 42 destroyer	*Planned operational decommissioning date*
HMS Cardiff	2008
HMS Newcastle	2007
HMS Glasgow	2009
HMS Exeter	2010
HMS Southampton	2011
HMS Nottingham	2012
HMS Liverpool	2010
HMS Manchester	2012
HMS Gloucester	2013
HMS Edinburgh	2013
HMS York	2014

Frigates

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if all type 22 and type 23 frigates will be refitted with the 114 mm Mark VIII Mod I gun. [40315]

Mr. Ingram: It is planned to install the 4.5 inch (114 mm) Mark VIII MOD 1 gun on type 22 batch 3 frigates and on all type 23 frigates.

Cape Wrath Range

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what his policy is on consent to applications received from *(a)* UK forces and *(b)* overseas forces for the use of depleted uranium-based ammunition at Cape Wrath range; [40329]

(2) if depleted uranium-based ammunition has been authorised for use at the Cape Wrath range by *(a)* UK forces and *(b)* overseas forces; and if he will make a statement. [40328]

Dr. Moonie: The use of depleted uranium ammunition is not and never has been authorised at Cape Wrath range. We have no intention of changing this policy.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Collaboration Agreements

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the *(a)* number and *(b)* type of collaboration agreements between universities and colleges and industry; and if she will make a statement on the benefit of these agreements. [39703]

Margaret Hodge: The most recent description of collaboration between higher education institutions and business is the Higher Education—Business Interaction Survey report by the Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies of the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, published in December 2001, copies of which have been placed in the Library. This survey was commissioned by the Higher Education Funding Council for England on behalf of stakeholders including the Department for Education and Skills. The report can also be found on the internet at www.hefce.ac.uk/Pubs/hefce/2001/01–68.htm. Interactions and collaboration between higher education institutions and businesses can bring a number of benefits, for companies, for institutions, for employees and for students.

Medical Schools

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action she is taking to address potential over-crowding in medical schools. [37218]

Margaret Hodge: Following a review of the medical workforce, published in December 1997, and the commitments made in the NHS Plan in July 2000, the number of places available to study medicine in England will increase to almost 6,000 in 2005–06. Of the additional places, over 40 per cent. will be at new medical schools. The extra places were approved by an implementation group chaired jointly by the Chief Executive of Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Chief Medical Officer for England following bids for additional places by medical schools. The General Medical Council also considered the bids for quality and delivery of teaching provision. The increases will be implemented, in stages, over seven years in line with the capacity of medical schools to accommodate the additional students.

Out of School Clubs

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many out of school clubs which received new opportunities funding since such funding was available *(a)* have subsequently closed and *(b)* are operational. [37297]

Margaret Hodge: Information is not available in the form requested.

The New Opportunities Fund Out Of Schools Hours Programme has created over 146,500 new out of school hours child care places in England since April 1999. Most of these projects are still receiving funding from the Fund but of those projects that have submitted their end of grant reports, over 90 per cent. of places are still in operation.

Between 1999 and 2004 £225.5 million is being made available to help start up new out of school hours child care in England.

Fast Track Scheme

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the cost has been of the Fast Track Scheme, including the costs of advertising. [38049]

Mr. Timms: The Government have invested the following funds in creating the Fast Track Teaching Programme, a new career route for some of the highest calibre future teachers:

	£
2000–01	4,603,058
2001–02	[1]8,530,000

[1] Estimated end-year forecast

This represents the total investment to date in fast track, including: national advertising; targeted marketing; application materials; assessment and selection; enhanced initial teacher training; bursaries; ICT; additional professional development events; marketing to schools; and the investment needed to build a highly personalised system of job-broking, career management and professional development.

Welcome Back Bonus Scheme

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the cost has been of the welcome back bonus scheme; and how much of that cost has been paid to returning teachers. [38051]

Mr. Timms: The information is not available in the form requested. Local education authorities pay welcome back bonuses to teachers and then claim reimbursement of this expenditure from my Department. The first reimbursements will be made this month. We do not yet have final claimant numbers. £117,280 was allocated in the current financial year to publicise the bonus and establish the administrative arrangements for the scheme.

Learning and Skills Councils

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which local learning and skills councils have appointed specialist officers in basic skills. [38452]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's grant letter to the LSC for 2002–03 highlighted the importance of tackling the legacy of poor basic skills, and asked the LSC to implement its adult literacy and numeracy strategy, to meet the target of raising the literacy and numeracy skills of 750,000 young people and adults by 2004 and set out the key priorities for the LSC in 2002–03 including taking responsibility for tackling the woeful legacy of poor basic skills.

The LSC has confirmed that there is at least one person in each local LSC with specific responsibility for basic skills.

Knowledge Transfer

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the value and effectiveness of knowledge transfer initiatives sponsored by her Department. [38521]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The Department for Education and Skills, in partnership with the Department of Trade and Industry, supports knowledge transfer through projects in higher education funded under the Higher Education Innovation Fund, which incorporates the earlier Higher Education Reach-Out to Business and the Community Fund. Many of the projects funded under these initiatives introduced new organisational and structural arrangements intended to lead to systematic and sustainable improvements in relationships between higher education institutions and business. As the earliest projects have only been running for just over two years it is still too soon for full evaluation. Early indications suggest that these initiatives are helping to improve the capacity of higher education institutions to carry out knowledge transfer.

Student Costs

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the number of potential students, broken down by social class, who were deterred from applying for a university place in 2001 because of the financial cost they might incur. [38787]

Margaret Hodge: The Youth Cohort Study shows that around nine in 10 young people who achieve two or more A-levels by 18 progress to Higher Education by the time they are 21. The differences in participation rates between different social classes largely reflect differences in prior attainment. A research study into the factors affecting participation in HE by different social class groups (which focused on those with, or seeking to get, entry-level qualifications) found that finance is one of a number of concerns people had when they were deciding whether or not to attend university. However, among those who had decided against going to university the main reasons were not related to the likely costs involved but because they wanted to start work or because they did not need a higher education qualification for their chosen career.

Student Guidance

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what type of guidance on available funding is offered to *(a)* students applying for university places and *(b)* current university students; and who offers this guidance. [38788]

Margaret Hodge: My Department produces an annual guide to the financial help available to students. Copies of this guide are made available directly to local education authorities (LEAs), higher education institutions (HEIs), and the booklet is also available on the Department's website.

Separate booklets are also produced for disabled students and those with children.

As part of our current marketing campaign to increase awareness of higher education among 13 to 19-year-olds we have produced booklets for pupils on student finance.

LEAs, schools, HEIs, my Department and a range of other advisers also provide advice and guidance to students on financial support.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what responsibility institutes of higher education have for offering guidance to students on matters relating to *(a)* funding available to them and *(b)* managing their personal budgets. [38789]

Margaret Hodge: Individual higher education institutions make their own arrangements for providing guidance to students. The Department, together with the Higher Education Funding Council for England, Universities UK and the Standing Conference of Principals is undertaking a project looking at the range of student services provided by institutions. The objective is to identify effective approaches in helping students especially those who are at risk. The project is due to report in the summer.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent assessment she has made of the arrangements for offering guidance to students applying for higher education courses on funding available to them. [38792]

Margaret Hodge: Each year my Department undertakes an independent survey of the information and guidance it produces on the funding available to higher education students. This survey informs the design and production of future financial support information materials. The most recent survey was carried out in November and December 2001.

Financial Literacy

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if the student funding review is examining measures to improve financial literacy among higher education students. [38790]

Margaret Hodge: The Government are not currently examining measures to improve financial literacy among higher education students.

Pupil Attainment

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many and what percentage of 11 year olds in maintained schools achieved the standard of *(a)* literacy and *(b)* numeracy for that age in each year since 1997. [38801]

Mr. Timms: The table shows the number and percentage of pupils in maintained mainstream schools in England who achieved Level 4 or above in the *(a)* English and *(b)* mathematics Key Stage 2 tests in each year from 1997 to 2001.

The table confirms that the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies have succeeded in raising standards in primary schools.

	(a) English	*(b) Mathematics*
1997		
Number at Level 4 or above[1]	360,200	353,100
Percentage of eligible pupils	63	62
1998		
Number at Level 4 or above[1]	377,800	341,200
Percentage of eligible pupils	65	58
1999		
Number at Level 4 or above[1]	424,500	415,600
Percentage of eligible pupils	70	69
2000		
Number at Level 4 or above[1]	446,100	427,000
Percentage of eligible pupils	75	72
2001		
Number at Level 4 or above[1]	453,900	427,300
Percentage of eligible pupils	75	71

[1] Numbers are rounded to the nearest 100.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what percentages her Department has set for pupils to achieve level 4 at Key Stage 2 tests in *(a)* English and *(b)* maths; and what target dates her Department has set for these targets to be met; [38804]

(2) what further targets her Department plans to set in relation to the commitment to increase the percentage of

children who achieve level 4 in each of the Key Stage 2 English and maths. [38805]

Mr. Timms: We remain committed to achieving our Key Stage 2 targets for 2002, which are for 80 per cent. of pupils to achieve level 4 or above in English and 75 per cent. to do so in maths.

We recently consulted on higher targets for 2004 of 85 per cent. of pupils achieving level 4 or above in English and maths and 35 per cent. achieving level 5 or above. We are considering responses to the consultation carefully and expect to make an announcement about the national targets shortly.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many and what percentage of pupils have reached level 5 in Key Stage 3 in *(a)* English, *(b)* maths, *(c)* ICT and *(d)* science in each year since 1997. [38808]

Mr. Timms: The table shows the number and percentage of pupils in all schools in England who achieved Level 5 or above in the *(a)* English, *(b)* mathematics, *(c)* ICT and *(d)* science Key Stage 3 assessments in each year from 1997 to 2001.

The Key Stage 3 National Strategy, just begun, will support schools in raising standards in the early years of secondary education and improving on these figures.

		(a) English	*(b) Mathematics*	*(c) ICT*[1]	*(d) Science*
1997	Number at Level 5 or above[2]	315,600	332,500	232,000	331,800
	Percentage of eligible pupils	57	60	50	60
1998	Number of Level 5 or above[2]	358,000	331,600	242,000	310,500
	Percentage of eligible pupils	65	59	56	56
1999	Number at Level 5 or above[2]	365,700	358,400	315,700	315,200
	Percentage of eligible pupils	64	62	58	55
2000	Number at Level 5 or above[2]	369,800	376,300	341,200	343,800
	Percentage of eligible pupils	64	65	62	59
2001	Number at Level 5 or above[2]	382,600	394,600	357,100	390,000
	Percentage of eligible pupils	65	66	65	66

Notes:

[1] The ICT results are based on Teacher Assessments; English, maths and science are based on the test results.

[2] The numbers are rounded to the nearest hundred.

Sixth Forms

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of the proportion of pupils proceeding into higher education from *(a)* schools with sixth forms and *(b)* schools without sixth forms in each of the last three years. [38860]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The available information is given in the table, showing the previous educational institution of students accepted for entry to full-time undergraduate courses via the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). However, it is not possible to identify the type of school that a student attended prior to entering higher education from a further education college. Therefore, the categories of institution shown do not equate directly to *(a)* schools with sixth forms and *(b)* schools without sixth forms.

Not all students who enter higher education do so directly after leaving full-time education at age 18; for example, some spend a period in employment before returning to study, and others take a gap year to broaden their experience. Around a third of young people enter full-time higher education by the age of 20, including those who enter at ages 18, 19 and 20.

Students from England aged 18 accepted for entry to full-time undergraduate courses in the UK by previous educational institution

	Academic year of entry to Higher Education		
	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Schools[1]			
17 year olds[2] in previous year studying in Schools	167,600	167,500	173,600
18 year olds[3] accepted for entry from Schools	83,200	83,200	86,900
Percentage proceeding to HE aged 18	50	50	50
FE Colleges			
17 year olds[2] in previous year studying in FE colleges	183,700	183,100	184,900
18 year olds[3] accepted for entry from FE colleges	37,700	38,100	40,800
Percentage proceeding to HE aged 18	21	21	22

[1] Including City Technology Colleges.

[2] Age at 31 August.

[3] Age at 30 September.

Postcode Premium Payments

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what criteria are used by the HEFC to determine those areas which qualify for postcode premium payments in connection with widening participation; and what the qualifying post code areas are. [38861]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* This is a matter for the Higher Education Funding Council for England. I have therefore asked the Chief Executive of the Funding Council to reply to your question and to place a copy of his reply in the House of Commons Library.

School Inspections

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many people are employed by *(a)* Ofsted and *(b)* other schools monitoring and inspection organisations. [39010]

Mr. Timms: I am advised that Ofsted employs 2,651 staff, including 216 HM Inspectors of Schools. Of these, over 1,900 are engaged in the regulation of child care and many others are involved in inspections of colleges, local education authorities and initial teacher training providers. Ofsted also employs on a temporary basis around 800 additional inspectors who carry out occasional work in specific areas across the range of Ofsted's remit. In addition, 7,633 school inspectors are contracted to, or employed by, inspection contractors to undertake school inspections under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996. Other bodies, such as local education authorities, employ people who monitor and inspect schools, but details are not collected centrally.

Classroom Assistants

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent discussions she has had with the Department for Work and Pensions about the payment of jobseekers' allowance to classroom assistants and other educational workers not paid during school holidays. [39463]

Mr. Timms: None, but officials are in regular contact with the Department for Work and Pensions.

Engineering Students

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the reasons for the difference between the projected debts of engineering students in Great Britain and the average for all students; and what measures she has taken to address the difference. [39530]

Margaret Hodge: The Government are committed to tackling the problem of students being put off higher education by debt or the perception of debt. That is an important strand of the current review of student support. The Government have also commissioned Sir Gareth Roberts to review the supply of high level science and engineering skills.

Standards Fund

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of specific grants made available from her Department through the Standards Fund required local education authorities to make a contribution in the years *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000–01. [39630]

Mr. Timms: The percentage of the Standards Fund contributed by local education authorities for each year between 1997–98 and 2000–01 is shown in the table.

Standards Fund contributed by local education authorities

Financial year	*Percentage*
1997–98	34
1998–99	36
1999–2000	31
2000–01	24

The Standards Fund programme is designed to be a funding partnership between local education authorities and the Government to support educational initiatives and priorities. Local education authority contributions to the Standards Fund are taken account of in setting the level of Education Standard Spending each year.

Teaching Vacancies

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teaching vacancies there are in schools in Eastbourne. [40362]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is not available.

There were 43 vacancies for full-time teachers in maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools in East Sussex local authority in January 2001.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the statutory instruments issued by his Department in the last 12 months, indicating *(a)* the purpose of each and *(b)* the cost of each to (i) public funds, (ii) businesses and (iii) individuals. [36237]

Angela Eagle: A list of statutory instruments issued by the Home Office is as listed. The purpose of each instrument is set out in its explanatory note. Information on the cost of each instrument to public funds, businesses and individuals is not available and could not be made available otherwise than at disproportionate cost.

Statutory Instruments issued by the Home Department from 13 February 2001 to 12 February 2002 (excluding Orders in Council)

The Channel Tunnel (International Arrangements) (Amendment No.2) Order 2001 (no. 418)

The Terrorism Act 2000 (Commencement No. 3) Order 2001 (no. 421)

The Terrorism Act 2000 (Code of Practice for Authorised Officers) Order 2001 (no. 425)

The Terrorism Act 2000 (Carding) Order 2001 (no. 426)

The Terrorism Act 2000 (Code of Practice for Examining Officers) Order 2001 (no. 427)

The Terrorism (Interviews) (Scotland) Order 2001 (no. 428 (S.1))

The Representation of the People (Variation of Limits of Candidates' Election Expenses) Order 2001 (no. 535)

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 (Commencement) Order 2001 (no. 566 (C.24))

The Norfolk (Coroners' Districts) Order 2001 (no. 666)

The Gaming Act (Variation of Fees) (England and Wales) Order 2001 (no. 725)

The Gaming Act (Variation of Fees) England and Wales and Scotland Order 2001 (no. 726)

The Gaming (Bingo) Act (Fees) (Amendment) Order 2001 (no. 727)

The Lotteries (Gaming Board Fees) Order 2001 (no. 728)

The Gaming Act (Variation of Monetary Limits) Order 2001 (no. 757)

The Local Probation Boards (Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations 2001 (no. 786)

The Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 (Approved Premises) Regulations 2001 (no. 850)

The Immigration and Asylum Appeals (One-stop Procedure) (Amendment) Regulations 2001 (no. 867)

The Immigration and Asylum Appeals (Notices) (Amendment) Regulations 2001 (no. 868)

The Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 (Commencement No. 4) Order 2001 (no. 919 (C.33))

The Deregulation (Sunday Licensing) Order 2001 (no. 920)

The Licensing (Special Hours Certificates) (Amendment) Rules 2001 (no. 921)

The Immigration (European Economic Area) (Amendment) Regulations 2001 (no. 865)

The Fixed Penalty (Procedure) (Amendment) Regulations 2001 (no. 926)

The Local Probation Boards (Appointments and Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations 2001 (no. 1035)

The Regulation of Investigatory Powers (British Broadcasting Corporation) Order 2001 (no. 1057)

The Licensing (Amendment of Various Rules) Rules 2001 (no. 1096)

The Police Act 1997 (Commencement No. 7) Order 2001 (no. 1097 (C.36))

The Order Prescribing Forms under the Licensing Act 1902 (Amendment) Order 2001 (no. 1098)

The Isles of Scilly (Sale of Intoxicating Liquor) (Amendment) Order 2001 (no. 1099)

The Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Designation of Public Authorities for the Purposes of Intrusive Surveillance) Order 2001 (no. 1126)

The Prison Service (Pay Review Body) Regulations 2001 (no. 1161)

The European Parliamentary Elections (Franchise of Relevant Citizens of the Union) Regulations 2001 (no. 1184)

The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) (Amendment) Order 2001 (no. 1192)

The Police Act 1997 (Criminal Records) (Registration) Regulations 2001 (no. 1194)

The Elections (Welsh Forms) Order 2001 (no. 1204)

The Human Rights Act (Amendment) Order 2001 (no. 1216)

The Suffolk (District Coroners') Order 2001 (no. 1220)

The Road Traffic (Owner Liability) (Amendment) (No.2) Regulations 2001 (no. 1222)

The Terrorism Act 2000 (Proscribed Organisations) (Amendment) Order 2001 (no. 1261)

The Electoral Commission (Limit on Public Awareness Expenditure) Order 2001 (no. 1329)

The Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 (Part V Exemption: Eligible Voluntary Bodies and Relevant Employers) Order 2001 (no. 1393)

The Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 (Commencement No. 10) Order 2001 (no. 1394 (C.49))

The Immigration (Restrictions on Employment) (Code of Practice) Order 2001 (no. 1436)

The Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 (Part V Exemption: Educational Institutions and Health Sector Bodies) Order 2001 (no. 1403)

The Channel Tunnel (International Arrangements) (Amendment No. 3) Order 2001 (no. 1544)

The Elections Act 2001 (Supplemental Provisions) Order 2001 (no. 1630)

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 (Commencement No. 1) Order 2001 (no. 56)

The Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 (Commencement No. 6) Order 2001 (no. 1651 (C.57))

The Representation of the People (England and Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2001 (no. 1700)

The Sex Offenders (Notification of Requirements) (Prescribed Police Stations) Regulations 2001 (no. 1708)

The Parliamentary Elections (Returning Officers' Charges) Order 2001 (no. 1736)

The Elections Act 2001 (Supplemental Provisions) (No. 2) Order 2001 (no. 1774)

The Road Traffic Offenders (Additional Offences and Prescribed Services) Order 2001 (no. 1814)

The Drug Abstinence Order (Responsible Officer) Order 2001 (no. 1815)

The Criminal Justice (Specified Class A Drugs) Order 2001 (no. 1816)

The Sex Offenders (Notice Requirements) (Foreign Travel) Regulations 2001 (no. 1846)

The Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 (Commencement No. 1) Order 2001 (no. 2223 (C.74))

The Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 (Commencement No. 7) Order 2001 (no. 2232)

The Community Order (Electronic Monitoring of Requirements) (Responsible Officer) Order 2001 (no. 2233)

The Curfew Order and Curfew Requirement (Responsible Officer) Order 2001 (no. 2234)

The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (Codes of Practice) (Modification) Order 2001 (no. 2254)

The Immigration (Designation of Travel Bans) (Amendment) Order 2001 (no. 2377)

The International Criminal Court Act 2001 (Enforcement of Fines, Forfeiture and Reparation Orders) Regulations 2001 (no. 379)

The National Crime Squad (NCS) Service Authority (Budget Statement) Order 2001 (no. 2427)

The National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) Service Authority (Budget Statement) Order 2001 (no. 2428)

The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (Tape-recording of interviews) (Amendment) Order 2001 (no. 2480)

The Police Act 1997 (Criminal Records) (Registration) (Amendment) Regulations 2001 (no. 2498)

The Misuse of Drugs (Designation) Order 2001 (no. 3997)

The Misuse of Drugs Regulations 2001 (no. 3998)

The Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 (Commencement No. 1 and Consequential Provisions) Order 2001 (no. 4019 (C.128))

The Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 (Part V Exemption: Relevant Employers) Order 2002 (no. 9)

The Closure of Prisons Her Majesty's (H.M.) Prison Haslar) Order 2002 (no. 77)

The Closure of Prisons Her Majesty's (H.M.) Young Offender Institution Dover) Order 2002 (no. 78)

The Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988 (Firearms Consultative Committee) Order 2002 (no. 127)

The Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 (Commencement No. 3) Order 2002 (no. 228 (C.4))

DRAFT European Union Extradition Regulations 2002

DRAFT Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) (Amendment) Order 2002

DRAFT Police Act 1997 (Enhanced Criminal Record Certificates) (Protection of Vulnerable Adults) Regulations 2002

Local Instrument

The Charities (The Bridge House Estates) Order 2001 (no. 2001/4017).

Mr. Nuredin Dalipi

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to announce a decision on the application of Mr. Nuredin Dalipi of Shoeburyness, Home Office Reference 0101 2951; and for what reason he has not been given a work permit. [36015]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 13 February 2002]:* I wrote to the hon. Member on 4 March 2002.

Women Trafficking

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what police services exist between the UK and other European police forces to combat the trafficking of women from European countries into the UK. [37201]

Angela Eagle: The United Kingdom (UK) works with other law enforcement agencies in Europe with Europol to tackle people trafficking from Europe to the UK. Europol has no executive or operational powers and no capabilities to gather evidence. It is intelligence based and offers a range of products and services to operational law enforcement teams in the European Union. These include analytical support for both strategic and tactical developments and a forum to process requests for assistance in UK investigations with connections in other European Union member states and candidate countries. There is ongoing operational work which is supported by Europol.

Another link between UK law enforcement and overseas partners is through the establishment of Project Reflex, a practical multi-agency taskforce on organised immigration crime. Led by the National Crime Squad (NCS), Reflex was set up in March 2000 and brings together all the key agencies, including the Immigration Service, the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS), the security and intelligence agencies and key police forces including the Metropolitan police, Kent and the British Transport police. Under Reflex, a central tasking forum has been established to plan and co-ordinate multi-agency operations. It is now well established and the NCS is currently co-operating with overseas law enforcement partners on the disruption of organised criminal groups intent on trafficking.

Anti-semitism

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on anti-semitism in the UK; and what action he has taken to combat it. [37457]

Angela Eagle: The Government are fully committed to tackling racism and anti-Semitism wherever it occurs. We have continued to strengthen our anti-discrimination laws and our criminal law to ensure that it continues to offer some of the most comprehensive protection against racism and anti-Semitism in Europe. In that regard we have introduced the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000; we are looking at ways to implement the European Union directives on race and discrimination in employment; strengthen the law on incitement to racial hatred by raising the maximum penalty to seven years' imprisonment and extending the scope to hatred directed against racial groups outside the United Kingdom and introduced religiously aggravated offences to add to the racially aggravated offences we introduced in 1998. We have asked the police and the Crown Prosecution Service to work together to pool knowledge and experience in the investigation and prosecution of race hate material.

We have also made significant changes to our laws countering the threat of terrorism, including the Terrorism Act 2000 and, in response to the events of September 11, the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001. The Government and the police continue to have a good working relationship with the Jewish community in Britain. The Government share the concern of the Jewish community that anti-Semitic incidents recorded by the community rose after September 11 but we welcome the co-operation and the experience of the Jewish community in security matters which has benefited all our communities over the last few months.

As a final example of the work that is ongoing, on 27 January 2002 the second Holocaust Memorial Day was commemorated. We established this event to educate people about and ensure that the lessons of the Holocaust are not forgotten. In doing so the day helps to counter anti-Semitism and other forms of racism and bigotry.

Drug Addicts

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many treatment places for addicts of *(a)* heroin and *(b)* cocaine are available; how many are being used; and what estimate he makes of the total numbers of addicts of these substances. [36559]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The National Drug Treatment Monitoring System (NDTMS) is the main source of information on people receiving drug treatment. 118,500 people were in treatment during 2000–2001—an eight per cent. increase over the last two years.

Information on the number of places provided specifically for heroin or cocaine users is not available, as all treatment places are for rehabilitation from all drug addictions.

Estimates from the British Crime Survey 2000 are that 4 million people use illicit drugs each year. Of the 1.8 million that use Class A drugs, 160,000–280,000 are problematic drug users.

Prison Estate

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements he is making to ensure back-up of record keeping within the Prison Estate in the event of fire or other cause of destruction of files and nominal rolls. [38451]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Paper records relating to individual prisoners are kept in prisons, headquarters and the Prison Service Registry. Back up of manual files is not considered viable, instead reliance is placed on prevention techniques to safeguard the integrity of records from fire and other environmental threats.

Electronic prisoner records are stored on the Prison Service inmate system at each establishment with overnight back up to the headquarters system. The Prison Service headquarters computer records are backed up daily and are stored at a secure off-site location. Establishments computer records are backed-up daily and stored in fireproof safes and held securely remotely from the computer they relate to.

Minister for Women

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the role of the Minister for Women in his Department. [37148]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 26 February 2002]:* I am Minister for Women in the Home Office and its services—police, probation, prisons and the immigration service. The role of Minister for Women in the Home Office is to champion women's issues and promote gender as a core issue for the Department and its services.

Sex Offender Treatment Programmes

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) who is responsible for overseeing the quality and implementation of sex offender treatment programmes throughout the prison estate; and if he will make a statement; [37682]

(2) how many offenders have had places on sex offender treatment programmes in each of the last five years; what the target was for the number of offenders on these programmes in each year for which targets were set; what the estimate is of the total number of sex offenders in prison at any one time; what the total number of sex offenders who were on programmes in young offenders institutions was in each of the last five years; what the estimate is of the total number of young sex offenders in custody at any one time; and if he will make a statement. [37681]

Beverley Hughes: The Prison Service measures its performance in delivering the sex offender treatment programme by completions rather than by the number of participants, because some participants who start the programme may not complete it. The table sets out the targets, completions and completions adjusted in the light of audit quality markings awarded to each programme site (the latter figure representing the Service's final Key Performance Indicator score).

Year	*Targets*	*Completions*	*Audit adjusted completions*
1996–97	650	680	663
1997–98	670	736	671
1998–99	680	664	589
1999–2000	700	669	585
2001–01	1,020	851	783

The numbers of prisoners in custody for sexual offences over the past five years were as follows.

Year	*Sentenced male adult sex offenders in custody*	*Sentenced male young offenders in custody*
1996–97	3,786	153
1997–98	3,903	166
1998–99	4,574	205
1999–2000	4,714	215
2000–01	4,854	216

The quality and implementation of the sex offender treatment programme is overseen by the Prison Service's Offending Behaviour Programmes Unit working to standards set and maintained by the independent Prison/Probation Service Joint Accreditation Panel. The Unit develops the programmes, the implementation processes and the audit processes, all of which must then be accredited by the Panel. The Unit ensures that the standards demanded by those processes are maintained by training staff and by annual audits of implementation, carried out to the accredited standards. The Panel also conducts an annual moderating exercise on the audits conducted by the Unit.

Illegal Drugs

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish the results of the study commissioned from York university on the costs of illegal drugs in Britain. [37625]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The University of York, Centre for Criminal Justice Economics and Psychology (Culyer A, Eaton G, Godfrey C et al, 2002) has recently completed a research report for the Home Office entitled 'The Economic and Social Costs of Class A Drugs Misuse in England and Wales, 2000'. The report will be published as a Home Office Research Study (HORS) in early summer.

Departmental Functions

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what functions of the former DfEE were transferred to the Home Office on the reorganisation of departmental responsibilities following the general election in 2001. [37149]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 26 February 2002]:* The function for work permits, which formerly were the responsibility of the former Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) were transferred to the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) of the Home Office after the general election.

Prakash Hinduja

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the inquiries received from hon. Members since 1 May 1997 in respect of a possible application for nationality by Prakash Hinduja; if an application is under consideration; and if he will make a statement. [34367]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 7 February 2002]:* Sir Anthony Hammond's "Review of the Circumstances Surrounding an Application for Naturalisation by Mr. S P Hinduja in 1998", published in March last year, included at Chapter six consideration of Mr. Prakash Hinduja's inquiries about naturalisation as a British citizen. There have been no further developments since then.

Performance Targets

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many performance targets have been set by his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies since May 1997 on *(a)* prisons policy, *(b)* police policy, *(c)* fire and emergency planning policy, *(d)* probation policy, *(e)* immigration, asylum and nationality policy, *(f)* constitutional policy, *(g)* reducing crime, *(h)* the prevention of terrorism and the reduction of organised and international crime, *(i)* sentencing, *(j)* youth justice policy, *(k)* crime prevention policy, *(l)* policy relating to victims and witnesses and *(m)* community and voluntary sector policy; how many of those targets have been (i) amended, (ii) revoked and (iii) achieved since May 1997; and if he will make a statement. [37762]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* The details requested are set out in the table, although most have not yet reached their target date of either 31 March 2002 or March 2004.

	Number of targets	*Amended*	*Revoked*	*Achieved*
(a) Prisons policy	5	1	—	—
(b) Police policy	2	1	—	—
(c) Fire and emergency planning policy[1]	3	—	—	—
(d) Probation policy	1	—	—	—
(e) Immigration, asylum and nationality	4	2	—	—
(f) Constitutional policy[2]	3	—	—	2
(g) Reducing crime	7	1	—	—
(h) The prevention of terrorism and the reduction of organised and international crime	4	1	—	2
(i) Sentencing	1	1	—	—
(j) Youth justice policy	2	1	—	—
(k) Crime prevention policy	3	1	—	—
(l) Policy relating to victims and witnesses	1	1	—	—
(m) Community and voluntary sector policy	1	1	—	—

[1] Responsibility for Fire and Emergency Planning was transferred to the Cabinet Office and the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in 2001.

[2] Responsibility for Constitutional Policy was transferred to the Lord Chancellor's Department in 2001.

The targets listed were set in the public service agreements in 1998 and 2000.

These are the published high level targets only. Each business area has more detailed internal management targets.

Asylum Seekers

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers were accommodated in prisons in *(a)* November 2001, *(b)* December 2001 and *(c)* January 2002. [37656]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* The latest available information on the number of persons detained under Immigration Act powers relates to 30 September 2001. The total number of asylum seekers detained in prison establishments as at that date is given in the table.

Place of detention	*Asylum seekers detained as at 30 September 2001*[1,2]
Dedicated Immigration Service wings[3]	390
Other prison establishments[4]	460
Total persons detained in prison establishments[4]	850

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest five, and may not sum due to rounding.

[2] Persons detained under Immigration Act powers who are recorded as having claimed asylum at some stage.

[3] Persons detained at the dedicated Immigration Service wings at Haslar, Lindholme and Rochester.

[4] Includes 145 persons detained under dual immigration and other powers.

Information on Immigration Act detainees as at 29 December 2001 will be published on 28 February 2002 on the Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate (RDS) website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

The temporary use of spaces in a number of local prisons ended in mid-January 2002, as did the use of the accommodation at Her Majesty's prison (HMP) Rochester. In addition, the dedicated detention facilities at HMP Haslar and HMP Lindholme were redesignated formally as immigration removal centres on 8 February 2002, thus requiring them to operate under Detention Centre Rules rather than Prison Rules. These changes will not be reflected fully in the statistics until the information on Immigration Act detainees as at 30 March 2002 is published on 31 May 2002 on the RDS website.

European Documents

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his position towards Council Document 14461/01, on the Competence, Recognition and Execution of Decisions Pertaining to Parental Responsibility. [39652]

Mr. Wills: I have been asked to reply.

The UK supports the underlying aim of this proposal, which is to improve arrangements in cross-border cases, and in particular to extend the principle of mutual recognition to all decisions on parental responsibility by establishing a clear and coherent set of rules for attributing jurisdiction and proper arrangements for co-operation between national courts and authorities. An explanatory memorandum on the proposal has been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Director of Public Prosecutions

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many staff are employed by the DPP in Northern Ireland; and what proportion are lawyers. [39661]

Dr. John Reid: I have been asked to reply. The Department of the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland currently has the equivalent to 185 full-time posts, of which 30.27 per cent. are legal.

Lord Chancellor (Duties)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the Lord Chancellor's attendance record for the last 36 months for *(a)* Committees of the House of Lords and *(b)* other non-Government bodies on which he sits. [30844]

Mr. Wills: The Lord Chancellor is an ex-officio member of two Committees of the House of Lords: the Offices Committee and the Procedure Committee. Since February 1999, the Lord Chancellor has attended two out of 15 meetings of the Offices Committee and three out of nine meetings of the Procedure Committee. In keeping with established practice, the Lord Chancellor is not expected to attend all the meetings of these Committees and will attend only those meetings where his participation is required.

The Lord Chancellor is an officer of, or a member of, the following bodies which could reasonably be described as 'non-Government':

British-American Parliamentary Group, Joint President;
Christ's College, Cambridge, Honorary Fellow;
The Church Commission, Commissioner;
Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Joint President;
Friends of the Slade School of Fine Art, Committee Member;
Hunterian Collection, Trustee;
Industry and Parliament Trust, Joint President;
Inner Temple, Bencher;
Inn of Court of Northern Ireland, Honorary Bencher;
Magistrates Association, President;
The Polish Bar, Honorary Member;
Society for Advanced Legal Studies, Honorary Fellow;
US College of Trial Lawyers, Fellow; and
World Mental Health Federation, Vice Patron.

Details of the Lord Chancellor's attendance at meetings of those bodies could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Lord Saville

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department which Department is paying the salary of Lord Saville of Newdigate; what the total capitation cost for a Lord Justice of his seniority was in 2001; and how much has been paid to him during the time the Saville Inquiry has been sitting. [33075]

Mr. Wills: Lord Saville of Newdigate is a Lord of Appeal in Ordinary, not a Lord Justice. The salaries of Lords of Appeal in Ordinary are paid from the Consolidated Fund and the payments are administered by HM Treasury. The current annual salary for a Lord of Appeal in Ordinary is £157,699.

In addition to his salary, Lord Saville has been paid expenses allowance of £50 per day for each day that he has been in Londonderry engaged in the Inquiry. To date Lord Saville has been paid £9,700 in respect of this daily allowance. This allowance is paid from a budget held by the Northern Ireland Office.

North-South Ministerial Council

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the findings were of the reserved judgment read in the Belfast High Court on 30 January 2001. [34125]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Judgment was delivered in the High Court in Belfast on 30 January 2001 *In the Matter of an Application by Bairbre de Brun and Martin McGuinness* for judicial review. Copies of the judgment have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Industrial Action

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many days have been lost owing to industrial action by staff in her Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years. [36188]

Ms Rosie Winterton: This answer covers the Headquarters of the Lord Chancellor's Department (including associated offices), the Court Service, Public Guardianship Office, Land Registry, Public Record Office, Northern Ireland Court Service, Legal Services Commission and the Children and Family Courts Advisory and Support Service. No industrial action has been taken in the Departments, agencies and NDPBs for which the Lord Chancellor has responsibility in any of the last four years, with exception of the Land Registry, which lost 170 days due to industrial action in April 2001.

Union Duties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many staff in her Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies receive paid leave to undertake union duties; how many days they are allocated; and what has been the cost to public funds in each of the last four years. [36212]

Ms Rosie Winterton: This answer covers the Headquarters of the Lord Chancellor's Department (including Associated Offices), the Court Service, Public Guardianship Office, Land Registry, Public Record Office, Northern Ireland Court Service, Legal Services Commission and the Children and Family Courts Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS).

The position is as follows:

LCD HQ

2000–01: 11 staff spent 216 days on union duties at a cost of £16,920.

1999–2000: 12 staff spent 216 days on union duties at a cost of £16,080.

1998–99: Nine staff spent 163 days on union duties at a cost of £11,552.

1997–98: 10 staff spent 179 days on union duties at a cost of £12,077.

Court Service

The information relates to trade union representatives working for the Court Service who are allocated 50 per cent. or more of their time to undertake industrial relations duties. Information on trade union representatives who spend less than 50 per cent. of their time on union activities is not held centrally.

2000–01: 28 staff spent 4,887 days on union duties at a cost of £484,126.

1999–2000: 27 staff spent 4,517 days on union duties at a cost of £447,472.

1998–99: 28 staff spent 4,331 days on union duties at a cost of £429,046.

1997–98: 28 staff spent 4,419 days on union duties at a cost of £411,017.

Public Guardianship Office

The PGO was established as an executive agency of LCD on 1 April 2001. In April 2001, two staff were allowed to work full-time on union duties and a third for 50 per cent. of their time at a total cost of £47,339. Figures for the Public Trust Office, which was abolished in 2001, are not available.

Land Registry

The details show the total hours spent by staff given special leave to undertake union duties. Because the Land Registry is a Trading Fund the allocations do not draw on public funds; the costs are met from fees paid by customers.

2001–01: 155 staff spent a total of 1,267 days on union duties.

1990–2000: 154 staff spent a total of 1,322 days on union duties.

1998–99: 152 staff spent a total of 1,545 days on union duties.

1997–98: 158 staff spent a total of 1,646 days on union duties.

Public Record Office

The Public Record Office allows a part-time Trade Union Side officer 18 hours per week for union business. The cost of this was £8,180 in 2001, £7,803 in 2000, £7,509 in 1999 and £7,176 in 1998.

Northern Ireland Court Service

The cost of 13 staff who received paid leave to undertake union duties each year is as follows:

2001: £24,200

2000: £23,300

1999: £22,400

1998: £21,600.

These costs have been based on the average salary costs for each employee who has received paid leave to undertake union duties.

Legal Services Commission

Paid time off for trade union duties is granted with management agreement but is not monitored centrally.

Children and Family Courts Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS)

CAFCASS is currently negotiating a Partnership Agreement with the trade unions which will cover trade union facilities and time off. It is hoped that the new policies will be approved in March 2002.

Community Fines

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many community fines were cancelled in the west midlands up to and including the year ending September 2001. [36121]

Mr. Wills: There are two types of non-custodial sentences: fines and community penalties. If a community penalty is breached the offender is brought back before the court for whatever action the court deems appropriate. This could mean that the court imposes further hours on the order or an additional condition. Alternatively it could result in the order being revoked and the offender instead receiving a term of imprisonment if such a sentence was available for the original offence. 1,398 community penalties were revoked in the west midlands in the year 2000.

A fine may be cancelled (remitted) in whole or in part by the courts if circumstances have changed since the conviction. A large proportion of financial penalties cancelled are where a defaulter is imprisoned for wilful refusal or culpable neglect to pay, or where a defaulter is already serving a prison term for a separate offence.

Statistics on the number of fines cancelled are not kept. The value of all impositions, including fines, cancelled in the West Midlands Magistrates Courts Committee area amounted to £7,643,470 in the year ending September 2001.

Judicial Appeals

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will seek to change the rules of court to permit *(a)* the Court of Appeal to correct an order of the court if it can be shown that the Lord Justices reached their conclusion inappropriately and *(b)* a right of appeal against a decision of the Court of Appeal where it over-ruled the original decision of the court; and under what powers the Court Service may reject or delay an application for an appeal against a Court of Appeal ruling. [39433]

Mr. Wills: It is not clear whether this question relates to the civil courts or to the criminal courts and so I have answered for both jurisdictions.

In the civil courts:

(c) the recent Court of Appeal decision in Taylor *v.* Lawrence ([2002] EWCA Civ 90) sets out the circumstances in which it might consider reopening an application or appeal;

(d) there already is a right of appeal against a decision of the Court of Appeal where it "over-ruled the original decision of the court" (of first instance)—that appeal lies to the House of Lords and permission is required.

In the criminal courts:

(c) the Court of Appeal has an inherent jurisdiction to reopen cases where it considers that an earlier hearing was listed in error and the Criminal Cases Review Commission may refer a case back to the Court;

(d) the position is the same as with civil cases, except that the Court of Appeal has to certify that there is a point of law of general public importance involved before an application for permission can be made.

The Lord Chancellor has no plans to propose any alteration to the present rules in either jurisdiction.

The Court Service does not reject any application which is properly made and is within the Court's jurisdiction. When any application to the Court is listed for hearing is a case management decision, usually made by a member of the Court's listing staff acting under general instruction from the Court.

Census (1901)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when work started on transcribing the 1901 Census returns on to computer. [38540]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Work commenced on transcription in March 2000.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what his latest estimate is of the date when the 1901 Census on-line service will become available *(a)* at designated service centres and *(b)* generally to on-line searchers. [38555]

Ms Rosie Winterton: QinetiQ Ltd. is continuing to work on the technical enhancements. Rigorous testing will be completed during the next few weeks. These enhancements are intended to make the site sufficiently robust to permit general Internet access, and are being done with a sense of urgency. However, the most important consideration is to ensure that the service is re-launched successfully. The system will again be made available to designate service centres as part of the general re-introduction of the site. General on-line searches will be available as soon as practicable following testing.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many people were employed to check [illegible] transcriptions onto computer of the 1901 Census returns. [38544]

Ms Rosie Winterton: At the peak of quality assuring the data, some 68 full time equivalent individuals were employed by the Public Record Office.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what criteria were used to select the people who were employed to check the transcriptions onto computer of the 1901 Census returns. [38548]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The individuals employed by the Public Record Office to quality assure the 1901 Census transcribed data were required to undertake and pass a transcription test in reading late-nineteenth century handwriting.

Magistrates Courts

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on the number of magistrates' courts. [40384]

Mr. Wills: The Government's policy is that decisions on the number and location of magistrates courts in England and Wales are for the individual magistrates courts committees to determine, in consultation with their local paying authorities.

It is for each magistrates court committee to decide how best to deploy its resources in order to fulfil its statutory responsibility to provide an efficient and effective service to court users.

EU Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the European Union directives and regulations relating to her Department that have been implemented in each of the last four years, specifying *(a)* the title and purpose of each, *(b)* the cost to public funds of each and *(c)* the cost to businesses of each. [39124]

Mr. Wills: No directives or regulations relating to the Lord Chancellor's Department came into effect in 1998 or 1999. The information for the following years is set out in the table. The costs to public funds given do not take account of officials' time, which is not readily quantifiable.

Title	*Purpose*	*Cost to public funds*	*Cost to business*
2000			
Directive 98/5/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 February 1998	To facilitate the practice of the profession of lawyer on a permanent basis in a member state of the European Community other than the state in which the qualification was obtained	Negligible	Negligible; if anything businesses gained as a result of easier access to European markets
2001			
Council Regulation (EC) No. 1347/2000 of 2 May 2000	To establish rules relating to jurisdiction and the recognition and enforcement of judgments in matrimonial matters and in matters of parental responsibility for children of both spouses	£3,500 for the production of forms and leaflets	Negligible
Council regulation (EC) No. 1348/2000 of 29 May 2000	To establish common rules throughout the EU for the transmission of legal documents in cross-border civil and commercial matters	Negligible	Negligible, since the scheme replaced bilateral agreements and a Hague Convention

Title	*Purpose*	*Cost to public funds*	*Cost to business*
2002			
Council Regulation (EC) No. 44/2001 of 22 December 2000	To establish updated rules relating to jurisdiction and the recognition and enforcement of judgments in civil and commercial matters	Negligible	Negligible

NORTHERN IRELAND

Departmental Spending Review

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans his Department has to appraise the environmental implications of its Spending Review submission to the Treasury. [29031]

Dr. John Reid: As part of my Department's Spending Review submission to the Treasury, we will, in common with other Departments, report on the sustainable development of our bids which will detail any environmental impact.

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many environmental appraisals have been published by his Department since 1 January 2001; and if he will list the last four. [29028]

Dr. John Reid: The work of the Northern Ireland Office only rarely if ever has a direct impact on the environment.

It is normal practice in the Department for the implications of administrative and policy decisions to be analysed rigorously prior to any decision being taken. If environmental considerations emerged, appropriate appraisals would be conducted.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) when the last occasion was on which he requested an environmental appraisal before making a policy decision; [29029]

(2) what procedures his Department has to ensure environmental appraisals are undertaken prior to *(a)* administrative and *(b)* policy decisions being made. [29030]

Dr. John Reid: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave for question ref. 29028.

Empty Properties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what his estimate is of the *(a)* annual cost and *(b)* total value of the empty properties owned by (i) his Department, (ii) his agencies and (iii) other public bodies for which he has had responsibility in each of the last four years. [30076]

Dr. John Reid: The NIO currently owns no properties that are empty, therefore there are no related costs.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the total area in square feet of all empty properties owned by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which he has had responsibility was in each year since May 1997. [37812]

Dr. John Reid: My Department does not own any properties which are currently empty.

Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the cost of refurbishing each ministerial private office was in each year since May 1997. [37823]

Dr. John Reid: The only work carried out to ministerial private offices has been as a result of moving to different buildings, for operational purposes. The cost of these works cannot be separated from the overall cost of all the works associated with these relocations.

Defence Lawyers

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what dates training seminars on the role of defence lawyers have been held for individual criminal justice agencies; what the programme was and how many people attended each seminar; if he will place a copy of training materials used in the Library; and what plans he has for future events of this kind. [29782]

Mr. Browne: Individual criminal justice agencies will be responsible for developing training seminars on the role of defence lawyers, working with the Law Society, which has welcomed the recommendation in the Criminal Justice Review and confirmed a willingness, wherever practical, to contribute constructively to its implementation.

Firearms

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the objections are of the Chief Constable to the application in Northern Ireland of section 39 of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997 requiring the establishment of a register of persons who have applied for and been granted a licence to carry a firearm. [29940]

Jane Kennedy: The Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997 is not applicable to Northern Ireland. However, information on all firearms certificate holders is currently held on a Police Service of Northern Ireland computer system.

Contracts

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many contracts were let by his Department and agencies for which he is responsible to *(a)* PWC Consulting or PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(b)* Ernst & Young, *(c)* Deloitte & Touche, *(d)* KPMG and *(e)* Andersen for consultancy services for the financial years (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99, (iii) 1999–2000, (iv) 2000–01 and (v) 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available, indicating the remuneration in each case. [33854]

Dr. John Reid: Payments made to each of the companies during the periods in question were as follows:

£

	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001[1]
PWC Consulting/PricewaterhouseCoopers	115,829	273,705	70,853	[2]1,982,924	126,274
Ernst & Young	0	0	5,500	5,500	0
Deloitte & Touche	39,372	133,210	155,498	2,145,743	414,962
KPMG	27,250	0	0	0	62,313
Andersen	0	0	0	0	0

[1] To date.

[2] This figure contains an estimate of maximum cost of an on-going contract.

As no records are held centrally, there would be disproportionate costs involved in identifying the actual number of contracts let to each company.

Accountancy Contracts

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish the *(a)* number and *(b)* value of contracts awarded by his Department to (i) Arthur Andersen, (ii) Deloitte Touche, (ii) Ernst and Young, (iv) KPMG and (v) PricewaterhouseCoopers accountants in each year since 1997. [34991]

Dr. John Reid: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster), Question ref. 33854.

Job Advertisements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the job advertisements placed by his Department in the last 12 months specifying where the advertisements were placed and the cost in each case. [39064]

Dr. John Reid: The Department advertises external competitions in the *Belfast Telegraph*, *Irish News* and *Newsletter* unless another newspaper is specifically requested.

The vacancies advertised in the last 12 months are as follows:

£

Vacancy	Cost
Crown Solicitor	3,296.34
Legal Assistants—DPP	2,594.83
Support Grade Band 2 (SBG II)—Gardener[1]	2,280
Head of Accounts (NI Prison Service)[2] Head of Financial Services Division[2]	5,247.72
Assistant Director—DPP	3,875.23
Head of Corporate Services—DPP[3]	14,191.37
SGBII—Repository Assistant	583.64

[1] This post was also advertised in the Ulster Star.

[2] These competitions were run jointly.

[3] This competition had to be re-advertised and the costs were split between the Recruitment agency and the newspapers concerned.

Catering Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the cost was of *(a)* in-house canteen and *(b)* other catering services provided by his Department in each of the last four years. [38922]

Dr. John Reid: Details of the Department's (including its agencies, but excluding NDPBs as we do not have access to a breakdown of their expenditure) total expenditure on in-house canteen and other catering services combined (unable to identify separate costs) in each of the last four years is as follows:

	£
1998–99	878,146
1999–2000	1,112,965
2000–01	832,771
2001–02	[1]425,124

[1] To date. Full year estimate £510,150.

Note:

Please note that this expenditure includes catering for Government functions held at Hillsborough Castle.

City of London Corporation (Events)

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list those functions, engagements and events which Ministers, his officials and advisers have attended which have been sponsored, funded, promoted and hosted by the City of London Corporation since 1997. [35701]

Dr. John Reid: The information requested is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. All attendance at events, engagements and functions by Ministers and civil servants is taken in line with the guidance and principles set out in the Ministerial Code and Departmental Handbooks.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many staff left the service of his Department and its agencies in the year ended 31 March 2001; how many left before attaining the formal retirement age of 60 years; and in respect of how many his Department and its agencies assumed responsibilities for making payments until retirement age. [37546]

Dr. John Reid: The figures are as follows:

	Civil servants	Prison Officers
Number of staff who left my Department in the year ended 31 March 2001	69	878
Number of staff who left my Department before formal retirement age	54	878

	Civil servants	Prison Officers
Number of staff my Department assumed the responsibility of making payment to until retirement age	2	334

Correspondence

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the average response time was for responding to departmental correspondence; what percentage of letters took longer than one month for a response; and what percentage took longer than three months for a response in each of the last five years. [37440]

Dr. John Reid: This information is not held in the format requested.

Since 1 October 1999 the Northern Ireland Office has applied revised service standards. Details of the Department's performance in meeting the target of replying to letters within 15 working days over the period 1 April 1999 to 31 March 2000 can be found in the 2001 Departmental Report. The statistics for 2000–01 are presently being collated and will be published in the spring in the 2002 Departmental Report.

Statistics on the Department's performance in responding to ministerial correspondence is also contained in the Northern Ireland Office Departmental Reports held in the House of Commons Library.

SCOTLAND

Census Website

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many hits were received by the 1901 Scottish Census website in its first 24 hours of operation; what the latest average daily number of hits is; and if she will make a statement; [38537]

(2) what the ISP bandwidth is of the 1901 Scottish Census website. [38534]

Mrs. Liddell: This matter is devolved and is the responsibility of the Scottish Executive.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Gibraltar

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the status of the bi-lateral agreement between the Governments of Britain and Spain. [R] [36538]

Peter Hain: The provisions of the Joint Communiqué agreed in Brussels on 27 November 1984 remain in effect. The negotiating process established by that Communiqué, aimed at overcoming all the differences between the UK and Spanish Governments over Gibraltar, continues.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what funding has been accorded to Gibraltar under the Interreg III Community Initiative. [R] [37222]

Peter Hain: Gibraltar is currently involved in three Interreg III programmes, with an allocation of 425,000 euro for each, for the period 2000–06. These are: a dedicated Gibraltar/Morocco programme; the South West Europe programme (covering Spain, Portugal, Gibraltar and South West France); and the Western Mediterranean programme (covering Southern Portugal, Southern and Eastern Spain, the South East of France, and Western Italy).

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what funding for Gibraltar, in addition to the Interreg III Community Initiative, will be provided following a bilateral agreement between the UK and Spain under the Brussels Process. [R] [37221]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North (Syd Rapson) on 27 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 1308W.

British Influence (EU)

Mr. Laxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list advisers who attended an FCO seminar on 6 January 1999 which discussed the paper 'Building British Influence in the EU' by Charles Grant. [37210]

Peter Hain: One Special Adviser to the then Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Mr. David Clark, attended the seminar on 6 January 1999 that discussed the paper 'Building British Influence in the EU'.

Mr. Laxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the seminar on British influence in the EU; and if he will list *(a)* those Ministers and *(b)* the grades of officials who attended. [37209]

Peter Hain: The seminar on British influence in the European Union was held on 6 January 1999. It was convened to discuss a paper prepared for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Policy Planning Department by Charles Grant. The following Ministers attended: my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), then Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin), then Minister of State. Several civil servants of various grades also attended.

Council of Ministers

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will improve the publication and availability to Parliament of relevant draft European directives, decisions and regulations prior to decisions in the Council of Ministers. [37102]

Peter Hain: A UK initiative to respond to Westminster concerns about late receipt of texts from Brussels resulted in the Protocol on National Parliaments, annexed to the treaty of Amsterdam, introducing a minimum scrutiny period of six weeks between receipt of official texts and their earliest adoption in the Council of Ministers.

The Government are committed to send to Parliament proposals for European legislation under all three pillars of EU activity as soon as they are received from the Council Secretariat.

Steel Industry (Romania)

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what communications there have been between his Department and the European Commission regarding the privatisation of the Romanian state-owned steel industry. [36741]

Peter Hain: European Union member states, including the UK, have worked with the Commission in the relevant EU Committees to encourage the Romanian Government to complete the privatisation of their steel industry as part of their economic reform programme in preparation for EU membership, and to establish a level playing field between EU and Romanian steel producers.

LNM Group

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance was given by the British Embassy in Bucharest to the LNM Group in its attempts to acquire Sidex. [37934]

Peter Hain: The Embassy offered all the help to which any company meeting Trade Partners UK's requirements would be entitled. This support continued until the successful conclusion of the deal, when the Ambassador recommended that the Prime Minister should write to his Romanian opposite number to welcome the outcome.

Ambassadors (Guidelines on Representations)

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what guidelines ambassadors are expected to follow when they are asked to make representations on behalf of a British company; and if he will make a statement. [38113]

Mr. MacShane: It is part of every ambassador's job to promote British commercial interests overseas. In determining whether to act in any particular case, diplomatic posts overseas are expected to consider the benefit to the UK, including the effect on British commercial, economic and foreign policy interests.

Colombia

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the visits to Colombia made by his Department's Ministers since 1 January 1999. [38492]

Mr. MacShane: The following Foreign Office Ministers have visited Colombia since 1 January 1999.

10–13 September 2000—the then Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle),

15–18 October 2001—me.

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions the Government have had with the Government of the United States in the past year regarding the peace process in Colombia. [38493]

Mr. MacShane: We have continuing discussions with the US Administration about developments in Colombia, including the peace process and other related issues. Dr. Mo Mowlam discussed Colombia during her visit to Washington in March 2001, as I did when I visited in August 2001.

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on the recent breaking-off of the peace negotiations in Colombia. [38494]

Mr. MacShane: The UK fully understand President Pastrana's decision to suspend dialogue with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). We support this and the decision President Pastrana has taken to terminate the demilitarised zone. I made this clear in my press statement of 21 February and this is a key point in the EU statement of 22 February available on www.fco.gov.uk..

We continue to believe that only peaceful dialogue can bring an end to the internal conflict in Colombia and shall continue to urge the Colombian Government to seek a solution through peaceful means.

Latin America

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans Ministers from his Department have to visit each country in Latin America, indicating the proposed month of each visit. [38485]

Mr. MacShane: Since taking on responsibility for Latin America I have visited Argentina, Peru, Mexico, Colombia and Brazil and fully intend to continue to visit the region as often as my schedule allows. This is kept under regular review. The Foreign Secretary also intends to visit Latin America this year as will Baroness Symons.

British Nationals Abroad

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many times his Department has been asked to help British nationals abroad who have *(a)* been imprisoned and *(b)* suffered serious illness in the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [38413]

Mr. Bradshaw: More than 3,000 British nationals are currently in prison overseas and looking after their welfare is one of our Consular staff's key duties. They visit prisoners at least once a year, more regularly in many cases. If necessary, we raise individual cases with local authorities to ensure that British prisoners' welfare is adequately provided for, and their human rights respected, in accordance with international standards. This includes pressing for proper medical treatment if a prisoner falls ill.

All British Embassies and High Commissions overseas keep records of when prisoners are visited and if they have suffered health problems. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office does not collate data centrally on the number of prisoners who suffer serious illnesses and so to provide this information would incur disproportionate costs.

Romania

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the nature of Foreign Office support and sponsorship for organisations promoting bilateral relations between the UK and Romania and list the organisations concerned. [37181]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* The Foreign Office has consistently supported organisations promoting bilateral relationships between the UK and Romania. Examples include the British-Romanian All-Party Parliamentary Group, the British Romanian Chamber of Commerce, the British Association for Central and Eastern Europe, Communication Workers' Union Humanitarian Aid, the Lay Visiting Charitable Trust, and the Mihai Eminescu Trust.

FCO support includes sponsorship for particular projects, briefings for MPs and others, and assistance to charities having difficulties with Romanian import requirements.

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs at whose request and on whose advice the Romanian Government were invited to visit Britain in November 2001. [39046]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The Romanian Prime Minister was invited by the CBI in June 2001 to speak to their Annual conference on 6 November. On the advice of the FCO, the Prime Minister agreed to a meeting with Mr. Nastase during this visit.

FCO-Sponsored Organisations

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the organisations promoting bilateral relations between the UK and individual foreign countries which have been sponsored by his Department in each year since 1997. [37183]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* This information is not available centrally and the cost of collecting it would involve disproportionate cost.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which *(a)* present and *(b)* former Ministers in his Department have been associated with Foreign Office-sponsored organisations promoting bilateral relations between the UK and individual foreign countries in each year since 1997. [37184]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* All present and former Foreign Office Ministers are involved with officially sponsored organisations promoting bilateral relations with other countries.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the organisations promoting bilateral relations between the UK and individual foreign countries set up in each year since 1997 which his Department has sponsored. [37185]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* This information is not available centrally and the costs of collecting it would incur disproportionate cost.

General Affairs Council

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether a Scottish Executive Minister will be a member of the UK delegation to the General Affairs European Union Council of Ministers meeting on 18 and 19 February; and what information is being provided by his Department to permit pre-council scrutiny by the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament. [38034]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* The UK was represented at the 18–19 February General Affairs Council by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and me.

Arrangements for scrutiny by the European Committee of the Executive's involvement in preparations for EU Council of Ministers meetings are a matter for them. The Government provide the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament, for information, with the same Explanatory Memoranda on EU documents as are provided to the Westminster Scrutiny Committees.

British Defence Exporters

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment has been made of the measures needed to protect British defence exporters from being included in blanket regulatory legislation to control private military companies; and if he will make a statement. [38794]

Mr. MacShane: The consultative paper "Private Military Companies: Options for Regulation", which was published on 12 February, examines a variety of options for regulation and invites all interested parties to make their views known to the FCO during the consultation period up to the middle of August this year. The Government recognise the need to define carefully the scope of any legislation designed to regulate the activities of private military companies in order to distinguish them from security and defence equipment companies. A full regulatory impact assessment would be drawn up once final decisions on any legislative proposal have been made.

Mercenaries

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment has been made of the measures needed to make the distinction between mercenaries involved in direct combat and those providing assistance for ground troops only; and if he will make a statement. [38793]

Mr. MacShane: The paper "Private Military Companies: Options for Regulations" which was published on 12 February, examines the various activities of private military companies and sets out options for their regulation. It is a consultation paper, and invited comments from all interested parties by mid-August 2002. The Government will make final decisions on the way forward after this consultation period.

As the paper points out, private military companies may provide a wide range of different services: such as advice, training, logistic support, supply of personnel for monitoring roles and demining.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the problems other countries have faced when using mercenaries; what measures are planned to counteract such problems; and if he will make a statement. [38795]

Mr. MacShane: The paper "Private Military Companies: Options for Regulation", published on 12 February, describes the activities of a number of private military companies employed by other countries. It also includes outlines of current legislation in a number of countries relating to mercenaries and allied activity. Few countries have national legislation on private military companies.

The paper is a consultative document, setting out a variety of options for regulating, under UK law, the activities of such companies.

Lakshmi Mittal

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department and its agencies have made of the background of Mr. Mittal of LNM Holdings in the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [38503]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* None. As in all such cases an assessment was made of whether LNM/Ispat was a company we should support.

LNM/Ispat International

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what undertakings were *(a)* sought and *(b)* received from LNM/Ispat International when it obtained the assistance of the British ambassador in Romania in its attempted acquisition of Sidex. [39050]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 23 February 2002]:* None.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when, and on what authority, the British ambassador in Romania was authorised to assist the attempted acquisition of Sidex by LNM/Ispat International. [39051]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Posts have a wide measure of discretion to support British companies in their market. They do not require specific authorisation to offer such support, unless it involves the Post spending public money, which was not the case with LNM/Ispat. Posts maintain regular contact with Trade Partners UK and other Government Departments as necessary about their activities, as happened in this case.

Government Wine Cellar

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it has been Government policy since 1997 to boycott the purchase of fine wines from certain countries for the Government wine cellar as part of the ethical foreign policy; and if he will make a statement. [39651]

Mr. MacShane: Wine in the Government wine cellar is bought on the basis of quality and value for money from wine producing democracies in Europe, the Commonwealth and the Americas.

Since 1997 Government Hospitality has only bought wines from England, Wales, France, Italy, Germany, Portugal, the United States, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. I have asked Government Hospitality to include Latin American wines in the future.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reason his Department is the lead Department in managing Government wine stocks. [39649]

Mr. MacShane: The Government wine cellar is managed by Government Hospitality Section of Conference and Visits Group, with the advice of the Government Hospitality Advisory Committee for the Purchase of Wine. Responsibility for the Government Hospitality Fund (as it then was) was transferred to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office from the Cabinet Office/Civil Service Department by a Cabinet decision in 1980.

European Federation of Journalists

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom activities of the European Federation of Journalists. [39650]

Peter Hain: We have no knowledge of the United Kingdom activities of the European Federation of Journalists.

Republic of Congo

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information his Department has collated on the make up of the European Union observer teams that will observe the presidential elections in the Republic of Congo in March, broken down by *(a)* country and *(b)* role. [39801]

Mr. Straw: The EU Electoral Observation Mission is made up as follows:

18 long-term observers

Italy (Four); Belgium and France (Three each); Germany, Spain, and Austria (Two each); Ireland and Portugal (One each).

20 short-term observers

Spain (Three), Belgium, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Sweden (Two each); Germany, Netherlands, and Finland (One each), with Austria and Luxembourg providing one reserve each.

A core team of six experts will be present throughout—Head of Mission (Portugal), Deputy Head of Mission (Spain), Media Expert (Italy), Logistics and Security Expert (France), Legal Expert (Spain), and a co-ordinator for the Long Term Experts (France).

Zimbabwe

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his Department has had with *(a)* the European Union and *(b)* member countries of the Southern African Development Community concerning the impartiality of the 20 observers appointed by the Tanzanian Government to monitor the Zimbabwean presidential election. [39445]

Mr. Straw: Neither I, nor any members of my Department, have held discussions with European Union or member countries of the Southern Africa Development Community about the Tanzanian election observation team in Zimbabwe.

British Prisoners (Guantanamo Bay)

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on British detainees at Guantanamo Bay. [40764]

Mr. Bradshaw: A team of British officials paid a second visit to Guantanamo Bay between 26 February and 1 March. The purpose of the visit was to ask questions relevant to national security, to establish the identity and nationality of two British detainees transferred there in February and to check on the current welfare of all five British detainees. The British officials were from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Security Service.

The officials met the detainees individually. The meetings were held in the presence of US officials. The detainees appeared to be in satisfactory physical health, though two complained of minor ailments that are being addressed by the US authorities. None of the detainees complained of having been mistreated. At the time of the meetings with the detainees none was involved in the hunger strike reported in the camp.

British officials handed recent written letters from some of the detainees' families to the camp authorities to be passed to the detainees. Some of the detainees asked the officials to relay oral messages to their families. All the detainees confirmed that they had had the opportunity to write letters to their families through the camp authorities or through the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

On the conditions in the camp, work is now in hand to provide indoor accommodation including individual sleeping and toilet facilities. Medical facilities now include a field hospital in addition to the clinic at Camp X-Ray itself. Exercise arrangements have also been enhanced. All detainees remain able to conduct their religious duties. They have copies of the Koran and have prayer caps and towels for use as prayer mats. Calls to prayer are broadcast throughout the camp.

The visiting team found the US camp authorities open and fully co-operative.

The ICRC continues to maintain a presence at Guantanamo Bay. It has access on demand to the detainees.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the visits and meetings so far *(a)* undertaken and *(b)* arranged by the Lessons Learned Inquiry into Foot and Mouth. [38834]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* I understand that the Chairman of the Lessons Learned Inquiry and members of his Secretariat visited the South West of England on 23–24 January, Wales on 6–7 February, Scotland on 14–15 February and the Netherlands on 25–26 February. Members of the Inquiry Secretariat visited Anglesey on 20 February. The Inquiry is planning visits to the North East and North West of England and Yorkshire in the next few weeks.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if it was a condition, accepted by Dr. Anderson on his appointment as Chairman of the Foot and Mouth Lessons Learned Inquiry, that interviews conducted with Ministers or senior officials would not be published in verbatim form. [38832]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* No.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will request that evidence submitted to the "Lessons Learned Inquiry" into Foot and Mouth is published as and when it is received, provided that those submitting evidence are content for this to happen. [38833]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* This is a matter for the Chairman of the Lessons Learned Inquiry.

Recycling

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the contribution to meeting the Government's recycling targets to date of the PFI credits announced in the last comprehensive spending review. [38827]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The Spending Review 2000 allocated £220 million of PFI credits for local authorities waste projects (£50 million for 2001–02, £70 million for 2002–03 and £100 million for 2003–04).

Three projects have been approved so far for this period. The local authorities involved are East London waste authority, Leicester city council and a joint project for East Sussex and Brighton and Hove. The outputs in the approved outline business cases for these three projects are to achieve a minimum of 25 per cent. recycling rate of household waste by 2005, in line with the national target published in Waste Strategy 2000.

We published revised criteria for waste PFI schemes in September 2000. These make clear the central place of recycling in PFI proposals. Where proposals include incineration, they must demonstrate that all opportunities for recycling have been considered first and that there is no barrier to the future development of recycling.

Waste Disposal

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much UK waste was disposed of, in million of tonnes in each year from 1998 to 2001 by *(a)* landfill, *(b)* recycling, *(c)* energy recovery, *(d)* other recovery and *(e)* other disposal. [38277]

Mr. Meacher: It is estimated that in 1997–98 around 190 million tonnes of controlled waste were produced in the UK, by households, commerce and industry, including construction and demolition. Of this, it is estimated that around 58 per cent. or 111 million tonnes were disposed of to landfill, 30 per cent. or 57 million tonnes to recycling, 2 per cent. or 3 million tonnes to energy recovery, 7 per cent. or 14 million tonnes to other recovery and 2 per cent. or 5 million tonnes to other disposal. Data for later years are not available. This is a headline indicator of sustainable development for the UK, the indicator is shown in "Environment in your pocket", published by the Department in December 2001.

Ozone Depletion

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if he will publish the report made to the EU Commission under the terms of paragraph 6 of Article 15 of EU Regulations 2037/2000 (29 June 2000). [38870]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Under the terms of Article 16(6), the UK reported to the European Commission by 31 December 2001 on systems established to promote the recovery of used controlled substances, including the facilities available and the quantities of used ozone-depleting substances recovered, recycled, reclaimed or destroyed. This was achieved by defining minimum qualifications for personnel, publishing guidance on recovery and destruction, and providing details on plant capacity for volumes destroyed.

My Department wrote to the European Commission on 18 December 2001 to define minimum qualifications. A copy of the letter and enclosures has been placed in the Library of the House. The information on destruction and capacity for destruction is commercially sensitive as there are only two facilities in place in the UK at present, so we are unable to publish it. The joint ex-DETR/ DTI guidance can be found on the DTI's website, www.dti.gov.uk/access/ozone/htm.

Emissions

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to require climate change agreement participants to move from energy efficiency targets to absolute emissions targets. [38613]

Mr. Meacher: I have no plans to require climate change agreements participants to move from energy efficiency targets to absolute emissions targets.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the Government's policy is towards the proposed EU emissions trading scheme. [38615]

Mr. Meacher: The Government are pleased with the Commission's interest in trading and the opportunity it offers to European business and Governments. The commission's proposal for an EU emissions trading scheme does differ in some important respects from the UK scheme, but it is just that—a proposal. Negotiations are only at an early stage and it is far from clear what the final EU scheme will look like. The Government's policy is to work with the Commission and other member states during the negotiation process to develop the best possible emissions trading scheme for the EU and that any EU scheme is compatible with or, at the very least, has sufficient flexibility for established national schemes to run their course.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the compatibility of the United Kingdom's emissions trading system with the emissions trading scheme proposed by the European Union. [38614]

Mr. Meacher: The Commission launched a formal proposal for an EU Emissions Trading Scheme on 26 October 2001. There are a number of differences between the proposed EU scheme and the UK scheme which is to be launched in April. These include that the proposal requires mandatory, not voluntary participation; has limited sectoral coverage; only includes CO_2, rather than all six greenhouse gases; includes emissions from electricity generators directly (rather than assigning emissions from power generation to the end-user of the electricity); and, has a bureaucratic rather than market-based allocation procedure. However, negotiations are only just beginning and it is far from clear what the final shape of the EU scheme will look like.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she intends to end the emissions trading scheme when an EU-wide scheme is introduced. [38616]

Mr. Meacher: The Commission's proposal for an EU emissions trading scheme does differ from the UK scheme, but it is just that—a proposal. Negotiations are only at an early stage and it is far from clear what the final EU scheme will look like. The Government have always said they will endeavour to manage any transition to an EU scheme and to wider international trading as seamlessly as possible. The UK will work with the Commission and other member states during the negotiation process to ensure that the schemes are compatible or, at the very least, there is sufficient flexibility for established national schemes to run their course.

Climate Change

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will give *(a)* the targets for 2010 and *(b)* the biennial interim targets for each sector of industry now taking part in a climate change agreement. [38612]

Mr. Meacher: The targets for 2010 and for the intervening milestone years are set out in each of the 44 sector agreements which have been placed in the Library of the House and are on the DEFRA website. The website also contains an explanatory document—Climate Change Agreements; Sectoral Energy Efficiency Targets.

The targets are expressed in different units in the different agreements. To aid understanding the attached table presents this information in terms of percentage energy saving over the base year for that sector. The differences in magnitude of the targets reflect the differences in scope for energy efficiency measures, taking into account savings already made, and a wide range of conditions in the sector.

		Percentage savings at each milestone (cumulative—primary energy)				
Sector	*Base year*	*2002*	*2004*	*2006*	*2008*	*2010*
Aerospace—Society of British Aerospace companies[1]	2001	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	8.5
Aluminium	1990	27.40	29.50	30.50	31.00	32.20
Craft Bakers—National and Scottish Associations of Master Bakers[2]						
Bakeries	1999	1.5	3.5	5.0	7.0	9.0
Shops		0.5	1.5	2.5	3.5	4.5
Brewers	1999	3.00	5.20	7.30	9.50	11.60
Cement	1990	13.10	16.10	22.60	23.60	25.60
Ceramics—British Ceramics Confederation						
Pottery	2000	2.8	8.9	10.2	11.4	12.4
Heavy clay		2.2	4.7	6.4	8.9	10.22
Fletton brick		0.9	2.4	4.3	6.2	8.1
Refactories		3.1	4.8	5.8	8.4	10.33
Cer materials		2.4	4.8	7.1	8.7	10.1

Sector	Base year	Percentage savings at each milestone (cumulative—primary energy)				
		2002	2004	2006	2008	2010
Chemicals	1990	28.00	30.70	32.20	33.50	34.00
Cathode Ray Tubes—National Microelectronics Institute	2000	6.20	13.20	15.90	18.60	21.00
Dairy Industry	1999	4.10	6.40	7.30	8.20	9.20
Egg Processing—BEIC/BEPA	1995	6.90	8.60	10.00	11.40	13.20
Egg Production—British Egg Industry Council and NFU	1999	4.90	7.40	9.80	11.80	13.70
Eurisol	1999	7.50	11.00	12.50	14.40	14.90
Food and Drink	1995	7.80	9.70	11.60	12.70	13.80
Foundries: Target 2010	2000	1.60	3.80	6.30	8.60	11.00
Glass	1999	2.70	5.30	7.90	9.90	9.20
Gypsum Products	2000	1.10	2.30	3.80	5.70	7.16
Leather—British Leather Confederation	1999	1.90	3.90	5.90	7.90	9.81
Lime	1998	6.10	6.50	6.80	7.70	7.90
Maltsters Association of Great Britain	1999	1.70	3.20	4.70	6.30	7.80
Poultry Meat processing—BPMF	1999	7.2	8.5	9.8	11.1	12.3
British Meat Federation	1995	6.40	9.40	11.90	13.20	14.40
Metal Forming—Confederation of	2000	1.40	2.80	4.20	5.60	7.00
Metal Packaging Manufacturers Association	1999	4.00	5.50	7.00	8.00	9.00
Motor Manufacturers—SMMT	1995	7.90	10.10	12.60	13.90	15.30
Pig Rearing—NFU	1999	6.30	10.20	12.20	15.10	18.00
Non-Ferrous	1998	5.50	8.20	10.00	11.40	14.70
Paper	1990	29.40	33.00	36.30	38.00	40.00
Poultry Rearing—NFU[3]	1999	4.30	6.80	9.70	12.70	14.70
Poultry Rearing—BPMF[3]	1999	4.20	6.40	9.00	11.90	13.70
Printing	2000	0.50	3.10	5.60	9.50	12.00
Renderers—UK Renderers Association)	1999	1.70	3.90	5.60	7.30	9.00
Rubber	1999	3.10	4.80	6.40	8.20	10.30
Semiconductors—National Microelectronics Institute	2000	21.00	49.00	52.00	56.00	59.00
Slag Grinders	1999	0.00	2.50	6.10	8.20	10.00
Spirits	1999	0.20	1.20	2.80	3.60	4.50
Steel	1997	4.90	7.60	9.50	10.50	11.50
Supermarkets[2]						
Scratch bake[1]	2001	1.0	3.5	5.0	7.0	9.0
Bake-off facil[1]		0.3	1.5	2.5	3.5	4.5
Surface Engineering[4]	1999	2.89	5.17	7.10	8.77	10.28
Textiles—British Apparel and Textile Confederation	1999	1.20	2.90	4.70	6.80	9.00
UKASTA—UK Agricultural Supply Trade Association	1999	2.10	4.10	5.60	6.30	7.10
Vehicle Builders and Repairers Association Ltd.	2000	2.00	6.00	7.30	8.60	10.00
Wallcoverings	1999	1.56	5.97	7.42	8.18	9.00
Wood Panel	1999	1.30	3.50	5.60	6.50	7.34

[1] Intermediate milestone targets are not yet determined.

[2] The target for the Craft bakers and Supermarkets are in delivered energy terms.

[3] The targets for the two poultry rearing agreements is the same in delivered energy terms so each facility is being treated equivalently. However because of the different mix of fuels between the two groups, the primary energy sector targets are different.

[4] The targets for the SEA agreement are in delivered energy terms. The 10.28 per cent. reduction in delivered specific energy consumption to 2010 is equivalent to 12.01 per cent. in primary energy.

Asbestos

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 15 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 275W, on asbestos, what differentiations she has made between white and blue asbestos waste, including asbestos cement. [39231]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* There are hazards associated with all types of asbestos waste. We do not, therefore, distinguish between white and blue asbestos and as I said in the answer I gave on 15 January, all types of asbestos waste have been classified as special waste in Great Britain since 1996 and in Northern Ireland since 1998.

GM Crops

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the results of the genetically modified crops trials. [39275]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* We currently expect that the first results of the Farm Scale Evaluations for certain spring-sown herbicide tolerant genetically modified crops will be published in a peer reviewed scientific journal in the summer of 2003. The independent Scientific Steering Committee, which oversees the evaluations, will publish its advice to Government at the same time.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many genetically modified crops were imported into the UK for the last year for which figures are available; and if she will make a statement. [39273]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Grain and derived products from the following genetically modified crops have approval under Directive 90/220/EEC for importation into the European Community, dating from 1996 onwards. No figures of amounts imported are available.

Crop	*Modification*	*Company*	*Consent Reference*
Soybean	Herbicide tolerant	Monsanto	C/GB/94/M3/1
Oilseed rape	Herbicide tolerant	Aventis	C/GB/95/M5/1
Maize	Insect resistant and herbicide tolerant	Northrup King	C/GB/96/M4/1
Maize	Insect resistant and herbicide tolerant	Ciba-Geigy	C/F/94/11–03
Maize	Insect resistance	Monsanto	C/F/95/12/02
Maize	Herbicide tolerance	Aventis	C/F/95/12/07

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her policy towards growing genetically modified crops. [39274]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The Government have an open mind about genetically modified (GM) crops. Our first priority is to protect human health and the environment. No GM crop can be grown in the environment for research or commercial purposes without prior assessment and approval in compliance with the European union regulatory regimes.

In addition, the Farm Scale Evaluation research programme will provide information about the effect, that the management practices associated with GM herbicide tolerant crops might have on farmland wildlife, when compared with weed control used with equivalent non-GM crops. There will be no commercial growing of GM crops until the evaluations are completed and only then if the crops and associated farming practices are assessed as causing no unacceptable impact on the environment. The results of the evaluations will enable a more informed decision to be taken about the possible use of this technology.

Inland Rivers

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 648W, how much additional access to white water inland rivers the report Water-based Sport and Recreation estimates is necessary; and if he will make a statement. [39321]

Alun Michael: The report identified an imbalance between supply of and demand for white water for canoeists, particularly in south-east England. The report did not identify how much additional access was needed.

Officials recently met the other sponsors of the research (British Waterways, the Countryside Agency, the Countryside Council for Wales, the Environment Agency and Sport England) and other interested Government Departments and we are considering what action to take in the light of the report's findings.

Deregulation

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her Department's policy on deregulation in the agriculture industry; and if she will list the regulations removed since May 1997. [33375]

Mr. Morley: The Department implements the Government's policy on better regulation. This is regulating only when necessary, doing so in a light touch way, consistent with policy objectives, and reducing regulatory burdens where possible.

Regulatory reform can included changes to primary and secondary legislation and administrative procedures. The process was started through implementation of the recommendations of the 1999 Red Tape Reviews and the Better Regulation Task Force's Review of Environmental Regulations and Farmers. This has led to the streamlining of processes and procedures for example by implementing a simplified procedure for granting "own-use" approvals for imports of pesticides with a reduced fee, by streamlining intervention procedures, and by better co-ordinated cattle inspections. The Government's Regulatory Reform Action Plan announced on 4 February contains further proposals for reform by the Department.

The Department does not hold a comprehensive list of deregulatory changes made since 1997. However, in the last two months the Department has achieved the removal of complex rules applying to sheep produced groups and their replacement by simpler general rules as part of the changes to the CAP sheep regime agreed at the December 2001 Agriculture Council, and the removal of a requirement in Commission regulations on arable crops for testing of farm-saved rapeseed for glucosinolate content, estimated to result in savings to farmers of about £1 million. The Regulatory Reform Action Plan provides a basis for recording all such changes systematically from now on.

Waste Disposal (Electrical Equipment)

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact of the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive on the amount of waste electrical goods illegally abandoned in public places. [38123]

Mr. Meacher: The Directive on Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) is still in draft. We are currently at Common Position stage, and for this reason we have not yet made any such assessment.

The Directive requires distributors to take back waste electrical goods free of charge to the end user. This take-back provision may be in-store, on delivery or through an alternative arrangement, eg. curbside collection. Furthermore, the Directive requires member states to ensure that users are given necessary information about the return and collection systems available to them and about their role in contributing to re-use, recycling and other forms of recovery of WEEE.

We therefore believe that the Directive will make a positive contribution to increasing the amount of waste electrical goods recovered and recycled and we see no reason to anticipate an increase in the illegal abandoning of WEEE in public places.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Departmental E-mail

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what progress has been made towards meeting his pledge that all central Government should be contactable electronically by 2005; which *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* members of the Cabinet are contactable by the public via e-mail; and if he will make a statement. [38163]

Mr. Leslie: The latest figures on progress towards the target of making Government services available electronically by 2005 show that over 50 per cent. of Government services are e-enabled now. In addition, Departments predict that three-quarters of services will be e-enabled by the end of 2002.

The Guidelines for UK Government websites encourage individual departmental websites to list Ministers and their responsibilities, and to publish contact addresses, that is, a full postal address as well as an e-mail address.

Departmental Policies (Bristol, East)

Jean Corston: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Bristol, East constituency, the effects on Bristol of his Department's policies and actions *(a)* from 5 May 1994 to 2 May 1997, *(b)* from 2 May 1997 to 7 May 1998, and *(c)* since 7 May 1998. [35598]

Mrs. Roche: The following tables provide key data for Bristol from 1997 to 1998 and from 1998 to date. Limited data are available, given changes in methodologies within the period. The information requested prior to 1997 is not held centrally, nor in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Statistic	*1997*	*1998*	*Change*
Education (Bristol Local Education Authority)			
Percentage of 15-year-olds gaining 5+A*-C GCSE/GNVQ[1]	32.1 per cent.	29 per cent.	–3.1 percentage points
Percentage of pupils gaining level 4 plus at Key Stage 2 (11-year-olds) English[2]	54 per cent.	55 per cent.	1 percentage point
Percentage of pupils gaining level 4 plus at Key Stage 2 (11-year-olds) mathematics[3]	52 per cent.	47 per cent.	–5 percentage points
Infants in class sizes of more than 30[4]	3,708 (January)	3,770 (January)	62 pupil increase
Funding per pupil (in real terms)[5]	£2,700	£2,750	£50 real terms increase
Welfare to Work (Bristol Unitary Authority)			
Number of adults in employment[6]	171,000 (May)	182,000 (May)	11,000 (6.4 per cent.)
Percentage of working age people in employment[7]	68.9 per cent. (May)	72 per cent. (May)	3.1 percentage points
Claimant count unemployed[8]	13,269 (May)	9,851 (May)	–3,418 (-25.8 per cent.)
Youth unemployment (18–24 claimant count)[9]	3,033 (May)	2,303 (May)	–730 (-24.1 per cent.)
Health (Avon Health Authority)			
Number of doctors[10]	2,169	2,326	157 (7.2 per cent.)
Qualified nurses[11]	8,260 (September 1997)	6,679 (September 1998)	–581 (-7 per cent.)
Inpatient waiting lists[12]	23,104 (March 1997)	—	—
Outpatients seen within 13 weeks[13]	Robust data not available	76 per cent. (June 1998)	—

[1,2,3,4] DfES published statistics (taken from DfES Internet site)

[5] DfES held statistics obtained through policy officials for use in ministerial briefing

[6,7,8,9] NOMIS database (Office for National Statistics)

[10] DoH statistic obtained through policy officials for use in ministerial briefing

[11,12,13] DoH statistics from Avon health authority briefing

Statistic	*1998*	*Latest*
Education (Bristol Local Education Authority)		
Percentage of 15-year-olds gaining 5+A*-C GCSE/GNVQ[1]	29 per cent.	31.8 per cent. (2001)
Percentage of pupils gaining level 4 plus at Key Stage 2 (11-year-olds) English[2]	55 per cent.	65.5 per cent. (2001)
Percentage of pupils gaining level 4 plus at Key Stage 2 (11-year-olds) mathematics[3]	47 per cent.	61.6 per cent. (2001)
Infants in class sizes of more than 30[4]	3.770 (January)	Zero (September 2001)
Funding per pupil (in real terms)[5]	£2,750	£3,290 (2001—provisional)
Welfare to work (Bristol Unitary Authority)		
Number of adults in employment[6]	182,000 (May)	205,000 (November 2001)
Percentage of working age people in employment[7]	72 per cent. (May)	78.2 per cent. (November 2001)
Claimant count unemployed[8]	9,851 (May)	6,266 (December 2001)
Youth unemployment (18–24 claimant count)[9]	2,303 (May)	1,502 (December 2001)
Health (Avon Health Authority)		
Number of doctors[10]	2,326	2,508 (2001)
Qualified nurses[11]	7,679 (September)	7,569 (September 2000)
Inpatient waiting lists[12]	—	21,492 (September 2001)
Outpatients seen within 13 weeks[13]	76 per cent. (June)	80 per cent. (September 2001)

[1,2,3,4] DfES published statistics (taken from DfES Internet site)

[5] DfES held statistics obtained through policy officials for use in ministerial briefing

[6,7,8,9] Publicly available through NOMIS database—(Office for National Statistics)

[10] DoH statistic obtained through policy officials for use in ministerial briefing

[11,12,13] DoH statistics from Avon Health Authority briefing (available through the Government Knowledge Network)

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Randall: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what meetings the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has had with representatives of the *(a)* British Wind Energy Association, *(b)* oil and gas industry, *(c)* Association of Sea Fisheries Committees and *(d)* Shellfish Association of Great Britain since October 2001. [40605]

Mr. Leslie: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has asked me to reply.

Lord Macdonald has not had meetings in his capacity as Chancellor of the Duchy with any of the bodies named since October 2001.

Mr. Randall: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what meetings the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has had with conservation bodies since October 2001. [40602]

Mr. Leslie: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has asked me to reply.

Lord Macdonald has not had any meetings with conservation bodies in his capacity as the Chancellor of the Duchy. However, Duchy surveyors regularly meet representatives from a wide section of conservation and environmental bodies and groups as part of their management of the Duchy estates.

Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill

Mr. Randall: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what representations the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has received with regard to the regulatory impact of the Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill. [40603]

Mr. Leslie: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has asked me to reply.

Lord Macdonald has not received any representations in his capacity as the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster with regard to the regulatory impact of the Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

South London Metro

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when work will begin on the creation of the integrated South London Metro Commuter Network. [37232]

Mr. Jamieson: Work is proceeding to identify a phased programme, co-ordinated with franchise replacement, for implementation of the London Metro concept. A Steering Group, chaired by the Strategic Rail Authority, comprising the key stakeholders, including Transport for London, Railtrack, the Train Operating Companies, local authority and passengers representatives has been meeting regularly to take forward implementation.

Rail Safety

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many employees of railway companies and their contractors held certificates to *(a)* work on the track, *(b)* supervise others working on the track and *(c)* train people to work on the track in each year since 1990. [37715]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department does not hold such information.

Red Route System

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what is the mileage in use within Greater London of the red route system. [38202]

Ms Keeble: This is a matter for the Mayor and Transport for London. However, I understand that the length of the red route network currently in use is some 515km. Further information may be obtained from:

Peter Heather
The Assistant Director of Street Management Services:
TfL Street Management
Windsor House
42–50 Victoria Street
London
SW1H OTL.

Council Houses

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many new council houses have been *(a)* built since 1997 and *(b)* brought out of disrepair and are now available. [37178]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 26 February 2002]:* The figures for the number of council dwellings built since April 1997 are given in the table.

Local authority new building: England

	Number of dwellings
1997–98	323
1998–99	194
1999–2000	102
2000–01	717

Figures are not held centrally on the number of council dwellings in disrepair in 1997 which have now been brought out of disrepair. However, we are committed to improving the condition of social housing. In July 2000, the Government set targets to ensure that all social housing meets set standards of decency by 2010 and reducing the number of households living in social housing below these standards by a third between 2001 and 2004. Most of this reduction will take place in deprived areas. We currently estimate that we are on track to meet the 2004 target which should mean 550,000 more units of social housing of a decent standard by 2004.

Public-Private Partnerships

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which companies that have been involved in public-private partnerships with his Department have become insolvent since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [38263]

Dr. Whitehead: None of the companies that have been involved in public-private partnerships with the Department have become insolvent since 1997.

Rural Exception Sites Policy

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the operation of the rural exception sites policy. [37466]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 26 February 2002]:* National policy on rural exception sites is set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note 3: Housing and my Department's circular 06/98: Planning and Affordable Housing. It allows local planning authorities to adopt rural exception policies for the release of sites for small-scale residential development within or adjoining existing villages where planning permission would not otherwise be given. Under the rural exception policy an authority must be satisfied that any application to build housing would meet a local need not being achieved through existing plan policies, and that it could remain as affordable housing to meet local needs in perpetuity.

Registered Social Landlords

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what duty of care is required for members of the boards of registered social landlords when undertaking investment decisions; and what the consequences are of failure to meet this duty. [38093]

Ms Keeble: Members of the boards of registered social landlords (RSLs) have the same fiduciary duty to the RSL as any company director and, if the RSL is a charity, the same duty as any other charity trustee. The consequences of failing to meet their duties will also be the same.

The Housing Corporation, as regulator of RSLs, lays down in its Regulatory Code the fundamental obligations it expects RSLs to meet: that they must be viable, well-governed and well-managed. RSLs' governing bodies are expected to provide leadership and control and, among other things, to protect public investment in the sector. Where an RSL falls short of its obligations, the corporation has statutory powers to take action.

Reputational Externalities

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 13 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 249W, on reputational externalities, if the concept of reputational externalities was used as an element of the financial analyses of the London Underground PPP final assessment; and if he will make a statement. [37622]

Mr. Jamieson: Details of the financial analysis behind the value for money appraisal of the bids for the tube modernisation contracts are given in the final assessment report produced by London Underground. This is available on London Underground's website.

Residential Dwellings (St. Helens, South)

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what percentage of residential dwellings are vacant in St. Helens, South including *(a)* privately rented, *(b)* owner occupied, *(c)* council rented or *(d)* housing association. [38266]

Ms Keeble: 4.8 per cent. of all residential dwellings in St. Helens, South are vacant. Of this, 1 per cent. is within the council's stock, with the remaining 3.8 per cent. made up of owner occupiers, Registered Social Landlords, and the private rented sector.

Note—information on vacant property that differentiates between owner occupiers, Registered Social Landlords and private rented sector is not available.

Equipment Leasing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the equipment leasing arrangements entered into by his Department in each of the last four years; and what the cost is to public funds in each case. [39078]

Dr. Whitehead: The information requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list by local authority the level of *(a)* rent and *(b)* council tax arrears in each year since 1992 in England and Wales. [38323]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* On rent arrears, I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 10 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 979W to my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane), which provided information on rent arrears by local authority in England.

On council tax arrears, central Government do not collect information on the level of council tax arrears in England. However, estimates are available from 1 April 1995 on the total amount of council tax arrears in England. This information is given in the table.

£ billion

	Estimated amount of council tax arrears for England
1 April 1995	0.8
1 April 1996	1.1
1 April 1997	1.1
1 April 1998	1.1
1 April 1999	1.2
1 April 2000	1.2
1 April 2001	1.4

The council tax was introduced on 1 April 1993 as a replacement for the community charge (or poll tax).Requests for information about rent arrears and council tax arrears in Wales should be directed to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

London Underground

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what powers the Health and Safety Executive has in relation to withdrawing the safety cases for the London Underground PPP under the *(a)* Greater London Authority Act 1999, *(b)* Transport Act 2000 and *(c)* contracts between London Underground (and Transport for London when transferred) and the Infracos; and what implications this has for the ability of London Underground (and Transport for London when transferred) to (i) change or (ii) withdraw the Infraco contracts. [38973]

Mr. Jamieson: None. The relevant powers of the Health and Safety Executive are in the Railways (Safety Case) Regulations 2000, on which guidance is published by and available from HSE. HSE assesses and considers safety cases for acceptance. It can require London Underground to revise its safety case and submit the revision for assessment.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what powers he has regarding the placing of the Infracos on the London Underground into administration under *(a)* the Greater London Authority Act 1999, *(b)* the Transport Act 2000 and *(c)* the contracts with the Infracos for the London Underground PPP. [38980]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to Section 221 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what the *(a)* nature and *(b)* length of leases of (i) real estate, (ii) property and (iii) premises on the London Underground which (A) have taken place and (B) are due to take place under the London Underground PPP; [38986]

(2) what his Department's definition is of *(a)* premises, *(b)* real estate and *(c)* property on the London Underground, listing in each case the type and number of assets. [38978]

Mr. Jamieson: The establishment in April 2000 of the infrastructure companies, which are subsidiaries of London Underground Limited, enabled shadow running of the proposed arrangements which would operate under the PPP. The infrastructure companies have the benefit of such leases of infrastructure as are appropriate and necessary in order for the infrastructure companies to perform their contracts with London Underground Limited. Ensuring the necessary arrangements are in place is a matter for London Underground Limited and the infrastructure companies.

The leases give the infrastructure companies sufficient interest in the infrastructure to enable them to carry out their obligations under the contracts. The freehold remains with London Underground Limited. London Underground Limited has the benefit of a sub-lease, reflecting its role as operator of the network.

If London Underground Limited enters into the proposed PPP arrangements, the infrastructure companies' interest in the leases will remain with those companies.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what changes there have been to the final contracts with the Infracos on the London Underground PPP, regarding *(a)* the level of financial allowance for safety critical work and *(b)* contractual safety cases. [38979]

Mr. Jamieson: London Underground is responsible for the development of PPP contracts for the modernisation of the underground's infrastructure. I understand that the contracts require the infrastructure companies to comply with a contractual safety case, and to finance up to £50 million of safety changes and qualifying law changes in any contract year. That compares to the previously proposed level of £200 million per seven and a half year review period (around £26 million per year).

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when assessments made by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the Treasury, *(c)* Ernst and Young, *(d)* London Underground Limited, *(e)* the Mayor of London and Transport for London and *(f)* the Health and Safety Executive of (i) value for money and (ii) safety of the contracts tendered by bidders Metronet and Tube Lines wishing to enter into a public-private partnership with London Underground Limited were (1) concluded, (2) published and (3) made available for further consultation. [38968]

Mr. Jamieson: London Underground is responsible for implementation of the proposals for a public private partnership to modernise its infrastructure. It published on 7 February the assessment report considered by the London Transport Board, which considers, among other things, both value for money and safety. The report was sent on the same day to the Mayor and Transport for London, along with a wide range of other information, as part of the statutory duty of consultation and co-operation.

The Secretary of State commissioned Ernst and Young to carry out an independent review of London Underground's value for money analysis for him. This was completed before the LT Board meeting on 7 February and published on that day.

The Health and Safety Executive is responsible for regulation of London Underground in relation to safety, including acceptance of London Underground's statutory safety case.

Assessments made by the Mayor and Transport for London are a matter for them.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list those assets transferred to the Shadow Infracos on the London Underground; and the date on which the transfers took place. [38985]

Mr. Jamieson: Assets were transferred by statutory transfer scheme from London Underground Limited to the infrastructure companies BVC Limited, SSL Limited, and JNP Limited, which are subsidiaries of London Underground Limited, in April 2000. The establishment of the infrastructure companies and subsequent transfers took place in order to enable shadow running of the proposed arrangements which would operate under the PPP. The transfer schemes transferred such property, rights and liabilities as were appropriate and necessary in order for the infrastructure companies to perform their contracts with London Underground Limited.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what level of performance under the performance measurement code is required by the contracts for the London Underground PPP with Infracos for *(a)* each Infraco and *(b)* each line; what penalties will be imposed upon Infracos for failure to meet these performance targets; and if he will place in the Library copies of related documentation prepared (i) for and (ii) by his Department; [38989]

(2) what the performance measurement code is for the London Underground Infracos under the PPP; if he will place copies of related documentation prepared *(a)* for and *(b)* by his Department in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [38990]

Mr. Jamieson: London Underground is responsible for the PPP contracts for the modernisation of the Underground's infrastructure. I understand that the Performance Measurement Code sets out how the performance of each of the three infrastructure companies will be monitored and measured. It does not specify the level of performance required or the bonuses and penalties to be imposed for better or worse levels of performance, which are set out in schedules to the PPP service contracts. I understand that London Underground intends to make the contractual documentation publicly available following completion of the competitions.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will place in the Library the contracts tendered by bidders Metronet and Tube Lines wishing to enter into a public private partnership with London Underground Ltd. [38967]

Mr. Jamieson: London Underground is responsible for the development of the PPP contracts for the modernisation of the Underground's infrastructure. I understand that London Underground intends to make the contractual documentation publicly available following completion of the competitions.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what changes there have been in the last six months to the final contracts with the Infracos for the London Underground PPP concerning with whom the responsibility for cost overrun will lie; if he will state with whom the responsibility for cost overrun will lie under the contracts with the Infracos for the London Underground PPP; and if he will make a statement. [38981]

Mr. Jamieson: The PPP plans will require three private sector infrastructure companies to carry out work to modernise and maintain the infrastructure of the underground. These infrastructure companies will be responsible for ensuring that they meet their contractual obligations on time and on budget, and they will bear the risk of any cost overruns that result from their own inefficient or uneconomic behaviour. This principle has not been changed in the last six months.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which organisations and individuals must be consulted regarding the contracts tendered by bidders wishing to enter into a public-private partnership with London Underground Ltd.; and what the length of time required for consultation to take place is as defined in *(a)* the Greater London Authority Act 1999, *(b)* the Transport Act 2000 and *(c)* subsequent decisions made by (i) his Department and (ii) London Transport. [38964]

Mr. Jamieson: Section 298 of the GLA Act imposes a duty on the Mayor, London Regional Transport and Transport for London to consult and co-operate with each other for the purpose of, among other things, facilitating the securing and carrying into effect of PPP agreements for London Underground. The Act does not specify the length of time required for consultation. I understand that London Regional Transport considers that the current consultation time scale is realistic, reasonable and in compliance with its statutory obligations.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the conditions precedent, as referred to at http://www.railways.dtlr.gov.uk/lunderground/factsheets/safety/inde x.htm and as published by his Department on 11 February, that must be satisfied by London Transport before contracts are signed on the London Underground PPP; what timetable these must be satisfied by; and whether his Department must also accept these conditions precedent before final signing of the contracts. [38975]

Mr. Jamieson: The London Transport Board is expected to decide in March whether to enter into the proposed PPP contracts to modernise London Underground's infrastructure. If they decide to proceed, London Underground Ltd. will sign agreed contract terms with the bidders. They will sign on the basis that, before the agreements can come into effect, a number of conditions ("conditions precedent") must be fulfilled. These may relate to issues such as financing and regulatory consents, as well as acceptance of the safety case. The details of the conditions precedent themselves, like other contract terms, are a matter for London Underground Ltd. and the bidders.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many and what type of specific improvements are expected under the contracts of the first 7.5 years of the London Underground PPP in terms of *(a)* track improvement, *(b)* signals, *(c)* trains and *(d)* other infrastructure (i) in total, (ii) for each infraco and (iii) for each line. [38984]

Mr. Jamieson: London Transport's plans for modernisation of the tube are designed to deliver a comprehensive upgrade of the whole network as quickly and efficiently as possible. London Transport is currently consulting the Mayor and Transport for London on the plans following its announcement on 7 February that it is minded to proceed. I understand that London Underground intends to make the contractual documentation publicly available following completion of the competitions.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what definition of privatisation *(a)* is used by his Department as standard and *(b)* has been referred to in documentation published by his Department relating to the PPP of London Underground since 7 June 2001; and if he will make a statement. [38977]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the statement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on 7 February 2002 *Official Report*, columns 1126–47.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list changes to the Gateway process for major Government construction projects arising from consideration of Jubilee line extension project reports; whether these will apply to construction projects undertaken by private sector infrastructure companies involved in the public-private partnership for the London Underground; and if he will make a statement. [39001]

Mr. Jamieson: The Deputy Prime Minister asked Peter Gershon of the Office of Government Commerce to consider the July 2000 Ove Arup "end of commission" Jubilee line extension report in the light of his own report on best practice for central Government procurement. Mr. Gershon concluded that the report reinforced his views that large, high risk projects should be subject to a Gateway process to test viability, approve procurement methods, etc. Following a number of successful pilot exercises, the Gateway technique was formally extended to all large, high risk Government procurement projects.

Under the PPP plans for the modernisation of London Underground three private sector companies will be contracted to carry out work to modernise and maintain the underground's infrastructure. These companies will be responsible for the project management of the work. I understand that each intends to follow a form of Gateway procedure.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects to publish the result of the study by Westminster University commissioned by his Department and Transport for London into the economic impact of the Jubilee Line Extension project; and if he will make a statement. [39000]

Mr. Jamieson: The Jubilee line extension impact study report is expected to be published jointly by Transport for London and the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in the spring of next year.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects to publish his Department's review of its oversight of the Jubilee line extension project; and if he will make a statement. [38999]

Mr. Jamieson: Officials have been studying the Department's oversight of the way in which the Jubilee line extension project was carried out, with a view to providing advice to Ministers on lessons learned for the Government's role. This work is continuing and its conclusions will be submitted to Ministers. The Secretary of State's agent, Ove Arup, produced an end of commission report on the JLE project. Copies are available in the Libraries of the House.

Railway Industry

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the members and/organisations, companies and individuals represented on the Health and Safety Commission Railway Industry Advisory Committee; what the frequency of meetings of the RIAC is; and what recommendations have been *(a)* made and *(b)* implemented as an outcome of the meetings and discussions which have taken place. [38971]

Mr. Jamieson: The current membership of the Health and Safety Commission's (HSC) Railway Industry Advisory Committee (RIAC) is as follows:

Margaret Burns—Chair (a member of the HSC)

John Cartledge—London Transport Users Committee, Rail Passengers Council

David Heseldin—Rail Passengers Council

Vernon Hince, Phil Dee—RMT

Mick Rix, Dave Bennett—ASLEF

John Allen, Alan Tipping—TSSA

Paul Reuter—Amicus (formerly AEEU)

Aidan Nelson—Railway Safety (also chair of RIAC's Human Factors working group)

Chris Leah—Railtrack plc (in railway administration)

Richard Gostling—Railway Industry Association

Terry Worrall—Association of Train Operating Companies (employed by Thames Trains)

Paul Abbott—Railtrack plc (in railway administration) (also chairman of RIAC's Freight working group)

Allen Baker—Rolling Stock Companies (employed by Angel Train Contracts)

David Madden—Heritage Railway Association

Mike Strzelecki—London Underground Ltd.

Andrew Steel—Light Rail representative (employed by Stagecoach Supertram).

The Strategic Rail Authority, the Office of the Rail Regulator and the DTLR have observer status. This is being extended to include the Northern Ireland Department of Regional Development. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) provides secretariat support to RIAC, and is also currently represented at meetings by two senior officials. RIAC normally meets quarterly.

RIAC's activities prior to April 2001 were reported in successive editions of the Chief Inspector of Railways' Annual Report, copies of which are in the House Library. Since April 2001, RIAC has considered and provided the HSC with advice on aspects of all the recent public inquiry reports. Following a review of RIAC and the recommendations of Lord Cullen's public inquiry, its role was refocused in November 2001 to provide strategic advice to the HSC. Hence, at its most recent meeting in January 2002, RIAC considered HSE's draft railway regulatory strategy, and a negotiating strategy for the draft railway safety directive, both of which have subsequently been agreed by the HSC.

Business Contacts

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how his Department define the terms *(a)* independent advice, *(b)* independent assessment and *(c)* independent report when (i) awarding contracts for research and (ii) referring to written documentation published for his Department by outside organisations and bodies. [38965]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department seeks and commissions advice from all types of academics, consultants, committees and other public and private sector enterprises. That advice gives rise to reports, independent of the Department's own view, which may be published by the organisation or by the Department.

Research Documents

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list *(a)* published documentation and *(b)* unpublished written reports or other documentation which have resulted from research or other contracts awarded since (i) 1 May 1997 and (ii) 1 January 2001 by (A) his Department and (B) the Health and Safety Executive to (1) Balfour Beatty plc, (2) Bombardier Transportation (formerly Adtranz), (3) WS Atkins plc, (4) Amey/Amec, (5) Bechtel-Halcrow, (6) Jarvis and (7) AEA Technology; and if he will place copies of related documentation in the Library. [38961]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answers given to the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) on 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 813W. Information about my Department's research and other contracts is made widely available through publications, websites and events. The exceptions to this policy are work-related to national security or which involve issues of commercial confidentiality. HSE research reports are published in full and free of charge on their website.

The range of expertise of the firms identified is such that they may be commissioned by many areas of my Department. The information requested is not recorded centrally and would require searches throughout the Department, at disproportionate cost.

SSA (Surrey)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the initial assessment of SSA and grant finance to local authorities in the case of district councils in Surrey. [39014]

Dr. Whitehead: The 2002–03 local government finance settlement meant that, taken as a whole, district councils in Surrey received a grant increase of £2.75 million (2.3 per cent.) which translates into an SSA increase of £3.67 million (3.7 per cent.) All of these authorities benefited from our guarantee that districts would get grant increases of at least the rate of inflation.

Highways Agency

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much money the Highways Agency has spent on maintenance of main roads in each of the past 10 years. [39135]

Mr. Jamieson: During the last 10 years the Highways Agency and its predecessor organisations have spent the following amounts on maintenance of motorways and trunk roads:

	£ million
1991–92	482
1992–93	539
1993–94	584
1994–95	595
1995–96	488
1996–97	428
1997–98	499
1998–99	638
1999–2000	726
2000–01	722

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much additional public sector investment the Highways Agency will make during the period of the 10 Year Plan over and above spending on routine maintenance. [39137]

Mr. Jamieson: The 10-year Plan for Transport provided for expenditure of £22.5 billion. This is broken down as follows:

	£ billion
Investment	
Major schemes over £5 million	7.2
Expenditure on small scale improvements to the network	3.3
Structural maintenance—renewal of carriageways and bridges	4.3
Sub total	14.8
Payments to the private sector for privately financed investment	3.9
Other	
HA Administration	1.0
Routine and winter maintenance	2.8
Sub total	3.8
Total 10-year plan funding	22.5

Travel Concessions Eligibility Bill

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of local authorities he estimates will be fully funded for the cost of implementing the Travel Concessions Eligibility Bill; and which local authorities he estimates will not be fully compensated for the cost. [39013]

Ms Keeble: The Government will take into account in setting the spending totals in the Spending Review the additional cost on local government overall of the Travel Concessions (Eligibility) Act 2002. Provision will be included in the 2003–04 general grant for local authorities, and it will be for councils to decide their spending priorities in the light of their responsibilities and the wishes of their electorate. It is not possible to identify provision for a particular responsibility within general grant, and the grant for individual councils will not, in any case, be available until the provisional local government finance settlement is announced at the end of the year.

National Transport Model

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 800W, ref 36609, when this model will be completed; and whether there are funds allocated in the 10-year Plan budget which will enable projects to be restructured if the modelling reveals flaws in the initial analysis for the plan. [39157]

Mr. Jamieson: A preliminary version of our enhanced National Transport Model is under test at present. As part of the review of the 10-year Plan, expected to be completed this summer, the enhanced version will be used to provide revised forecasts for the impacts of the plan, although the model itself is subject to constant review.

The 10-year Plan provides an investment framework with indicative funding allocations, with some unallocated moneys in later plan years. This allows flexibility for later years. Projects will emerge from multi-modal studies, from the business plans of the Strategic Rail Authority and Highways Agency, and the Local Transport Plan bids of local authorities, and will be subject to detailed appraisal as appropriate.

Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the advice received from the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors concerning marriage value and leasehold enfranchisement. [38477]

Ms Keeble: I understand that, by this, the hon. Member for Torbay wished to know whether we would make public the views expressed by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) in response to consultation on the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill. All responses to the consultation paper—with the exception of those who asked for their responses to be treated as confidential—are available to the public. The response from the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors is among them. Copies can be inspected by visiting my Department's library at Ashdown House. Appointments are not necessary, but we would advise visitors to contact the library in advance on 020 7944 6107 to avoid unnecessary delays.

Homelessness

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what statutory powers he has to ensure local authorities meet their statutory duty to house the homeless. [38444]

Ms Keeble: Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1999 (best value) imposes a general duty on local authorities to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which their functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. Section 15 of the 1999 Act provides the Secretary of State with a wide range of intervention powers to secure an authority's compliance with part 1. For example, he may direct the local authority to carry out a review of the function or to contract out the function. The Secretary of State also has the power, in cases of serious failure, to assume responsibility for a function and nominate a person to undertake it on his behalf.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how he determines if a local authority is meeting its statutory duty to house the homeless. [38443]

Ms Keeble: The Housing Inspectorate, part of the Audit Commission's Inspection Service undertakes scrutiny of local authorities' housing functions, including their statutory homelessness duties. The Minister for Housing and Planning is notified by the Chief Inspector of Housing of any inspection which concludes that a service is poor, and the Secretary of State has intervention powers which he can use if he is satisfied that the authority is not complying with its statutory best value responsibilities. For the years 2001–01 and 2001–02 local authorities were required to assess their performance against Best Value Performance Indicator 67, the proportion of homelessness applications decided upon within 33 working days. Local authorities are also encouraged to set appropriate local performance indicators.

The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions also collects, monitors and publishes at quarterly intervals data about local housing authorities activities under the homelessness legislation. Among other things, this indicates the numbers of applicants accepted by individual authorities as statutorily homeless and the number of households being accommodated under the legislative provisions.

The Homelessness Act 2002 includes provisions which will require local housing authorities to carry out a homelessness review in their district and to formulate a homelessness strategy based on the review. The new Homelessness Directorate being established within DTLR will monitor the development and progress of these reviews and strategies.

Accident Black Spots

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action he proposes to take about the worst 10 accident black spots on the trunk and primary route network, with particular reference to the A5 from the A45 to the A428 in the Daventry constituency; and if he will discuss these accident black spots with the Automobile Association. [38454]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Mr. Tim Boswell, dated 4 March 2002:

The Transport Minister, David Jamieson, has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the worst 10 accident black spots on the trunk and primary route network and in particular, on the A5 in the Daventry constituency.

Safety is a high priority for the Highways Agency and we welcome the initiative that the AA has recently taken in alerting drivers to the need to take care when using the strategic road network. The Agency's network is one of the safest in the world and, since 1998, the number of those killed and seriously injured on these roads has been reduced by more than 400. However, there is no room for complacency. The Government's Ten Year Plan for Transport sets a target for measures to be taken to further reduce the number of people killed or seriously injured on the strategic road network by a third by 2010, with a 10% reduction in the slight casualty rate.

We are aware of the safety issues highlighted by the AA and, on certain stretches of the trunk road network we have taken, or are planning, steps to improve them. We are delivering 100 small improvement schemes, half of which are aimed specifically at improving safety at locations on the trunk road network, in addition to the programme of major improvements, eight of which are expected to be completed by March 2003. We have regular meetings with the AA and other representative road user groups at which these issues are discussed.

The AA identified the A5 between Daventry and Rugby as the 11th most dangerous route in Britain. Since 1999, when data for the AA's survey was collected, a safety scheme between Kilsby and Weedon has been completed. This involved providing improved signing and road markings and the introduction of a Police speed check area. Accident data from January 2000 to August 2001 shows that there has been a noticeable reduction and, although it is still too early to fully assess this reduction, early indications are encouraging. In addition, we propose to install speed cameras in the Watford Gap area and that the speed limit there be reduced to 50 mph.

Autism

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if members of the Disabled Person's Transport Advisory Committee have expertise in autism spectrum disorders. [39752]

Ms Keeble: Members of the committee are appointed on the basis of their personal transport and disability experience. They do not represent any particular organisation or interest group. We expect the committee to take account of the needs of the widest range of disabled people in formulating their advice to Ministers.

The committee can also benefit from the expertise of one member of the secretariat who has family experience of autism spectrum disorders.

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to what extent the revised Blue Badge Scheme for Disabled People takes account of the serious mobility impairment of people with autistic spectrum disorders through their behavioural difficulties and inability to perceive danger. [39753]

Ms Keeble: The current review of the Blue Badge Scheme will consider all aspects of the Scheme, including the eligibility criteria, administration and enforcement. Formal representations have been made by the National Autistic Society and their views will be given due consideration during the review process.

Asbestos

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 10 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 986–87W, on asbestos, if the handling of asbestos cement will be limited to licensed contractors after the regulations come into operation. [39250]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* No. There are no plans to require work with asbestos cement to be in any way limited to contractors licensed by the Health and Safety Executive.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 10 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 987W, on asbestos, who commissioned the *(a)* 1985 Doll and Peto paper and *(b)* 2000 Hodgson and Darnton paper; and on what basis their reports may be deemed to be independent. [39251]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The 1985 report by Professors Doll and Peto was commissioned in 1982 by the Health and Safety Commission. Both individuals are highly respected academic epidemiologists, chosen for this task on the basis of their expertise in the subject matter. The paper by Hodgson and Darnton, was prepared as part of their day-to-day work in the HSE. Drafts of the paper were seen and reviewed by a number of external experts before it was submitted for publication, and again by peer reviewers selected by the Annals of Occupational Hygiene before its publication in this journal. Copies of the report and paper are in the Libraries of the House.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 10 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 986W, on asbestos, if he will give a breakdown of the 2000–01 prosecution figures differentiating between white and blue asbestos. [39249]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 10 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 986W, on asbestos, which explained that the system for recording prosecutions does not differentiate between the different types of asbestos.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 10 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 986W, on asbestos, if he will give a breakdown of his estimate of the compliance cost of the proposed new duty to manage the risk from asbestos to include the *(a)* cost of replacement materials, *(b)* devaluation of property, *(c)* premature demolition of property affected, *(d)* cost of collection and disposal of asbestos cement, *(e)* replacement of blue asbestos water pipes and *(f)* legal costs. [39242]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The Health and Safety Executive included the cost of the replacement materials in the estimated removal costs provided with the consultation document. The cost of replacement materials varies by type and location of asbestos. The research the Executive commissioned for the proposals indicates that reinstatement costs could be in the region of 35–45 per cent. of the calculated removal costs. On this basis total reinstatement costs would be between £230 million and £290 million for the asbestos that is actually removed as a result of the proposals. These reinstatement costs include labour costs. These costs were included in the original overall cost estimates.

The Health and Safety Executive do not believe there will be any significant devaluation of property values following reinstatement if asbestos is removed or adequate management of asbestos remaining in place. Any on-going management costs are expected to be only a small fraction of annual building maintenance costs.

The Health and Safety Executive do not expect these proposals in themselves to result in any premature demolition. Other factors, such as the overall desirability of the property, are likely to play a more significant role in any decision to demolish. Under existing legislation, an asbestos survey has to be undertaken and asbestos has to be removed under controlled conditions before a building is demolished.

It is not possible to breakdown any cost by type of asbestos.

Information on legal costs is not available.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the anticipated costs are of removing all blue and brown asbestos from domestic properties. [39213]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* There are no plans to require the removal of blue and brown asbestos from domestic properties so it has not been costed. It is safer to leave asbestos in place if it is not going to be damaged or disturbed.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the anticipated cost is of removing all white asbestos from domestic properties. [39214]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* There are no plans to require the removal of white asbestos from domestic premises so it has not been costed. It is safer to leave asbestos in place if it is not going to be damaged or disturbed.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether he plans to ban sales of domestic property containing blue, brown or white asbestos; and if he will make a statement. [39215]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* There are no such plans. Our proposals for seller's packs will help raise home buyers' awareness. The seller's pack will include a home condition report which will disclose the presence of asbestos where it is a safety hazard and is apparent from a visual inspection of the property.

The Health and Safety Executive does not call for asbestos to be removed if it is in good condition and is not going to be disturbed. In those circumstances, it is safer to leave undamaged asbestos in place, and this is what the Health and Safety Executive recommends.

Pilotage Exemption Certificates

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will impose a national standard for the issue of pilotage exemption certificates. [39820]

Mr. Jamieson: The Pilotage Act 1987 assigns to competent harbour authorities the responsibility for deciding the qualifications required of applicants for pilotage exemption certificates. They have to consider skill, experience and local knowledge and, where appropriate, knowledge of English. We have no plans to change this. However, we have proposed to develop with the ports industry guidelines on the way this task might be undertaken: our aim is to assist authorities with advice on agreed industry practice. These guidelines would support the Port Marine Safety Code.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many pilotage exemption certificates have been issued on the Humber in the last year. [39819]

Mr. Jamieson: The issue of pilotage exemption certificates is a matter for the competent harbour authority. I understand from the authority for the Humber that 40 new pilotage exemption certificates were issued in 2001, compared with 35 in 2000. These are the latest readily available figures. There is always a turnover of certificate holders since crews change on vessels regularly using any port. I understand that almost all the new certificates were replacements of additional certificates issued in these circumstances.

Associated British Ports

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many pilots are employed on the Humber by Associated British Ports. [39821]

Mr. Jamieson: This is a matter for the competent harbour authority. They have indicated that 77 authorised pilots will be employed by 4 March, that a further 17 have been recruited and are training for authorisation; and that they hope to have a full complement of 110 authorised pilots by the end of March.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much Government funding was given to Associated British Ports for their training of new pilots, under their new pilotage scheme, on the Humber. [39822]

Mr. Jamieson: None.

Fire Service

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the estimated *(a)* administrative and *(b)* total cost is of best value in England and Wales in the fire service since its introduction. [39623]

Dr. Whitehead: There are a number of different categories of fire authorities in England and Wales. Broadly speaking, these divide into 34 single-purpose authorities and 16 county fire authorities, where the fire service is provided by the county council as one of a range of services. Single-purpose fire authorities are best value authorities in their own right. For county fire authorities the duty of best value applies at county council level. No overall assessment is available of the costs incurred by fire authorities on the best value process. It would not be feasible to apportion costs incurred by county councils in respect of best value for the fire service.

Arson

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* non-accidental vehicle fires, *(b)* incidents of arson and *(c)* incidents of arson in educational establishments there were, broken by (i) fire brigade area and (ii) local authority, in England and Wales, in each year since January 1997. [39622]

Dr. Whitehead: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries of the House. It relates to malicious or deliberate fires attended by local authority fire brigades in England and Wales between 1997 and 2000.

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what date the Government introduced its target to cut arson by 30 per cent. by 2009. [39624]

Dr. Whitehead: The target to reduce by 30 per cent. the number of deliberate fires by March 2009 from the 1998–99 baseline was set as a service delivery agreement target in conjunction with Spending Review 2000. The service delivery agreement target was agreed with Treasury in November 2000.

Telecommunications Masts

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many appeal applications for telecommunications masts to be erected have been received by him; how many have been turned down; and on what grounds. [39542]

Ms Keeble: Information is not held about appeal decisions for telecommunications masts specifically. The following is information relating to appeal decisions about telecommunications development generally.

	1999	*2000*	*2001*
Number of appeals	147	325	589
Number of appeals allowed	85	191	248
Number of appeals dismissed	52	108	136
Number of appeals withdrawn or undecided	10	26	205

Note:

All figures relate to the year in which the appeal was received, not necessarily the year it was decided.

While a large number of issues have been taken into account in determining telecommunications appeals, the most common issues for those that have been dismissed are the effect on the landscape, surrounding area (by reason of size, character, materials etc), areas of outstanding natural beauty or green belt policy issues, and other bad neighbour issues.

M42

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps are being taken to alleviate traffic noise from the M42, with specific reference to where it passes through Solihull. [39492]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Mr. John Taylor, dated 4 March 2002:

The Transport Minister, David Jamieson, has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about measures to alleviate traffic noise from the M42 where it passes through Solihull.

The Government's Ten Year Plan for Transport said that all concrete roads would be resurfaced with quieter surfacing materials by 2010. In line with that, the concrete surface of the Solihull section of M42 between Junctions 3A and 4 will be resurfaced, probably during the second half of the period covered by the 10 year plan.

You will know that the West Midlands Multi Modal Study, carried out by consultants on behalf of the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions, has recommended widening the M42. You will also know that proposals for a motorway service area, which could result in the section of motorway between Junctions 5 and 6 being widened, are currently the subject of a planning inquiry. Were these widenings to go ahead, both would be subject to environmental appraisal, which would include an assessment of the impact of noise on surrounding properties.

I should add that asphalt surface of the M42 between Junctions 4 and 7 is in good condition and is unlikely to need resurfacing as part of its normal maintenance cycle for some years. When it is, however, a quieter surfacing material will be used.

If you would like further information, the Agency's Area Manager, David Cropper, would be pleased to help. He can be contacted at the Agency's offices at Broadway, Broad Street, Birmingham B15 1BL, or telephone on 0121 678 8482.

Planning Applications

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assistance is given to people who require help to contest planning application decisions. [39485]

Ms Keeble: An applicant may appeal against refusal of planning permission by a local planning authority, against the imposition of conditions, or against non determination of a planning application by a local planning authority. The Planning Inspectorate provide advice on making and taking part in planning appeals.

Third parties who object to the grant of planning permission may make an application to the courts for judicial review of the local authority's decision. Public funding is available for legal representation in judicial review proceedings on certain terms and advice should be sought from a legal aid solicitor.

Our Planning Green Paper puts forward a range of proposals designed to improve community participation in the planning system. This includes strengthening the existing opportunities for people to comment on and influence development proposals early in the process before formal planning applications are submitted. In order to help people engage more effectively in the planning process we are working with the Royal Town Planning Institute on ways in which the service provided by Planning Aid can be expanded and better funded.

External Contracts

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will list the 30 largest contracts awarded by his Department from *(a)* May 1997 to April 1998, *(b)* May 1998 to April 1999, *(c)* May 1999 to April 2000, *(d)* May 2000 to April 2001 and *(e)* May 2001 to the latest date, indicating in each case the values of the contracts and the companies with which the contracts were placed; [38731]

(2) which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations which previously held contracts with his Department *(a)* won new contracts at the culmination of the existing contracts and *(b)* won new contracts after a period of inactivity with his Department in each of the past five years; [38730]

(3) which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations have won new contracts with *(a)* his Department and *(b)* executive agencies in each of the past five years. [38729]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The information requested is not held centrally and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Housing Units (Telford)

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many new housing units have been constructed by registered social landlords in Telford in each financial year since 1990. [39748]

Ms Keeble: The numbers of new dwellings constructed by registered social landlords in Telford and Wrekin unitary authority, as report by the local authority, for the financial years requested are given in the table.

Dwellings completed for registered social landlords in Telford and Wrekin

Period	*Number of dwellings*
1990–91	2
1991–92	152
1992–93	118
1993–94	82
1994–95	228
1995–96	130
1996–97	149
1997–98	15
1998–99	59
1999–2000	183
2000–01	180

Fire Authorities

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the separate precepting arrangements for combined fire authorities in England outlined in the latest local government White Paper will come into effect. [39727]

Dr. Whitehead: As announced in the White Paper, the Government are proposing to take the legislative steps necessary to make combined fire authorities in England major precepting bodies. This change will require an amendment to primary legislation, because the revised financial arrangements would otherwise conflict with the provisions of section 5 of the Fire Services Act 1947. The timetable for making the change will depend upon the Department securing a legislative slot in a forthcoming Session of Parliament for a Bill to implement proposals in respect of local government finance in the White Paper.

Transport Research Laboratory

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the studies *(a)* being conducted and *(b)* published since 1997 by the Transport Research Laboratory. [38531]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* TRL is an independent private company and carries out research studies for many clients including DTLR. Since 1997 a large number of studies have been completed or are continuing for DTLR, and reports are normally published by TRL on completion of each study. To list the studies and reports would require disproportionate effort, but TRL should be able to provide copies of any report that has been published. Also, TRL publishes annual reports that list all the research and publications for that year and copies of these from 1997 may be obtained directly from TRL.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will publish the Transport Research Laboratory's report into speed and road traffic accidents. [38530]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* TRL has published many such studies over many years. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given today [38531], about TRL studies and publications. The next TRL report on this topic is due to be published in March. This is TRL report number 511, "The relationship between speed and accidents on rural single carriageway roads" by M. C. Taylor, A. Baruya and J. V. Kennedy.

Local Strategic Partnerships

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the role of local strategic partnerships in rural areas; and what advice is available to parish and town councils. [39396]

Dr. Whitehead: Parish and town councils provide a recognised role for involvement specific to people in rural areas, not only for local authorities in predominantly rural areas but also for those in areas which include some rural elements. Accountable parish and town councils can make an important contribution to the work of local strategic partnerships, for example feeding into the establishment of the long-term vision and identifying local priorities to be contained in the community strategy. The role that parish and town councils play should be a matter for local discussion between those councils and the relevant local strategic partnership. The Government produced guidance on local strategic partnerships in March 2001, and on the related subject of preparing community strategies in December 2000.

Leylandii

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on his plans to control leylandii hedges; and what the proposed timetable is for their implementation. [39487]

Ms Keeble: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) on 30 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 325W.

European Railway Safety Agency

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on his policy towards the establishment of a European railway safety agency under paragraph 36 of the Laeken conclusions; and what powers it will have. [39635]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government welcome the publication by the Commission on 23 January of a "second package" of proposed measures to revitalise Europe's railways. This package includes a proposal to establish a European Rail Agency (ERA). We are considering these proposals carefully and will be consulting widely on them before reaching a formal position.

The Commission's proposal makes clear that the ERA will have no substantive powers of its own. It will act in a technical advisory capacity to the Commission on railway interoperability and safety matters, and will be staffed by experts from the industry.

Coal Mining

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which organisations with a specific remit to support coal mining and former coal mining communities receive Government funding. [39381]

Ms Keeble: The Government funded organisations with specific remits to support coal mining and its former communities are:

(i) The Coal Authority, whose principal functions are to license coal mining operations and to discharge liabilities stemming from historic mining activity;

(ii) the Coalfield Regeneration Trust, whose objective is to be a key agency promoting and achieving the social and economic regeneration of the former coalfields.

In addition, English Partnerships are responsible for delivering the ringfenced National Coalfields Programme working with the RDAs. This programme delivers environmental improvements and development infrastructure on the 86 former coalfield sites within the programme's portfolio.

Furthermore, a Coalfields Enterprise Fund is to be launched later this year, providing venture capital to new and expanding small and medium sized business located in the former English coalfields.

Railtrack

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what arrangements will be made for debt to be covered by Railtrack's successor company; and if it will be guaranteed by Government. [39859]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* It is for bidders to propose their arrangements for the treatment of debt.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the level of indebtedness was of *(a)* Railtrack plc and *(b)* Railtrack Group immediately prior to the date of being put into administration; and how much debt the administrator has built up (i) to date and (ii) until the financial year end. [39843]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* This is a matter for the administrator of Railtrack plc and, in the case of Railtrack Group plc, the company and its auditors.

Station Platforms

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the decision of Her Majesty's Rail Inspectorate not to allow new trains to stop at short platforms. [39438]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* The Health and Safety Executive's Railway Inspectorate's (HMRI) policy on long trains stopping at short platforms is based on an assessment of risk. HMRI prefer to see stations' platforms modified to ensure that they are long enough to accommodate trains without the need for selective door opening. However, where this is not possible, for example where there are structural constraints, HMRI are prepared to consider proposals from operators for selective door opening.

Braunstone Community Association

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 808–09W, on the Braunstone Community Association, if he will publish *(a)* the results and *(b)* the evidence obtained by his Department's audit investigation into the Braunstone Community Association; and what plans he has to alter the aims of the New Deal project following the audit investigation. [40371]

Ms Keeble: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 808–09W.

Council Tax

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the council tax for a band D property in each local authority in England for each financial year from 1997–98 to 2001–02. [40283]

Dr. Whitehead: Tables showing the band D council tax in each local authority in England for each financial year from 1997–98 to 2001–02 have been placed in the Libraries of the House. Table 1 provides information on the band D council tax for the area of each local authority, with table 2 showing each authority's own band D council tax. The figures are based on two adults and include amounts funded by council tax benefit and transitional reduction.

Allowances (Local Government)

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guidance he gives to local authorities on *(a)* the payment of members' allowances and *(b)* employment of political staff. [40282]

Dr. Whitehead: We issued local authorities with guidance on allowances for councillors in April 2001. Local authorities are required to have regard to the statutory parts of this guidance, as well as to the relevant legislation.

The guidance sets out that basic and special responsibility allowances are discretionary allowances, with levels set by individual local authorities, having regard to the recommendations of their independent remuneration panels. Local authorities are required to publish the details of their scheme of allowances, the amount of each allowance paid to each member, and the recommendations of their independent remuneration panel.

The maximum levels payable to councillors for travel and subsistence are governed by section 174 of the Local Government Act 1972. They were last updated in April 2000 by an Annex to Circular 1/86.

The employment of political staff is covered by section 9 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. There may be no more than three political assistants in a Local Authority. These posts are usually assigned to the three largest political groups which have ten per cent. or more of the membership of the authority, unless the authority decides to allow a different minority group to appoint a political assistant. Where only one political group has more than 10 per cent. of the authority's membership, that group and the next largest group will be entitled to appoint a political assistant. A political assistant may not discharge any of an authority's functions, nor may they direct any staff except for their own clerical or secretarial support. The maximum remuneration of political assistants is set by the Local Government (Assistant for Political Groups) (Remuneration) Order 1995, and is currently £25,044.

TREASURY

Customs and Excise

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what statistics he keeps on the ethnic background of business-owners under investigation by HM Customs and Excise; and if he will make a statement. [36032]

Mr. Boateng: No such statistics are available. Customs in the course of their investigations do not collect this information.

PIU Voluntary Sector Review

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list the *(a)* numbers, *(b)* grades and *(c)* sections in which they work of the officials in his Department who have worked with PIU voluntary sector review: organisational forms for social enterprise; and if he will make a statement; [36034]

(2) which Minister in his Department has responsibility for the PIU voluntary sector review: organisational forms for social enterprise. [35974]

Ruth Kelly: The Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU) is not part of HM Treasury but is located in the Cabinet Office and reports directly to the Prime Minister. The sponsor Minister for the PIU voluntary sector review is the Home Secretary. In the course of normal business the PIU are in close touch with a range of Treasury officials on issues of common concern.

Meat Imports

Mr. Paice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many Customs officials were employed to check personal imports of meat and meat products on 1 January *(a)* 2002, *(b)* 2001, *(c)* 2000 and *(d)* 1999. [36584]

Mr. Boateng: Customs law enforcement officers deal with the full range of prohibitions and restrictions where Customs has an enforcement responsibility. No Customs officials are employed specifically for meat and meat product checks where local and port health authorities and DEFRA have the lead responsibilities.

Customs officers do however participate in joint exercises organised by the lead agencies to target illicit meat as well as seizing meat found in the normal course of their duties.

Global Crossing

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the dates that Ministers in his Department have received hospitality in their ministerial capacities since 1 January 1999 from Global Crossing; and if he will make a statement. [37684]

Ruth Kelly: Offers of hospitality which are accepted are registered in line with the requirements of paragraph 139 of the Ministerial Code.

Departmental Development

Mr. Luff: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how often the Department has applied the special urgency provisions in paragraph 22 of Circular 18/84 (Development by Government Departments) to a development by the Department; and if he will make a statement. [38710]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury has not applied these provisions.

Catering Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the cost was of *(a)* in-house canteen and *(b)* other catering services provided by his Department in each of the last four years. [38926]

Ruth Kelly: Expenditure on services provided by the Treasury's caterers was as follows.

	£
In-house staff restaurant and associated facilities:	
1997–98	52,709.85
1998–99	39,643.51
1999–2000	129,978.39
2000–01	146,236.35
Other catering services:	
1997–98	86,095.73
1998–99	111,245.58
1999–2000	93,426.23
2000–01	106,466.30

This period covers the provision of additional facilities in a second Treasury building, Allington Towers, and the provision of additional snack bar facilities in the main Treasury building. In addition, this period saw the loss of subsidy contribution when other occupants of main Treasury building moved out.

Euro

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the countries pegged to the euro which are outside the Eurozone. [39642]

Ruth Kelly: This information was published in the European Central Bank's "Review of the International Role of the Euro", in October 2001.

Smuggling

Brian Cotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people have been prosecuted for smuggling tobacco and alcohol into the country during the past five years; and what forms of punishment were administered to these individuals. [39764]

Mr. Boateng: Each prosecution case can involve a number of defendants. Customs central records collate the number of prosecution cases rather than the number of people prosecuted.

For the number of prosecutions relating to tobacco and alcohol smuggling for the period 1996–96 to 1999–2000, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given to the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on 15 January 2001, *Official Record*, column 123W.

In 2000–01, Customs prosecuted 764 cases. Details of the penalties levied for excise and single market offences are contained in the Customs and Excise Annual Reports from 1996–97 to 1999–2000. The same information for the period 2000–01 will be detailed in the Customs and Excise Annual Report for 2000–01, due to be published shortly.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many individuals have been found guilty by a court of law of smuggling non-excise paid tobacco and alcohol into this country; how many of these individuals received a penalty fine as a result; and what was the average level of this penalty in the last three years. [39810]

Mr. Boateng: Customs do not hold centrally information in the format requested. However, details of the penalties levied for excise and single market offences are contained in the Customs and Excise Annual Reports for 1996–97 to 1999–2000. Information for the period 2000–01 will be detailed in the Customs and Excise Annual Report for 2000–01, due to be published shortly.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many websites offering the sale of non-duty paid tobacco and alcohol have been shut down within the past five years. [39765]

Mr. Boateng: As part of the Tackling Tobacco Smuggling strategy published in March 2000, Customs actively started targeting websites selling non-UK duty paid tobacco. Customs do not hold records of all websites operating prior to the start of the Tackling Tobacco Smuggling strategy.

Customs estimate that as a result of their actions since March 2000, 85 of these websites have ceased trading.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the number of cigarettes that will be seized as a result of scanner operations in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [38626]

Mr. Boateng: Customs targets for the overall number of cigarettes to be seized in the years 2000–01 to 2002–03 are included in the Tackling Tobacco Smuggling strategy published in March 2000—a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House. In 2000–01 Customs substantially exceeded their target. An estimate for the revenue value of seizures in these years resulting from the installation of scanners is included in this document.

The Government will publish annually details of the outcomes from the Tackling Tobacco Smuggling strategy. The results from the first year of the strategy were included in the Tackling Indirect Tax Fraud paper published in November 2001—a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what methods he has used to measure the effectiveness of HM Customs and Excise's publicity campaign about tobacco smuggling. [38629]

Mr. Boateng: In common with most major Government publicity campaigns, effectiveness is measured through detailed creative development and tracking research. The outcome of the research is taken into account in planning further phases of the campaign.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what quantities of unmarked tobacco products have been seized and detained by trading standards officers, since June 2001. [38619]

Mr. Boateng: Trading Standards Officers do not currently maintain central records of cigarettes and hand-rolling tobacco seizures, but Customs and Excise are requesting them to provide an annual return.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to review his target for 2001–02 for asset seizures in connection with tobacco smuggling. [38618]

Mr. Boateng: The Tackling Tobacco Smuggling strategy published in March 2000 set Customs, for the first time, financial targets against tobacco smuggling involving asset seizures. Customs regularly review performance against these targets, monitoring the contribution made to the achievement of the overall outcome of reducing the size of the illicit cigarette market.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* private light goods vehicles and *(b)* other private vehicles used for smuggling were seized by Customs and Excise in (i) 1999–2000, and (ii) 2000–01; and how many in each category were restored to their owners in each year. [38628]

Mr. Boateng: Customs centrally held information on vehicle seizures does not differentiate between the types of private vehicle seized. For the total number of vehicles seized across the UK in 1999–2000 I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 15 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 125W. Figures for the number of vehicles seized by Customs across the UK during 2000–01 are contained in the Government's response to the independent report by John Roques into "The Collection of Excise Duties in HM Customs and Excise" (House of Commons command 5329, July 2001), a copy of which was placed in the Library on 19 July 2001.

I regret that Customs does not centrally hold information on the number of vehicles restored.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many private and light goods vehicles have been seized by HM Customs and Excise in the last five years for suspected smuggling offences; and, of these, how many were *(a)* confiscated indefinitely and *(b)* returned for a fee. [39769]

Mr. Boateng: Customs records of the number of vehicles seized do not disaggregate between the nature of the offence or the type of the vehicle involved in each case. For the number of vehicles seized across the whole of the UK from 1996–97 to 1997–98, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given on 18 June 1998, *Official Report*, column 274W. For the number of vehicles seized across the UK in 1998–99, 1999–2000, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given on 15 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 125W. Figures for the number of vehicles seized across the UK during 2000–01 are contained in the Government's response to the independent report by John Roques into "The Collection of Excise Duties in HM Customs and Excise" (House of Commons command 5329, July 2001), a copy of which was placed in the Library on 19 July 2001.

Customs do not centrally hold information on vehicle restoration.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many complaints have been received by HM Customs and Excise in the past five years relating to the seizure of private and light goods vehicles at UK ports for suspected smuggling offences. [39768]

Mr. Boateng: Customs do not maintain in the form requested a central record of the number of complaints received.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many heavy goods vehicles used for smuggling have been seized by HM Customs and Excise since the introduction of the new policy in July 2001; how many of those seizures were for *(a)* first and *(b)* second or subsequent offences; and if he will make a statement. [38627]

Mr. Boateng: This information is currently unavailable. Customs expect to collate and publish it on an annual basis.

EC Directive 92/83

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to transpose EC Directive 92/83; and if he will make a statement. [39356]

Mr. Boateng: Council Directive 92/83/EEC is already implemented in the UK.

Overseas Aid

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the percentage of GNP is committed to overseas aid in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03; what plans he has to increase the percentage of GNP committed to overseas aid; and if he will make a statement. [39726]

Ruth Kelly: The final figures for 2002 are currently not available from the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC). The latest DAC figures available show the UK net overseas development assistance average for 2000 was 0.32 per cent. of GNP.

The Government remain fully committed to the UN 0.7 per cent oda/GNP target. They have made clear their pledge that the ratio of aid to GNP will reach 0.33 per cent. in 2003–04. This would place the UK above the G7 country average of 0.19 per cent. and the OECD average of 0.22 per cent.

In his speech in November in New York and in his pre-Budget report speech, the Chancellor emphasised his commitment to ensuring further substantial increases in development assistance and its share in national income. The impending spending review will set spending plans for 2003–04 to 2005–06 and is an opportunity to consider plans for development spending beyond 2003–04, alongside other priorities and pressures.

Ian Lucas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the proportion of gross national income devoted to overseas development assistance was in each financial year since 1979. [39970]

Mr. Boateng: The oda/GNI ratio is an input target whose elements are set by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC). Development assistance as a percentage of GNP will rise to 0.33 per cent. in 2003/04, up from 0.26 per cent. in 1997.

The figures for the proportion of gross national income devoted to overseas development assistance for each financial year since 1979 are available in the DFID Report, Statistics on International Development 1996/7–2000/01, page 143, Figure 16.1 Net oda/GNI ratios for the UK.

The report is a National Statistics publication.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by what date he intends to achieve the United Nations' target of 0.7 per cent. GNP for overseas aid. [40324]

Mr. Boateng: The Government remain fully committed to the UN 0.7 per cent. oda/GNP target. They have made clear their pledge that the ratio of aid to GNP will reach 0.33 per cent in 2003–04. This would place the UK above the G7 country average of 0.19 per cent. and the OECD average of 0.22 per cent.

In his speech in November in New York, and in his pre-Budget report speech, the Chancellor emphasised his commitment to ensuring further substantial increases in development assistance and its share in national income. The impending spending review will set spending plans for 2003–04 to 2005–6 and is an opportunity to consider plans for development spending beyond 2003–04, alongside other priorities and pressures.

Fair Trade

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether fair trade products are sold in his Department. [39827]

Ruth Kelly: Yes.

Pensions

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the effects of the abolition of the advance corporation tax credit on future pensions. [40194]

Chris Grayling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the additional contributions that *(a)* a 30- year-old man, *(b)* a 40-year-old man and *(c)* a 50-year-old man would have to make to a money-purchase pension scheme as a result of changes to the tax treatment of pension funds introduced since 1997. [39432]

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimate he has made of the number of months' pension contributions would now be required to achieve an equivalent funded pension to a year's pension contributions in 1997; [40281]

(2) to what extent the value of pension funds has changed as a result of his amendments to advance corporation tax. [40279]

Ruth Kelly: The Government's package of corporation tax reforms included measures to boost corporate investment by removing tax distortions. The withdrawal of payable tax credits on dividends was just one part of these measures. Pension funds will share in the long-term benefits from these changes to corporation tax. The overall effects of these changes on pension funds and future pensions will depend on a variety of factors, including: the type of scheme paying the pension; the take-up of private pensions; the level of future pension contributions; pension schemes' asset allocation and investment policies; and investment returns generally.

Sir Ronald Cohen

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what meetings he has had with Sir Ronald Cohen since 1 May 1997; what subjects were discussed at those meetings; and if he will make a statement. [39900]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon Gentleman to the answer given by the Chancellor on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 114–15W.

EU Prospectus Directive

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the proposed EU Prospectus Directive, with specific reference to the impact of this directive on the regulatory burden and costs of listing on non-recognised investment exchanges. [40252]

Ruth Kelly: It is not possible to list securities on a 'non-recognised investment exchange', but I assume that my hon. Friend's question relates to AIM and OFEX.

The admission of securities to trading on AIM and OFEX does not currently trigger requirements in terms of the Listing Particulars Directive (which would be repealed by the Prospectus Directive). The Prospectus Directive, as drafted, would stipulate that the admission of trading of securities to trading on a regulated market would trigger a requirement for a prospectus. AIM is currently a regulated market but OFEX is not.

However, the position in respect of both AIM and OFEX could change depending on the changes made to the definition of 'regulated market' in the new Investment Services Directive.

Three aspects of the prospectus Directive, as drafted, could give rise to additional costs for companies that seek or obtain admission to trading on AIM: the precise content requirements of both the registration document and the full prospectus; the approval process for prospectuses; and the provision for mandatory shelf registration.

We take very seriously the possibility that the Prospectus Directive might increase the regulatory burden for UK companies. But it is not possible at this stage of the negotiation to calculate the cost implications for companies whose securities are admitted to trading on AIM and OFEX.

Government Management Map

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 27 February 2002, ref 37683, if he will list the units which report to each Minister for the organogram to which he refers; and if he will make a statement. [40543]

Ruth Kelly: Ministerial responsibilities are set out in HM Treasury's Departmental Report, (Cm 5116). The responsibilities of teams across the Department are also outlined in the report.

Monetary Union

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his policy on the required European Union conditions for the public sector borrowing requirement in advance of a decision of UK entry into the monetary union. [40416]

Ruth Kelly: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 6 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 517–18W.

Advance Corporation Tax

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much additional income has been realised by the Exchequer as a result of his most recent changes to advance corporation tax. [40280]

Dawn Primarolo: Advance corporation tax was abolished with effect from April 1999. The abolition did not in itself give rise to additional yield to the Exchequer.

The abolition of advance corporation tax was part of a package of reforms that included the abolition of payable tax credits on dividends and cuts in corporation tax rates. These changes were designed to boost corporate investment by removing tax distortions and to improve the climate for quality long-term investment. The figures of cost and yield for these reforms were given in the FSBR for the July 1997 and March 1998 Budgets.

X-ray Images

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what was the original target date, and what the latest target date is, for the completion of HM Customs and Excise's programme to train officers in the recognition of x-ray images; [38622]

(2) by how long the Customs and Excise programme to train officers in the interpretation of x-ray images has exceeded the original plan; [38621]

(3) for what reason the Customs and Excise programme to train officers in the interpretation of x-ray images has taken longer than planned. [38623]

Mr. Boateng: The original target to train sufficient staff for the proposed operation of each scanner was met for all scanners.

However, in certain locations managers decided to extend the scope of the operation or increase the number of staff involved with image interpretation. These changes created an additional training requirement which is being met. The operational efficiency of the scanner fleet has not been adversely affected.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many Customs officers he plans will undergo training during *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03 in the interpretation of x-ray images; [38624]

(2) how many customs officers have received training in the interpretation of x-ray images. [38625]

Mr. Boateng: 247 officers working with the mobile x-ray freight scanners have received training in the interpretation of x-ray images.

Training for a further 100 officers will be delivered during the first half of 2002–03.

Fuel Fraud

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will state the reasons for the size of the variation between HM Customs and Excise's upper and lower estimates of revenue lost from frauds on petrol and diesel, as reported in paragraph 7 of the National Audit Office report, HC614; [38633]

(2) what his estimate is in respect of Northern Ireland of the revenue loss from *(a)* frauds on petrol and diesel and *(b)* legitimate cross-border shopping for petrol and diesel in (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99, (iii) 1999–2000, (iv) 2000–01 and (v) 2001–02; [38554]

(3) what his estimate is of the revenue loss from frauds on petrol and diesel in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02; [38632]

(4) what his estimate is of the revenue lost from frauds on diesel in Great Britain in *(a)* 2000–01, and *(b)* 2001–02; [38631]

(5) if he will place in the Library a description of the methodology used by HM Customs and Excise to calculate the revenue lost from frauds on petrol and diesel. [38535]

Mr. Boateng: The methodology used by HM Customs and Excise to estimate the revenue lost from frauds on petrol and diesel, and details of those estimates currently available, can be found in "Measuring Indirect Tax Fraud", a paper published alongside the pre-Budget report, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House.

Fuel (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimate he has made of the cost of requiring all duty paid fuel in Northern Ireland to be chemically marked; [38553]

(2) if he will make it his policy to require duty paid fuel in Northern Ireland to be chemically marked. [38703]

Mr. Boateng: Customs will keep under review the feasibility and effectiveness of all measures required to tackle oils fraud. No estimate of the relevant costs has yet been made.

VAT Departmental Trader Register

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) for how many minutes of a working day the VAT Department Trader Register has been unavailable on average over the last 12 months for which figures are available; [38596]

(2) on which occasions between February and June 1991 the VAT Departmental Trader Register was unavailable as stated in paragraph 4.7 of Volume 16 of the Appropriation Accounts 2000–01. [38597]

Mr. Boateng: The VAT Departmental Trader Register has been unavailable on average for 36 minutes per day over the last 12 months. Almost half of this related to pre-planned downtime for system upgrades. On such occasions staff were notified in advance enabling them to plan their work accordingly.

The occasions between February and June 2001 on which the VAT Departmental Trader Register system was unavailable are as follows:

Date	*Times*
February 2001	
12	16.00–16.45
13	08.00–15.50
March 2001	
19	08.00–18.00
27	08.00–10.20
April 2001	
6	09.50–12.05
10	08.20–08.50
19	13.30–16.10
20	11.15–12.15
23	08.00–08.35
25	13.00–14.30
26	13.00–14.30
27	07.30–10.00
30	09.10–10.00
	and 15.00–16.05
May 2001	
4	12.45–13.15
9	08.00–09.45
11	10.15–11.10
15	15.46–17.02
30	08.00–10.47
31	08.00–10.47
June 2001	
13	08.00–18.00
14	08.00–18.00

VAT Directive

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what plans he has to press for the amendment of the Sixth VAT Directive following the decision of the European Court of Justice in 'Commission *v.* the Netherlands' (C-338/98); [38605]

(2) what assessment he has made of the impact on United Kingdom employers of the decision of the European Court of Justice in Commission *v.* the Netherlands, (case C-338/98). [38604]

Mr. Boateng: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 20 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 688W.

VAT

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what requirements HM Customs and Excise impose on the suppliers of digital certificates for VAT in order for those certificates to be accepted. [38558]

Mr. Boateng: The digital certificates must have been issued by a trust service that meets Government guidelines for registration of businesses and individuals.

Additionally, the service must be approved by a Government recognised approval body, or the trust service provider must have committed to achieve such approval.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what method of selection he used to determine the organisations accepted by HM Customs and Excise as suppliers of digital certificates for VAT. [38559]

Mr. Boateng: The Government welcome digital certificates as evidence of identity issued by any trust services that meet Government guidelines for identification of individuals and businesses, provided:

(a) that the service has been approved by a recognised approval body, or that there is a commitment to gain such approval;

(b) that the technical interface between the Government Gateway and the trust service provider can be established;

(c) that the Certificate Policy and contractual issues allow the Government to rely upon the certificates.

The Government have been, and continue to be, in discussion with a number of potential suppliers to increase the availability of digital certificate services.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in how many cases in the year to the end of August 2001 HM Customs and Excise carried out pre-VAT registration visits to traders. [38593]

Mr. Boateng: As part of their strategy to tackle VAT missing trader fraud, Customs carried out 4,498 pre-VAT registration visits between September 2000 and August 2001.

Customs do not maintain data on pre-registration visits conducted for other reasons and it would involve disproportionate cost to produce.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the providers of digital certificates for VAT pay fees and other payments to the Government. [38557]

Mr. Boateng: No.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if it is the Government's policy to seek amendments to European VAT directives to allow HM Customs and Excise to refuse applications from traders to register for VAT in cases where they have continuing concerns about possible fraud. [38594]

Mr. Boateng: Tackling VAT missing trader fraud is a Customs VAT fraud priority. In "Tackling Indirect Tax Fraud", published at the pre-Budget report, the outline of customs strategy to tackle the fraud was set out. It includes a commitment to evaluate new legal and system options for tackling this fraud.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) which organisations have been selected by HM Customs and Excise as providers of digital certificates for VAT; [38560]

(2) if he plans to allow companies to submit on-line VAT returns directly to HM Customs and Excise without having to obtain a digital certificate from an outside supplier. [38561]

Mr. Boateng: HM Customs and Excise are currently reviewing their policy in relation to the use of digital certificates in providing a secure method of submitting VAT returns electronically. The review aims to achieve the optimum balance between ease of use while maintaining the necessary level of security. The review will take into account any latest advice from the Office of the e-Envoy on Government policy in this area.

Customs currently allows any digital certificate approved by the Office of the e-Envoy to be used with the electronic VAT return. Two organisations have approved products: Equifax and the British Chambers of Commerce.

National Lottery Franchises

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in how many cases since July 2001 HM Customs and Excise *(a)* removed a National Lottery terminal from a trader convicted of selling unmarked tobacco products, *(b)* objected to the renewal of a liquor licence and *(c)* asked a franchise-owner to take action against a franchisee. [38620]

Mr. Boateng: Customs notify Camelot when a lottery terminal holder has been convicted of an excise offence. Any decision to remove the lottery terminal remains with Camelot. Since April 2001, Customs have not sent any notifications to Camelot.

Customs notify the police when a person holding a liquor licence has excise goods seized, or is convicted of an excise offence. The police are responsible for lodging any objections to the renewal of a liquor licence. Since April 2001, Customs have notified the police on one occasion.

The information requested relating to franchise owners is not held centrally by Customs and Excise.

Road Fuel Testing

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if HM Customs and Excise plans to review its policy on the prosecution of offenders detected by road fuel testing units; [38549]

(2) what the policy of HM Customs and Excise is in deciding whether an offender detected by a road fuel testing unit should have his seized vehicle restored or the seizure should be maintained. [38550]

Mr. Boateng: HM Customs and Excise have a wide range of sanctions available to deal with offenders detected by road fuel testing units, including prosecution. Customs current vehicle seizure policy in relation to the misuse of rebated fuels takes into account the individual circumstances of each case and seeks to ensure that individuals who are repeatedly detected misusing rebated fuel will not have their vehicle restored. As outlined in the PBR paper "Tackling Indirect Tax Fraud" Customs are currently developing their strategy to tackle oils fraud, and are reviewing the use of all sanctions to ensure that they are used in the most effective way against those engaged in oils fraud.

Nursing Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress he has made in challenging the decision of the London VAT Tribunal in the Kingscrest case on the implementation of free nursing care and the affordability of fee levels; and if he will make a statement. [39444]

Mr. Boateng: The decision of the VAT and Duties Tribunal in the Kingscrest Associates Ltd. and Montecello Ltd. case does not impact upon nursing care.

Customs and Excise's appeal against this tribunal decision was heard by the High Court on 19 February. Whatever the outcome of the appeal, the Government will take steps to ensure that the residents of care homes do not face increased costs as a result of VAT.

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many organisations and companies have elected to pay the climate change levy in euros. [38582]

Mr. Boateng: No organisation or company has elected to pay the climate change levy to HM Customs and Excise in euros.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) for what reasons companies registered under Part B of the Pollution Prevention and Control Regulations are ineligible to participate in a climate change agreement; [38592]

(2) what the reasons are for his decision to impose an Integrated Pollution, Prevention and Control Directive criteria for membership of a climate change levy energy efficiency agreement; [38611]

(3) what plans he has to amend the descriptions of energy-intensive installations included in Schedule 6 to the Finance Act 2000; [38578]

(4) for what reasons companies whose business is slaking lime for the purpose of making calcium hydroxide and calcium magnesium hydroxide are ineligible to participate in a climate change agreement. [38591]

Mr. Boateng: Energy intensive installations that are eligible to enter into climate change agreements are those covered by parts A1 and A2 of the Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control Regulations (IPPC) (as set out in Schedule 6 to the Finance Act 2000). IPPC covers all the main energy intensive sectors of industry which are subject to international competition. IPPC sites also have to operate in an energy efficient manner; other sites are not subject to this requirement. The decision to use IPPC to define the eligible energy intensive sectors was confirmed following extensive consultation with industry on possible alternatives. The Government are still prepared to consider suggestions for alternative eligibility criteria, but they would have to meet the same conditions as IPPC, which provides a clear rationale, legal certainty, administrative simplicity, and compatibility with EU state aid rules.

LNM

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what sums are owed by companies in the LNM group to HM Customs and Excise; [38705]

(2) if HM Customs and Excise has imposed penalties or fines on companies in the LNM group for late payment of taxes and duties in the last two years; [38702]

(3) what his policy is towards the recovery by HM Customs and Excise of taxes and duties owed by the LNM group of companies. [38704]

Mr. Boateng: The tax affairs of companies and of private individuals are confidential, under section 182 of the Finance Act 1989.

LORDS Computer System

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the original target date was for the replacement of the LORDS computer system; what the latest target date is; and if he will make a statement; [38600]

(2) what the original budget for replacing the LORDS computer system was; what the estimated cost of the project is; and if he will make a statement. [38599]

Mr. Boateng: The replacement of the LORDS computer system for VAT registration is one component of a series of fundamental changes under consideration to the way Customs process applications for all their taxes and duties. The total cost of these changes, which are far wider than a straight replacement for LORDS, would be in the region of £12.6 million. The original target date for implementation of the new computer system was July 2002.

As part of this, a small number of high priority improvements to the LORDS system are planned for delivery in summer 2002. Plans for a full replacement of the LORDS system will be considered in due course as part of Customs' strategic review of their IS projects and priorities.

CCL 100 Forms

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many CCL 100 forms were returned to HM Customs and Excise for the *(a)* first, *(b)* second and *(c)* third quarters of the financial year 2001–2002; how many such forms in each quarter were (i) completed incorrectly and (ii) submitted late; and if he will make a statement. [38580]

Mr. Boateng: Information based on individual calendar quarters is not available because registered businesses submit returns according to the particular stagger of tax period they request. The number of returns received to date for each stagger is as follows:

Stagger 1 (returns ending in March, June, September and December—566;

Stagger 2 (returns ending in April, July, October and January)—150;

Stagger 3 (returns ending in May, August, November and February)—102.

Only one return was completed incorrectly; and all returns have been received within acceptable timescales.

HEALTH

NHS Trusts

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which NHS trusts were in debt in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001; and what was the level of debt for each. [16847]

Mr. Hutton: The information has been placed in the Library.

Note:

Changes (in line with best accounting practice) in the accounting and financial reporting arrangements for NHS trusts mean that the figures provided for 1996–97 and 2000–01 are not directly comparable.

Oral Cancer

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of oral cancer were diagnosed in each health authority in England in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [17415]

Yvette Cooper: The number of cases of oral cancer diagnosed in each health authority in England in 1998, the latest year for which figures are available, are shown in the table.

The NHS Cancer Plan, published last year, provides a comprehensive strategy for improving cancer care linking prevention, diagnosis, treatment, care and research.

Smoking is implicated in the cause of oral and many other cancers. The NHS Cancer Plan sets out a clear agenda for improving cancer prevention through changes in lifestyle related to smoking and diet. There have already been notable improvements in numbers of people giving up smoking. In 2000–01, over 64,000 people were helped by national health service cessation services to give up smoking.

Health authority	*Number*
Avon HA	73
Barking and Havering HA	21
Barnet HA	23
Barnsley HA	15
Bedfordshire HA	34
Berkshire HA	55
Bexley and Greenwich HA	37
Birmingham HA	85
Bradford HA	28
Brent and Harrow HA	34
Bromley HA	18
Buckinghamshire HA	51
Bury and Rochdale HA	48
Calderdale and Kirklees HA	48
Cambridge and Huntingdon HA	26
Camden and Islington HA	29
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly HA	26
County Durham HA	42
Coventry HA	24
Croydon HA	26
Doncaster HA	29
Dorset HA	56
Dudley HA	20
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow HA	48
East and North Hertfordshire HA	30
East Kent HA	39
East Lancashire HA	37
East London and The City HA	26
East Norfolk HA	53
East Riding HA	56
East Surrey HA	37
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove HA	51
Enfield and Haringey HA	46
Gateshead and South Tyneside HA	41
Gloucestershire HA	32
Herefordshire HA	10
Hillingdon HA	13
Isle of Wight HA	11
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster HA	38
Kingston and Richmond HA	24
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham HA	54
Leeds HA	51
Leicestershire HA	55
Lincolnshire HA	43
Liverpool HA	50
Manchester HA	41
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth HA	63
Morecambe Bay HA	22
Newcastle and North Tyneside HA	49
North and Mid Hampshire HA	29
North and East Devon HA	41
North Cheshire HA	19
North Cumbria HA	25
North Derbyshire HA	23
North Essex HA	47
North Nottinghamshire HA	28
North Staffordshire HA	36
North West Anglia HA	31
North West Lancashire HA	48
North Yorkshire HA	58
Northamptonshire HA	39
Northumberland HA	27
Nottingham HA	53
Oxfordshire HA	43
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	30
Redbridge and Waltham Forest HA	21
Rotherham HA	10
Salford and Trafford HA	42
Sandwell HA	20
Sefton HA	19
Sheffield HA	32
Shropshire HA	34
Solihull HA	10
Somerset HA	36
South and West Devon HA	49
South Cheshire HA	54
South Derbyshire HA	49
South Essex HA	32
South Humber HA	26
South Lancashire HA	23
South Staffordshire HA	40
Southampton and South West Hampshire HA	54
St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	24
Stockport HA	29
Suffolk HA	55
Sunderland HA	24
Tees HA	52
Wakefield HA	18
Walsall HA	20
Warwickshire HA	32
West Hertfordshire HA	28
West Kent HA	64
West Pennine HA	44
West Surrey HA	57
West Sussex HA	54
Wigan and Bolton HA	40
Wiltshire HA	48
Wirral HA	42
Wolverhampton HA	19
Worcestershire HA	24
England	3,670

Diabetes

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much of the proposed funding for diabetes care outlined in the interim Wanless report is earmarked for *(a)* eye screening and *(b)* eye complications associated with diabetes and if he will make a statement. [R] [22767]

Jacqui Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to him on 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 169W.

Hospices

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will increase Government funding for children's hospices. [31309]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* Children's hospices have access to national health service funding, the level of which must be agreed by health authorities and primary care trusts following assessment of local options available to support children with life threatening illnesses, and their families. In addition children's hospices will be eligible to apply for funding from the New Opportunity Fund's children's palliative care grant programme later this year that will make available an additional £48 million for children's paediatric care.

Solihull Hospital

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will repeat the pledge made by the then Health Minister on 3 March 1997 concerning Solihull Hospital and the services to be provided there. [32260]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* Decisions about services at Solihull hospital are a matter first for local consideration. Any proposals for significant changes to services anywhere in the national health service require formal consultation, and where local agreement is not reached, matters are referred to Ministers. No such proposals for consultation have been received for Solihull hospital.

Residential Care (Elderly)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with Lancashire county council concerning the impact on the NHS of its proposals to reduce the numbers of residential homes for the elderly. [34570]

Jacqui Smith: The Social Services Inspectorate is following closely the work that Lancashire county council is undertaking to assess its current care provision, in particular the consultation with the national health service, local people and other interested parties about future strategies.

Pesticide Residues

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice is given by his Department to pregnant women about reducing their exposure to pesticide residues in food. [36087]

Yvette Cooper: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is advised on the issue of pesticides by the Food Standards Agency (FSA). The FSA has provided the following reply in consultation with the Pesticides Safety Directorate (an executive agency of the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)).

When considering the approval of a pesticide the independent Advisory Committee on Pesticides refers to a large dossier of information and studies carried out on the pesticide. The dossier has information on toxicology of the pesticide, including specific studies to address the reproductive toxicity of the pesticide and crop residues data. Only those pesticides which demonstrate an acceptable risk to all groups of consumers (including pregnant women) can be approved.

The findings from the 2000 pesticide residues monitoring programme indicates that standards are being maintained at levels that the FSA believes provide a high level of consumer protection and confidence.

Thus, the FSA believes it is not necessary to issue specific advice to pregnant women on this issue as the regulatory process fully takes the risks to this consumer group into consideration.

Diarrhetic Shellfish Poisoning

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health at what locations in the UK cockles have tested positive for diarrhetic shellfish poisoning when other shellfish have tested negative. [37096]

Yvette Cooper: There have been six locations where cockles have tested positive for diarrhetic shellfish poisoning while other shellfish sampled on the same day have tested negative. These are the Thames Estuary, the Wash, Whitstable, the Menai Straight, the Burry Inlet and Strangford Lough.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the highly toxic form of diarrhetic shellfish poisoning affecting cockles, which does not show the normally typical presence of okadaic acid, was first discovered by the FSA; at what locations; and what research has been commissioned into its causes. [37097]

Yvette Cooper: The Food Standards Agency became aware of the unusual aspects of the diarrhetic shellfish poisoning tests in cockles in October 2001. This has been seen in samples taken from the Burry Inlet, Anglesey, the Thames Estuary, the Wash and Strangford Lough. Initial investigations into the cause of the toxicity have been undertaken as part of the agency's on-going programmes of research and surveillance on shellfish toxins. The results of these investigations have been used to produce a structured plan of research on this toxicity, which will begin at the start of March.

Non-EU Nurse Training

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* the countries outside the EU where nurses trained, who registered with UKCC in each of the last four years and *(b)* the number from each such country. [37376]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested for the last three years where the data have been published is in the table.

Entrants to the UKCC register

Country	*Number*
Year to 31 March 1998	
Australia	1,170
New Zealand	472
Nigeria	130
S/Africa	393
USA	143

Entrants to the UKCC register

Country	*Number*
Canada	203
West Indies	93
Other	290
Total	2,894
Year to 31 March 1999	
Australia	1,335
New Zealand	527
Nigeria	179
S/Africa	599
USA	139
Canada	196
West Indies	237
Other	409
Total	3,621
Year to 31 March 2000	
Australia	1,209
New Zealand	461
Nigeria	208
Philippines	1,052
S/Africa	1,460
USA	168
Canada	130
West Indies	425
Zimbabwe	221
Other	654
Total	5,988

Source:

Statistical Analysis of the UKCC Professional Register

The data published for the year to 31 March 1997 do not list the countries where entrants from overseas trained but does show that there were 2,633 overseas entrants.

Community Nursing

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS hospital and community health services, nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff there were within the community nursing areas of work broken down by qualification and region on *(a)* 30 September 1996, *(b)* 30 September 1997, *(c)* 30 September 1998 and *(d)* 30 September 1999. [37381]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

NHS hospital and community health service (HCHS) and practice nurses: nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff employed in the community areas of work by region and grade in England as at 30 September each year

Headcount

	England	*Northern and Yorkshire*	*Trent*	*Anglia and Oxford*	*North Thames*	*South Thames*	*South and West*	*West Midlands*	*North West*	*Others*
1996										
Total nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff	91,260	11,860	9,330	9,710	12,950	13,800	11,350	9,340	12,920	10
Total qualified	75,280	9,610	7,610	7,920	10,640	11,340	9,790	7,930	10,450	10
Manager	1,000	180	80	100	140	170	160	80	100	0
Registered sick children's nurse	530	60	40	70	30	160	30	90	50	0
Health Visitor	12,350	1,640	1,240	1,320	1,600	1,830	1,590	1,280	1,860	0
District Nurse	14,250	1,860	1,380	1,540	1,800	2,040	1,840	1,540	2,250	0
Other 1st level	25,820	3,140	2,830	2,480	4,160	4,040	2,960	2,670	3,540	10
Other 2nd level	3,430	580	320	330	320	600	510	190	590	0
Practice Nurse	17,900	2,160	1,720	2,080	2,580	2,500	2,700	2,080	2,090	0
Total unqualified	15,980	2,250	1,720	1,800	2,310	2,460	1,560	1,410	2,470	0
Nursery nurse	420	80	80	30	30	20	40	70	70	0
Nurse assistant/auxiliary	15,570	2,170	1,640	1,760	2,280	2,440	1,520	1,340	2,400	0

Headcount

	England	*Northern and Yorkshire*	*Trent*	*West Midlands*	*North West*	*Eastern*	*London*	*South East*	*South West*	*SHAs and Others*
1997										
Total nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff	94,110	12,130	9,690	10,370	13,250	9,840	14,030	16,130	8,660	*
Total qualified	77,250	9,790	8,030	8,550	10,650	7,800	11,780	13,270	7,360	*
Manager	1,000	170	90	80	110	120	180	160	90	0
Registered sick children's nurse	780	40	60	200	80	*	170	200	20	0
Health Visitor	12,410	1,560	1,320	1,300	1,840	1,150	1,880	2,170	1,200	0
District Nurse	14,150	1,700	1,310	1,860	2,260	1,450	2,040	2,300	1,220	0
Other 1st level	27,390	3,630	3,160	2,620	3,750	2,650	4,490	4,670	2,420	0
Other 2nd level	3,130	510	280	210	490	280	460	440	470	*
Practice Nurse	18,390	2,190	1,830	2,280	2,110	2,150	2,560	3,330	1,940	0
										0
Total unqualified	16,860	2,340	1,660	1,820	2,600	2,040	2,260	2,860	1,300	0
Nursery nurse	510	100	90	100	70	60	20	30	40	0
Nurse assistant/auxiliary	16,350	2,240	1,570	1,720	2,520	1,980	2,240	2,820	1,250	0

Headcount

	England	*Northern and Yorkshire*	*Trent*	*West Midlands*	*North West*	*Eastern*	*London*	*South East*	*South West*	*SHAs and others*
1998										
Total nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff	98,350	13,070	10,140	11,400	13,860	10,130	14,380	16,410	8,960	*
Total qualified	80,110	10,420	8,440	9,100	11,040	8,170	12,090	13,280	7,570	*
Manager	1,040	170	100	100	110	120	210	140	80	0
Registered sick children's nurse	760	40	20	240	80	10	140	220	10	0
Health Visitor	12,570	1,560	1,320	1,350	1,850	1,190	1,960	2,120	1,200	0
District Nurse	14,260	1,940	1,380	1,800	2,250	1,420	1,910	2,400	1,170	0
Other 1st level	29,610	3,810	3,290	3,160	4,100	2,990	4,580	4,890	2,780	*
Other 2nd level	2,970	520	220	230	460	290	450	390	410	0
Practice nurse	18,890	2,370	2,100	2,230	2,180	2,160	2,830	3,110	1,910	0
Total unqualified	18,240	2,650	1,700	2,300	2,820	1,960	2,300	3,140	1,380	0
Nursery nurse	630	90	140	120	100	80	20	40	50	0
Nursing assistant/auxiliary	17,610	2,550	1,570	2,170	2,720	1,880	2,280	3,100	1,330	0

Headcount

	England	*Northern and Yorkshire*	*Trent*	*West Midlands*	*North West*	*Eastern*	*London*	*South East*	*South West*	*SHAs and others*
1999										
Total nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff	101,810	13,090	10,190	11,840	14,860	10,230	14,950	17,730	8,910	*
Total qualified	82,580	10,560	8,500	9,310	11,630	8,150	12,670	14,030	7,730	*
Manager	1,020	170	60	80	120	150	190	170	80	0
Registered sick children's nurse	530	40	50	70	120	10	80	150	*	0
Health Visitor	12,800	1,580	1,360	1,420	1,840	1,140	2,050	2,220	1,190	0
District Nurse	14,260	1,710	1,210	1,920	2,180	1,360	2,250	2,450	1,180	0
Other 1st level	31,480	4,060	3,570	3,490	4,530	3,040	4,710	5,100	2,970	*
Other 2nd level	3,000	570	220	220	420	230	610	340	380	0
Practice nurse	19,500	2,430	2,020	2,110	2,410	2,230	2,780	3,590	1,930	0
Total unqualified	19,230	2,530	1,700	2,530	3,230	2,080	2,280	3,700	1,180	0
Nursery nurse	740	90	140	140	120	100	30	50	60	0
Nursing assistant/auxiliary	18,490	2,440	1,560	2,390	3,120	1,970	2,250	3,650	1,120	0

Notes:

Figures are rounded to the nearest 10

Due to rounding totals may not equal the sum of component parts

Figures exclude learners and agency staff

1996 Practice nurse data collected as at 30 October and 1997 to 1997 Practice nurse data collected as at 1 October

Due to the new regional office boundaries in 1999 the 1997 and 1998 figures are estimated regional splits

The community areas of work that we can separately identify are community psychiatry, community learning disabilities and community services

* five or less and greater than zero

Sources:

Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census

Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics

Mental Health

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to address the shortage of mental health beds. [37216]

Jacqui Smith: The NHS Plan referred to the creation of almost 500 extra secure psychiatric beds and 320 24-hour staffed beds by April 2001. These targets were achieved. Work is on-going to meet the further NHS Plan commitment to develop 200 long-term secure beds by 2004.

It is also important to provide alternatives to in-patient care so that patients can benefit from appropriate care and treatment in the least restrictive environment consistent with their needs, including in their own homes where this is clinically appropriate and preferred by the patient. The NHS Plan contained a commitment to create 335 crisis resolution teams, 50 early intervention teams and a further 50 assertive outreach teams by April 2004 so that patients can benefit from these alternatives to in-patient care. We envisage that crisis resolution teams alone will treat around 100,000 people every year who would otherwise have to be admitted to hospital.

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will conduct a national audit of mental health beds. [37217]

Jacqui Smith: Information about the availability and usage of mental health beds is already collected through annual returns obtained by the Department from providers of services. The returns are made on a financial year basis and the latest year for which data are available is 2000–01. Figures are taken from the annual Korner return KHO3—"Bed Availability and Occupancy". A more detailed national audit of mental health beds would not be appropriate at this stage because we are in a phase of rapid change. Local services are currently engaged in the implementation of new service models such as early intervention, assertive outreach and crisis resolution, which aim to provide alternatives to in-patient care. Forthcoming departmental guidance on acute in-patient mental health care will advise local services to map their strengths and weaknesses and to plan accordingly.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 958W, what steps he has taken to ensure that *(a)* the £50 million allocated to health authorities and *(b)* the £35 million allocated to local authorities has been spent on child and adolescent mental health services; and if he will make a statement as to the effectiveness of ring fencing of the allocations. [39844]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* The funding for health authorities is now in their baseline allocations and is not specifically audited. However we expect health authorities, and their successors, to continue to devote these funds to child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS). The local authority grant is a specific grant scheme and is audited to ensure that the grants are expended on CAMHS in line with the conditions of the grant.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many young offender institutions will have no mental health in-reach services by 2004. [39685]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* The exact distribution of new mental health in-reach services to 2004 has not yet been finalised, but young offender institutions are being treated as a priority for the development of these services.

Cervical Cancer

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce human papilloma virus screening to test for cervical cancer. [38086]

Yvette Cooper: As yet, there is insufficient evidence to support the use of human papilloma virus (HPV) testing as a primary screening tool. The health technology assessment (HTA) review of research into HPV testing, published in September 1999, concluded that the evidence might support testing for HPV only in certain situations, such as the management of borderline screening test results.

A Government funded pilot study of HPV and liquid based cytology testing as triage for women with mild or borderline abnormalities began in April 2001. The HPV arm of the pilot will end in September 2002. Analysis of the data will begin in October 2002 and a report of the evaluation of the pilot will be submitted in early 2003.

BSE

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of people who have consumed meat from the offspring of BSE-infected cows since 1 November 2001. [37867]

Yvette Cooper: No estimates are available, but the number of cases of BSE arising in cattle born since August 1996, and considered to be attributable to maternal transmission, is below expectations. In addition, certain key control mechanisms help protect consumers if there is a failure of the controls which exclude BSE offspring from the food chain. These include the ban on specified risk material from being used for human consumption and the over-thirty-months rule which prohibits older animals more likely to harbour infectivity from entering the food chain.

Cancer Treatment

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the health authorities that *(a)* have and *(b)* do not have the facilities to administer radiotherapy for cancer patients. [37908]

Yvette Cooper: All health authorities commission radiotherapy services for cancer patients. These services may be provided from a radiotherapy centre located within that health authority itself, or one nearby.

Health authorities with radiotherapy centres located within its boundaries

Area	
Cambridgeshire	Addenbrooke's NHST
Norfolk	Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital NHST
North Essex	Essex Rivers Healthcare NHST
South Essex	Southend Hospital NHST
Suffolk	Ipswich Hospital NHST
Hertfordshire	West Hertfordshire Hospitals MHST
Barking and Havering	Barking Havering and Redbridge Hospitals NHST
Barnet Enfield and Haringey	North Middlesex University Hospital NHST
Camden and Islington (2)	Royal Free Hampstead NHST
	University College London Hospitals NHSTCH
Ealing Hammersmith and Hounslow	Hammersmith Hospitals NHST
East London and the City	Barts and the London NHST
Kensington Chelsea and Westminster	Royal Marsden NHST
Lambeth Southwark and Lewisham	Guys and St. Thomas' Hospital Trust
Manchester	Christie's Hospital NHST
North-west Lancashire	Preston Acute Hospitals NHST
Wirral	Clatterbridge Centre for Oncology NHST
East Riding and Hull	Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHST
Leeds	Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHST
Newcastle and North Tyneside	The Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHST
North Cumbria	North Cumbria Acute Hospitals NHST
Tees	South Tees Hospitals NHST

Health authorities with radiotherapy centres located within its boundaries

Area	
Berkshire	Royal Berks and Battle Hospitals NHST
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	Brighton Health Care NHST
IoW, Portsmouth and South-east Hampshire	Portsmouth Health Care NHST
Northamptonshire	Northampton General Hospital NHST
Oxfordshire	Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals NHST
Southampton and South-west Hampshire	Southampton University Hospitals NHST
West Kent	Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHST
West Surrey	Royal Surrey County Hospital NHST
Avon (2)	United Bristol Healthcare NHST
	Royal United Hospital Bath NHST
Cornwall and IoS	Royal Cornwall Hospitals Trust
Dorset	Poole Hospitals NHST
Gloucestershire	East Gloucestershire NHST
North and East Devon	Royal Devon and Exeter Healthcare NHST
South and West Devon (2)	Plymouth Hospitals NHST
	South Devon Healthcare NHST
Leicestershire	University Hospitals of Leicester NHST
Lincolnshire	United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHST
Nottingham	Nottingham City Hospital NHST
Sheffield	Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHST
Southern Derbyshire	Southern Derbyshire Acute Hospitals NHST
Birmingham	University Hospital Birmingham NHST
Coventry	University Hospitals of Coventry and Warwickshire NHST
North Staffordshire	North Staffordshire Hospital NHST
Shropshire	Royal Shrewsbury Hospitals NHST
Wolverhampton	The Royal Wolverhampton Hospitals NHST

Health authorities without radiotherapy centres located in its boundaries.

Bedfordshire
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich
Brent and Harrow
Croydon
Hillingdon
Kingston and Richmond
Merton Sutton and Wandsworth
Redbridge and Waltham Forest
Bury and Rochdale
East Lancashire
Liverpool
Morecambe Bay
North Cheshire
St. Helens and Knowsley
Salford and Trafford
Sefton
South Lancashire
South Cheshire
Stockport
West Pennine
Wigan and Bolton
Bradford
Calderdale and Kirklees
County Durham and Darlington
Gateshead and South Tyneside
North Yorkshire
Northumberland
Sunderland
Wakefield
North and Mid Hampshire
West Sussex
Somerset
Wiltshire
Barnsley
Doncaster
Buckinghamshire
East Kent
East Surrey
North Nottinghamshire
North Derbyshire
Rotherham
South Humber
Dudley
Herefordshire
Sandwell
Solihull
South Staffordshire
Walsall
Warwickshire
Worcestershire.

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what proportion of cancer patients are prescribed anti-blood infection drugs to treat neutropenia contracted while undergoing chemotherapy; [38080]

(2) what proportion of cancer patients are receiving reduced chemotherapy doses to avoid the onset of neutropenia; [38081]

(3) what *(a)* the average cost per patient and *(b)* the total cost has been over the last 12 months to each health authority of prescribing Neupogen to patients undergoing chemotherapy. [38085]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not available centrally.

Medicines Control

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 8 February 2002, *Official*

Report, column 1242W, on medicines control, if he will list the *(a)* dates and *(b)* issues of the articles relating to inappropriate use and overuse of medication in the publication "Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance"; and what articles have been produced in respect of overuse and inappropriate use of antipsychotic medication in care settings. [37693]

Yvette Cooper: The Medicines Control Agency (MCA) and its advisory committee, the Committee on Safety of Medicines (CSM) have published the following articles in the MCA's bulletin "Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance" alerting health professionals to the inappropriate use of medication. These articles include the following:

	Volume
Accidental overdose with Alfacalcidol (one-alpha drops)	February 2001 Vol. 27
Reminder: Methotrexate safe prescribing and dispensing	September 2000 Vol. 26
Medication error: Potential for confusing Humalog and Humalog Mix 25	May 2000 Vol. 26
Reminder: Naloxone in opioid overdose	May 1997 Vol. 23
Potential for confusion between Lamictal and Lamisil	December 1997 Vol. 23
Reminder: Paracetamol toxicity in overdose	November 1995 Vol. 21

The MCA and CSM have not produced any articles specifically relating to the overuse and inappropriate use of antipsychotic medication in care settings. However the following articles in relation to antipsychotics have been published in "Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance" and encourage dose titration of the antipsychotics to help prevent adverse drug reactions:

	Volume
QT interval prolongation with antipsychotics	February 2001 Vol. 27
Drug-induced prolongation of the QT interval	March 1996 Vol. 22
Cardiac arrhythmias with pimozide (Orap)	February 1995 Vol. 21
Neuroleptic sensitivity in patients with dementia	May 1994 Vol. 20
Drug-induced extrapyramidal reactions	November 1994 Vol. 20
Convulsions may occur in patients receiving clozapine	June 1991 No. 31 Vol. 17
Cardiotoxic effects of pimozide	August 1990 No. 29 Vol. 16

Copies of all these articles have been sent to the Library.

Social Work Training

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many application packs for social workers training packs were sent out following the launch of the social worker recruitment campaign. [37800]

Jacqui Smith: One of the aims of the social work recruitment campaign is to increase the number of people applying for social work training by 5,000 by 2004. As part of the campaign, the Department, has made available two publications, including "Careers in Social Work", which outlines the role of the social worker including the training required. 12,172 have been sent out by the helpline.

Maternity Service Liaison Committee

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how maternity service liaison committees will fit into the new NHS structure. [37639]

Yvette Cooper: Anecdotal and research evidence during the past 10 years has shown that maternity service liaison committees have proved very effective in influencing and shaping maternity service provision. In future primary care trusts will be the local health organisations responsible for working with maternity service liaison committees.

Air Rifles and Pistols

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many accidents resulting from air *(a)* rifles and *(b)* pistols have been reported since 1996. [38246]

Yvette Cooper: The Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) system does not have definitive cause codes for accidents resulting from air rifles and pistols separately. The table shows the number of admissions with accidental firearm-related cause codes for the year 2000–01.

	Number
W32 Handgun discharge	48
W33 Rifle shotgun and larger firearm discharge	67
W34 Discharge from other and unspecified firearms	737
Y22 Handgun discharge undetermined intent	6
Y23 Rifle shotgun and larger firearm discharge undetermined intent	13
Y24 Other and unspecified firearm discharge undetermined intent	44

Notes:

1. The cause code is a supplementary ICD10 code, which indicates the nature of the condition.

2. Data are for 2000–01 and is not yet adjusted for shortfalls.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many fatalities have been recorded as resulting from misuse of air rifles and pistols since 1996. [38247]

Yvette Cooper: Fatalities attributed specifically to the misuse of air rifles and pistols are not collected centrally.

Fatalities attributed to various unspecified firearms and explosives are as follows.

Year	E9179	E9554	E9654	E9854	Total
1996	15	50	19	10	94
1997	21	55	22	3	101
1998	16	46	9	10	81
1999	11	40	10	7	68
2000	13	46	22	11	92

Key:
E9179: Striking against or struck accidentally by objects or persons
E9554: Suicide and self-inflicted injury
E9654: Assault
E9854: Other accidental or deliberate injury
Source:
Office for National Statistics

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the extent of physical impairment that can result from injury by an air *(a)* rifle and *(b)* pistol. [38248]

Yvette Cooper: The Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) system does not have definitive cause codes for accidents resulting from air rifles and pistols separately. It is also not possible to accurately determine the extent of physical impairment from injuries of this sort.

Exercise Referral Schemes

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health since the publication of the national standards for GP exercise referral schemes in April 2001, how many exercise referral programmes have been offered by *(a)* GPs, *(b)* primary care nurses and *(c)* registered fitness professionals in each health authority in the UK. [38088]

Yvette Cooper: The National Quality Assurance Framework published last year aims to improve the quality of existing schemes and help the development of new ones. The Department does not keep a national register of practices which offer these schemes. However, details of existing schemes are held locally by health authorities or local authorities.

The National Service Framework for Coronary Heart Disease requires that all NHS bodies will have agreed and be contributing to the delivery of a local programme of effective policies on increasing physical activity by April 2002. Exercise referral schemes can form an element in the delivery of these programmes. These schemes also contribute to the achievement of milestones relating to the prevention and treatment of coronary heart disease within primary care, and cardiac rehabilitation.

Cancelled Operations

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations were cancelled in 2001 in the *(a)* Royal Shrewsbury, *(b)* Princess Royal, *(c)* Robert Jones and *(d)* Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic hospitals. [37884]

Yvette Cooper: The information requested is shown in the table

Number of operations cancelled during 2001 in acute NHS trusts in Shropshire

Hospital	Number
Royal Shrewsbury Hospital	423
Princess Royal Hospital	80
Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic and District Hospital[1]	67

[1] Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital National Health Service Trust is one hospital.

Radiation Risk

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what systems the National Radiological Protection Board has in place to update their radiation risk models; when the risk models were last reviewed; and when the risk models were last updated. [38275]

Yvette Cooper: The National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) conducts a rolling programme of research and scientific review in order to update advice on the health effects of ionising radiation and the appropriate risk models for assessing these effects. NRPB has issued formal advice in the documents of the NRPB (Vol. 4(4), 1993; Vol 6(1), 1995). The NRPB's advisory group on ionising radiation will report shortly on the risks of leukaemia.

Scientific reviews and reports on risk models are also undertaken by NRPB staff in the context of a United Kingdom input to the work of the International Commission on Radiological Protection, the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR), and a committee of the National Academy of Sciences of the USA. The UNSCEAR 2000 report on radiation effects and risk models included input from NRPB staff acting as consultants. This report represents the current international scientific consensus on the health effects of ionising radiation.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the National Radiological Protection Board's policy is on the radiation risk from *(a)* external and *(b)* internal low level radiation; when this policy was developed; and when it is next subject to review. [38274]

Yvette Cooper: The policy of the National Radiological Protection Board is to provide advice on the health effects of exposure to external and internal radiations which is based on the totality of relevant scientific information. These sources of information include assessment of doses to critical tissues in the body, epidemiological (human health) investigations and knowledge of the fundamental biology of radiation action on cells and tissues. In circumstances where direct epidemiological information is lacking, judgments are developed using knowledge of doses to different tissues, the biological effectiveness of different radiations and the relative radiation sensitivity of different tissues.

Risk modelling procedures used by NRPB have been developed over many years often in conjunction with international bodies such as the International Commission on Radiological Protection (ICRP) and the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR).

Current risk modelling procedures are based essentially on the 1990 Recommendations of ICRP and subsequent advice published by NRPB (Documents of the NRPB, Vol 4(4), 1993 and Vol 6(1), 1995). Scientific review of the data and procedures for assessing the health effects of external and internal radiations is an on-going process. The general policy of NRPB is to review and revise these procedures in the light of accruing scientific knowledge and therefore no specific date for revision may be given.

HIV/AIDS

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how mainstreaming of HIV prevention and HIV treatment and care allocations into primary care trust budgets will take account of different levels of need in each PCT area. [38475]

Yvette Cooper: Health authority and primary care trust allocations are informed by weighted capitation targets. From 2002–03, targets are adjusted for HIV treatment and care and prevention using the latest epidemiology. This will ensure the uniquely skewed distribution of HIV infection in England is reflected in targets for future years.

Home Births

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many times in the most recent year for which data are available home births have been refused, broken down by health authorities or trusts. [38777]

Yvette Cooper: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Abortion

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people seeking termination of pregnancy at NHS clinics in the UK in the last 12 months were foreign nationals visiting the UK; and if such requests are met free of charge. [38431]

Yvette Cooper: In 2000, 73 terminations of pregnancy were performed on non-UK residents in NHS hospitals in England and Wales. 2001 abortion data for England and Wales are not available until later in the year. Abortions performed in Scotland are a matter for the Scottish Executive.

No data are held centrally on nationality or whether the treatment was free.

Myopia

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health where laser eye treatment for correction of myopia is available through the NHS; and what criteria are used to decide whether it should be provided. [38635]

Ms Blears: Laser surgery for the correction of myopia is not available under the national health service. Refractive errors can be successfully corrected by spectacles and contact lenses and optical vouchers are available to children and people on low incomes to help with the costs of these appliances.

NHS Scrutiny

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by what formal means councillors and committees of shire district councils will be involved in the scrutiny of bodies within the health service after 1 April. [38786]

Jacqui Smith: The Health and Social Care Act 2001 gives new powers to local government overview and scrutiny committees to scrutinise the national health service. Local authorities with these new powers will be those with social services responsibilities: specifically county councils, unitary authorities and London borough councils.

We recognise the important role that district councils will play in ensuring effective scrutiny of local health services and will be encouraging through guidance the full involvement of district councils in the scrutiny process.

A consultation on the proposed arrangements is currently under way and we would encourage all local authorities to feed their views into this process.

Health Authority Expenditure

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for *(a)* England and *(b)* each health authority area the expenditure on health by weighted head of population in 2001–02. [40069]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested will not become available until the 2001–02 national health service accounts have been completed, submitted to the Department, and subjected to audit. They are expected to be available in late autumn 2002.

Genetics

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish a green paper on genetics; and if he will make a statement. [39317]

Yvette Cooper: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in his speech at the conference "Genetics and Health—A Decade of Opportunity", reaffirmed his commitment to the Green Paper on genetics being published later this year. No formal publication date has been announced, but good progress is being made with six meetings of the advisory panel and a successful conference to inform the Green Paper having taken place.

Sexual Health

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will implement his sexual health strategy; and if he will make a statement. [39314]

Yvette Cooper: An action plan outlining implementation of the sexual health and HIV strategy will be published in the spring. In addition, we have started to prepare for implementation by asking health authorities to undertake a baseline review and by seeking expressions of interest in chlamydia screening. Bids for chlamydia screening have now been received and are being considered. The Health Development Agency review of what works for local HIV/STI prevention will be available later this year and a new campaign to increase awareness of sexually transmitted infections (including HIV) and how to prevent them is planned for the autumn.

Correspondence

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the hon. Member for Broxbourne will receive a reply to her letters of 30 November, 2 January, 29 January and 26 February relating to correspondence from her constituent Mr. Charles Williams of Hoddesdon. [39559]

Mr. Hutton: A reply was sent on 1 March.

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will respond to the letter of 8 February from the hon. member for Bexhill and Battle, regarding a constituent requiring radiotherapy for cancer. [37391]

Ms Blears: A letter from the hon. Member, dated 7 February, was received in my Department on 11 February 2002. A reply was sent to him on 4 March.

Malnutrition

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 7 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1155W, on nutrition, how many episodes of hospital inpatients with a primary diagnosis relating to malnutrition there were, broken down by *(a)* age, *(b)* health authority and *(c)* region, in the last five years. [37763]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* The tables show a count of episodes of care where the main diagnosis was malnutrition by age (Table 1) and regional office area of residence (Table 2). Figures for health authority of residence have not been given as the numbers are very small and subject to variation.

Table 1—Finished consultant episodes for main diagnosis of malnutrition by age. National health service hospitals, England 1996–97 to 2000–01

Age	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
0–4	13	13	6	11	17
5–14	14	13	15	6	6
15–44	78	62	86	68	47
45–64	62	82	82	87	73
65–74	34	39	59	46	53
75–84	62	55	50	67	65
85 and Over	34	36	38	34	45
Total	297	300	336	319	306

Table 2—Finished consultant episodes for main diagnosis of malnutrition by regional office area of residence. NHS hospitals, England 1996–97 to 2000–01

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Northern and Yorkshire	32	55	43
Trent	28	17	40
Anglia and Oxford	27	10	29
North Thames	28	53	53
South Thames	31	30	29
South and West	62	43	69
West Midlands	50	45	36
North West	37	40	33
Wales	0	0	1
Foreign	0	1	1
Not known	2	6	2
Total	297	300	336

	1999–2000	*2000–01*
Northern and Yorkshire	31	28
Trent	49	27
West Midlands	30	30
North West	42	47
Eastern	41	42
London	47	50
South East	43	39
South West	33	40
Wales	0	0
Foreign	2	2
Not known	1	1
Total	319	306

Notes:

1. A finished consultant episode (FCE) is defined as a period of patient care under one consultant in one health care provider. The figures do not represent the number of patients, as one person may have several episodes within the year.

2. The main diagnosis is the first of seven diagnosis fields in the HES data set, and provides the main reason why the patient was in hospital.

3. Data for 1996–97 and 1997–98 are adjusted for both coverage and unknown/invalid clinical data; 1998–99 to 2000–01 are not yet adjusted for shortfalls.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

Patient Numbers

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients there were in hospital *(a)* in total, *(b)* aged 65 and under, *(c)* aged between 65 and 75 and *(d)* aged over 75 by (i) region and (ii) health authority in the second quarter of 2001–02; and what the delayed discharge rate for each age group was as a percentage of the number of patients in hospital in each health authority and region. [38701]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Information is not collected centrally in the form requested.

Voluntary Organisations (Definition)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will define voluntary organisation as used in the documents "A Cancer Plan" and "Implementation of the Cancer Plan". [38462]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* For the purposes of the "NHS Cancer Plan" and "The NHS Cancer Plan—Making Progress" a voluntary organisation is a body which is not a public or local authority whose activities are carried out not for profit.

NHS Budget

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the NHS budget is accounted for by *(a)* research, *(b)* training and *(c)* education. [39210]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* 6.8 per cent. of planned total national health service net expenditure has been set aside for research, training and education in 2001–02.

Heart Surgery

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many heart operations were carried out in England and Wales in each of the last five years, broken down by major categories of heart operation; and what comparative figures he has collated for other OECD countries. [39233]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The number of heart operations carried out in the national health service in England during the last five years rose by 30 per cent. The figures are as follows.

	Number
1996–97	
CABG	22,700
PTCA	17,045
Other	132,080
Total	162,186
1997–98	
CABG	22,129
PTCA	17,291
Other	131,343
Total	161,508
1998–99	
CABG	23,996
PTCA	19,294
Other	148,011
Total	191,301
1999–2000	
CABG	23,698
PTCA	22,341
Other	154,199
Total	200,238
2000–01	
CABG	24,387
PTCA	25,698
Other	161,891
Total	211,976

Figures from other Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development countries are not available on a comparable basis. Information about heart operations undertaken in Wales is the responsibility of the Welsh Assembly.

Meat Imports

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what investigation he has made into carcases being imported into the UK with spinal cords still in place; how many of these came from countries *(a)* with and *(b)* without records of BSE infection; and if he will make a statement. [39259]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* I am advised on matters of food safety by the Food Standards Agency.

On each occasion where consignments of imported carcase meat have been found with remnants of spinal cord still attached, the matter has been vigorously pursued with the chief veterinary officer of the European Union member state of origin, and with the European Commission. Where the incident has revealed a systematic problem, the FSA has pressed for firm action at the exporting plant. In eight cases, this has led to plant licences being suspended or certain operations halted until the authorities have been satisfied that the problems have been rectified.

All EU member states involved in these incidents have reported BSE cases during 2001. Further information is set out in the table.

	Number of:	
Exporting country	*consignments where spinal cord found by UK veterinary inspectors*[1]	*reported BSE cases (2001)*
Germany	8	125
Netherlands	6	20
Ireland	4	242
Belgium	2	46
Spain	2	82
Italy	1	48
Denmark	1	6

[1] 1 January 2001 to 26 February 2002

PFI

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which PFI projects are at Outline Business Case stage within his Department; and if he will make a statement. [38658]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The table shows schemes with a capital value of £20 million or greater which are currently developing Outline Business Cases (OBCs) with the intention of going on to tender under the Private Finance Initiative. Information is not collected centrally on schemes below £20 million, which do not have approved OBCs.

DOH regional office	*Scheme name*	*Value (£ million)*
Eastern	Peterborough	135
Eastern	Chelmsford	80
Eastern	Colchester	79
London	Whipps Cross	184
London	Chase Farm	41
London	North Middlesex	73
London	Lewisham	47
London	Paddington Basin	460
Northern and Yorkshire	Bradford	116
Northern and Yorkshire	Wakefield	164
Northern and Yorkshire	Hull	39
North West	Salford	114
North West	St. Helens	211
North West	Tameside and Glossop	41
South East	Brighton	25
South East	East Kent	102
South East	Tunbridge Wells	175
South East	Oxford	28
South East	Southampton	52
South West	Bristol	104
South West	Plymouth	101
South West	Torbay	65
Trent	Leicester	286
Trent	C Notts/Kingsmill	66
West Midlands	Walsall	43
West Midlands	Birmingham	306
West Midlands	North Staffs	224
West Midlands	Wolverhampton	110

National Lottery Funding

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money from the National Lottery was spent on the NHS and NHS projects in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [39756]

Mr. Caborn: I have been asked to reply.

Of the lottery distributors, the New Opportunities Fund supports projects in the fields of health, education and the environment.

In the period from 1 March 2001 to 28 February 2002, NOF funded a number of health related projects. Approximately £90 million was spent on 115 healthy living centres; £39.75 million was spent on projects to help in the treatment of coronary heart disease and cancer, including funding for 27 cardiac angiography machines and 16 MRI scanners. Finally, £1.4 million was provided to fund multi-viewers to view breast screening X-rays.

Congestion Charging

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the results were of the consultation on congestion charging for essential workers which concluded on 18 January. [33493]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The proposed congestion charging scheme for central London is a matter for the Mayor of London. In his statement of 26 February he explained his reasons for deciding to proceed with the scheme and his position on exemptions, including those for essential workers. Copies of the statement have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Matrons

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many modern matrons are in post in each *(a)* region and *(b)* health authority. [39443]

Mr. Hutton: This information is being collected and will be available shortly.

Pedestrian Deaths (Children)

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many child pedestrians from social class *(a)* five and *(b)* one have been killed in each of the last five years. [39967]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Ms Oona King, dated 4 March 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your question concerning how many child pedestrians from Social Class (a) five and (b) one have been killed in each of the last five years. (39967)

The figures requested are given in the table below:

Number of deaths occurring to child[1] pedestrians[2] in social class[3] one (SCI) and five (SC V), England and Wales, calendar years 1996 to 2000[4]

Calendar Year	*Fathers in professional occupations (SC I)*	*Fathers in unskilled occupations (SC V)*
1996	3	2
1997	7	5
1998	8	3
1996	3	6
2000	5	2

[1] Children were classified as deaths occurring to persons aged 0 to 15.

[2] Defined as deaths where the underlying cause indicated that a pedestrian was involved in a land transport accident. Deaths from land transport accidents were defined using codes E800-E829 from the International Classification of Diseases Ninth Revision.

[3] Registrar General's Social Class based on occupation. Father's Social Class is used for children under 16.

[4] Data are for occurrences of death per calendar year.

Health Authority Funding

Andy Burnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the funding per head of population for each health authority in England in 2001–02 and the expected level in 2002–03. [37193]

Mr. Hutton: Health authority allocations per weighted and unweighted head of population for 2001–02 and 2002–03 are shown in the table.

(£)

Health authority	*Allocation per weighted head of population*		*Allocation per unweighted head of population*	
	2001–02	*2002–03*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Avon	727	809	684	751
Barking and Havering	746	814	778	849
Barnet[1]	716	n/a	703	n/a
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey[1]	n/a	798	n/a	846
Barnsley	722	808	795	887
Bedfordshire	706	775	645	714
Berkshire	711	776	626	685
Bexley and Greenwich[1]	789	n/a	800	n/a
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich[1]	n/a	858	n/a	856
Birmingham	745	821	784	867
Bradford	737	809	767	842
Brent and Harrow	738	843	768	889
Bromley[1]	747	n/a	717	n/a
Buckinghamshire	715	784	617	677
Bury and Rochdale	740	817	775	852
Calderdale and Kirklees	743	809	755	820
Cambridgeshire	713	791	632	693
Camden and Islington	750	867	1,016	1,204
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	751	829	752	827
County Durham	730	804	808	884
Coventry	733	809	757	834

(£)

Health authority	*Allocation per weighted head of population*		*Allocation per unweighted head of population*	
	2001–02	*2002–03*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Croydon	727	797	707	791
Doncaster	751	826	803	881
Dorset	757	832	742	813
Dudley	735	813	709	780
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	723	817	800	922
East and North Hertfordshire[1]	728	n/a	658	n/a
East Kent	758	834	777	854
East Lancashire	742	824	810	895
East London and The City	688	794	901	1,041
East Riding	754	828	741	814
East Surrey	751	846	693	771
East Sussex Brighton and Hove	758	829	784	862
Enfield and Haringey[1]	729	n/a	783	n/a
Gateshead and South Tyneside	745	823	849	934
Gloucestershire	763	834	695	758
Herefordshire	740	814	693	759
Hertfordshire[1]	n/a	815	n/a	736
Hillingdon	729	824	727	795
Isle of Wight[1]	795	n/a	846	n/a
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire[1]	n/a	824	n/a	799
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	659	757	831	981
Kingston and Richmond	742	810	705	771
Lambeth Southwark and Lewisham	737	852	905	1,076
Leeds	753	832	759	838
Leicestershire	719	789	660	724
Lincolnshire	736	811	717	785
Liverpool	767	846	890	979
Manchester	765	842	902	1,002
Merton Sutton and Wandsworth	762	827	791	881
Morecambe Bay	771	851	776	852
Newcastle and North Tyneside	759	834	847	928
Norfolk	732	808	698	767
North and East Devon	745	821	724	795
North and Mid Hampshire	736	807	615	678
North Cheshire	755	839	763	839
North Cumbria	742	820	736	810
North Derbyshire	743	823	734	809
North Essex	728	797	674	744
North Nottinghamshire	734	814	739	815
North Staffordshire	734	815	776	857
North West Lancashire	751	832	826	911
North Yorkshire	730	802	683	749
Northamptonshire	738	807	674	739
Northumberland	748	821	755	824
Nottingham	731	806	727	799
Oxfordshire	712	788	606	676
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire[1]	739	n/a	701	n/a
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	761	843	783	884
Rotherham	739	822	784	868
Salford and Trafford	761	839	823	905
Sandwell	743	820	803	883
Sefton	774	861	838	925
Sheffield	764	838	809	884
Shropshire	729	803	681	748
Solihull	742	817	685	751
Somerset	741	813	695	757
South and West Devon	757	830	756	826
South Cheshire	747	830	704	774
South Derbyshire	721	797	694	765
South Essex	726	789	692	756
South Humber	758	839	754	836
South Lancashire	746	829	715	789
South Staffordshire	726	804	656	722
Southampton and South West Hampshire	738	807	690	757
St. Helen's and Knowsley	739	822	819	906
Stockport	732	812	713	785
Suffolk	743	814	667	730
Sunderland	740	833	839	940
Tees	739	808	802	878
Wakefield	743	818	768	843

(£)

Health authority	Allocation per weighted head of population		Allocation per unweighted head of population	
	2001–02	2002–03	2001–02	2002–03
Walsall	726	808	772	858
Warwickshire	744	820	684	750
West Hertfordshire[1]	735	n/a	686	n/a
West Kent	741	817	672	741
West Pennine	727	809	780	865
West Surrey	749	839	671	745
West Sussex	733	821	718	790
Wigan and Bolton	718	799	777	858
Wiltshire	739	812	655	717
Wirral	770	853	834	919
Wolverhampton	737	814	793	875
Worcestershire	737	810	661	724
England total	738	817	738	817

[1] There were health authority mergers on 1 April 2001

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* In May 1997, my right hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) supported the President of the Board of Trade on a three-day visit to Tokyo, Japan, which was focused on inward investment.

Small Businesses

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will publish the Government's response to the Competition Commission's report on small business banking. [39766]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Publication dates for such reports are not announced in advance. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will publish the report as soon as practicable.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the barriers that stand in the way of effective competition between the relatively small and the relatively large construction companies in Government Department construction contracts; and what measures regarding *(a)* aggregation, *(b)* contract bundling and *(c)* framework agreements she has implemented to ensure that businesses are offered a more level playing field. [38685]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Over the past year OGC and the Small Business Service have jointly undertaken research to identify the barriers to effective competition in the government marketplace. No specific research has been conducted in the construction sector.

Aggregation, contract bundling and framework agreements were all raised by small firms as being barriers to accessing the government market. OGC is reviewing best practice in each of these areas to ensure optimum value for money.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mission statement of small business/Europe is. [39647]

Nigel Griffiths: The mission statement of small business/Europe is to maximise the interests of UK small and medium-sized businesses at the European Union level.

Regulatory Impact Assessments

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of the regulatory impact assessments which are relevant to small businesses have attracted comments from the Small Business Council. [36976]

Nigel Griffiths: None. It is the role of the Small Business Service to comment on individual regulatory impact assessments (RIAs) and not the Small Business Council.

Engineering Industry

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the earnings on the services account by engineering consultancies and the proportion of exports from the United Kingdom that are manufactured goods. [39527]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* Information on the overseas earnings of engineering consultancies is given in Table C8.2 of UK Trade in Services 2000 which was published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). In 2000, the latest year for which figures are available, this industry earned £1,449 million from exports overseas, representing 2 per cent. of UK exports of services.

According to information published by ONS in the Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics, UK exports of manufactured goods in 2001 were worth £160.7 billion, representing 84 per cent. of exports of goods, or 60 per cent. of exports of goods and services, together.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the statement of the working group set up by the Hawley Review in the report "Universe of Engineering" on the research needed to estimate the number of people who practise engineering. [39532]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* The "Universe of Engineering" Report was produced by The Royal Academy of Engineering to assist The Hawley Group in its review of the Engineering Council and the needs of the wider engineering and technology community in the UK. The Report concluded that at least 2 million people are now employed in skilled engineering and technology jobs in this country, and that a new type of organisation, taking over from the Engineering Council, was required to support them.

The Engineering and Technology Board (ETB) has been established for this purpose and is now starting work with the full support of Government. The ETB's principal aims are:

(1) Start the reversal of the downward trends in the supply of people (of all ages) with qualifications and skills relevant to engineering and technology based careers and jobs.

(2) Achieve a marked notable shift in public attitudes towards, and understanding of, engineering and technology in today's economy.

(3) Build effective and valued links with business and industry, reflecting its real-time and future needs.

Transaction Costs

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact of the level of transaction costs in the provision of equity finance to private business. [37598]

Nigel Griffiths: Although this Department has made no assessment of the impact of these costs, the Government appreciate that they have the effect of encouraging private equity investors to focus on larger investments. This makes it more difficult for smaller enterprises to raise finance and is one of the reasons we have launched Regional Venture Capital Funds to provide smaller amounts of equity capital to growth businesses.

Aerospace Industry

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received on helping the aerospace industry since the incidents of 11 September 2001; and if she will make a statement. [38199]

Mr. Wilson: Both Ministers and Officials have been in contact with the major trade associations, aerospace companies, hon. Members and other bodies. We remain in contact with the major companies to discuss how to best manage the situation.

BNFL

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) pursuant to the answer of 20 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 163–64W, for what reason the profit and loss figures of BNFL Inc. are commercially confidential; [39325]

(2) pursuant to her answers of 20 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 163–64W, 15 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 153W and 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 522W, on BNFL, on what basis she has refused to provide profit and loss figures for BNFL Inc. [39326]

Mr. Wilson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 20 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 163–64W.

BNFL has assured me that it complies with all requirements placed on it by financial regulators in the US and the UK.

Smurfit Corrugated, Warrington

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps her Department is taking to ensure that people who lose their jobs at Smurfit Corrugated, Warrington, are helped to find alternative employment. [40001]

Alan Johnson: Cheshire and Warrington Business Link is working with the company to see exactly what support Smurfit Corrugated employees need from the Small Business Service. This is likely to include benefits advice, careers guidance, training and help with identifying job vacancies. The North West Development Agency is also aware of the situation and is considering, with the Employment Service, whether Rapid Response Funds are required.

Pay Differentials

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average gap between men's and women's pay in the Stafford constituency is. [39954]

Alan Johnson: Estimates for the parliamentary constituency of Stafford are not available. According to the 2001 New Earnings Survey conducted by the Office for National Statistics, average hourly pay for full-time employees excluding overtime in Staffordshire was £10.43 for men and £8.67 for women, a gap of £1.76.

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average gap between men's and women's pay is in Milton Keynes, South-West at the latest date for which figures are available. [40304]

Alan Johnson: Estimates for the parliamentary constituency of Milton Keynes, South-West are not available. According to the 2001 New Earnings Survey conducted by the Office for National Statistics, average hourly pay for full-time employees excluding overtime in the Milton Keynes Unitary Authority, was £12.53 for men and £10.03 for women, a gap of £2.50.

Fishing

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether her scheme to compensate British fishermen for the loss of fishing when Iceland extended her fishing limit to 200 miles applies to statutory or nautical miles. [38483]

Nigel Griffiths: The 200 "miles" in the scheme rules applies to imperial miles and not nautical miles.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many claims for compensation for the loss of Icelandic fishing jobs have been submitted from *(a)* Fleetwood, *(b)* Grimsby and *(c)* Hull; how many from each port have (i) been paid, (ii) gone to appeal and (iii) gone to arbitration; and how many for each port have been reported. [38484]

Nigel Griffiths: The table shows the available information.

Port	*Paid Compensation*	*Requests to review the decision*	*Appeals to the Independent Adjudicator*
Hull	1,489	444	48
Grimsby/Cleethorpes	701	298	56
Fleetwood/Blackpool	312	135	20
Aberdeen	158	205	13
Other	889	122	13
Total	3,549	1,204	150

Excluding duplicates, a total of 7,740 claims have been made. I regret that there is no breakdown by port of this figure.

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what calculation has been made of the amount of carbon dioxide produced by the nuclear energy industry; and what estimate has been made of the annual cost to the nuclear industry of meeting the climate change levy. [40703]

Mr. Wilson: As with any large project, the process of constructing a nuclear power station will lead to carbon dioxide emissions but these will be negligible in relation to the lifetime generation capacity of the plant. Generation of nuclear electricity does not produce any significant carbon dioxide emissions. It is estimated that in 2001 in the absence of nuclear generation, emissions of carbon dioxide would have been between 11 and 22 MtC higher, depending on the mix of generation used to replace it.

The climate change levy (CCL) falls on supplies of electricity to business users rather than on electricity generators. The amount attributable to nuclear generation will depend on the extent to which consumers of nuclear electricity are domestic consumers or are businesses which are eligible for reductions in the rate of levy. For each terawatt hour of electricity supplied to business customers the CCL at the full rate would amount to £4.3 million.

Fireworks

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her policy is on reducing nuisance caused by fireworks. [39757]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I understand the depth of current concerns about fireworks, particularly in relation to neighbourhood safety, noise and nuisance. We are now actively considering with relevant government departments what action can be taken within existing legislation to address these growing problems. I am also having further talks with the industry.

Global Crossing (Ministerial Hospitality)

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the dates that Ministers in her Department have received hospitality in their ministerial capacities since 1 January 1999 from Global Crossing; and if she will make a statement. [37686]

Ms Hewitt: Offers of hospitality are accepted and registered in line with the requirements of paragraph 139 of the Ministerial Code.

Paragon Finance

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received about the activities of Paragon Finance following the judgment in the case of Paragon Finance plc *v.* Nash and Another, Sane *v.* Stanton and Another held before Lord Justices Thorpe, Dyson and Astill on 15 October 2001. [39027]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have received correspondence concerning this case and it was also raised in some of the responses to DTI's recent consultation on reform of our consumer credit legislation. I am aware that the case has important implications for our plans to make the extortionate credit provisions of the Consumer Credit Act more effective and we will be studying the judgment carefully as we develop our proposals.

Loan Sharks

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to reform the Consumer Credit Act to tackle loan sharks; and if she will make a statement. [39026]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department is in the process of reviewing the Consumer Credit Act in order to improve consumer protection against unfair lending practices. I published the summary of responses to our consultation paper "Tackling loan sharks—and more" on 18 February. The summary contains a provisional timetable for when DTI expects to publish further consultation papers on our plans to modify the Consumer Credit Act and improve consumer protection against unfair lending practices. The summary also sets out the following priorities for the review:

Improving the consumer credit licensing regime;

Making the extortionate credit provisions more effective;

Increasing consumer protection by changing the Consumer Credit Act's financial limit and categories of exempt agreements and simplifying the rules on multiple agreements;

Enabling consumers to conclude credit agreements on-line;

Simplifying the advertising regulations, including the regulations on the Annual Percentage Rate (APR);

Amending the rules on early settlement, and;

Implementing recommendations by the Task Force on overindebtedness.

Copies of both the consultation paper and the summary of responses have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

British Steel Exports

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she is taking to facilitate the export of British steel products to the USA. [38391]

Mr. Wilson: The US market is open to UK steel exporters. We are working closely with the European Commission to try to ensure that the US Government do not impose unilateral restrictions on steel imports. In addition, Ministers are taking every opportunity to lobby against any action by the US to restrict imports, which would be totally unjustified.

LNM Holdings

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if her Department was consulted by the Prime Minister's Office on the letter sent by the Prime Minister to the Romanian Government supporting the bid for Sidex steel by LNM Holdings. [39036]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* No.

Correspondence

David Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a reply to his letter of 17 December 2001 regarding fireworks. [38457]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* My hon. Friend was sent a reply dated 26 February 2002.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Cheshire Police Authority

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on *(a)* the level of deducted grant taken from the Cheshire police authority 2001–02 baseline and *(b)* the relationship the deducted grant has with that attributable to National Crime Squad and National Criminal Intelligence Service funding. [31871]

Mr. Denham: The 2001–02 grant baseline was notionally adjusted to allow like-for-like comparison with 2002–03, following the transfer of funding for the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) and the National Crime Squad (NCS) in 2002–03.

As a result, the notionally revised grant for Cheshire police authority for 2001–02 became £96.6 million. Actual grant was £99.2 million, a difference of £2.6 million.

The levies paid by Cheshire in 2001–02 for NCS and NCIS were £2.6 million.

Cheshire police authority will receive grant in 2002–03 of £99.0 million—an increase of 2.5 per cent. on the adjusted figure for 2001–02. No police authority will receive less than a 2.3 per cent. increase on the adjusted notional figure.

Police and Judiciary (Training)

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps the Government are taking to ensure that *(a)* the police force, *(b)* the Crown

Prosecution Service and *(c)* judges take part in continuing training programmes, so they can identify and respond to the needs and concerns of people with a learning disability. [35546]

Mr. Denham: The basic training received by all recruits to the police service includes an element designed to raise awareness of all disabilities, including learning disabilities, and to highlight the importance of communicating effectively and sensitively with people suffering from mental illness and mental disorder. In addition, forces provide further training to meet local needs.

For the future, we are developing national occupational standards and a core curriculum which will identify the knowledge and skills required for officers' roles and any training requirements.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) provides a number of training courses, which consider the needs of people with disabilities (including learning disabilities) both as victims of crime and as employees of the service.

The following training is available to staff and specifically considers the requirements of customers and staff with learning disabilities:

Diversity Training

Direct Communication with Victims and Witnesses

Disability Discrimination Act Training

Speaking Up for Justice Training.

Judicial education is the responsibility of the Judicial Studies Board (JSB). The JSB comprises six committees one of which is the Equal Treatment Advisory Committee which issued the Equal Treatment Bench Book to all judges. A chapter in the Bench Book gives advice on identifying and responding to the needs and concerns of people with a learning disability. Continuing training is carried out by seminars organised by the criminal, civil and family committees of the JSB.

Police Houses

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many police houses are empty; and if he will make a statement; [35806]

(2) how many police houses, other than right-to-buy houses, were sold in 2000–01. [35807]

Mr. Denham: Information on the number of empty police houses is not held centrally.

The number of police houses sold in 2000–01 was 620. No information is available on the terms under which the houses were sold.

In its report entitled "Action Stations—Improving the Management of the Police Estate" (published March 1999), the Audit Commission recommended that police forces identify and dispose of buildings that were unsuitable or had maintenance liabilities which were beyond the forces' means. Further it recommended that the remaining residential estate was rationalised. In some cases, for example, it may be appropriate to sell off some vacant accommodation in order to refurbish and bring back into use other accommodation.

In those areas where high housing costs are hindering recruitment and retention of police officers, allocations from the starter home initiative (SHI) will help about 1,100 police staff to buy first homes over the next three years. In Surrey about 40 police staff are expected to benefit from rounds one and two of the SHI.

We have also recently agreed with the Department of Health that the role of the National Health Housing Co-ordinator will be extended to cover the police service.

Police Secondments

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his estimate is of the cost borne by the Dorset police authority of secondments to *(a)* the NCIS, *(b)* the Police Staff College, *(c)* police training centres, *(d)* the International Police Task Force in Bosnia and *(e)* Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary. [36805]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* I have been advised by the chief constable of Dorset that while an officer is seconded to the bodies named in the question, their pay, allowances and overtime are met initially by Dorset police but all costs are subsequently recharged to the seconding body. There are therefore no direct costs to Dorset police authority arising from these secondments.

Lancet Inquiry

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what powers he has to seek reimbursement of the costs of the Lancet inquiry. [36515]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* There are no powers to press for reimbursement of the costs of the Lancet inquiry.

I recognise that the Operation Lancet investigation placed a significant burden on Cleveland police authority. Because of the length and complexity of the investigation a special grant of £1.9 million was made to the authority in March 2001.

Brixton Police

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 56W, on Brixton police, how many staff were absent during the period; and what the total number of staff is at Brixton police station. [37514]

Mr. Denham: Statistics on absences are not available for Brixton police station separately from the whole of the borough of Lambeth. There are 240 police officers and 130 civilian support staff at Brixton police station; some of these staff have responsibilities relating to the whole of Lambeth.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 56W, on Brixton police, if he will list the periods during 2001 when Brixton police were unable to accept telephone reports of minor crime. [37515]

Mr. Denham: I understand that the information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Correspondence

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will make a substantive reply to the letter of 29 January from the hon. Member for Thurrock concerning his constituent, Andrew Palmer of East Tilbury; and if he will make a statement. [37435]

Mr. Denham: I replied to my hon. Friend's letter of 29 January 2002 on 25 February 2002.

Humberside Police

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average number of days sickness absence per year for *(a)* police officers and *(b)* support staff was in each of the past five years for Humberside police. [37746]

Mr. Denham: The information is shown in the table.

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Police Officers	12	12	8	9	9
Support Staff	12	10	8	10	11

Yarl's Wood

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps were taken to alert residents of Thirleigh and Clayham, Bedfordshire, that an escape of detainees had taken place at the Yarl's Wood removal centre on 14 February. [38782]

Angela Eagle: I understand from Bedfordshire police that, as a precautionary measure, a general warning was issued to the public on the night of the incident to stay inside with windows and doors locked.

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will ensure that Bedfordshire county council is not financially disadvantaged by the destruction of the Yarl's Wood Detention Centre. [38646]

Angela Eagle: There is no reason to believe that Bedfordshire county council will be financially disadvantaged by the incident at Yarl's Wood removal centre.

Asylum Seekers

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers there are in each unitary or borough in Essex broken down by *(a)* country of origin and *(b)* gender. [38428]

Angela Eagle: The information is not available in the form requested.

The availability of information on the location of asylum seekers in the United Kingdom (UK) is currently linked to the support the asylum seeker receives. Asylum seekers in the UK are receiving support from the National Asylum Support Service (NASS), local authorities and the Department for Work and Pension (DWP), or are supporting themselves.

Currently asylum seekers supported by NASS are not dispersed to Essex because NASS has no dispersal accommodation there. Some asylum seekers supported by NASS find their own accommodation and receive vouchers from NASS. From available information, as at the end of December 2001, there were 1,690 asylum seekers (including dependants) in receipt of voucher only support in the east of England (which includes Essex).

For asylum seekers supported by local authorities, DWP or who support themselves, no information is held centrally on the numbers living in Essex.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he plans to revise his target of 30,000 removals per year of failed asylum seekers. [38662]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The 30,000 target (2,500 per month) for the removal of failed asylum seekers has always been ambitious and high risk, but our continued expectation is to achieve that removal rate in the next financial year.

The full impact of the incident at Yarl's Wood has yet to be assessed. However, any measures taken are expected to be short term. At this current point in time it is not our intention to revise our removals target.

"Secure Borders, Safe Haven"

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the responses to the various consultation exercises announced in his White Paper "Secure Borders, Safe Haven". [38471]

Angela Eagle: The Government will place copies of responses to the White Paper from organisations in the Library unless they have indicated they do not wish their responses to be published.

Decisions on publication of the responses to the consultation exercises in respect of working holidaymakers and entitlement cards will be made later in the year.

Car Theft

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had with car manufacturers about reducing the incidence of car theft. [38839]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The principal forum for such discussions is the Vehicle Crime Reduction Action Team. This was set up in 1998 under the chairmanship of the Director of Fleet Operations at the Ford Motor Company to develop, and oversee the implementation of, initiatives to meet the Government's target to reduce vehicle crime by 30 per cent. over five years. Members of the action team include the chief executives of the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders and the Retail Motor Industry Federation. It meets three times a year, with additional meetings of its executive committee, and has in our view been an outstanding success.

Private Medical Insurance

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 57W, on private medical insurance, how many police authority employees will be covered by the private medical insurance scheme begun in November 2001; what assessment he has made of the reasons for Surrey police authority choosing to take out private medical insurance; and if he will make a statement. [37191]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The chief constable of Surrey police informs me that about 2,800 police staff are covered by the private insurance scheme arranged by Surrey police authority.

The reasons given by the force for introducing the scheme are that it will help reduce sickness absence and ill health retirements and increase officer availability.

Chelmsford Prison

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the maximum capacity is for prisoners at Chelmsford prison; and how many prisoners are housed in the prison; [37479]

(2) what plans he has to increase the maximum number of prisoners at Chelmsford prison; by how many prisoners he plans to increase capacity; and if he will make a statement. [37481]

Beverley Hughes: On 25 February 2002 the operational capacity of Chelmsford prison was 531. This includes an increase of 30 places effective from 25 February 2002. On 27 February 2002 the population of the prison was 529. Consideration is being given to increasing the operational capacity by a further 45 places.

Child Abuse

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police authorities within England and Wales have been involved in cases of child abuse; what resources have been utilised to service each investigation as a percentage of the total budget allocated to each police authority in each year since 1996; and what definition is used for a victim and complainant. [35958]

Mr. Denham: I have been informed by the Association of Chief Police Officers that all authorities are likely to have been involved in investigation of cases of child abuse and all authorities will have family protection units.

It is for the chief officer to determine what level of resources should be allocated to any investigation. Provision will vary between cases.

Central records of numbers of cases and resources employed are not held.

A widely recognised definition of 'victim' is that of the European Union Council Framework Decision of 15 March 2001:

> "Victim shall mean a natural person who has suffered harm, including physical or mental injury, emotional suffering or economic loss, directly caused by acts or omissions that are in violation of the criminal law of a member state""

There is no formal definition of "complainant".

Asylum Seekers Accommodation Centres

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people he plans to accommodate in accommodation centres for asylum seekers; what length of average stay is planned; and what range of facilities will be provided. [37077]

Angela Eagle: The accommodation centre trial will be based on 3,000 places, spread across four centres.

It is not possible to specify what an average length of stay will be, at this stage. We intend, as my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said in the House on 7 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 1039, that no asylum seeker should be in an accommodation centre for in excess of six months.

A range of facilities will be provided on site. They will include health care, interpretation, education for both adults and children (including English language), and other purposeful activities such as information technology classes and volunteering. Residents will also have access to legal advice.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the sites that have been identified as potential sites for accommodation centres for asylum seekers. [37098]

Angela Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) on 11 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 57W.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to locate all residential asylum facilities in areas with ready access to the emergency services. [38645]

Angela Eagle: As part of the initiative to develop new removal centres and trial accommodation centres for asylum seekers, the Home Office will consult and take account of the views of the relevant emergency services.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 11 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 57W, on asylum accommodation centres, what the distance to the nearest *(a)* primary school, *(b)* secondary school, *(c)* special school, *(d)* further education college, *(e)* railway station, *(f)* bus stop, *(g)* post office, *(h)* chemist, *(i)* hospital, *(j)* leisure centre, *(k)* library and *(l)* Immigration Appellate Authority appeal centre is for each proposed site. [37849]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* We have not collected the information requested by my hon. Friend. Accommodation centres will have a range of on-site services and will provide for transport where necessary.

Police Officers

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on changes made to the recruitment criteria for police officers in England and Wales in the last five years; and what further changes he plans. [30451]

Mr. Denham: The Police Regulations 1995 (as amended) set out qualifications for appointment to a police force.

The Home Office provides medical and eyesight guidelines. These were issued in Home Office Circular (HOC) 9/95 and last revised in March 1998 by HOC 7/98.

A Home Office project is under way to establish national recruitment standards (NRS) for the police service. It is reviewing all current entry requirements, to ensure they are job-related, evidence-based and non-discriminatory.

NRS guidelines on age, previous criminal convictions and tattoos were issued in October 2001.

We are putting in place a national fitness test for recruitment. The intention is that from 1 April 2002 recruits should be tested using the job-related fitness test (JRFT), against a set national standard.

A change to the nationality requirement for entry to the police service was published in the Police Reform Bill on 25 January. It will allow European Economic Area (EEA) and other foreign nationals who are living in the United Kingdom free of restrictions to join the police service.

As part of the NRS project the medical and eyesight guidelines are currently under review, with recommendations due this summer.

A review of the police initial recruitment test (PIRT) is also taking place to ensure that it is job-related, non-discriminatory and consistent with the national competency framework.

We are currently developing a common competency based application form and pack consistent with the national competency framework which will be used by all forces.

The NRS work is due to be completed by April 2003.

British Overseas Citizens

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what changes he plans to make to the special voucher scheme. [40868]

Angela Eagle: The special voucher scheme was introduced in 1968 in recognition of the specific hardship being suffered at that time by British Overseas Citizen (BOC) passport holders and their dependants, who were under political pressure to leave their countries of residence in East Africa, but who held no other citizenship and had nowhere else to go. Several thousand BOCs and other United Kingdom passport holders took advantage of the scheme and settled in the United Kingdom in the 1970s and 1980s.

However, the world political situation has now changed and BOCs are no longer under threat of expulsion. They have, over the intervening years, either settled with their families in the new independent East African countries or, alternatively, some have moved with their families to India. Their families have now grown up and have families of their own.

There are relatively few applications for special vouchers these days and those who do apply are not being pressured to leave the country in which they reside. The scheme no longer serves the purpose for which it was set up. The Government have therefore decided that the time has come to abolish the scheme, with immediate effect. No new applications for special vouchers will be considered.

Attacks on Pensioners

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the estimated annual cost is of prosecuting individuals who have carried out criminal attacks on pensioners in each of the last three years. [38649]

The Solicitor-General: I have been asked to reply.

Such information is not collated and so could be found only involving a disproportionate cost.

DEFENCE

Departmental Retirement Ages

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the retirement ages that apply to the employees of his Department and its agencies, including how many and which categories of employees are affected by each; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on flexible retirement. [32829]

Dr. Moonie: Two-thirds of the Ministry of Defence's civilian work force of some 90,000 employees, mainly support, technical and industrial grades, have the options to retire at any time between 60 and 65. The remainder, most of whom are in managerial, professional and technical grades, have a normal retirement age of 60. Following the publication of the Government's Code of Practice on Age Diversity in Employment the MOD, like other Government Departments, has been reviewing its retirement policy and we expect to announce the findings in the next few weeks.

MOD uses the full range of options for flexible retirement which are available under the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme to meet its business needs and in response to the individual preferences of employees where this is possible.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list, for 1997–98 and for each subsequent financial year, the amount spent *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* abroad by (i) his Department, (ii) its agencies and (iii) its non-departmental public bodies on (1) providing mobile telephone equipment, including handsets and other associated equipment, (2) telephone calls made using such equipment and (3) telephone calls made using privately owned mobile telephones but subsequently reclaimed by (x) Ministers and (y) staff. [34317]

Dr. Moonie: This information is not held centrally in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. I am therefore unable to provide a substantive answer under the terms of Exemption 9 (voluminous and vexatious requests) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Nuclear Decommissioning

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what expenditure he incurred on the decommissioning and clean-up of nuclear materials, equipment and facilities in each year since 1997; and how much he expects to incur in this financial year. [37248]

Dr. Moonie: Expenditure on the decommissioning and clean-up of nuclear materials, equipment and facilities for the past four financial years is shown in the table together with expected expenditure in this financial year.

	£ million
1997–98	124.387
1998–99	152.211
1999–2000	114.721
2000–01	224.602
2001–02	[1]203.081

[1] Expected expenditure

The figures include Ministry of Defence's contribution to BNFL and UKAEA waste management and decommissioning costs and the costs of running UK NIREX Ltd.

Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost of refurbishing each ministerial private office was in each year since May 1997. [37820]

Dr. Moonie: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Relatively small costs, such as the ad hoc purchase of furniture, were involved as the offices are being redeveloped as part of the Main Building Redevelopment PPP contract signed in May 2000.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his estimate is of the cost of buildings refurbishment carried out by his Department between 1992 and 1997. [39466]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total cost is of the public private partnership for the redevelopment of his Department's main building in Whitehall. [39467]

Dr. Moonie: The costs to the Ministry of Defence will be some £55 million per annum at March 2000 prices over the 30 years of the public private partnership contract. This encompasses the short-term decant arrangements as well as the long-term provision of a wide variety of services to both the redeveloped Main Building and the Old War Office Building.

Defence Housing Executive

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many families are waiting for accommodation broken down by region; and if he will make a statement; [38231]

(2) whether the Defence Housing Executive holds the details of *(a)* which families will be placed in houses awaiting families and *(b)* when the families will be placed in specific properties; and if he will make a statement. [38230]

Dr. Moonie: The Defence Housing Executive (DHE) provides housing to meet the entitled Service applicants' required dates for accommodation. When DHE accommodation is unavailable, Substitute Service Families Accommodation (SSFA) is provided by DHE from the private rental market. In the quarter October to December 2001, the last period for which information is available, there were no known cases of entitled Service families, having applied for Service Families Accommodation, being left without accommodation. Each DHE Area Office holds details of DHE or SSFA properties that have been allocated to Service families and the families' planned move-in dates. If the hon. Member has a specific case in mind perhaps he would let me know.

The Defence Evaluation and Research Agency

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many lawyers are employed by DERA; and at what cost in the last 12 months. [39146]

Dr. Moonie: As part of the implementation of the DERA public-private partnership, the DERA Trading Fund Agency was disestablished on 1 July 2001. From its constituent parts two new organisations were created: QinetiQ plc, a wholly Government owned company, and the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl), an agency of the Ministry of Defence.

Prior to vesting of the company, DERA employed three lawyers and 11 patent attorneys and would have also used the services of the MOD's legal department and consulted external legal advisers where appropriate. These costs fell to a number of different departments within the former DERA and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Since vesting, Dstl has used the services of the MOD's legal department and occasionally employed external legal advisers. QinetiQ employs six barristers/solicitors and 11 patent attorneys to deal in the main with intellectual property matters. It also employs external lawyers as and when necessary in connection with its joint venture and other business activities. In addition, a number of external lawyers have been contracted to advise on aspects of the PPP, including intellectual property, trademark and contractual issues. I am withholding details of costs in accordance with Exemption 14 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Special Urgency Provisions

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how often the Department has applied the special urgency provisions in paragraph 22 of Circular 18/84 (Development by Government Departments) to a development by the Department; and if he will make a statement. [38711]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Ministry of Defence Police

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent guidance has been given to the MDP on the compatibility of their responsibilities for guarding *(a)* civil and *(b)* defence sites; and if he will make a statement. [39538]

Dr. Moonie: The primary responsibility of the Ministry of Defence police is to provide policing services to the Ministry of Defence. I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 176W to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer), about the ongoing Quinquennial Review of the MDP. The MDP will however continue to provide certain policing services, as now, to external customers on repayment terms.

Submarines

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when it is planned that each of the S and T class fleet submarines will be paid off. [40312]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* HMS Swiftsure was operationally decommissioned in 1992. The planned operational decommissioning dates for the remainder of the Royal Navy's S class submarines are given in the table.

Swiftsure class SSN	*Planned operational decommissioning date*
HMS Sovereign	2005
HMS Superb	2006
HMS Sceptre	2010
HMS Spartan	2006
HMS Splendid	2003

The planned operational decommissioning dates for the Royal Navy's Trafalgar class submarines are shown in the table.

Trafalgar class SSN	*Planned operational decommissioning date*
HMS Trafalgar	2007
HMS Turbulent	2008
HMS Tireless	2011
HMS Torbay	2021
HMS Trenchant	2023
HMS Talent	2017
HMS Triumph	2019

QinetiQ

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total cost was to QinetiQ of its proposal to base the future strategic tanker aircraft fleet at Boscombe Down airfield. [39315]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 9 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 368W, on the costs incurred by DERA, prior to its disestablishment as part of the DERA PPP on 1 July 2001, on its bid to base the future strategic tanker aircraft fleet at Boscombe Down. Information relating to any further costs incurred by QinetiQ since it was vested as a plc is commercial in confidence and is therefore withheld under Exemption 14 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

RAF Chilmark

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what have been *(a)* the costs to date of achieving certificated explosive ordnance clearance, *(b)* the revenue from sale of part of the site and *(c)* the area sold at RAF Chilmark. [39316]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* The cost over five years since the closure of RAF Chilmark for clearing explosive ordnance has been in the region of £1.7 million. Receipts from sales of parts of the site since the closure total £1.5 million. The area of RAF Chilmark which has been sold is 65.2 hectares (161 acres).

Axis Chemical Weapons

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the classification of documents relating to the dumping of Axis chemical weapons in the Baltic Sea by the Allies after World War Two. [40621]

Dr. Moonie: In accordance with custom and practice after World War Two, many records of sea disposals of munitions, including chemical weapons (CW), were destroyed when they were perceived to be of no further administrative use. As a result of this practice, a detailed inventory of all munitions and CW dumped at sea does not exist.

Where relevant British records on sea dumpings of munitions and CW have survived, these have been declassified and transferred to the Public Record Office in accordance with the terms of the Public Records Act, 1958 and 1967. Furthermore, as the disposals took place largely between 1945 and 1948, prior to the creation of NATO, we are not aware of any NATO papers on this issue.

War Cemeteries

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has made to the French Government about plans to build on war cemeteries for a new Paris airport. [40582]

Dr. Moonie: Her Majesty's Government have made no representations to the French Government about plans to build on war cemeteries for a new Paris airport. At this stage the matter is entirely the responsibility of the French authorities. However, following media speculation about the possibility that First World War cemeteries containing some British and Commonwealth casualties may be affected if the project goes ahead, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, which is responsible for the maintenance of the graves, has written to the French Ministry of the Interior seeking further clarification of the proposals. They have drawn attention to the concern expressed in the UK and have asked to be kept informed of any developments.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has made to the Belgian Government on plans to extend the A19 over war cemeteries. [40583]

Dr. Moonie: The Government have had no discussions with the Belgian Government regarding the proposal to extend the A19 motorway across a previously undeveloped section of Pilckem Ridge, a battlefield in the Ypres Salient. In view of the number of British soldiers who lost their lives in this campaign and whose bodies were never found, it has been suggested that the area should remain untouched as an historical heritage site, but this is a matter for the Belgian Government to decide on.

However, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission has had discussions with the Belgian authorities seeking clarification of the proposals. The Commission has been assured that while the proposed route has not as yet been finalised, it will not interfere with any of the cemeteries it maintains.

US Visiting Forces

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total strength is of US visiting forces based in the UK; and where they are located. [39849]

Mr. Ingram: As at 28 February 2002, 13,457 members of the United States visiting forces were present in the United Kingdom. Numbers of the USVF by location are shown in the table.

Site	*USVF numbers at each site*
RAF Alconbury/Molesworth/Upwood	1,098
RAF Croughton/Barford St. John	377
RAF Daws Hill/West Ruislip Eastcote/USN London	1,118
RAF Digby	47
RAF Fairford/Welford	189
RAF Feltwell	132
RAF Fylingdales	1
RAF Hythe	5
RAF Lakenheath	4,853
RAF Menwith Hill	1,396
RAF Mildenhall	3,913
Northwood	18
RAF Oakhanger	1
RAF St. Mawgan	309

In addition, there are approximately 140 US service personnel present in the UK, mainly serving in singleton posts at a wide variety of locations who are either participating in UK/US exchange programmes or engaged in specific bilateral projects or operational posts.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Rothwell/Desborough Bypass

11. **Phil Sawford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when construction work will commence on the A6 Rothwell/Desborough bypass. [36654]

Mr. Jamieson: The contract for the construction of the A6 Rothwell/Desborough bypass was awarded on 13 February. Depending on how quickly the Contractor can set up his site and mobilise his work force, work could start on site shortly after Easter.

Heathrow Terminal 5

13. **Pete Wishart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of the proposed terminal 5 at Heathrow on the air services of the nations and regions of the UK. [36656]

Mr. Spellar: The possible impact of Terminal 5 on regional air services was considered at the planning inquiry. In section 8.6.6 of the main report on Terminal 5 the inspector states that he does not consider that regional airports would be harmed if Terminal 5 were provided. The Secretary of State's reasons for his decision on Terminal 5 are set out in his decision letter of 20 November.

Airport Development

14. **Dr. Gibson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to review his strategy for airport development in relation to local council borrowing. [36657]

Mr. Jamieson: Our proposed air transport White Paper will provide a framework within which airports can plan for the future with greater certainty. Meanwhile soundly-financed local authority airport companies are already free to invest without public sector borrowing controls.

Rail Safety

15. **Ms Drown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress is being made on implementing the recommendations of the Cullen report. [36658]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government have asked the Health and Safety Commission, the regulator for railway safety, to ensure that action is taken on all the recommendations made by Lord Cullen.

The HSC published an action plan in November 2001 on how each of the recommendations in part 1 of Lord Cullen's report would be taken forward. The HSC intend to publish shortly a detailed progress report on the implementation of these recommendations in the six-month period to 20 December 2001.

The HSC are currently consulting the industry about implementing the recommendations in part 2 of Lord Cullen's report. They intend to issue a progress report in April 2002 for the period to 8 March 2002.

The HSC's first progress report on the recommendations from the joint inquiry into train protection systems was published in September 2001. The second report will be published in the spring.

Local Authorities (Performance Assessment)

16. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what changes he proposes to introduce to the performance assessment for local authorities. [36659]

25. **Ms Coffey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to introduce a more coherent and integrated system of local government performance measures. [36668]

Dr. Whitehead: In our White Paper—Strong Local Leadership-Quality Public Services—we announced that the Audit Commission would develop, in consultation with central and local government, a comprehensive performance assessment framework for local government. This will bring together the range of existing assessment processes to provide a coherent overall performance profile for each authority.

Comprehensive performance assessment is at the heart of a significant move towards a more bespoke evaluation, inspection, support and intervention process for local authorities. It will provide Government, councils and the public with a clear performance profile for each council. This information will allow a proportionate action plan to be agreed with each authority to address areas of concern, better inform negotiation of targets and provide a robust basis for action to tackle poor performance.

Road Links (Mid Wales and West Midlands)

17. **Mr. Roger Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with the Environment Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales on improving road links between mid-Wales and the west midlands. [36660]

Mr. Jamieson: My right hon. Friend and other Ministers are always willing to discuss these matters with the Assembly Secretary.

London Underground

18. **Angela Watkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what percentage of the debt of the PPP deal for London Underground will be guaranteed by the Government. [36661]

Mr. Spellar: The Government will not guarantee any of the debt raised by the infrastructure companies to support the plans for the modernisation of the tube.

London Transport is currently consulting the Mayor and Transport for London on proposed contracts. The draft contract provides that in certain circumstances, should a private sector infrastructure company persistently breach the contract and should no alternative contractor be found, London Underground would take control of the infrastructure company and ensure that 95 per cent. of approved third-party bank and bond debt was repaid. None of the finance provided by the shareholders would be repaid, providing a strong incentive on them to meet contractual obligations to improve performance.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the cost of capital is for each PPP contract on the London Underground. [37245]

Mr. Jamieson: I understand that London Underground intends to make information on the cost of capital on each contract publicly available following completion of the competitions. This information has already been made available to the Mayor and Transport for London by London Underground as part of the statutory consultation process.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he or his Department is due to make a recommendation on the arbiter for the PPP of London Undergound; what the date, or timing, related to their appointment is; what early expressions of interest have been received; what the bidding process required with respect to their appointment is; and what discussions there have been to date regarding their appointment. [38963]

Mr. Jamieson: Section 225 of the GLA Act 1999 provides powers for the Secretary of State to appoint a PPP Arbiter. It also requires the Secretary of State to make such an appointment if requested in writing by a party to a PPP Agreement.

London Underground is currently consulting the Mayor and Transport for London. Following this consultation, the Board of London Transport is expected to take a final decision on whether to proceed with the PPP contracts. If the LT Board confirms its decision of 7 February that it is minded to sign contracts, and subject to the Secretary of State's statutory decisions in relation to the PPP agreements, it is the intention of the Secretary of State:

(a) to appoint a PPP Arbiter as soon as possible after completion of the PPP contracts, on a permanent basis;

(b) to ensure that the PPP Arbiter is supported by appropriate staff with technical, legal and financial expertise and understanding of the contracts;

(c) to consult London Underground, Metronet, Tubelines and Transport for London before making an appointment.

Given the requirements for making public sector appointments, this will necessarily take some time. However, the Secretary of State recognises the need to prepare the Arbiter's office and ensure continuity with the negotiation of the PPP contracts. The Secretary of State therefore intends to take steps to put in place interim staff before a permanent appointment can be made.

Railtrack

19. **Ian Lucas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how he intends to improve the accountability of the successor to Railtrack to its passengers. [36662]

Mr. Spellar: All potential bidders for Railtrack will need to take account of the guidelines issued in response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) on 31 October 2001, *Official Report,* columns 669–71W. The guidelines specify, among other things, that bidders must satisfy the Secretary of State on their proposals for creating, at regional level, relationships with railway passenger and freight service operators and other stakeholders. They should also provide evidence of the confidence of relevant industry stakeholders to their proposals.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the Strategic Rail Authority has notified his Department of valuations of rail assets in the United Kingdom carried out by the Authority. [40219]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority has not carried out any valuations of rail assets. It has, however, estimated the cost of enhancing the network to the levels that would be needed to meet the Ten-Year Plan targets for the railways. This information is published in the Authority's Strategic Plan.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the EU has placed conditions on the provision of state aid to Railtrack in administration. [40208]

Mr. Jamieson: No conditions were placed on the provision of state aid.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if his Department has placed an estimated valuation on rail assets in the United Kingdom; [40218]

(2) if his Department has carried out joint work with the Treasury to estimate the total valuation of rail assets in the United Kingdom; [40220]

(3) what work his Department has undertaken to estimate the total value of railway assets held by *(a)* Railtrack and *(b)* other rail-related organisations. [40217]

Mr. Jamieson: The valuation of the assets of Railtrack Plc is a matter for the administrator. The valuation of other railway assets is a matter for the individual companies that own these assets.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, (1) pursuant to his answer of 25 February 2000, *Official Report,* column 783W, ref 36311, if he will list the reasons for the administrator's additional funding request; and how much is being requested for each area of need; [39161]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 783W, ref 36312, whether there are no such contingency plans. [39162]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 25 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 783W.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether the guarantees that he will provide to secure commercial funding for the Railtrack administrator are time-limited by the recent ruling of the European Commission on state aid. [40232]

Mr. Jamieson: They are time limited.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 782W, ref 30239, whether the Ford Motor Company is being paid for his services. [39160]

Mr. Jamieson: No.

West Coast Main Line

20. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the level of investment projected for the west coast main line as included in the Strategic Rail Authority's 10-year plan. [36663]

Mr. Jamieson: The precise outputs of the west coast upgrade are currently under review by the Strategic Rail authority and the key stakeholders. Until the outputs are agreed the precise cost of the project will not be known. The plan makes it clear that the upgrade is a priority project.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what agreement has been reached on the allocation of capacity on the west coast main line. [39012]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority is in the course of a review, with Railtrack and the rail operators, of future capacity utilisation on the west coast main line. As and when specific proposals for capacity allocation arise, these will be subject to the approval of the Rail Regulator.

Housing Associations

21. **Margaret Moran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what measures he intends to take to monitor and cap salaries of registered social landlord chief executives. [36664]

Ms Keeble: Registered social landlords—better known as housing associations—are independent organisations. It is for them to decide the salaries of their senior staff, including chief executives. However, the Housing Corporation requires all housing associations to demonstrate good governance and to act in a way that maintains the sector's good reputation.

Regional Assemblies

22. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if, in referendums to establish a regional assembly, he will make it his policy to require a majority of the votes cast in each county, metropolitan or unitary council area constituting the region to be cast in favour of establishing such an assembly before approving its establishment. [36665]

Dr. Whitehead: The forthcoming Regional Governance White Paper will set out our proposals for the referendums that must be held before a region can have an elected assembly.

26. **Mr. Peter Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether regional assemblies will levy a precept on council tax. [36670]

Dr. Whitehead: The forthcoming Regional Governance White Paper will set out our proposals for the funding of elected regional assemblies.

Community Transport Services

23. **Judy Mallaber:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will introduce regulations to extend fuel duty rebate to community transport services. [36666]

Ms Keeble: We expect to introduce regulations shortly which will commence from 1 May this year that will provide a new entitlement to fuel duty rebate for a wide range of community transport services.

Transport (North-West)

24. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what research his Department has undertaken to ascertain the transport needs of the north-west for the decade from 2001. [36667]

Mr. Spellar: The north-west Regional Assembly in consultation with the Government Office and other regional stakeholders have developed the draft Regional Transport Strategy which is part of the Regional Planning Guidance (RPG). The draft RPG was published by the north-west Regional Assembly in August 2001 and I am currently considering the report of the panel. I hope to make my announcement shortly and there will then be a twelve-week consultation period before the final RPG is published by the Secretary of State later this year.

Housing

27. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the amount of empty private sector housing in particular local authorities. [36671]

Ms Keeble: The amount of empty private sector housing in some areas is a cause for concern. We are tackling this problem in high demand areas by encouraging local authorities to adopt empty property reduction strategies. In low demand areas—including parts of east Lancashire—we are considering proposals for housing market renewal schemes. We cannot give commitments about resources ahead of the conclusions of the current spending review.

Councillors (Allowances)

28. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proposals he has to review allowances for councillors; and if he will make a statement. [36672]

Dr. Whitehead: Basic and special responsibility allowances are discretionary allowances, with levels set by individual local authorities, having regard to the recommendations of their independent remuneration panels. Allowance levels will be considered as part of our forthcoming research into the operation of new council constitutions.

We are currently considering changes to the regime of travel and subsistence allowances for councillors. We propose that these allowances should also be discretionary and set locally. We consulted on these proposals in October of last year.

Local Government (Voting Methods)

29. **Siobhain McDonagh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to introduce new methods of voting in local government. [36673]

Dr. Whitehead: As announced to the House on 5 and 13 February, we have given approval to 31 local authorities to run electoral modernisation of the pilot authorities to run electoral modernisation pilot schemes in the May 2002 local and mayoral elections. In addition to using traditional voting methods and all-postal voting, over half of the pilot authorities will explore innovative ways in which people can vote electronically. This programme will test new and easier arrangements while at the same time maintaining the integrity and security of the ballot. It will mark an important step towards making the electoral system easier to use and more relevant to today's society.

Council Houses

30. **Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to increase the number of council houses being built *(a)* for and *(b)* by local authorities. [36674]

Ms Keeble: Support for new affordable housing is mainly available to Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) via the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme. We are increasing this programme to over £1.2 billion by 2003–04, almost double the amount in 2000–01. Local authorities can also fund provision through their housing capital programme although we expect this to be done through RSLs owing to their greater ability to draw on private sources of funding. £2.6 billion has been provided to support housing investment by authorities in 2001–02, which is three times the amount made available in 1997–98.

Deprivation

31. **Vernon Coaker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent assessment he has made of Government policies to tackle small areas of deprivation. [36675]

Ms Keeble: Our National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal was built on an unprecedented exercise in joint working within and outside Government. 18 Policy Action Teams considered the whole range of policy problems affecting our most deprived neighbourhoods. Since the launch of the National Strategy in 2001 a research and evaluation strategy has been developed, which will look at all our neighbourhood renewal programmes and initiatives to identify what works, and why.

Local Government White Paper

32. **Mr. Rammell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the proposal for reform of capital financing for local government contained in the local government White Paper. [36676]

Dr. Whitehead: We propose to allow local authorities to borrow without our consent, provided that the debt is affordable. Affordability will be assessed in accordance with a code being drawn up by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. We shall introduce legislation as soon as Parliamentary time allows.

Regional Planning

33. **Mr. Wiggin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans his Department has to increase the role of regional planning. [36677]

Ms Keeble: The Green Paper "Planning: delivering a fundamental change" sets out proposals for increasing the effectiveness of regional planning. The new statutory Regional Spatial Strategy will provide the longer term planning framework required for the preparation of the proposed Local Development Frameworks, Local Transport Plans, and other relevant strategies and programmes.

Eurostar

34. **Mr. Tom Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the provision of direct Eurostar services between Scotland and continental Europe. [36678]

Mr. Jamieson: It is for Eurostar to decide whether to run Regional Eurostar services from Scotland. The British Railways Board and an independent report for Government from Arthur D. Little have concluded that it is highly unlikely that Regional Eurostar services will be commercially viable at least until CTRL Section 2 opens in 2007.

Train Travel (South-East)

35. **Mr. Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the demand for train travel in the south-east over the next 10 years. [36679]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government's 10-year plan assumptions about demand for train travel are set out in "Transport 2010: The Background Analysis".

Antisocial Behaviour

36. **Mr. Russell Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what measures he is taking to tackle antisocial behaviour among tenants in the private rented sector. [36680]

Ms Keeble: The Government are committed to tackling antisocial behaviour across all housing tenures. We are striving to promote a healthier private-rented sector and to do this we recognise the importance of tackling the problem of tenants who behave in an antisocial manner.

Much work has already been done across Government to try and tackle the problem. My own Department, for example, is currently considering responses to our recent consultation paper on the selective licensing of private landlords. This will ensure that in areas where local authorities adopt such a scheme all landlords meet minimum management standards and participate with others in dealing with antisocial tenants. We envisage that these powers will be available alongside the mandatory licensing of houses in multiple occupation, which although it is primarily concerned with targeting properties that are the highest risk to tenants, will also require that the licensee is a fit and proper person.

Road Safety

37. **Jean Corston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what measures he is taking to improve roadside safety outside schools. [36681]

Mr. Jamieson: There is a wide range of measures available to local authorities to improve safety outside schools. As well as urban safety measures, such as 20 mph zones, they can, for example, designate no waiting areas outside school entrances and provide school crossing patrols. In many areas school travel plans consider safety within the wider context of journeys to and from school.

Housing Authorities

38. **Dr. Iddon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many housing authorities have been designated consistently as band I authorities since this designation was introduced. [36682]

Ms Keeble: Since performance bandings in the Housing Investment Programme were first published in 1995 only one local authority—Derby, has maintained a top performance assessment throughout.

Planning Green Paper

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations from environmental groups he has received concerning the planning Green Paper. [36655]

Ms Keeble: A number of environmental groups have written to their Members of Parliament who have passed on the correspondence to Ministers. In addition we have had more than 3,000 consultation responses of which about 2,000 are from environmental groups or their members. The consultation period on the Green Paper ends on 18 March.

Departmental Overseas Visits

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many overseas visits have been undertaken by Parliamentary Private Secretaries in his Department at departmental expense in each of the last four years; and at what cost to public funds. [36819]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* Parliamentary Private Secretaries supporting Ministers in this Department or in the former Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions have not travelled overseas on Government business in the last four years.

Airline Group

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the Government expect to receive the £35 million from the Airline Group for deferred sale proceeds. [37057]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* The information on the date for payment of the deferred proceeds is commercially confidential.

Local Authority Houses

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the investment by English local authorities in new build of homes for rent in the past year; and if he will also list, per housing authority, by *(a)* joint venture and *(b)* other resources. [36618]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* Available information reported by local authorities about their capital investment during 2000–01 in the provision of new homes, including support for registered social landlords, has been placed in the Libraries of the House. Information collected by the Department on local authorities' funding of housing capital expenditure does not separately identify joint venture resources. The available information on funding for each local authority in England was provided in my answer of 27 February 2002 [Ref: 36621] to my hon. Friend.

Trunk Roads

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which roads have been de-trunked in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement on de-trunking. [37230]

Mr. Jamieson: A New Deal for Trunk Roads in England published in July 1998 set out the Government's conclusions on its strategic review of the trunk road programme. These included a proposal to de-trunk roads not on the core network so that their management and improvement can be fully integrated with land use planning and the new local transport plans for delivering integrated transport.

Some 1,900 miles of non-core trunk roads (about 30 per cent.) are in the process of being transferred to local authorities. The roads for which resource have been transferred to local authorities by means of the Special Grants Report and de-trunked as part of this programme are shown in the table.

Road	*From*	*To*	*Date of de-trunking*
A638	Junction with A1(M)	Doncaster	1 April 2001
A650	Westgate Hill Street	A62 (Drigh Bypass)	1 April 2001
A10	Junction with A505	Kings Lynn	1 May 2001
A134	Kings Lynn	Thetford	1 May 2001
A12	Ipswich	Lowestoft	1 June 2001
A140	Needham Market	Norwich	1 June 2001
A361	A361 Southam Road/A422 Hennef Way Roundabout in Banbury Junction with B4100	Castle Street/Warwick Road	15 June 2001
A423	Ryton-on-Dunsmore Roundabout	A361 Southam Road /A422 Hennef Way Roundabout in Banbury	15 June 2001
A15	(a) M180 (b) Roundabout on north of Humber Bridge	(a) Humber Bridge (b) Junction with Ferriby High Road	1 July 2001 1 July 2001
A6	Luton	Bedford	31 August 2001
A6	Junction with A45	Junction with A14/A6003 Burton Latimer	31 August 2001
A43	M1 Junction 15A	Junction with A16 Stamford	31 August 2001
A428	Junction with A421 East of Bedford	Northampton	31 August 2001
B1525 (formerly part of A16)	Junction with A15/A16. West of Market Deeping	Junction with A16, North of Deeping Common	1 September 2001
A557	M62 Junction 7	Runcorn—Widnes Bridge	1 December 2001
A58	Leeds	Halifax	28 January 2002

This excludes trunk roads that were transferred to Transport for London and also any de-trunking that has been implemented as part of improvement schemes.

Non-governmental Organisations

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list non-governmental organisations operating in the south-west region that receive public funds from his Department; and what amount of annual funding they received in the most recent year for which figures are available. [39179]

Dr. Whitehead: The information is not available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Air Traffic Control

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in relation to the New En Route Centre at Swanwick *(a)* what was the final commissioned cost, *(b)* how many extra air traffic control officers are employed and *(c)* what will be the estimated increased capacity at the new centre in each of the next five years; and by what means this will be achieved. [39761]

Mr. Jamieson: The final commissioned cost of the New En Route Centre at Swanwick was £623 million. Approximately 80 extra air traffic controllers are employed there. Capacity increases at the new centre are planned to match peak demand over each of the next five years. This would be achieved by applying traditional air traffic control workload splitting (sectorisation) and traffic flow simplification (systemisation) improvements.

Transport Funding

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) for what purpose the funding budgeted but not used in the 2000–01 financial year for transport has been used subsequently; [39431]

(2) what his latest estimate is of the final figure for underspend in the 2001–02 transport budgets. [39430]

Dr. Whitehead: Amounts carried forward into 2001–02 under end year flexibility arrangements were published in the Public Expenditure 2000–01 Provisional Outturn White Paper (Cm 5243). Amounts taken up, and the programmes for which they were taken up, were announced in written answers preceding supplementary estimates on 22 June 2001, *Official Report*, columns 12–13W; 28 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 948–52W and 13 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 398–401W.

Estimated outturn for 2001–02 in respect of transport budgets will be published in my Department's annual report after the end of this financial year.

Shoreham Port Authority

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what criteria members of the Shoreham Port Authority are appointed by him. [39237]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Six appointments made by the Secretary of State to the Shoreham Port Authority are made after consultation with various stakeholder groups. These are: the Chamber of Shipping, Brighton and Hove council, Adur district council, the Shoreham Private Wharfingers and such persons appearing to the Secretary of State to be representative of organised labour as the Secretary of State thinks appropriate.

Three appointments are made directly by the Secretary of State following public advertisement of these posts. The criteria for these posts will vary at the time of each vacancy depending on what skills, knowledge and experience are required on the board at that time.

Housing Market Renewal Fund

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the proposed housing market renewal fund. [39038]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Low demand for housing is adding to the decline of many of our inner cities and towns, particularly in the north. It blights communities, and the lives of those who live in the areas affected. We are determined to tackle this, and the Government have made a commitment to turn around the incidence of low demand by 2010.

A number of northern local authorities and housing associations have submitted a proposal to Government for a strategic housing market renewal fund to tackle areas of the country most adversely affected by low demand. We are considering the housing market renewal fund proposal in the context of the current spending review. We can make no commitments in advance of its conclusions.

Volunteers

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many members of his staff in each of the past two years have been granted a day's paid leave to work as a volunteer; and if he will make a statement. [39736]

Dr. Whitehead: This information is not recorded centrally. The Department supports volunteering and allows staff both paid and unpaid time off for a range of voluntary public service.

Fair Trade

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether fair trade products are sold in his Department. [39834]

Dr. Whitehead: I would refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir) on 13 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 396W. The Department supports the sale of fair trade products; some of them are on sale in staff canteens.

Asbestos

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what scientific evidence has been received in respect of white asbestos and the proposed control of asbestos at work regulations. [38869]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Research by Professor Peto and Health and Safety Executive epidemiologists, published in *The Lancet* on 4 March 1995 confirmed that building and maintenance workers are the largest group at risk of exposure to asbestos. At least a quarter of the 3,000 people now dying from asbestos related diseases have at some time worked in these trades. The Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations are therefore being tightened to ensure workers know where asbestos is in premises and can take appropriate precautions. A copy of the research paper is available in the Libraries of the House.

Departmental Policies (Cities of London and Westminster)

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will set out, including statistical information relating as directly as possible to the constituency, the effect on Cities of London and Westminster constituency of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [40187]

Dr. Whitehead: The information requested can be obtained only at disproportionate cost, as such statistics are normally collected on the basis of administrative units (such as local authorities) rather than parliamentary constituencies.

Business Rates (Greater London)

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much revenue was raised from the business rate in the Greater London area during *(a)* the last 12 months and *(b)* each year since 1992. [40182]

Dr. Whitehead: The table gives the revenue raised from business rates in Greater London for 1991–92 to 2000–01, and estimated revenue from business rates for 2001–02 and 2002–03. This information is based on returns provided by London boroughs and the City to the Department.

£ billion

	Net business rate yield
1991–92	3,211
1992–93	3,272
1993–94	3,149
1994–95	2,845
1995–96	2,802
1996–97	3,191
1997–98	3,090
1998–99	2,793
1999–2000	2,810
2000–01	3,117
2001–02	3,552
2002–03	3,804

Revenue from business rates between 1991–92 and 2000–01 is based on local authorities' outturn net yield figures shown on the national non-domestic rates return (NNDR3). Figures for 2001–02 and 2002–03 are based on the local authorities' net rate yield figure shown on the national non-domestic rates return (NNDR3). The net rate yield is the amount of business rates local authorities expect to collect.

Council Tax

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what

assessment he has made of the impact of increasing the number of council tax band rates; and if he will make a statement. [40183]

Dr. Whitehead: In the White Paper, "Strong Local Leadership—Quality Public Services" (CM5237), we said that we would legislate to require properties to be revalued for council tax purposes every 10 years, that work on the first revaluation would commence in 2005 and that it would be completed in time for the council tax bills issued in 2007. We said that we would listen to the views of taxpayers and local government about council tax bands and related matters.

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the change in levels of band D council tax since 1997. [40184]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, gave to the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) on 9 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 849W.

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the average band D council tax level in *(a)* Greater London and *(b)* the City of Westminster for each year since 1992. [40178]

Dr. Whitehead: Council tax was introduced in England in April 1993. The table shows the average band D council tax for the Greater London area, and the City of Westminster's own and area band D council tax for each financial year from 1993–94 to 2001–02. Council tax figures for 2002–03 are not yet available.

£

	Greater London	*City of Westminster*	
	Average band D council tax[1]	*Own band D council tax*	*Area band D council tax*[1]
1993–94	558	131	295
1994–95	534	73	245
1995–96	576	189	275
1996–97	616	206	295
1997–98	651	203	304
1998–99	687	212	325
1999–2000	731	230	350
2000–01	778	235	375
2001–02	841	259	410

[1] The area council tax includes amounts collected for the Metropolitan Police and London Fire and Civil Defence Authority (1993–94 to 1999–2000), and the Greater London Authority (from 2000–01), as well as amounts collected for individual boroughs.

Housing (Supporting People Grant)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the funding streams that are being consolidated into the supporting people grant. [40213]

Ms Keeble: Supporting People will consolidate the following Funding Streams:

SHMG (Supported Housing Management Grant from the Housing Corporation). This is a revenue grant which is paid to RSLs (registered social landlords) to fund the cost of support services. Only RSLs can receive this grant as the Housing Corporation only funds RSLs. It is a block grant, which is paid quarterly in advance.

THBS (Transitional Housing Benefit System) this is an individual welfare benefit. It is paid as part of an individuals Housing Benefit entitlement to cover the cost of housing support. It was introduced in April 2000 as a means of identifying the amount of Housing Benefit paid for support, prior to transfer to the Supporting People pot. Providers must separate out the cost of support services that was previously just charged as part of the rent. From April 2003 support costs will be ineligible for housing benefit and transitional housing benefit will be transferred to the Supporting People pot.

PAGS (Probation Accommodation Grants) this is a grant paid by the probation service for housing service for offenders. Each local probation service has a number of contracts with providers. The contract value will transfer to the pot. Until recently, part of the PAGs funding came from local authorities, this is no longer the case.

HIA (Home Improvement Agencies) funding this is paid by the DTLR to local authorities to fund the cost of home improvement agency services. It has to be match funded by the authority. Continuing the local authority match funding for the life of the existing funding period will be a condition of the Supporting People grant paid to the authority by DTLR.

Income support—this welfare benefit is paid to owner occupiers. It is used to fund housing support services in the leasehold sheltered sector. This will not be a big element of the pot but we are not sure yet of the precise size. We are working with DWP and the Benefits Agency on how to identify the recipients and costs.

Funding from sources other than those listed above will not transfer to the Supporting People pot. We expect that there will continue to be a range of funding sources for housing related support. Authorities will be expected to establish all funding paid for services to ensure that they understand the full picture.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what additional funds his Department has provided to local authorities and other agencies to fund the one-off transition costs to the supporting people framework. [40214]

Ms Keeble: The Government have allocated £40 million to local authorities to fund the implementation of the Supporting People programme in 2002–03. This is in addition to the £15.2 million allocated to local authorities in 2001–02. In addition, £3.5 million has been made available for provider organisations to help prepare for implementation.

Local Government Finance

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the total cost to local authorities of implementing Best Value in *(a)* monetary terms and *(b)* terms of officer hours. [40229]

Dr. Whitehead: No reliable estimates exist as to the costs incurred by local authorities in complying with their duty under the Local Government Act 1999, either in monetary or officer hour terms. Any such costs have to be set against the benefits of improved services. My Department has commissioned research from Cardiff Business School to consider both the costs and benefits of best value; their interim report is expected in April.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) when he expects to provide updated guidelines to local authorities on future applications for e-Government support funding; and if he will make a statement; [40469]

(2) when he expects to provide local authorities with the definitive strategy and detailed guidelines for implementation of the e-Government agenda; and if he will make a statement; [40468]

(3) what forward funding there will be for the next five years for local authorities implementing the Government's e-Government agenda; and if he will make a statement; [40466]

(4) what requirements there will be on local authorities to provide match funding for e-Government implementation; and if he will make a statement. [40467]

Dr. Whitehead: The Government have committed £350 over three years from 2001–02 to support local authorities making their services e-enabled. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government on 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 25W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) on the funding that has been provided to date. We will announce detailed plans for the remainder of this funding with the publication of the draft National Strategy for consultation shortly.

There are no match funding requirements for the allocation of e-government money as such. However, we have always made clear that funding from Government to local authorities would only be a contribution to the overall costs.

Mr. Lammy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much public money has been provided for the London borough of Haringey since 1997. [36970]

Dr. Whitehead: London borough of Haringey have reported the following public funding.

Revenue and capital grants paid to Haringey

£000

	Outturn				*Budget*
	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Central Government funding					
Revenue support grant	137,723	146,158	146,206	148,064	157,404
Redistributed non-domestic rates	46,577	49,195	54,223	61,509	60,645
SSA reduction grant	0	0	601	0	0
Specific grants inside AEF[1]	14,079	22,126	35,856	61,243	64,970
Revenue grants paid into GFRA[2]	184,300	195,353	200,429	209,573	218,049
Capital grants[3]	7,939	11,097	10,843	7,296	9,685
Public funding	192,239	206,450	211,272	216,869	227,734

[1] Aggregate External Finance (AEF) is central Government support towards total standard spending. It comprises RSG, NNDR, and certain specific, supplementary and special grants. Specific grants inside AEF, reported asylum seekers grant increasing from £3.8 million in 1997–98 to £34.6 million in 2000–01. Haringey budgeted for £40 million asylum seekers grant in 2001–02.

[2] This includes all revenue grants paid into the General Fund Revenue Account (GFRA), but may exclude certain public funding, for example from some non-departmental public bodies, which is recorded as income and is not separately identifiable.

[3] Consists of central Government, non-departmental public bodies and National Lottery.

Sources:

1. Revenue Summary and GFRA Budget Estimates return.
2. Capital Outturn returns and Capital estimate return.

Statutory Plans

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the statutory plans that each local authority is required to produce. [40207]

Dr. Whitehead: The recent Local Government White Paper announced, as part of our commitment to decrease unnecessary bureaucracy, that we will reduce the number of plans local authorities are required to produce by one half. The research report published on 18 February 2002—"Review of Local Authority Statutory and Non-Statutory Service and Policy Planning Requirements"—will provide a vital steer in taking this forward.

Of the 66 plans reviewed within the report, 31 are statutory. The titles of these plans, and details of the Department/agency with responsibility for them, are as listed. Further details of the nature and purpose of each plan are set down within the research report.

DTLR

Best Value Performance Plan

Community Strategy

Homelessness Strategy (forthcoming duty under Homelessness Act, 2002)

Development Plans: Local Plan

Development Plans: Minerals Local Plan (in non UDP areas)

Development Plans: Structure Plan

Development Plans: Unitary Development Plan

Development Plans: Waste local Plan (in non UDP areas)

Local Transport Plan

DEFRA

Local Air Quality Action Plan

Home Energy Conservation Report

Rights of Way Improvement Plan

Strategy to Identify Contaminated Land

Waste Recycling Plan

DH

Community Care Plan

Health Improvement and Modernisation Plan

Quality Protects Management Action Plan

Training/Human Resources Plan

HSE

Off Site Emergency Plan

Pipeline Safety Emergency Plan

HO

Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy

Youth Justice Plan

CO

Civil Defence Plan

DCMS

Annual Library Plan

Accessibility Strategy

DfES

Behaviour Support Plan

Class Sizes Plan

Early Years Development and Childcare Plan

Education Development Plan

Office for Standards in Education and Teaching (Ofsted) Action Plan

School Organisation Plan.

Green Belt Land

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in what circumstances his Department does not call in planning consents granted by local authorities for green belt land. [40206]

Ms Keeble: The Secretary of State's general approach is not to interfere with the jurisdiction of local planning authorities unless it is necessary to do so. Parliament has entrusted them with responsibility for day-to-day planning control in their areas. Local planning authorities are normally best placed to make decisions relating to their areas and it is right that, in general, they should be free to carry out their duties responsibly, with the minimum of interference.

There will be occasions, however, when the Secretary of State may consider it necessary to call in a planning application to determine himself instead of leaving it to the local planning authority. His policy is to be very selective about calling in planning applications. He will, in general, only take this step if planning issues of more than local importance are involved and if those issues need to be decided by the Secretary of State rather than at a local level. Each case is, however, considered on its own facts.

MOT Test

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what information he has about the number of cars which failed an MOT test in 2000–01. [40209]

Mr. Jamieson: The Vehicle Inspectorate collects returns from all 19,000 MOT testing stations on a monthly basis which contain details of the vehicles tested, failures and passes. A 2 per cent. sample of the returns is used as the basis for calculating an annual fail rate. In 2000–01 22,775,000 cars, vans and passenger vehicles with up to 12 seats were tested, with a fail rate of 31.7 per cent. More information about failure rates and defect categories can be found in the Vehicle Inspectorate Effectiveness Report 2000–01, a copy of which has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

The introduction of the computerised MOT database from January 2003 will provide the Inspectorate with the facility to improve the reporting of pass and fail rates.

Bus Lanes

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when his Department will consult on CCTV enforcement of bus lanes; and if he will make a statement. [40305]

Ms Keeble: Work is in progress on preparing the regulations. Our target is to make the regulations this autumn.

Rough Sleepers

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how those conducting the count, for the latest rough sleeping head count conducted by the RSU, chose the areas of the various cities in which their counts would take place; and if he will publish the guidance issued as to how the count areas were to be chosen. [40053]

Mr. Byers: Rough sleeping head counts are conducted by local authorities and voluntary sector agencies and the results are submitted to the DTLR.

The method used to conduct counts, including deciding which areas should be covered is clearly set out in our guidance, which was first published in 1996. This states that a working group of key local agencies should be formed and that this working group in consultation with other local agencies should:

> "Agree on the boundaries of the area and identify segments of the area where people sleeping rough are likely to be found."

This is the guidance that was used for the latest rough sleeping head count.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how it was determined whether someone on the streets during the latest rough sleeping headcount conducted by the Rough Sleepers Unit was a rough sleeper; and if he will publish the guidelines issued to those conducting the count, relating to whom should be included in the count. [40052]

Mr. Byers: Rough sleeping headcounts are conducted by local authorities and voluntary sector agencies and the results are submitted to the DTLR.

The definition of people who should be included in rough sleeper counts is clearly set out in Government guidance, which was first published in 1996. It is:

> "people sleeping, or bedded down, in the open air (such as on the streets, or in doorways, parks or bus shelters); people in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations or 'bashes')".

This is the guidance that is still used today.

Concessionary Travel

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 551W, on concessionary travel schemes, if it is his intention to publish the results of the Department's survey of concessionary travel in England before the Easter recess. [39974]

Ms Keeble: The results of this survey are scheduled for publication on 28 March 2002.

Pensions

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what assessment he has made of the cost of extending Local Government Pension Scheme benefits to the partners of its members; [40288]

(2) what recent representations he has received regarding the extension of Local Government Pension Scheme benefits to the partners of its members; and if he will make a statement. [40289]

Dr. Whitehead: I am considering a proposal from the local authorities employers' organisation and the trade unions to extend the benefits payable under the Local Government Pension Scheme to surviving spouses to include unmarried partners. Representations from scheme members have also been received supporting changes to the scheme. A full assessment of the proposal is being made in the light of the costs identified by the scheme's actuaries and advice provided by the Government Actuary's Department. A response will be sent to the employers' organisation and the trade unions shortly.

Coalfields Regeneration Trust

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the work of the Coalfields Regeneration Trust with particular reference to *(a)* the Cynon Valley and *(b)* Wales. [40538]

Ms Keeble: This is a devolved matter and should be addressed to the National Assembly for Wales.

Congestion Charging (London)

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what powers there are under European legislation for an environmental assessment to be conducted into the effects on London of congestion charging. [39847]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* The proposed London congestion charging scheme does not fall within the scope of Directive 85/337/EEC (as amended by Directive 97/11/EC) on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment.

Park and Ride

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many park and ride sites in England have been supported with Government funding in the last five years; how many of these sites are operating; what the average level is of Government financial support per park and ride scheme supported by Government; and how many such schemes have opened and subsequently been discontinued in England in the last five years. [40000]

Ms Keeble: The information requested is not held centrally and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Funding for new park and ride schemes and extensions to existing schemes in England is provided through the annual Local Transport capital settlement and we announced on 13 December 2001 that the 2002–03 settlement provided for a range of small scale transport schemes including up to 50 new or extended park and ride sites. Transport authorities in England reported in Annual Progress Reports on their Local Transport Plans in August 2001 that capital funding had been used or is expected to support 24 new or extended park and ride sites in 2000–01 and 32 such schemes in 2001–02.

A12

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans his Department has to introduce measures to reduce traffic noise on the A12 by Margaretting, Chelmsford; and if he will make a statement. [38359]

Mr. Jamieson: In my answer of 9 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 327W, I said that the precise timing of measures to reduce traffic noise on the A12 between Margaretting and Boreham would be determined in the light of criteria which had then to be announced.

Those criteria were announced in October 2001. They are:

> That wherever possible the application of quieter surfaces will fit in with normal maintenance needs;
>
> That priority will be given to those sites where treatment would benefit the greatest number of people;
>
> That the works will be carried out in such a way as to minimise disruption to the general public and users of the network;
>
> That priority will be given to roads, opened since June 1988, where actual noise levels have turned out to be significantly higher than predicted at the time of the Public Inquiry.

In the light of these criteria, the Highways Agency has identified in its programme of future works a major maintenance scheme on the A12 Margaretting Bypass which will include the provision of a quieter surface. Although the Agency has not yet determined a start date for the scheme they currently expect that work will start within the next three to five years.

Affordable Homes

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many new affordable homes were provided in the south-east in 2001, broken down by *(a)* housing associations, including rent and shared ownership, *(b)* housing benefit subsidy of privately rented homes, *(c)* right-to-buy resales, *(d)* local authorities and *(e)* sale below market value by private housebuilders; and what was the total number provided. [39560]

Ms Keeble: The available estimates are as given in the table.

New provision of affordable homes in the south-east region 2001

	Number
Registered social landlords[1]	7,302
Right-to-buy re-purchases by local authorities[2]	26
Local authority new build for rent	52

[1] RSLs' (formerly referred to as housing associations) data represents new homes for rental, outright or shared ownership (including "off the shelf" purchases of properties built by private developers), and existing property acquisitions for refurbishment (including temporary social housing provision). Completions are recorded when the final tranche payment for the scheme is made.

[2] Local authority acquisitions of ex-council properties under "Buyback" scheme arrangements.

Source:

Housing Corporation returns

DTLR P1B (quarterly) and P2 (monthly) housing activity returns

Information about the number of affordable housing units built without any form of public funding, eg by private housebuilders, is not collected centrally.

The number of private sector householders in the south-east, excluding those renting from RSLs, in receipt of rent allowance as at August 2001 was estimated at 90,000.

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the Housing Corporation allocation was for shared ownership in each year since 1997. [39562]

Ms Keeble: The funding for shared ownership through the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme in each year since 1997–98 to the end of January 2002 was as follows.

Shared ownership funding

	£ million
1997–98	87.95
1998–99	86.59
1999–2000	51.49
2000–01	70.63
2001–02	[1]41.85

[1] 10 months

Funding fell in 1999–2000 because *(a)* the do-it-yourself shared ownership scheme (DIYSO) was replaced by the Homebuy scheme on 1 April 1999 (local authorities may still fund DIYSO through Local Authority Social Housing Grant); and *(b)* the Approved Development Programme was no longer subject to a national target for the percentage of expenditure allocated to schemes which help people into low cost home ownership: this allows schemes to be selected on the basis of local needs.

These figures exclude the Government's £250 million Starter Home Initiative which will provide 10,000 homes for key workers over the period 2001–04, mostly through equity loan and shared ownership schemes.

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will introduce a definition of affordable housing related solely to rental and shared ownership houses provided by housing associations and local authorities. [39561]

Ms Keeble: There are no formal definitions of affordable housing within housing policy and we have no plans to introduce a definition confined to rental and shared ownership homes. We will continue to keep the situation under review.

For the purposes of securing affordable housing through the planning system affordable housing encompasses low-cost market and subsidised housing whether for rent or shared ownership. Local authorities are expected to define in their local plans what they consider to be affordable in the plan area, in terms of the relationship between local income levels and house prices or rents for different types of households.

We are looking at how the planning system can deliver more affordable housing, including through the proposals for reforming planning obligations that we announced in December.

Public Bodies

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people from Warrington, North he has appointed to non-departmental public bodies since 1997. [39450]

Ms Keeble: As far as we have been able to ascertain, no people who live in Warrington, North have been appointed to DTLR's non-departmental public bodies since 1 May 1997.

River Safety

Mr. Pond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will report on progress in implementing the recommendations of Lord Justice Clarke's inquiry into river safety. [36669]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer of 18 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 230W. Further updates will be placed in the libraries at about six-monthly intervals and so the next one will be available sometime in the late spring.

Chiltern Line

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what timeframe has been agreed for the investment programme in the Chiltern Line; and what the timeframe was in the original heads of agreement. [39011]

Mr. Jamieson: The investment programme in the new Chiltern Railways Franchise Agreement will be staged for implementation throughout the duration of the franchise—as was the case when Heads of Terms were signed.

Rail Strategic Plan

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 795W, ref 36451, for what reason this work was not carried out prior to the finalising of the 10-year plan and the SRA Strategic Plan. [39158]

Mr. Jamieson: The contribution of assumed fare levels to the projected increase in rail demand is outlined in Annex A of the Ten-Year Plan Background Analysis. General elasticities in relation to fares are provided in paragraph 3 of this annex.

Rail Passengers

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how many passengers, on average, board trains each day at each station on the *(a)* LTS Rail Line and *(b)* First Great Eastern Rail Line; [38421]

(2) how many passengers, on average, board trains each day at *(a)* Sudbury, *(b)* Felixstowe, *(c)* Harwich Town, *(d)* Walton on Naze, *(e)* Clacton, *(f)* Southminster, *(g)* Shoeburyness and *(h)* Braintree. [38422]

Mr. Jamieson: I understand this information is available from the appropriate train operating companies.

Rail Industry

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will place in the Library the memorandum submitted to him on the future of the rail industry by Sir Alistair Morton in June 2001. [40203]

Mr. Jamieson: The information requested falls under exemption 2 Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Information.

Rail Investment

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the total public and private investment, not including public resource expenditure, allocated *(a)* in total and *(b)* for the railways to be spent over the period 2001 to 2011, at (i) today's prices and (ii) outturn prices as at (A) the launch of the 10 year plan in July 2000, (B) 1 April 2001, (C) 2 April 2001, (D) 13 January 2002, (E) 14 January 2002, (F) 22 January 2002, (G) 23 January 2002, (H) 29 January 2002, (I) 7 February 2002 and (J) the present date. [40307]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to Table A3 of the 10-Year Plan and a revised version of this table that was placed in the House Library on 25 February. These tables provide a breakdown of projected public and private investment from the original 10-Year Plan and reflect the £4.5 billion increase in public sector funding for rail since then.

No similar detailed breakdowns were undertaken at the particular dates mentioned. The investment profiles can be translated into today's prices by applying standard HM Treasury inflation assumptions.

Railway Industry

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when *(a)* he and *(b)* Ministers in his Department last met officials of the RMT Union to discuss industrial relations in the railway industry. [37194]

Mr. Jamieson: Ministers are in regular contact with the Rail, Maritime and Transport union on a number of transport-related issues.

HEALTH

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the time taken to reply to written questions tabled for answer by his Department. [41128]

Mr. Milburn: Concerted action has been taken in the Department to reduce the number of outstanding parliamentary questions. The Department is now receiving questions at the rate of around 45 a day, almost double the rate of the last session. Last week the Department responded to over 500 questions. There are currently 411 outstanding questions due for reply before 14 February 2002. I aim to have provided right hon. and hon. Members with answers to those outstanding questions by 12 March 2002.

Several Members have raised concerns about unanswered questions and the length of time it has taken for questions to be answered. Last week in the course of dealing with these inquiries evidence came to light of what appears to be systematic falsification in recording the handling of parliamentary questions in the Department's parliamentary section. This included recording questions as having been answered when no such reply had been given to the Member or to the *Official Report*. Some of these questions date back to the beginning of this session.

The falsification that took place meant that both officials and Ministers were wrongly led to believe that Members had received replies to their questions when they had not. A full investigation is now under way to ensure that all the facts are known and that the necessary remedial action is taken. An official from the Department's parliamentary section has been suspended and is now the subject of a disciplinary investigation. The decision to suspend the official was taken by the line manager of the individual concerned in accordance with standard departmental disciplinary procedures.

Ministers and officials within the Department are fully committed to supporting the system of accountability to Parliament which underpins our democracy. We aim to provide timely and accurate responses to parliamentary questions. There has been a serious failure in honouring that commitment which I deeply regret. All possible steps will now be taken to deal with the backlog of outstanding parliamentary questions. As soon as I am able I will also report to Parliament on the outcome of the investigation that is now under way.

Asbestos

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what grounds the Health and Safety Executive is proposing to tighten regulations governing the presence of white asbestos in buildings. [39286]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

Research by Professor Peto and Health and Safety Executive epidemiologists, published in *The Lancet* on 4 March 1995 confirmed that building and maintenance workers are the largest group at risk of exposure to asbestos. At least a quarter of the 3,000 people now dying from asbestos related diseases have at some time worked in these trades. The Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations are therefore being tightened to ensure workers know where asbestos is in premises and can take appropriate precautions. A copy of the research paper is available in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to publish the evidence that white asbestos is dangerous to human health. [39287]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

The evidence that white asbestos represents a risk to human health has been published. The evidence has been recently reviewed by a WHO task force and published in the International Programme on Chemical Safety's Environmental Health Criteria (EHC) Series. A recent review of the studies providing the basis for quantification that confirmed the risk from chrysotile is: "The Quantitative risks of mesothelioma and lung cancer in relation to asbestos exposure" by Hodgson and Darnton. Copies are available in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the cost to local authorities of the proposed new Health and Safety Executive regulations on asbestos. [39289]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

The Health and Safety Executive cannot precisely separate costs to local authorities. Total costs in Government offices, public buildings and state schools are estimated at £440 million over a 50-year period, including costs arising from the provisions implementing the Chemical Agents Directive. The average yearly cost over the first five years the proposals would be in force in these buildings is £47 million. A large proportion of this cost would fall to local authorities.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the likely cost to business of the proposed new Health and Safety Executive regulations on asbestos. [39291]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

Details of the costs of the proposals were given in the Consultation Document published by the Health and Safety Commission, and have since been revised. The total cost to businesses, charities and voluntary organisations of the proposals are currently estimated at £4.2 billion over a 50-year period. This includes a relatively small number of Government buildings open to the public, and also includes the estimated costs of complying with the provisions in the regulations arising from the Chemical Agents Directive. This cost is equivalent to £2.9 billion once costs are discounted to present values following Government costing conventions. The average yearly cost over the first six years the proposals would be in force is £460 million.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if white asbestos, or chrysotile, is chemically distinguishable from talcum powder. [39292]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* I have been asked to reply

White asbestos is chemically similar to talc, but it is the fibrous nature of asbestos, not its chemical composition, that makes it a risk to human health. Talc is not fibrous.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what threat to human health is posed by chrysotile, or white asbestos. [39293]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

White asbestos is classified by the International Agency for Research on Cancer, on behalf of the World Health Organisation, as a category 1 carcinogen hazardous by inhalation. The most recent and comprehensive study carried out on the relative risks of asbestos "The Quantitative Risks of Mesothelioma and Lung Cancer in Relation to Asbestos Exposure" suggests there is a real risk of cancer from white asbestos (1 in 5,000) at levels of exposure realistically experienced by maintenance workers. The quantification of risk at these levels of exposure is however highly uncertain. The same paper implies the arguable range of risk runs from a quarter to seven times the central estimate.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he plans to pay compensation to workers who can prove exposure to white asbestos. [39298]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has no plans to pay compensation to workers who can prove exposure to white asbestos.

Asthma

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many local education authorities in England are implementing an asthma policy. [36875]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I have been asked to reply.

The Department does not collect this data. While there is no legal requirement for local education authorities and schools to have specific medical support policies, the Department promotes the drawing up of school policies in its good practice guide "Supporting Pupils with Medical Needs" (produced jointly with the Department of Health), which includes a section on asthma.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

DPP

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many and in what proportion of cases in the last year where police have issued charges the DPP decided to discontinue prosecution. [39665]

The Solicitor-General: I have been asked to reply.

In the period between 1 January 2001 and 31 December 2001 the Department of the Director of Public Prosecutions received files in respect of 1,832 persons who had already been charged by police at the point of submission of the file. Current information indicates that no prosecution was directed of 200 such persons (10.92 per cent.).

RUC Sergeant A

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what reasons have been given by the DPP for NI for not prosecuting RUC Sergeant A for the killing of Pearce Jordan in 1992. [34126]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

No reasons, other than in general terms, have been given to date. Inquest proceedings in relation to the death of Pearce Jordan are currently live. Once the proceedings have been completed, the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland will give further consideration to whether any prosecution should follow. Following the decision of the ECHR in the case of Jordan *v.* UK the Director has reviewed his policy on the giving of reasons. I would refer my hon. Friend to a written reply the Attorney-General gave on 1 March 2002, *Official Report, House of Lords*, column WA 259 which I reproduce here:

> "The Government are considering a package of measures which, taken together, should meet the concerns expressed by the European Court of Human Rights in its judgments in a series of cases from Northern Ireland, including that of *Jordan v The United Kingdom.*
>
> In furtherance of that objective, I have had a number of discussions with the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland (the Director) regarding the giving of reasons when a decision is reached not to initiate or continue a prosecution. We have agreed that the following statement should issue.
>
> "The policy of the Director in the matter of providing reasons for decisions not to initiate or continue prosecutions, is to refrain from giving reasons other than in the most general terms. The Director recognises that the propriety of applying the general practice must be examined and reviewed in every case where a request for the provision of detailed reasons is made. This policy is based on a series of public interest considerations. It also reflects the duties owed by the Director to a range of parties as a public authority under section 6 of the Human Rights Act 1998. The lawfulness of the policy was upheld by the Northern Ireland Court of Appeal in *Re Adams Application for Judicial Review* (2001) NI 1.
>
> The Director, in consultation with the Attorney General, has reviewed his policy in the light of the judgments delivered by the European Court of Human Rights on the 4 May 2001 in a number of Northern Ireland cases, including the case of *Jordan v The United Kingdom*. Having done so, the Director recognises that there may be cases in the future, which he would expect to be exceptional in nature, where an expectation will arise that a reasonable explanation will be given for not prosecuting where death is, or may have been, occasioned by the conduct of agents of the State. Subject to compelling grounds for not giving reasons, including his duties under the Human Rights Act 1998, the Director accepts that in such cases it will be in the public interest to reassure a concerned public, including the families of victims, that the rule of law has been respected by the provision of a reasonable explanation. The Director will reach his decision as to the provision of reasons, and their extent, having weighed the applicability of public interest considerations material to the particular facts and circumstances of each individual case."

Marriage Value Taper

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what her policy is on setting a marriage value taper in respect of the provisions of the Commonhold and Leasehold Bill. [40175]

Ms Keeble: I have been asked to reply.

It is our view that the current valuation basis provides its own taper. The price payable for enfranchisement increases progressively as leases get shorter. We do not accept there is a case for a further arbitrary apportionment of the marriage value which would effectively reduce the price payable by leaseholders.

Pre-trial Publicity

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he will publish a consultation paper on proposals to amend the law in relation to payments to witnesses and pre-trial publicity. [40869]

Mr. Wills: The Lord Chancellor today issued a consultation paper seeking views on the detail of the legislation the Government intend to introduce to outlaw payments to witnesses. The legislation proposed is that it should be a criminal offence to make, or agree to make, or to receive, a payment to a witness or potential witness in criminal proceedings for his or her story with a view to publication.

Also, following the abandonment of the first trial of R *v.* Woodgate and others the Government intend to amend s.19 of the Prosecution of Offences Act 1985 to empower the court to order a third party to pay costs incurred as a result of his or her unnecessary or improper act. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Information Commissioners

Brian Cotter: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if his Department will place a notice on its website warning businesses about fraudulent organisations that claim to have statutory powers to maintain the register of data controllers as part of the Information Commissioner's public information campaign. [39763]

Mr. Wills: Details of the Information Commissioner's public information campaign were given in my reply to the hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Mr. Wood) of 5 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 906–07W. The Commissioner's website at www.dataprotection.gov.uk provides further information. In the interests of assisting the Commissioner's campaign, I am happy to provide a link to her website from the Lord Chancellor's Department website at www.lcd.gov.uk. The necessary arrangements are being put in hand.

Volunteers

Bob Russell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many members of her staff in each of the past two years have been granted a day's paid leave to work as a volunteer; and if she will make a statement. [39742]

Ms Rosie Winterton: All staff in the Lord Chancellor's Department are entitled to one day's paid leave to work as a volunteer.

Also, provided the nature of any service undertaken is compatible with the work of the employee concerned, the Department provides higher allocations of special leave with pay, within specified limits, for a wide range of voluntary public service, such as acting as a school governor, sitting on a health boards, parish council work etc.

Although we do not keep a central register of staff who participate in voluntary work, we are aware that a large number of staff have taken advantage of these arrangements.

Director of Public Prosecutions

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the annual budget of the DPP is in Northern Ireland; and what his estimate of the additional sum required to finance proposals contained in the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill is. [39663]

Mr. Browne: I have been asked to reply.

In the current financial year (2001–02)—the budget of the DPP in Northern Ireland is £12,023,000 and the additional sum required to finance proposals contained in the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill is £1,267,000.

Resident Magistrates

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many resident magistrates serve in Northern Ireland; what the average number of sitting days is at which each magistrate presides; what mileage cost allowance is available for travel expenses for resident magistrates; and what was the cost of travel expenses paid over the last convenient 12 month period to resident magistrates. [38294]

Ms Rosie Winterton: There are 19 resident magistrates in Northern Ireland. In 2001, the average number of sitting days for each resident magistrate was 191. Resident magistrates are paid mileage allowances in accordance with the rates that are applicable in the Northern Ireland Court Service. The rates paid are determined by the engine capacity of cars. There are four bands that range from 28p per mile for the smallest engine capacity to 53p per mile for the largest. After 4,000 miles are claimed, the rates reduce to a range from 17p per mile to 36p per mile. Subsistence allowances are also payable in accordance with the rates that are applicable in the Northern Ireland Court Service—£4.25 per day for more than five hours and £9.30 per day for more than 10 hours. Travel expenses (including subsistence) paid to resident magistrates in 2001 totalled £88,918.34.

Legal Aid

Harry Cohen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many family applications have been made for legal aid for representation at an inquest since 1997; and how many have been granted. [38818]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Public funding is not generally available for representation at inquests. However, under section 6(8)(b) of the Access to Justice Act 1999, the Lord Chancellor has the power to authorise the Legal Services Commission to grant funding for representation at inquests in exceptional cases.

Since April 2000, 182 applications for exceptional funding for representation at inquests have been received and 90 granted. The vast majority of those granted were for representation for family members, although there may be a very few cases where non-family members have been granted funding.

Before April 2000, the Lord Chancellor exercised a discretionary power under Part 2 of the Legal Aid Act 1988 to grant funding for representation at a very small number of inquests.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Correspondence

Mr. Evans: To ask the President of the Council what the average response time was for responding to departmental correspondence; what percentage of letters took longer than one month for a response; and what percentage took longer than three months for a response in each of the last five years. [37451]

Mr. Robin Cook: The service standard deadline[1] in my department for replying to correspondence from hon. Members is 15 working days.

Information for the period 1999 and 2000 could not be provided in the form requested. However, set against this deadline, the information is as follows:[2]

	1999	*2000*
Number of letters received	151	271
Percentage of replies within target	81	94

The average response time for 2001 was 11 days. Of the total number of correspondence received, 3 per cent. took longer than one month and 0 per cent. longer than three months.

Data for 1997 and 1998 could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

---

[1] Information on the performance of other Government Departments is currently available on the Cabinet Office website http://www.servicefirst.gov.uk/2000/introduc/six.htm.

[2] Written reply from the Minister for the Cabinet Office, 6 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 325W.

TREASURY

Pesticides

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what assessment he has made of the success of the voluntary approach to the regulation of pesticides against the criteria set by his Department; [38565]

(2) which organisations he is consulting in the course of his review of the self-regulation arrangements for pesticides; [38563]

(3) if he has received the progress reports from the independent steering group on the voluntary pesticides partnership approach; and if he will publish those reports; [38564]

(4) if it is his policy that his assessment of the success of the voluntary approach to pesticides control should take account of the costs of clearing up pollution currently borne by water companies. [38566]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* The independent steering group overseeing the voluntary package of measures to minimise the environmental impact of pesticides is made up of signatories to the package, an equivalent number of environmental organisations and an independent chairperson. The steering group reports to DEFRA. Publication of its reports is a matter for DEFRA.

Reports from the independent steering group will help the Government's assessment of the success of the package. The assessment of whether the package is delivering environmental benefits over and beyond those that would result from a pesticides tax will consider the uptake of the measures in the package, their coverage, effectiveness and cost. It will therefore take account of the impact of the measures on pollution that has to be cleaned up by water companies.

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Page: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment is taking place to evaluate the effect of the climate change levy; and if he will place the relevant documentation in the Library. [40702]

Mr. Boateng: The climate change levy is designed to promote greater energy efficiency. Part of the levy revenue is being recycled to provide enhanced advice on energy efficiency to business and to provide support for energy efficiency investments. As the levy package has only been operational since April 2001, it is too early for an assessment to be made of its impact.

Pensioners

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what advice has been tendered by his Department to British contributors *(a)* already resident abroad and *(b)* about to take up residence abroad as to the continuing payment of Class 3 contributions in order to qualify for retirement pension. [40690]

Ruth Kelly: Customers should contact Inland Revenue National Insurance Contributions Office International Services on their helpline (telephone number 0191 225 4811) or visit the Inland Revenue website for information. Leaflet NI 38 "Social Security Abroad" sets out the conditions for the payment of voluntary contributions and includes an application form, CF83. There are separate information leaflets covering the EU Social Security Regulations and separate leaflets (one for each country) covering those countries with which the UK have entered into a bilateral social security agreement. International Services can give advice on the appropriate leaflet depending on the country.

Progressive Beer Duty

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about giving brewers producing up to 200,000 hl a reduction in their standard duty rate in respect of progressive beer duty. [39357]

Mr. Boateng: Treasury Ministers and Customs and Excise have received numerous representations from the brewing industry, trade bodies and members of the public in relation to the introduction of progressive beer duty.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what considerations will inform his decision regarding volume criteria when introducing a system of progressive beer duty; and if he will make a statement. [39355]

Mr. Boateng: The Government have announced that they are minded to introduce a reduced rate of duty on the beer produced by small breweries. The Chancellor will take into consideration a wide range of factors when making a decision, including representations from the industry. A decision will be announced in Budget 2002.

Smuggling

Brian Cotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what HM Customs and Excise procedure is with regard to the policy of seizing private vehicles at UK ports for offences relating to the smuggling of tobacco and alcohol; and what the levels are of fees that must be paid. [39767]

Mr. Boateng: When vehicles are detected being used for smuggling tobacco and alcohol, they are currently seized and are not usually restored. Where vehicles are restored, it is for a sum equal to the revenue the smuggler has attempted to evade.

Seminars

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 25 February 2002, (ref 37050), how many seminars were conducted; what the title and date of each seminar was and which firms sponsored each one; and if he will make a statement. [39501]

Ruth Kelly: Three seminars were held following publication of the guidance "Selling Government Services into Wider Markets". The titles, dates and companies which were involved in the organisation of each event are given in the table.

Title	*Date*	*Supporting Company*
Selling Services into Wider Markets	26 October 1998	Ernst and Young
Joint Ventures Workshop	20 November 1998	PricewaterhouseCoopers
Creating Knowledge: Creating Wealth	14 April 1999	Arthur Andersen

Excise Duties (Tobacco and Alcohol)

Brian Cotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Government have formally responded to the formal request for information received from the European Commission relating to excise duties on tobacco and alcohol; and if he will place a copy of this response in the Library. [39809]

Mr. Boateng: The Government replied to the formal request for information from the European Commission relating to excise duties on tobacco and alcohol on 18 December 2001.

Due to the confidentiality of the response it is not possible to place a copy of the Government response in the Library. Documents relating to infraction proceedings, of which the letter of formal notice is the first stage, remain confidential unless and until the proceedings reach the European Court of Justice. This is covered by the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information (Part II, Section 1 (c)) which exempts from disclosure

> "information received in confidence from foreign Governments, foreign courts or international organisations".

Conscience Money

Ian Lucas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much conscience money was received by the Exchequer in each financial year since 1979. [39969]

Mr. Andrew Smith: No central records are kept of conscience money payments to Government Departments. Since 1979 the annual amounts received by the Treasury itself have never exceeded £3,000, and the largest single payment has been £2,500 (in 1979).

Spending Reviews

Pete Wishart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the comparability percentages for each Government Department, used in each spending review from 1979. [38766]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Details of comparability factors were published for the first time by the Treasury in the first Statement of Funding Policy in March 1999. This was updated in July 2000 reflecting the 2000 spending review. Information on the changing composition of the blocks since 1978 was published in the report of the Treasury Committee on the Barnett formula published in December 1997.

Devolved Administrations

Pete Wishart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the mathematical formula he uses to decide net change in spending for devolved Administrations. [38767]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The formula was published by the Treasury in the Statement of Funding Policy in July 2000.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish comparability percentages used when deciding the net change to all three devolved Administrations for *(a)* each Government Department and *(b)* each of the last spending reviews. [38765]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The departmental comparability factors for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland used in the 2000 spending review were published in the Statement of Funding Policy in July 2000, and in the March 1999 Statement of Funding Policy for the 1998 spending review.

Volunteers

Bob Russell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many members of his staff in each of the past two years have been granted a day's paid leave to work as a volunteer; and if he will make a statement. [39732]

Ruth Kelly: Central records are not kept in the form requested. The Treasury allows staff to take up to 10 days paid special leave in any 12 month period, for public service such as membership of a committee of a local education or health authority or service as a school governor. In addition all staff are allowed one day's special (i.e. extra) leave to undertake voluntary work in a private capacity. Special leave may also be granted in other circumstances.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Union Duties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many staff in his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies receive paid leave to undertake union duties; how many days they are allocated; and what has been the cost to public funds in each of the last four years. [36201]

Mr. Bradshaw: All FCO staff are entitled to paid leave to undertake union duties. About 50 members of staff are members of union or branch committees. Information on the number of days taken is not held centrally and could be supplied only at disproportionate cost. In the British Council the total cost for union activities is approximately £23,000 per year in each of the last four years.

Pakistan

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what *(a)* explanation he has requested and *(b)* assessment he has made of Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh being held in custody for a week by Pakistan Security Services (ISI) before the civilian authorities were notified of his arrest; and if he will make a statement. [38993]

Mr. Bradshaw: The British High Commission in Islamabad and the Deputy High Commission in Karachi asked for information on the detention of Mr. Sheikh on 13 February, but did not specifically ask about the delay in notifying the civil authorities. We are investigating the case further. If Mr. Sheikh is a dual UK/Pakistani national, Pakistani authorities are not obliged to give us consular access or information.

Krishna Maharaj

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response has been received to the request to Florida State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle that she not proceed to another death sentence for Mr. Krishna Maharaj. [39860]

Mr. Bradshaw: We have made clear to the Florida state authorities our opposition to the death penalty and have asked on various occasions that they do not proceed to another death sentence for Mr. Krishna Maharaj. The Florida authorities have to date responded that, given the circumstances of the murder, they are obliged to seek the death sentence. We will continue to do all we properly can on Mr. Maharaj's behalf.

Volunteers

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many members of his staff in each of the past two years have been granted a day's paid leave to work as a volunteer; and if he will make a statement. [39730]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office supports the Prime Minister's initiative on volunteering and staff are entitled to take at least one day's special paid leave every year to engage in voluntary or community activities.

FCO staff are periodically reminded of this entitlement through, for example, staff newsletters. The granting of specific days is at line managers' discretion, and no central records are kept.

Nepal

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of links between the Nepalese Maoist insurgents, and other non-Maoist terrorist organisations outside that country. [40059]

Mr. Bradshaw: We have no credible evidence of links between the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) and non-Maoist terrorist organisations outside of Nepal. This is an issue which we watch very closely, particularly since the events of 11 September 2001.

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support the British Government have given to the Nepalese peace process since July 2001. [39928]

Mr. Bradshaw: Our Ambassador in Kathmandu was in regular contact with the Nepalese Prime Minister and other senior figures during the period when the Nepalese Government and the Maoists in Nepal were engaged in peace talks. Unfortunately the peace talks were ended abruptly in November 2001 by the Maoists who returned to violence to further their aims. Our Ambassador remains in close contact with the Nepalese Government. I made it clear to the Nepalese Prime Minister and others during my recent visit to Kathmandu that the UK stands ready to help in the peace process if asked to do so.

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the visits to Nepal made by his Department's Ministers, by date, since 1 January 1999; and what plans Ministers have to make further visits. [39930]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House visited Nepal on 20–21 April 2000 as Foreign Secretary. I visited Nepal from 19–20 February 2002. There are currently no further plans for Ministers from this Department to visit Nepal. However, we will keep under review, in conjunction with the other two Government Departments with particular interest in Nepal, the MOD and DFID. In this context my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for International Development and for Defence visited Nepal in November 1998 and December 2001 respectively.

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Government of Nepal regarding the recent unrest and Maoist violence in that country. [39929]

Mr. Bradshaw: During my visit to Nepal on 19 and 20 February I held discussions with the King of Nepal, the Nepalese Prime Minister and the Nepalese Assistant Foreign Minister. In all of these meetings I discussed the current security situation in Nepal and condemned the recent barbaric attacks by the Maoists on the Nepalese security forces, politicians and general public.

Afghanistan

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his assessment is of the interim Afghan administration's ability to apprehend drug traffickers. [40397]

Mr. MacShane: The Interim Administration, with support from the International Community, is developing its law enforcement capabilities. We are working with the Interim Administration to ensure the development of a significantly enhanced capacity to apprehend drug traffickers and other criminals.

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what targets have been set for the reduction of opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan; and if these targets have been met. [40394]

Mr. MacShane: It is our long-term aim to have effective and sustainable drugs law enforcement in Afghanistan. An important element of the international community's approach will be measures designed to break the dependence on poppy cultivation of many within Afghanistan. In order for these measures to be effective the Interim Administration will need to set appropriate targets.

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress there has been towards creating alternative sources of credit for poor Afghan farmers who rely on drug traffickers as their main source of credit. [40396]

Mr. MacShane: International assistance to Afghanistan has in the first phase focused on humanitarian relief. In the reconstruction and developmental phase the international community, including the UK, will consider structural issues such as the provision of legitimate rural credits.

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what acreage of the opium poppy crop has been destroyed as part of the Bonn conference agreement. [40401]

Mr. MacShane: The Bonn conference agreement was a political agreement intended to lead to a stable government in Afghanistan after a transitional period. In the agreement the international community and regional organisations were urged to co-operate with the Interim Administration to combat international terrorism, cultivation and trafficking of illicit drugs and provide Afghan farmers with financial, material and technical resources for alternative crop production. The Interim Administration has already introduced a ban on drugs production, processing and trafficking but it is too early to assess the impact on areas already under poppy cultivation.

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his assessment is of the role of regional leaders, who operate outside the control of the Afghan Interim Administration, in the Afghan opium poppy production and drug trafficking. [40385]

Mr. MacShane: There was no effective governance in Afghanistan for many years. As a consequence authority was traditionally exercised primarily at the regional level. As a result of the Bonn Process, on 22 December 2001, the Afghan Interim Administration took office as the country's first national Government for many years. In order to establish sustainable drugs law enforcement throughout Afghanistan it will be important for regional leaders to co-operate constructively with national counter-narcotics institutions established by the Afghan Interim Administration.

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his assessment is of the number of drug traffickers apprehended by the interim Afghan administration. [40398]

Mr. MacShane: The Interim Administration has been in place for just over two months. With support from the International Community it is developing its law enforcement capabilities. Over time, the Interim Administration is expected to develop a significantly enhanced capacity to apprehend drug traffickers and other criminals.

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Afghan poppy farmers have participated in crop substitution projects since the fall of the Taliban. [40395]

Mr. MacShane: In the short period since the Taliban fell, the international community has co-ordinated a comprehensive programme of humanitarian and development assistance for Afghanistan, within which an anti-narcotics strategy will be an integral part. The provision of alternative livelihoods for Afghan farmers currently dependent on poppy cultivation to sustain themselves and their families will be an important element of the international community's long-term programme of assistance for Afghanistan. We are working closely with the relevant UN agencies to ensure that this assistance is effective and sustainable.

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the *(a)* EU and *(b)* UN since the demise of the Taliban on the destruction of (i) heroin stockpiles and (ii) the current opium poppy crop. [40393]

Mr. MacShane: Tackling drugs in Afghanistan is an area of key concern to the international community, including the UK. We are consulting closely with partners in the EU and UN on how to address this issue.

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his assessment is of the level of heroin stockpiles in Afghanistan. [40392]

Mr. MacShane: There is evidence that stockpiles exist. There are no reliable figures as to their exact size.

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support the international community is providing to the authorities in Herat in their efforts to disrupt the drugs trade. [40399]

Mr. MacShane: Herat Province accounts for a very small proportion of Afghan opium cultivation (0.05 per cent. in 2000). The International Community is committed to supporting the Interim Administration's drug control efforts in all parts of Afghanistan. This includes the creation of alternative legal livelihood, the reconstruction of infrastructure, the creation of effective law enforcement institutions and the promotion of good governance.

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what crop substitution incentives the international community has in place to encourage Afghan farmers to destroy their current poppy crop. [40400]

Mr. MacShane: Sustainable drug control in Afghanistan can only be achieved by using a variety of different measures including the creation of alternative legal livelihoods (including crop substitution), the reconstruction of infrastructure, effective law enforcement and good governance. Reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan are addressing these issues and the Interim Administration, supported by the international community, is working to achieve effective drug control.

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his assessment is of the progress towards the destruction of heroin stockpiles in Afghanistan. [40390]

Mr. MacShane: The Afghan Interim Administration is developing its law enforcement capacity to act, inter alia, against the illegal drugs trade. The Interim Administration has already declared a ban on drugs production, processing and trafficking which we have publicly welcomed. The international community, including the UK, is exploring how best to help the Afghans implement this ban and carry out effective and sustainable law enforcement including against the stockpiling of drugs.

Montagnard Refugees

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what discussions he has had with his European counterparts regarding the persecution of Christians, with particular reference to the Montagnard refugees, in the Mondolkiri province of Cambodia; [39872]

(2) if he will make a statement regarding the treatment of repatriated Montagnard refugees in Vietnam; and what estimate he has made of the numbers of refugees involved; [39873]

(3) what action Her Majesty's Government are taking to press the Cambodian and Vietnamese Governments to *(a)* improve the treatment of the Montagnard refugees in their refugee camp in Mondolkiri province, Cambodia and *(b)* ensure that these refugees are allowed to freely choose whether to return to Vietnam. [39874]

Mr. Bradshaw: We have been monitoring the plight of the Vietnamese refugees in Cambodia for several months. Our embassies in Hanoi and Phnom Penh have been in regular contact with the Vietnamese and Cambodian

Governments, the local UNHCR representatives, and resident EU partners about this issue. The issue has also been discussed at official level in Brussels. When the Deputy Prime Minister visited Vietnam in December he urged the Secretary General of the Vietnamese Communist Party to co-operate with the UNHCR to ensure that the Vietnamese refugees could return without fear of retribution.

We are deeply concerned at recent reports that the Vietnamese and Cambodian Governments have failed to abide by the agreement they reached on 21 January with the UNHCR for the voluntary return of the refugees under UNHCR supervision. We are currently consulting with the UNHCR, EU partners and other sympathetic Governments on what action we should take to best safeguard the welfare of these refugees. 15 refugees were repatriated to Vietnam on 19 February, and we believe that there are around 1,070 refugees still remaining in two camps in Cambodia.

British Prisoners (Guantanamo Bay)

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it is his policy to ensure that British prisoners being held at Camp X-Ray be brought to face trial in the United Kingdom; and what representations to the US Administration he has made on the repatriation of British prisoners being held there. [39513]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* We are in close touch with US Government about the British detainees in Guantanamo Bay and the legal processes to which they might be subject.

Any prosecution of the detainees in the UK would be a matter for the Crown Prosecution Service.

Mr. Bailey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment has been made of the *(a)* living and *(b)* physical conditions of the British detainees in Camp X-Ray, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. [40697]

Mr. Bradshaw: I refer my hon. Friend to my statement in the House on 21 January and to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) on 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 69–70W.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what steps are being taken to ensure compliance by Zimbabwe with the terms of the Lancaster House agreement in relation to payment of pensions accrued during public service prior to independence and owed to British citizens; [40484]

(2) what steps are being taken to ensure continued payment by the Zimbabwean authorities of pensions owed to British citizens resident in the UK. [40483]

Mr. MacShane: The British High Commission in Harare regularly reminds the Zimbabwean authorities of their obligations to pensioners under the terms of the Lancaster House agreement.

The 1979 Lancaster House agreement stipulated that the Zimbabwe Constitution should contain provisions entitling public servants to state pensions, and that pension benefits should continue to be paid to former public employees no longer resident in Zimbabwe. The agreement did not contain any undertaking by the British Government to assume responsibility for the payment of pensions to those eligible, should the Zimbabwean authorities fail to maintain payments.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Government Building Procurement

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what incentives for excellence in design she is proposing for Government building procurement. [40357]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I have been asked to reply.

The Office of Government Commerce is supporting the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Construction Industry Council to develop a set of key performance indicators for design which can be applied across government building procurement.

The annual Prime Minister's Award for Better Public Building rewards excellence in Government building and construction procurement, including design excellence. The first award was made last year.

Procurement decisions must be based on value for money. Value for money is the optimum combination of whole-life cost and quality to meet the user's requirement. Attention to design excellence is a critical element of this.

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what incentives for sustainability she is proposing for Government building procurement. [40356]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I have been asked to reply.

In June 2000, Government launched the Achieving Sustainability in Construction Procurement Action Plan setting targets for the implementation of a wide range of practices in government construction procurement.

Market Research

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what expenditure has been incurred by her *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years on (i) opinion polling, (ii) focus groups and (iii) other forms of market research; and if she will list the surveys commissioned and the purpose of each. [27952]

Mr. Morley: The Department has only been in existence since June 2001, so does not have such historical information. Producing figures for the current year to the level of detail required would involve disproportionate cost.

Secondments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many staff in her Department have been seconded to jobs in the *(a)* private and *(b)* public sector in each of the last four years. [31767]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 7 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1129–30W.

GM Maize

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what further information has been obtained from the European Commission following the suspension of the public hearings on Aventis T25 genetically modified maize; what evidence and clarification has been obtained from the French competent authorities; if she will *(a)* make this information publicly available and *(b)* place it in the Library; and when the hearings will be reconvened. [34938]

Mr. Meacher: The European Commission has not responded substantively to letters from DEFRA Ministers and officials on the French maize variety testing system. However, the Commission has proposed amendments to Directive 72/180/EEC determining the minimum characteristics and conditions for examining the distinctness, uniformity and stability (DUS) of maize and some other species. These amendments, which bring the Directive into line with current best scientific practice, came into force on 14 February 2002 for implementation in member states no later than 31 March 2002.

The French testing authorities carried out a further year of official tests on the genetically modified maize variety Chardon LL in 2001 and provided a test report to the UK authorities in November 2001 based on the required two years of official DUS tests. The French authorities have confirmed that the tests were conducted according to the new Directive requirements. A copy of the French DUS report on Chardon LL will be placed in the Library.

Ministers have agreed in principle that if all of the legal and technical requirements have been met, the Chardon hearing may resume in spring 2002. The parties to the hearing will be informed when a decision has been taken.

Recycling (Refrigerators and Freezers)

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many applications there have been for recycling plants for refrigerators and freezers in the west midlands region; and when she expects them to be operational. [35457]

Mr. Meacher: There have been no applications submitted for waste management licences for the treatment of refrigerators in the west midlands region. However Aqua Force Special Waste are considering a plant at Wolverhampton.

Fishing Industry

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with her counterparts in *(a)* EU countries and *(b)* Norway to protect the future of low-impact fishing methods throughout the fishing nations. [35263]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 244W.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment she has made of the requirements of the Sea Fisheries Committee in relation to *(a)* their regulatory framework and *(b)* their management budget and regime. [35262]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answers given to him on 21 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 268W and 5 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 399W, and to the hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) on 25 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1162W.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with her counterparts in EU member states on the impact of *(a)* minimum mesh sizes and *(b)* minimum landing sizes on hake stocks in (i) area VII and (ii) area VIII. [35259]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* Following discussions in which the UK and other EU member states working in ICES Area VII or VIII took part the Commission issued an emergency Regulation on 14 June 2001. This Regulation which expires at the end of February has the effect of increasing the towed gear mesh size from 70mm to 100mm in Area VIII and from 80mm to 100mm in Area VII. Minimum landing size for hake was not changed.

Following discussions with the member states last month the life of these rules is to be extended. It will be some time before their long term benefits can be assessed.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with her counterparts in *(a)* the EU member states and *(b)* Norway to secure a long term cod recovery programme. [35260]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* As a result of very difficult negotiations between the European Commission, member states and Norway an agreement was reached in June 2001 about stage two of the North sea cod recovery programme. This agreement deals with improved technical conservation measures and came into operation in the North sea on 1 January 2002. Currently, the Council of Ministers is discussing a new proposal from the Commission for a multi-annual recovery programme for cod and hake stocks.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress she has made in securing a plan for the long-term sustainability of the North sea cod industry beyond spring 2003. [35261]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* At the Fisheries Council in December 2001 the Commission presented a proposal for a Council Regulation establishing measures for the recovery of fish stocks threatened with collapse. This provides for a multi-annual recovery plan for cod and hake stocks. Discussions are continuing.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) whether the Government's fishing decommissioning scheme will be funded through budgets solely within the gift of her Department; [36636]

(2) whether the moneys allocated through the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Objective 1 Programme to support her Department's commitment to a £6 million decommissioning scheme will be restored. [36638]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 653W.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many appeals have been *(a)* heard and *(b)* upheld against (i) livestock culls and (ii) contiguous culls since 20 February 2001. [37795]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* We are aware of 131 cases where animal owners challenged decisions to slaughter livestock, of which 105 were appealing against contiguous culls. Of the 131 cases, 29 were upheld, 28 of which were appeals against contiguous culls. We are currently seeking data from DEFRA's offices so that a definitive list of all appeals against livestock culls can be compiled.

Four of the 131 appeals were heard in court, of which three were against contiguous culls. Two of the four were upheld; one was an appeal against a dangerous contact cull and the other was against a contiguous cull. The successful appeal against a contiguous cull subsequently became an infected premise.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether a request was made to Northumberland county council on behalf of her Department to close the road to the Hemscott Hill site during *(a)* the burning of carcases on that site and *(b)* the removal of ash from the site. [39792]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* Yes, a request was made by the Department to Northumberland county council to close a section of road at Hemscott Hill during *(a)* the burning of carcases and *(b)* the removal of ash from Hemscott Hill burning site.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the criteria for a confirmation of foot and mouth disease; and whether the criteria for identifying an infected premises have changed since the last case in the UK. [39510]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* During last year's outbreak, diagnosis of foot and mouth disease (FMD) was normally confirmed by the National Disease Control Centre on the basis of clinical observations of a veterinary inspector on the spot. Some cases were confirmed on the basis of laboratory tests which confirmed the presence of FMD antibodies or virus. It is nearly five months since the last outbreak of foot and mouth and confirmation of any future case would need to be based on laboratory tests that confirm the presence of the virus.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the monitoring procedure to assess foot and mouth status in farm animals; and if she will make a statement. [38862]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* I am satisfied that we have effective arrangements for monitoring the presence of foot and mouth disease (FMD) in the national flock and herd. These are as follows:

(i) Any person who suspects that an animal in his possession or care may be affected by FMD is legally obliged to notify my Department.

(ii) Ante and post mortem inspections are conducted on livestock at slaughterhouses by official veterinary surgeons working on behalf of the Meat Hygiene Service.

(iii) Our extensive programme of serological testing of sheep flocks was an important part of the process of satisfying the Office International des Epizooties and the Standing Veterinary Committee of the EU the Great Britain is free of FMD. Nearly three million blood samples, from over 32,183 farms, have been tested. This includes samples taken from sentinel animals prior to the re-stocking of premises on which livestock have been slaughtered during the outbreak and from animals prior to movement under licence.

(iv) Official veterinary surgeons and local authority inspectors are present at markets and carry out farm visits as part of their routine duties.

(v) As part of the controlled restocking process, animals are examined regularly during a four week period of 'sentinel' restocking. In addition, sheep and goats on restocking premises are subject to blood testing after 28 days before restrictions are removed.

Although it is now over five months since the last outbreak, the FMD investigation at a farm near Hawnby, North Yorkshire last week, underlines the importance of maintaining our guard, and shows that the system of monitoring for FMD during controlled restocking is vitally important. Farmers and vets should remain vigilant and all those who have contact with livestock must maintain the highest standards of bio-security.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much has been paid in compensation to councils in the UK in respect of damage to roads and infrastructure during the foot and mouth disease outbreak; and if she will estimate the sums still to be agreed and paid. [37383]

Mr. Morley: No compensation has been paid in respect of damage to roads and infrastructure. The Department is considering claims or approaches from a small number of councils. I have no estimate of the total sum involved.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the most recent assessment was of the contribution of wild brown rats to the spread of foot and mouth; and what the outcome was. [39489]

Mr. Morley: Rats are not susceptible to foot and mouth disease but are theoretically capable of spreading the disease mechanically. For this reason an intensive programme of rodent control is carried out on infected premises. We have no record of any case of FMD being attributable to rats.

Common Agricultural Policy

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the *(a)* timetable and *(b)* practical requirements of delivering CAP payments to British farmers in euros. [36962]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* The Government are committed to providing farmers with the option of receiving grant and subsidy payments in euro at the earliest practical opportunity.

To operate a manual system, even to cope with modest demand, would be inefficient. IT systems are therefore being developed in the Rural Payments Agency and in the devolved Administrations to deliver such a service. The work has to be dovetailed with other developments and is therefore not expected to be complete before 2004.

Once a system for direct payments in euro is in place, it is likely that farmers would be asked to commit three months in advance and to sign up for a minimum of a year.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs at which European Council meeting the decision was taken to replace the ECU as the common currency for the Common Agricultural Policy with the euro; which UK Ministers attended; what reasons underlay the decision; and what assessment she has made of the financial consequences of the EU payment to UK agriculture. [37643]

Mr. Morley: On 9 June 1997 the UK Parliament lifted its long-standing scrutiny reserve on the regulations under article 235 (now article 308) of the treaty providing the legal basis for the introduction and use of the euro. This allowed the text to be adopted formally by the Council in Luxembourg on 17 June. My right hon. Friends the Deputy Prime Minister and the Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh (Dr. Strang) represented the UK. These provisions applied to all transactions involving the ECU, including those relating to the Common Agricultural Policy. The introduction of the euro was in accordance with the procedure and timetable set out in the treaty. It is not possible to assess the financial consequences to UK agriculture of the replacement of the ECU with the euro, because we cannot tell how the currencies from which the value of the ECU was calculated would have fluctuated had the euro not been introduced.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how much of the CAP underspend related to arable farming in each of the last five years for which figures are available; [39284]

(2) how much of the CAP underspend has been given back to the UK in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if she will make a statement; [39285]

(3) what representations she has made to the EU about the CAP underspend; and if she will make a statement. [39283]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Expenditure on the Common Agricultural Policy is made in accordance with the EU regulations. Actual CAP expenditure may be higher or lower than forecast at the beginning of each budgetary year, due to the market situation, exchange rate fluctuations, or exceptional items. Surplus from one year's EC Budget is returned to member states in the following year's Budget by means of a reduction of the amount to be financed from own resources. This has the effect of reducing the amount each member state is required to pay from GNP-based resource. Moneys returned in this way are not broken down by category and information is not therefore available for specific items of expenditure. So we have made no representations on this matter.

Civil Servants

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many new entrants to the civil service were employed in her Department in each of the last five years; and how many in each year were aged 50 and over. [36487]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley, the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Leslie) on 25 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 880W.

Milk

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with other EU countries concerning monopolies with respect to milk marketing; and if she will make a statement. [39264]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had no discussions with other member states about monopolies with respect to milk marketing.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has made to the European Commission on the proposed milk quota allocation for applicant EU member states; and what assessment she has made of the impact on the UK dairy industry of the quota allocations proposed under the EU formula for new member states. [37922]

Mr. Morley: The UK favours the abolition of milk quotas in advance of enlargement. If, however, this does not prove to be possible we believe the approach taken in the European Commission's paper on milk quota allocation for acceding countries to be a sound one. It follows previous practice, when quotas were first introduced in 1984, and in other EU enlargement processes, whereby quota is fixed on the basis of historical production during a set reference period, in this case the average for the years 1997–99. As such, there should be no impact on the UK dairy sector. We have made it clear to the Commission that we are looking for an outcome which is both fair and does not create new obstacles for CAP reform.

Lessons Learned Inquiry

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what transport was arranged for DEFRA official Mr. Tim Render to return home after the public hearing in Okehampton on 23 January of the Lessons Learned inquiry. [38208]

Mr. Morley: Mr. Tim Render (Director, Food, Farming and Rural Development in the Government Office, South West) accompanied the Lessons Learned inquiry for part of its visit to the South West. Mr. Render made his own travel arrangements but, after the public meeting in Okehampton, asked for a lift on the inquiry mini-bus to Gloucestershire, in preparation for the continuation of the visit the following day, which was granted.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what transport was arranged for the chairman of the Lessons Learned inquiry to return home after its public hearing in Okehampton on 23 January. [38209]

Mr. Morley: I understand the Inquiry Secretariat hired a mini-bus for Dr. Anderson's visit to the South West. He left the public meeting at Okehampton by this mini-bus to continue his visit in Gloucestershire the following day.

Dolphins

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many dolphins have been drowned through being caught in fishing nets in each of the last three years in the EU; and if she will make a statement. [38073]

Mr. Morley: Information on the full extent of dolphin casualties caused by fishing is not available.

Sample surveys of the incidental capture of cetaceans have demonstrated that there is a significant bycatch problem in the bass fishery off South West England which is why we are urgently conducting trials of mitigation measures to reduce bycatch in this fishery.

In my recent letter to Commissioner Fischler on the bycatch problem and the need for EU action, I also pressed the Commission to institute an observer programme across the EU to broaden the information available on bycatch.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what plans she has to press for the compulsory introduction of new fishing nets with an escape hatch for dolphins across the EU; and if she will make a statement; [38071]

(2) what plans she has to require new fishing nets to have an escape hatch for dolphins within the UK; and if she will make a statement. [38072]

Mr. Morley: I have written recently to Commissioner Fischler explaining the trials on separator grids which the Sea Mammal Research Unit will be undertaking on our behalf in the offshore bass fishery in March. I urged the Commissioner to be ready to take action to address the problem of cetacean bycatch in this EU fishery, either through compulsory introduction of this gear if the trials are successful, or by other means if they are not.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has made to the *(a)* French, *(b)* Spanish and *(c)* Portugese Governments on the issue of dolphins being trapped in fishing nets; and if she will make a statement. [38282]

Mr. Morley: For international fisheries implicated in the bycatch problem, action is required at EU level. This is why I have written recently to Commissioner Fischler alerting him to my concern on this issue and urging EU action to resolve the problem. We will also be briefing other member states about the evidence we have and the state of progress of trials on mitigation methods. As a start I have written to M. Glavany, the French Minister with responsibility for fisheries, drawing my concerns to his attention and seeking support for my approach to the Commission. Spain rarely fishes in the mouth of the Channel where the current problems seem to be focused. We are not aware of any Portuguese activity in this area.

Waste Disposal

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the UK strategy is with respect to the EU Landfill Directive, for the disposal of liquid waste; and what the locations are of sites capable of treating liquid waste. [38276]

Mr. Meacher: The forthcoming Landfill (England and Wales) Regulations which will implement the regulatory and technical requirements of the Landfill Directive will ban the landfilling of hazardous liquid wastes from July 2002 as required by the Directive. The Directive also requires that non-hazardous liquids are banned from landfill 'as soon as possible' and no later than July 2009. The Government are working with the Environment Agency and the waste industry to set a date within these parameters for the ban on non-hazardous liquids to come into effect.

The Department does not hold details of the locations of individual treatment facilities for liquid waste and to collate it would be disproportionately costly.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans the Government have to extend the principle of producer responsibility to other groups who benefit from the sale, purchase and use of cars and other consumer goods. [38125]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

The End of Life Vehicles Directive (2000/53/EC) defines "producers" and sets down the responsibilities they have for vehicle design and composition, and at end-of-life; the Directive also defines "economic operators", and sets down ELV recovery and recycling targets which must be achieved by 2006 and 2015. The Government are currently considering how they wish these producer responsibilities to be discharged, and how the targets should be met. The current draft of the proposed EU Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive contains similar provisions. The Department has undertaken also to publish shortly a discussion paper on a possible producer responsibility model for tyres. Consideration is also being given within Government to producer responsibility initiatives for direct mail and non-packaging farm plastics.

Empty Properties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 240W, what the total area in square feet of all empty properties owned by *(a)* her Department, *(b)* her agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which she has had responsibility was in each year since May 1997. [37913]

Mr. Morley: The information requested is set out in the tables. As the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs was created on 8 June 2001, this relates to the former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The Department does not hold centrally information about properties occupied by non-departmental public bodies.

Under Treasury guidelines, Departments have up to three years or more to dispose of surplus properties to ensure that the best possible price is obtained. The areas of some empty properties will, therefore, be included in more than one of the total annual area figures shown in the tables.

Redundant buffer depots (food stores) formerly used to accommodate the strategic food stockpile account for a large proportion of the empty core DEFRA space (figures shown in italics). However, the programme of disposals of buffer depots is now nearing completion.

Total area of empty core DEFRA properties in square metres and (square feet) including former buffer depots[1]

	Square metres	*Square metres*	*Square feet*	*Square feet*
2000–01	89,800	*88,200*	996,600	*949,400*
1999–2000	106,300	*106,200*	1,144,200	*1,43,100*
1998–99	118,400	*111,600*	1,274,400	*1,201,300*
1997–98	132,900	*128,100*	1,430,500	*1,378,900*

[1] Also shown separately in italics

Total area of empty DEFRA agency properties

	Square metres	*Square feet*
2000–01	4,800	51,700
1999–2000	5,800	62,400
1998–99	1,700	18,300
1997–98	1,700	18,300

Weeds Act 1959

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what resources her Department is devoting to enforcement of the Weeds Act 1959 in the current financial year. [38497]

Mr. Morley: This Department will investigate complaints about the spread of injurious weeds covered by the Weeds Act 1959 to farmed land or land used for the keeping of horses as part of a diversified farm business. Where the complaint is valid the occupier of the land will be asked to take action to remove the weeds. In most cases the occupier will co-operate and act promptly to remove the weed. However in a small number of cases, following discussion with the parties involved, the occupier will persistently refuse to take action. If this is the case we will arrange for the weeds to be cleared and will recover the cost from the occupier of the land.

When following up a complaint we may arrange for an inspector from the Rural Payments Agency to visit the holding to identify the weed concerned and the level of infestation. If necessary a follow-up visit may also be carried out to ensure the weeds have been removed. Technical staff from the Department's Rural Development Service will oversee clearance work arranged by DEFRA.

In the current financial year all work involving farm visits has been severely constrained by the foot and mouth outbreak. As a result only some one and a half staff years were devoted to this work over the period from April to December 2001.

Vets

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many vets are employed in Somerset; and how many were involved in the foot and mouth epidemic in the South West. [38481]

Mr. Morley: The number of vets employed in Somerset as at 28 February 2002 is 22.

The number of vets involved in the foot and mouth epidemic in the South West was 810.

Pollution

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent steps her Department has taken to assist local authorities with inspection of polluting processes. [38642]

Mr. Meacher: Local authorities receive income from fees and charges required to be paid by relevant polluting processes to cover the costs of undertaking their Local Air Pollution Control functions. The new risk-based regulation methodology being developed should provide local authorities with a framework for planning their inspection programmes.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department *(a)* has taken and *(b)* plans to take to ensure that local authorities conduct the inspection of polluting processes required by (i) her Department and (ii) statute. [38406]

Mr. Meacher: Local authorities have been given the Local Air Pollution Control regulatory function and it is for them to ensure that it is carried out adequately. They are letting down those they represent if they do not do so.

Local authorities have powers of entry under section 108 of the Environment Act 1995 to carry out inspections. Although the statute does not prescribe any specific level or frequency of inspections, like any statutory power this power must be exercised reasonably, to pursue the purpose of the statute.

The Department works closely with the Local Government Association and the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health over the implementation of LAPC. Specifically, in the last two years it has publicly listed all local authorities with a low inspection record, and has this year written to all these local authorities asking to be told what action will be taken to rectify the situation. We will shortly be writing to chief executives of all local authorities to remind them of the importance of undertaking adequate inspection.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment her Department has made of the results of the local authority pollution control statistical survey since 1997; and what steps have been taken by her Department in consequence. [38643]

Mr. Meacher: The statistical survey covers a wide spectrum of issues concerning the local air pollution control system; the 2000–01 report is over 200 pages long. It ranges from simple numbers of applications and authorised processes in each of the 24 process categories, to data on speed of local authority decision, numbers and types of prosecutions, whether cost accounting is undertaken, and whether authorities have enforcement policies. Each statistical report is circulated to key stakeholders for their comment and the reports are now published. The reports are very carefully considered by the Department and decisions made on what steps should be taken. For example, in the light of figures on local authority take-up of cost accounting, steps were taken to reinforce to local authorities the importance of adopting such practice, and practical guidance was issued to all local authorities on cost accounting methods.

Aquatic Pursuits

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action the Environment Agency has taken to improve access to waters for canoeists. [39476]

Alun Michael: On those navigations managed by the Agency, it has taken measures to improve facilities for canoeists. Canoe portage facilities have been installed on the rivers Great Ouse, Nene, and Stour with similar works planned for other rivers including the Thames. On rivers where there is no right of navigation, the Agency has sought to improve access for canoeists nationally through the Angling and Canoe Liaison Group which it hosts, chairs, and provides secretarial support for. With support from this Group, the Agency has funded the production of a booklet, "Agreeing Access to Water for Canoeing".

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which members of the Environment Agency Board have had interests in *(a)* angling and *(b)* boating/canoeing. [39479]

Alun Michael: No information is retained on the leisure activities of Environment Agency Board Members.

Board Members are drawn from, but do not represent, a wide range of relevant interests. They are selected on the basis that their stature, background and breadth of experience will enable them to make wide-ranging, direct and relevant contributions to the management of the Agency.

Meat Imports

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what reports *(a)* she and *(b)* Parliament receive from the (i) Ports Authority, (ii) HM Customs and Excise and (iii) Foods Standards Agency regarding the importing of illegal meat. [39262]

Mr. Morley: *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* We receive information on seizures of illegally imported animal products from all the enforcement agencies involved. This information is shared among enforcement authorities and kept on a DEFRA database. Reports are made to Parliament in response to Parliamentary Questions.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the interaction of the Ports Authority, HM Customs and Excise and the Foods Standards Agency in tackling illegal imports of meat. [39261]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* Since April last year initiatives on illegal imports have been co-ordinated by officials in DEFRA, working closely with other departments such as HM Customs and Excise and the Food Standards Agency, as well as the local authorities and port health authorities who are responsible for controls at ports and airports.

This joint approach has led to more effective information sharing and improved targeting of activity at ports and airports.

DEFRA is also holding a high level forum next month involving enforcement agencies, port and airport authorities airlines and other stakeholders, to consider the next steps for intensifying our efforts and to agree further priorities and action.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of meat imports are checked on entry to the UK; and if she will make a statement. [39263]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* All consignments of meat legally imported from third countries into the UK are subjected to a documentary check on the veterinary certification and an identity check to match the goods to certification. At least 50 per cent. of poultry and game meat and 20 per cent. of other meat imports are also given a physical check, which may include organoleptic checks, temperature checks and laboratory tests for pathogens or contaminants. Meat imported from other member states is not checked at the frontier but may be subjected to random checks at the point of destination.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many prosecutions for importing illegal meat have been carried out in each of the last three years. [39368]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* HM Customs and Excise have prosecuted three people for offences under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) involving illegal meat imports. Two of these were convicted as a CITES offence and one was acquitted but convicted under a separate Animal Health charge.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what new resources she is putting into inspections at ports and airports to track illegal meat imports. [39367]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* As part of a programme of action on illegal imports we are reviewing the appropriate level of inspection. However, currently responsibility for checks on illegal meat imports are the responsibility of the local or port health authority and it is for the appropriate local authority to deploy staff accordingly depending on the volume and nature of the products imported.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much *(a)* beef and (b)lamb is produced annually in the UK; what the annual consumption of these products in the UK is; how much of these products was imported in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if she will make a statement. [39260]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Figures for beef and lamb/mutton combined (separate figures are not available for lamb) are provided in the table.

Thousand tonnes[1]

	Home fed production	*Imported*	*Consumption*[1]
Beef			
1996	710.4	169.1	732.4
1997	698.3	216.5	856.6
1998	699.5	151.9	858.2
1999	678.8	183.2	934.3
2000	705.9	196.6	915.0
Mutton and Lamb			
1996	382.5	156.2	378.0
1997	350.8	151.7	359.6
1998	385.5	141.5	380.5
1999	402.7	137.1	386.9
2000	390.6	134.1	395.0

[1] Dressed carcase weight

Note:

Total domestic use; home fed production plus imports less exports net of stock.

IACS Payments

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will pay interest to farmers who have received their IACS payments late. [39278]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* EC regulations do not provide for the payment of interest. The extent to which claimants might be entitled to compensation for delays in their payments will be considered in the light of the merits of any representation made.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of IACS payments due were made before 31 January 2002 *(a)* in Gloucestershire and *(b)* in England. [39276]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* 80 per cent. of IACS claims in Gloucestershire and 94 per cent. of IACS claims in England were authorised for payment as at 31 January 2002.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will investigate the time taken for payment of IACS in Gloucestershire; and if she will make a statement. [39277]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Claims throughout the country were delayed as a result of the diversion of staff to foot and mouth disease duties and, more significantly, by industrial action by staff in the RPA. Until the industrial action was suspended on 11 January it was not possible to take action to relieve sites which were under the greatest pressure. Gloucester claims are processed at Exeter and, following the suspension, extra teams were drafted in from other RPA sites across the country and significant amounts of overtime were worked. As a result of this recovery action most of the Gloucestershire claims which are able to be paid will have been cleared by the end of February.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average time taken is for making IACS payments to farmers *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* in other EU countries; and if she will make a statement. [39280]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* The information requested is not collected. However, payments were delayed due to industrial action together with the knock-on effect of staff deployed on foot and mouth disease duties. The Rural Payments Agency as part of their change process are seeking to ensure payments are made as early as possible in the payment window.

Wheat

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average price of wheat has been in the UK in each of the last five years for which figures are available; what the *(a)* world and *(b)* EU prices were; and if she will make a statement. [39282]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Average wheat prices for the last five years, for the UK, EU and world, are given in the tables.

	World price[1] *$/t*	*EU price*[2] *euro/t*	*UK price*[3] *£/t*
1997	144	136	92
1998	111	100	78
1999	97	92	74
2000	99	108	70
2001	108	122	76

[1] US Soft Red Winter No. 2 fob US Gulf.

[2] EEC Standard wheat France Rouen.

[3] Production-weighted average of milling and feed wheat ex-farm prices.

Sources:

1. HGCA (Home Grown Cereals Authority)
2. IGC (International Grains Council)
3. HGCA

Prices converted to sterling

	World price £/t	*EU price £/t*	*UK price £/t*	*£/$ exchange rate*	*£/euro exchange rate*
1997	88	94	92	0.6118	0.6906
1998	67	68	78	0.6034	0.6762
1999	60	61	74	0.6181	0.6589
2000	65	66	70	0.6607	0.6093
2001	75	76	76	0.6941	0.6218

Fly Tipping

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact of the landfill tax on fly tipping; and if she will make a statement. [39271]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The Department does not collate statistics on fly tipping. Reports by the Tidy Britain Group on this issue showed that the type of waste most frequently fly-tipped is household waste. It is unlikely that the landfill tax causes householders to fly tip waste because local authorities have a legal obligation to collect or accept this type of waste and, as a result, householders do not directly meet the cost of the tax.

Under Section 59 of the Environment Protection Act 1990, local authorities (or the Environment Agency) have the power to remove any fly-tipped waste and recover costs incurred from any person who made or knowingly caused or permitted the deposit of the waste.

The local authority or the Environment Agency also has the power to prosecute the perpetrators of fly tipping which can lead to an unlimited fine and/or imprisonment for up to two years (five years for special wastes).

Agrimonetary Compensation

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to claim agrimonetary compensation from the CAP; and if she will make a statement. [39281]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* We have made no plans to claim any further agrimonetary compensation. We are waiting for the Commission to confirm whether any further compensation is available, and we will take a decision when we have the information.

Volunteers

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many members of her staff in each of the past two years have been granted a day's paid leave to work as a volunteer; and if she will make a statement. [39743]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA actively supports its staff in giving time to their communities. We aim to raise the profile of volunteering and make it easier for staff to give their time and effort to voluntary work.

Staff are allowed varying amounts of paid time off for voluntary public duties such as serving as magistrates or school governors. Additionally, in September 2000, we introduced arrangements that allow all staff a day's paid special leave each year to participate in an unpaid voluntary activity. Up until the end of March 2001, 10 people had taken advantage of this in DEFRA (including the Pesticides Safety Directorate, Rural Payments Agency, Veterinary Laboratories Agency and Veterinary Medicines Directorate). Due to major staff re-deployment during the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak, no records were kept between April and December 2001. So far this year three people have taken a day's paid leave for voluntary work.

DEFRA is supporting staff who wish to join the volunteer programme to help in the arrangements for the 2002 Manchester Commonwealth Games and will be allowing staff 50 per cent. of their time volunteering as paid special leave up to a maximum of eight days.

I have asked the Chief Executives of the Central Science Laboratory and the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science to reply separately.

Organophosphate Pesticides

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what economic assessment has been made of the cost of banning Thinsec (Carbaryl) for the top fruit industry. [39245]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Pesticide products containing carbaryl have been reviewed as part of the general review in the UK of all organophosphate pesticides. The main purpose of the review is to address public concerns about the potential toxicity of these chemicals and economic impact is not an overriding consideration where safety is concerned. However, the loss of some compounds may have an economic impact on particular sectors of industry. The decision to revoke a particular compound is not taken lightly. It may be revoked because serious safety concerns remain following the evaluation of data submitted in support of the compound or because there was insufficient data submitted for an adequate evaluation of the data to be made. The loss of carbaryl stems from a commercial decision by the approval holder not to support the compound under the UK review.

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs why the use of Thinsec (Carbaryl) for top fruit has been banned. [39246]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Carbaryl has been included as part of the general review in the UK of all organophosphate pesticides. The review was undertaken because of public concerns about the potential toxicity of these chemicals.

Organophosphate pesticides are mainly older compounds and the review will establish whether there is sufficient safety data available to satisfy modern standards. Companies are therefore required to submit data they hold on human health and environmental effects to support the continued safe use of the products containing these compounds. If data are not submitted then the approval for these products are revoked.

The approval holder for carbaryl did not submit supporting data, therefore products containing carbaryl have been revoked. The approval for the product Thinsec expired on 31 July 2001.

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with her EU counterparts on the decision to ban Thinsec (Carbaryl) for UK top fruit producers; and which EU countries plan to follow the UK's lead. [39244]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Under EU rules the UK is not obliged to inform other member states of any national review programme of pesticide products undertaken to address national issues. However, all member states and the commission were informed of the UK programme to review organophosphate compounds, which includes carbaryl. In addition, all are automatically informed of any new product approvals and revocations. A separate European programme intends to review all active substances used in plant protection products within the community and all member states and the commission are involved in this decision-making process.

The approval holder for carbaryl did not submit supporting data under the UK review and therefore the approval for all products containing carbaryl, including Thinsec, have been revoked. Under the European review programme carbaryl has been supported so far. Data for the evaluation of carbaryl must be submitted to the member state evaluating the compound by the end of April 2002. The continued approval of carbaryl throughout Europe is therefore dependent on the conclusions of that evaluation.

It is possible for member states to carry out their own review exercises and for these to be carried out at different times to the European review. Member states are not obliged to follow other countries, domestic decisions regarding the approval or revocation of compounds. In this case, the UK organophosphate review was introduced to address public concerns about the safety of these compounds and we have acted in a consistent manner to revoke their use where appropriate.

Farming

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to improve the public image of farming in England; and if she will make a statement. [39398]

Mr. Morley: The public image of farming in England is not the responsibility of Government alone. Farming faces a wide range of challenges and we are committed to working with all those with an interest in the future of farming to help tackle these and develop a more sustainable industry that better meets society's expectations.

That is why we established the independent Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food. The Commission's report to Government sets out a clear vision for a sustainable competitive and diverse farming and food sector, playing a dynamic role in the rural economy and delivering the environmental outputs that society demands. Delivery of this vision is for industry and other organisations, as well as Government. We will be launching shortly a process for engaging with interested organisations on the details of this with a view to launching a strategy for sustainable food and farming in the early autumn.

Social Exclusion (Transport)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on what research the Countryside Agency has launched into social exclusion and transport; and when it is expected to publish its research. [39395]

Alun Michael: The Countryside Agency is not currently involved in research specifically into social exclusion and transport. However, certain other studies include elements relating to the transport needs of the socially excluded. One such study is on "Wheels to Work", an evaluation and good practice guide on access to education and employment for young people. This is due to report in April.

Countryside and Rights of Way Act

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when Section 47 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 will be implemented. [39522]

Alun Michael: Section 47 is part of a group of provisions relating to restricted byways. Our aim is to consult later this year on the secondary legislation needed to implement these provisions, with a view to bringing them into effect in the early part of 2003. The task is complicated by the need to amend any relevant existing highways legislation: in primary legislation alone there are over 40,000 references to be investigated.

Village Halls

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with the Countryside Agency on the subject of village halls. [39394]

Alun Michael: I believe strongly that community buildings and village halls have an important role to play in village life. They can make an enormous difference to the well-being of communities by providing sustainable, multi-functional and flexible resources. They can provide a focus for a range of activities including child care, employment training and advice, sports, leisure and participative activities involving all members of the rural community.

Recent evidence from the Countryside Agency's "Rural Services Survey" suggests that the substantial amounts of funding from various sources over recent years—the 21st Century Halls for England Fund, the Community Fund, Awards for All funding and local authorities—has been very successful in increasing provision of village halls. We are in regular contact with the Countryside Agency on these issues and my officials will be meeting Action for Communities in Rural England shortly to discuss how best to support local communities so as to complement the investment that has gone into village halls.

Cattle Feed

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to review the importation of cattle feed into the UK; and if she will make a statement. [38525]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* New EU-wide measures (implemented domestically under the Processed Animal Protein Regulations from 1 August 2001) already control intra-Community trade and imports from third countries of a wide range of processed animal proteins effectively preventing their inclusion in feed for farmed animals in order to stop the propagation of BSE.

In Great Britain, a national feed sampling programme has been in place since 1996 to monitor compliance with BSE-related feed controls. This programme, operated by the State Veterinary Service, typically takes around 20,000 samples per year from feed mills, on-farm mixers and other premises handling livestock feed. The results of the programme are very encouraging and indicate wide compliance with the feed controls, confirming that prohibited ingredients (from domestic or imported sources) are being effectively removed from the market, distribution channels and farms.

One theoretical issue is that recent cases of BSE in younger animals may have been exposed to infection as a result of cross-contamination (during transhipment) of imported vegetable protein used in the production of animal feedingstuffs with meat and bone meal. We are continuing carefully to investigate such cases, but there is currently no clear evidence that individual animals have been infected by this route.

Veterinary Medicines

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will define suitably qualified persons who may sell animal medicines for food-producing animals under EU directive 2001/82/EC. [39301]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* Directive 2001/82/EC restricts the retail sale of veterinary medicinal products to persons permitted to carry out such operations by the legislation of the member state concerned. There are no proposals to change this provision. Under UK legislation veterinary medicines for food-producing animals may be sold by veterinary surgeons, registered pharmacists, registered agricultural merchants and saddlers or, in some cases, by any retail outlet, depending upon the conditions of use and consequent distribution category under which a particular product is classified.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if the Government define veterinary surgeons as the only suitably qualified professionals to sell animal medicines, under the terms of EU Directive/2001/82/EC. [39294]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* No. Directive 2001/82/EC restricts the retail sale of veterinary medicinal products to persons permitted to carry out such operations by the legislation of the member state concerned. UK legislation does not restrict the sale of veterinary medicines to veterinary surgeons. Veterinary medicines may be sold by veterinary surgeons, registered pharmacists, registered agricultural merchants and saddlers or by any retail outlet, depending upon the conditions of use and consequent distribution category under which a particular product is classified.

Livestock Markets

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received on the future of auction marts. [40377]

Mr. Morley: I have received a number of representations from auctioneers and the livestock industry. From 11 February it has been possible, under the Interim Animal Movements Regime, for some livestock markets to re-open, subject to biosecurity conditions. I am keeping the position of livestock markets under review.

Agricultural Tenancies

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the Government's approach to the review of farm business tenancies. [39950]

Mr. Morley: Farm business tenancies can be established under the Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995. This Act is currently the subject of a policy evaluation review which is being carried out by the University of Plymouth. This work is nearing completion, and the final report is expected shortly.

The recommendations made by the research team will be considered in detail over the coming months, in parallel with the tenancy related recommendations of the Policy Commission on Food and Farming.

Meat and Plant Imports

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many checks on meat and plant imports were carried out in each of the last five years; and how many imports were found to be illegal. [39508]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* We do not hold figures for the last five years.

Between November 2000 and October 2001, 19,140 checks were made at Border Inspection Posts and 458 of these were rejected.

In terms of personal baggage, since April 2001, 1,142 seizures of illegally imported animal and plant products have been made.

EU Fruit Marketing Standard

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if a decision has been taken on proposals to amend the EC Marketing Standard for Apples and Pears. [40078]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* No decision has yet been taken on the EU Commission's proposals to amend the EU Marketing Standard for Apples and Pears. As I indicated in my written reply of 15 January, we will ensure that the views expressed by all stakeholders are taken into consideration in any future discussions.

Scottish Executive

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason a devolved administration minister did not attend the 2410 European Union Council of Ministers meeting (Agriculture) on 18 February; which particular matters of concern from the Scottish Executive were raised in their absence by the UK Government delegation; and what evidence is being provided by her Department to guarantee effective post-council scrutiny by the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament. [40322]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* Scottish Executive Ministers did not attend the February Agriculture Council as there was nothing on the agenda of specific interest to Scotland and the UK Government are well briefed on the Scottish Executive interests in more general matters. There was no need for the UK Government to raise any issues of particular concern to the Scottish Executive. On the third point, it is the responsibility of the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament to scrutinise the Scottish Executive's involvement in preparations for EU Council meetings. These arrangements are a matter for the Committee and the Scottish Executive. My Department provides information to Scottish Executive officials as part of that process.

Horticulture (Climate Change Levy)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact of the climate change levy upon the *(a)* profitability and *(b)* competitiveness of British horticulture. [38579]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* It is not possible to comment precisely on the effect of the climate change levy on the competitive position of our horticulture industry. This depends, among other things, on the extent to which individual sectors and firms within the industry are exposed to international competition; its future energy use; and the extent to which it takes up the incentives which the Government have introduced to help it improve its environmental performance and to protect its competitiveness. These incentives include:

a special package of support which aims to improve energy efficiency across the sector, including the provision of site-specific advice for individual businesses;

exemptions from the levy for most renewable sources of energy and for fuel used by good quality combined heat and power systems;

enhanced capital allowances for investments in energy efficiency technologies including thermal screens, boilers, combined heat and power systems and lighting; and

a temporary 50 per cent. discount on the levy to the horticulture sector for a period of up to five years while the energy efficiency measures targeted at the sector take effect.

Private Sewers

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action is being taken in respect of private sewers. [40937]

Mr. Meacher: I announced this morning that agreement has been reached with the House Builders Federation and the water industry that all new sewers will be built to one agreed standard. We now have in place a protocol which sets out the key elements of design and construction for new development to enable wider adoption of sewers. As a result, owners of new property will not have the kind of problems experienced by those with existing private sewers. Copies of the protocol and the report on the outcome of the consultation undertaken by the Department into new sewers and drains have been placed in the Library. They are also on the Department's website.

I am equally keen that we should assist owners of existing private sewers. We have therefore appointed outside consultants to undertake research to establish the extent of the private sewer network, identify and examine the problems associated with private sewers and produce workable solutions. The research began in December and is due to last 18 months.

Waste Water Treatment

Mr. Bailey: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress has been made to review and identify further areas under the Urban Waste Water Treatment (England and Wales) Regulations 1994; and if she will make a statement. [41242]

Mr. Meacher: Based on recommendations from the Environment Agency I (by authority of the Secretary of State) announced this morning that I have reviewed the identification of Sensitive Areas in England in accordance with the criteria in Part I of Schedule I of the Urban Waste Water Treatment (England and Wales) Regulations 1994 (which transposes the European Council Directive (91/271/EEC) concerning urban waste water treatment).

This review has resulted in the identification of four freshwater stretches of the rivers Stour, Wissey, Chelmer and Leam, which are intended for the abstraction of drinking water, to be identified as Sensitive Areas (nitrate) on the basis of elevated levels of nitrate under the terms of the regulations.

These new requirements on water companies to remove nitrate from sewage treatment discharges will complement the action required by farmers under the Nitrates Directive.

Work to provide more stringent treatment (nitrogen removal) at six qualifying treatment works is expected to be completed by end 2004. 180 bathing waters (already identified under the Bathing Waters Regulations 1991) in England are also to be identified as Sensitive Areas as discharges from qualifying sewage treatment works receive, or are to receive by 2005 more stringent treatment (ultraviolet disinfection) to fulfil standards of those regulations.

Funding for these improvements have already been provided for in the Office of Water Services (Ofwat) Periodic Review of water company price limits for the five-year period from 2000.

We are committed to a steady improvement to Britain's freshwater and bathing quality. Already we have the best ever recorded bathing water quality. Today's moves mean that we can continue our efforts to ensure clean and healthy water both for this country's inhabitants and its aquatic life.

Lists of the new sensitive areas have today been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses. Maps showing the location of all current sensitive areas (nitrate) and (bathing waters) will be deposited in the Libraries of both Houses and at offices of the Environment Agency in due course.

Hazardous Waste

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what regulatory impact assessment she has made of the *(a)* Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive and *(b)* Restriction of Hazardous Substances Directive; [37529]

(2) what the estimated cost is to *(a)* public funds and *(b)* the industry of implementing the (i) Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive and (ii) Restriction of Hazardous Substances Directive in the United Kingdom; [37530]

(3) what representations she has made within the Council for Ministers regarding the *(a)* Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive and *(b)* Restriction of Hazardous Substances Directive; and if she will make a statement. [37531]

Margaret Beckett: The Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive and Restriction of the use of certain Hazardous Substances Directive were discussed at the Environment Council on 18–19 December 2000, 8 March 2001 and 7–8 June 2001, where my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment represented the UK. He stated our support for the environmental objectives of the Directives, which are very much in line with our national Waste Strategies. The UK negotiating line on the Directives was clearly explained to the House in European Standing Committee C on 28 March 2001 by the former Minister of State for Industry and Energy, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy has the lead responsibility for negotiating these Directives. He placed initial Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIA) for each in the Libraries of both Houses on 7 December 2000 and I am informed that he will be submitting revised RIAs later this month. Based on the principle of Producer Responsibility, these Directives provide that producers will be responsible for financing the costs which arise.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Ministerial Meetings

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills on what date she and her Ministers last met the Education Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales. [35458]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills and her Ministers last formally met the Education Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales on 24 September 2001.

Departmental Website

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the total cost of her Department's website was in real terms in each of the last four years; and how many hits it received in each of those years. [36147]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Core programme cost for the Department for Education and Skills central website (real terms figures are all compared with 2000–01 cost) were as follows.

	£
1997–98	42,275
1998–99	82,420
1999–2000	137,328
2000–01	261,000
2001–02	640,976

There is now wide acceptance among professionals in the web industry that hits are not a measure of site performance. So the Department, in line with the Government, as a whole gives more importance to unique visitors and page impressions than hits.

For example, the Department made a big effort in 2000 to speed up download times by reducing numbers of files on the site, hence hits went down from 173 million in 2000, to 89 million in 2001, while use was increasing.

Reliable site traffic figures are only available since January 2000.

Estimated site traffic for year 1999 is as follows:

Hits: 11.4 million.

Site traffic for year 2000 is as follows:

Unique visitors: average 1,293,000 per month

Page views: 43.7 million.

Individual Learning Account

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement in respect of the progress of her investigations into alleged fraud and abuse concerned with the individual learning account scheme; and whether her Department has the information necessary about individual learning account holders from the Capita database. [36946]

John Healey: The Department's Special Investigations Unit is investigating 97 registered learning providers. Of these, police are investigating 16 and the Department's Special Investigation Unit is discussing a further 52 with the police. 44 arrests have been made in relation to allegations of fraud with the operation of the individual learning account programme and 13 people have been charged, one of whom has been convicted.

As at 31 December, the Department had received some 5,900 complaints from individuals claiming that money had been drawn from their individual learning account (ILA) without their knowledge or consent. Complaints received will be followed up with providers, and where we have evidence of fraud we will make referrals to the police.

The Department's Special Investigation Unit has had access to information from the ILA Centre system about ILA holders necessary to carry out its investigations.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills on what date the new registration scheme for ILAs was *(a)* commissioned of and *(b)* delivered by Capita; when the new scheme was announced and by what means. [37535]

John Healey: The Department signed a letter of intent in April 2000 with Capita Business Services Ltd., but Capita began working on an action plan in March 2000. The Department signed the contract with Capita to act as the customer service provider for individual learning accounts on 2 June 2000. Registration for ILA holders and ILA learning providers was open from 12 June 2000 before the ILA national framework was launched on 4 September 2000.

Capita Contracts

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when the Cap Gemini report on the operation of the ILA scheme was commissioned; when it was due for delivery; when it was delivered; and what response her Department has made to the report. [37537]

John Healey: Cap Gemini Ernst and Young were commissioned by the Department to "Baseline the Capita computer systems" and to "Examine the Capita ILA system security arrangements". The assignments are not on the operation of ILAs. Work began in late December and it is envisaged that the final reports will be received in March.

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the contracts that have been awarded to the Capita Group by the Department. [39338]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My Department has a number of contracts with Capita for a range of different services. These are as follows:

Teachers' Pensions: Administration of the Teachers' Pensions Scheme.

Connexions Card: Development of the Connexions Card.

Individual Learning Accounts: Administration of the ILA scheme.

Consultancy Framework Contracts: Framework contract to provide general management consultancy support and consultancy support for LEA interventions.

They are all existing contracts within my Department.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list all contracts awarded by her Department to Capita since 1997, including *(a)* start and finish date of contract, *(b)* value of contract, *(c)* description of work to be carried out, *(d)* evaluation mechanism for successful delivery of contract, *(e)* penalty charges for failure to deliver and *(f)* if penalty charges have been incurred; and if she will make a statement. [40489]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My Department has awarded a number of contracts to Capita since 1997 for a range of different services. These are as follows:

Connexions Card—Development of the Connexions Card. A public-private partnership with a contract value in excess of £100 million over seven years from 2001 to 2008.

Individual Learning Accounts—Administration of the ILA scheme. A contract for five years with an estimated value of around £55 million from 2000 to 2005.

Consultancy Framework Contracts—Framework contract to provide general management consultancy support and consultancy support for LEA interventions. Both framework contracts were awarded for three years and expire in 2002 and 2004 respectively. Their level of usage determines the value of these contracts. Estimated expenditure to date has been £436,500.

The Department establishes clear arrangements for monitoring the quality of outcomes delivered and for evaluating the contractor's performance as part of all of its contracting activity. Those contract management arrangements apply to each of the Capita contracts listed, and my officials have put those monitoring arrangements into operation. None of the Department's contracts include penalty clauses, as these are unenforceable under English law. The Department's contracts often include arrangements which motivate the contractor to perform by linking payment to performance and also provide for termination if the contractor is in breach of the contract terms.

Sector Skills Council (Sport and Fitness Industry)

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to ensure the creation of a sector skills council for the sport and fitness industry. [37099]

John Healey: My Department is looking to employers to bring forward proposals for sectors that meet the Sector Skills Council (SSC) licensing standard and make sense to their industries. An expression of interest by employers to form an SSC in any sector will be considered by the Sector Skills Development Agency when it is made. If the expression of interest meets initial criteria then a period of up to six months will be agreed to develop a full SSC proposal. If this is successful an SSC licence will be issued. A Business Adviser has been allocated to advise employers in the sport and recreation sector on the preparation of an expression of interest.

Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 25 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1131W, what the cost of refurbishing each ministerial private office was in each year since May 1997. [37890]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The cost of refurbishing ministerial offices in each of the last four years is as follows:

	£
2000–01	1,960
1999–2000	5,674
1998–99	10,567
1997–98	74,404

Teachers (Performance Management)

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what the cost has been of the performance related pay threshold assessment, broken down by *(a)* pay given to teachers, *(b)* administration costs paid to CEA including the costs of external assessors and *(c)* administration costs paid to CfBT, including costs of training for threshold assessment; [38048]

(2) what the cost has been of providing external advisers for the performance management of head teachers in England; [38050]

(3) what the total training cost has been of the performance management system. [38052]

Mr. Timms: Since December 2000 the Department has paid about £650 million to local authorities to cover the additional salary costs of teachers passing the threshold. To help with the operation of threshold assessment and performance management we also make £28 million per year available to schools through the Standards Fund.

The Department has a contract with Cambridge Education Associates (CEA) for the provision and deployment of threshold assessors and external advisers to governing bodies on heads' performance. We also have a contract with the Centre for British Teachers (CfBT) for training in threshold assessment and performance management. The value of these contracts depends on the volume and quality of activity. Since January 2000 total CEA contract costs have been around £36.5 million and CfBT costs around £12 million, including the value of investment that will support future activity.

Universities

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her definition is of a high-ranking university as mentioned in Chapter 4 of "14–19: extending opportunities, raising standards"; and if she will collect information regarding the socio-economic background of students entering such institutions to enable comparisons with those entering other universities. [38091]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The reference to "high ranking universities" is to those universities which have particularly demanding entry requirements, as the higher award is based on at least ABB grades at A level plus one AS level or on an NVQ level 4. The Higher Education Funding Council for England already collects and publishes information on the social class of students entering higher education, which is broken down by institution. It published the information for the academic year 1999–2000, "Performance Indicators in Higher Education in the UK", last December (HEFCE Report 01/69). This is available on the HEFCE website at www.hefce.ac.uk/pi.

Civil Servants (Employment With Consultants)

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the dates and indicate the nature of the guidance given by her Department to Government Departments since May 1997 with respect to civil servants seeking employment within *(a)* Capita, *(b)* PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(c)* WS Atkins, *(d)* Nord Anglia, *(e)* Cambridge Education Associates, *(f)* KPMG and *(g)* Ernst and Young; and if she will place related documents in the Library. [36969]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 26 February 2002]:* Civil servants wishing to take up employment outside the civil service are subject to the requirements of the Business Appointment Rules, which are set out in full in the Civil Service Management Code.

Secondments

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many staff were seconded between *(a)* Capita, *(b)* PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(c)* WS Atkins, *(d)* Nord Anglia, *(e)* Cambridge Education Associates, *(f)* KPMG and *(g)* Ernst and Young and her Department in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) 2001–02. [36572]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 26 February 2002]:* The information is set out in the table in respect of Ernst and Young and PricewaterhouseCoopers; there were no secondments during these periods between any of the other companies listed and this Department.

	Ernst and Young	*PricewaterhouseCoopers*
1999–2000	1	—
2000–01	5	1

Pupil Data

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills for what reason the Government are collecting the names and addresses of all children; and how this information will be used. [38482]

Mr. Timms: The Department is collecting the names of most children, but not the addresses of any. This January we introduced the "Pupil Level Annual Schools Census" (PLASC) for maintained schools in England. Schools provided a list of the pupils on their register together with each pupil's name, "unique pupil number" (UPN), home postcode (not full address), and other details such as ethnic group, special educational needs and eligibility for free school meals. This information will be combined with details of Key Stage assessment and examination results collected separately from schools, marking agencies and exam boards, and with future PLASC returns, to create statistical profiles of pupils. The Department has no interest in the identity of individual pupils as such. However pupil names (in addition to UPNs) are needed to ensure that all data relating to the same pupil are collated correctly, and therefore that the statistical profiles are accurate. Within the Department only technical staff directly engaged in the data collation process will have access to pupil names.

Analysis of these statistical profiles will provide major new information to help schools, LEAs, the Department and other educational agencies in the drive to raise standards. It will also enable groups of pupils (such as ethnic minorities) who may be under-achieving to be identified far more effectively so that programmes can be developed or improved to meet their needs. Home postcodes too will be used for statistical purposes only. The postcode mix of a school's pupils provides an indication of socio-economic background which can be taken into account (along with other factors) in comparing the performance of different schools and setting targets for improvement. Postcode information also enables neighbourhood analyses to be carried out.

Certain limited disclosures of PLASC data with pupil names may take place provided these comply with the Data Protection Act 1998 and any other legislative requirements. For further details I refer the hon. Member to my answer on 28 January 2002, *Official Report,* columns 109–11W to the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington).

Special Urgency Provisions

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how often the Department has applied the special urgency provisions in paragraph 22 of Circular 18/84 (Development by Government Departments) to a development by the Department; and if she will make a statement. [38707]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My Department has not used the special urgency provisions in paragraph 22 Circular 18/84 (Development by Government Departments).

School Absence

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage of half days missed each year was in (i) maintained primary schools, (ii) maintained secondary schools and (iii) all maintained schools in each year since 1997. [38807]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information is as follows:

Half days missed (authorised and unauthorised absence) in maintained schools in England 1997–2001

Academic years	*Number of half days missed (thousand)*	*Percentage of half days missed*
Primary schools		
1996–97	66,839.5	6.1
1997–98	66,912.6	6.2
1998–99	66,501.5	5.9
1999–2000	62,926.5	5.7
2000–01	67,094.9	6.1
Secondary schools		
1996–97	75,934.5	9.1
1997–98	74,902.7	9.0
1998–99	77,722.3	8.9
1999–2000	75,701.5	8.6
2000–01	79,906.9	9.0
Primary and secondary schools		
1996–97	142,774.0	7.4
1997–98	141,815.4	7.4
1998–99	144,223.8	7.2
1999–2000	138,628.1	7.0
2000–01	147,001.9	7.4

Notes:

Figures are based on maintained mainstream schools and exclude maintained special schools and City Technology colleges. Information is collected for the period from the start of the school year in September to the mid-term break in May.

In the second round of Education Development Plans (EDPs), local education authorities were asked to set targets for the percentage of half days missed each year. The targets have now been submitted and are currently being assessed.

Special Educational Needs (Autism)

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much was spent on autistic education in each year since 1997 in *(a)* South Tyneside, *(b)* the north-east and *(c)* the UK. [39618]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Funding is not made available for specific categories of special educational need. Rather, funding is allocated and distributed via local education authorities (LEAs), who have a duty to provide appropriately for all children in their area. This includes the duty to identify children's individual special educational needs and to deliver the most appropriate provision to meet those needs.

More than £23 billion is available annually for the education of school children, including children with special educational needs. Over £1 billion of this is used by LEAs to provide additional support for children with special educational needs.

We have also made £91 million of supported expenditure available for special educational needs in next year's Standards Fund (2002–03). This is five times the amount available in 1997–98. The fund can be used for a range of activities including training for staff in special educational needs, improvements in speech and language therapy provision for children with communication difficulties and the greater inclusion of children with SEN in the mainstream. This latter includes early intervention for pupils with SEN, training on child development and behaviour management, and improved links between special and mainstream schools.

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action is being taken to promote Autism Awareness year. [39621]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Health gave to the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) on 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 672–73W.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State welcomes initiatives that aim to improve our knowledge and understanding of autism and raise awareness of the condition. Better outcomes for children with autism are encouraged by early identification and intervention to meet their special educational needs. In 2002, the Department for Education and Skills will be publishing guidance for schools, local education authorities and others, which will include pointers to good practice on provision for children with autism, including early identification. The Department will continue to work with the National Autistic Society and other interested parties to raise awareness of autism and improve provision for children with the condition.

National Curriculum

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list those maintained schools which are known not to be offering the full national curriculum. [38859]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* For a school not to offer the full national curriculum, it must make an application to the Department for Education and Skills, to disapply elements of the national curriculum, under section 362 of the Education Act 1996. This is to allow curriculum development or experimentation.

The schools that are currently disapplying elements of the national curriculum, through section 362, according to departmental records, are shown in the following list:

Churchfields Performing Arts College (Swindon)
Falmer High School (Brighton)
Wye Valley School (Bucks)
Blurton High School (Stoke)
The Lord Silkin School (Telford)
Moatbridge School (Greenwich)
Willington High School (Wallsend)
Cambourne School and Community College (Cambourne)
Walton-le-Dale High School (Preston).

Amy Gehring

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to the answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 746W, on Amy Gehring, if she will make a statement on the content of that letter; and what action, and when, her Department took in response. [39414]

Mr. Timms: The letter received on 20 November 2000 from Surrey police contained factual information about allegations made against Miss Gehring and stated that no further police action would be taken. The letter did not express concern about the risk that Miss Gehring might present to children. After receiving the letter my officials initiated their List 99 procedures, making a criminal background check and writing to Timeplan seeking copies of all the documents relating to the case. On 8 January 2001 my officials were informed by Surrey police that Miss Gehring's conduct was the subject of a fresh police investigation. The officials then followed normal practice and suspended further inquiries until documents, witness statements and other evidence from the police investigation and trial became available.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to the answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 746W, on Amy Gehring, on how many occasions in each of the past three years a police force has written to her Department to raise issues about a working teacher; and what action was taken in each case. [39415]

Mr. Timms: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The Department receives notification of misconduct from a number of sources including the police, a working teacher's employer and from press reports.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to the answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 746W, on Amy Gehring, on what date the contents of the letter were communicated to Ministers. [39416]

Mr. Timms: Ministers were informed of the contents of the letter from Surrey police on 24 January 2002.

Teachers

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers were at each point on the pay band in each local education authority in January 2001. [39218]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The data requested are not yet available.

The numbers of full-time regular qualified classroom teachers on each point of the then classroom teacher pay spine, in March 2000, from records provided by local education authorities, are contained in tables, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

Security

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent steps she has taken to improve security in *(a)* primary schools, *(b)* secondary schools, *(c)* colleges and *(d)* universities; and if she will make a statement. [40277]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: From 1997–98 to date, we have supported spending totalling £110 million through local education authorities to provide security improvements at maintained primary and secondary schools in England. In 1997 the Department issued joint guidance with the Home Office on "School Security-Dealing with Troublemakers", and in March 2001 the Department produced a video "Can You See What They See?" and set up a website "www.dfes.gov.uk/schoolsecurity/". Further education colleges and universities, as autonomous bodies, are responsible for their own security arrangements within the resources available to them.

School Expenditure (Leeds)

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the total spending was on schools in Leeds local education authority in each of the last 10 years in *(a)* cash and *(b)* real terms; and what the spending per pupil on the same basis in that period was. [39963]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is contained in the following tables.

Spending on schools in Leeds LEA

£ million

	Cash terms	*Real terms*
1991–92	196	246
1992–93	228	278
1993–94	229	272
1994–95	236	276
1995–96	228	259
1996–97	237	262
1997–98	237	254
1998–99	256	267
1999–2000	294	299
2000–01	325	325

Spending per pupil in Leeds LEA

£

	Cash terms	*Real terms*
1991–92	1,880	2,360
1992–93	2,150	2,620
1993–94	2,100	2,500
1994–95	2,120	2,490
1995–96	2,030	2,320
1996–97	2,110	2,320
1997–98	2,100	2,250
1998–99	2,260	2,360
1999–2000	2,600	2,640
2000–01	2,890	2,890

Notes:

Expenditure figures are based on net current expenditure after recharges on pre-primary, primary, secondary and special schools.

For 1993–94 to 1998–99 includes payments to GM schools.

Total spending rounded to the nearest £ million.

Spending per pupil rounded to the nearest £10.

Real terms figures are in 2000–01 prices using the December 2001 GDP deflators.

Source:

1991–92 to 1998–99 expenditure data are drawn from RO1 returns.

1999–2000 and 2000–01 expenditure data are drawn from the S52 outturn returns.

2000–01 expenditure figures are provisional and subject to change.

Apprenticeships

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to promote the level of apprenticeships in the UK. [39897]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Last November, at the launch of the new generation of Modern Apprenticeships, the Secretary of State announced a £16 million marketing campaign, to be run over three years in England, to promote apprenticeships and boost participation. That campaign, led jointly by the Department and the Learning and Skills Council, starts on 4 March with a new television advertisement, aimed at young people, which will run until the end of the month.

From the spring, a range of marketing measures will be introduced to reach not only young people, but also key influencers and employers. At the local level, Learning and Skills Councils, Connexions Partnerships, careers services and other partners will work together to raise awareness of, and foster support for, Modern Apprenticeships; and to provide young people with essential information and advice on the opportunities available in their communities. It is a key role of National Training Organisations and their successors the Sector Skills Councils in partnership with the LSC to ensure that employers continue to support MA and that they provide sufficient places to meet the demand from young people.

Marketing and promotion of MAs in the rest of the country is for the devolved Administrations.

Cambridge Education Associates

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what restrictions she has placed on the information which Cambridge Education Associates can publish. [39952]

Mr. Timms: The Department's general terms and conditions for contractors include requirements about the publication of information. Our contracts with Cambridge Education Associates are consistent with this.

Supply Teachers

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of the number of supply teachers working in maintained schools for periods over one week but less than one month in each of the last five years, broken down by local authority area. [39554]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* Information is not collected centrally in the form requested. The numbers of occasional teachers with contracts of less than one month, working for the whole day on the survey date, in the maintained schools sector, in January of each year, 1997 to 2001, by local education authority[1,2], were as follows.

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
City of London	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
Camden	80	90	100	110	70
Greenwich	60	70	60	50	100
Hackney	50	80	70	110	230
Hammersmith and Fulham	80	90	80	90	230
Islington	90	60	140	130	120
Kensington and Chelsea	90	70	60	50	60
Lambeth	70	30	30	90	50
Lewisham	110	100	110	90	100
Southwark	110	130	130	140	120
Tower Hamlets	70	110	80	90	220
Wandsworth	30	70	50	50	50
City of Westminster	50	70	70	50	80
Barking and Dagenham	60	100	90	60	110
Barnet	40	60	90	80	100
Bexley	70	60	100	130	110
Brent	50	60	70	110	100
Bromley	60	40	60	100	110
Croydon	110	100	100	110	190
Ealing	30	60	50	70	100
Enfield	60	90	70	100	140
Haringey	120	120	130	100	100
Harrow	40	40	40	120	120
Havering	60	70	80	100	90
Hillingdon	30	30	40	70	90
Hounslow	90	60	90	80	50
Kingston upon Thames	20	40	40	30	60
Merton	60	70	60	80	60
Newham	170	160	130	200	230
Redbridge	30	40	40	30	60
Richmond upon Thames	60	20	60	70	110
Sutton	60	40	40	70	40
Waltham Forest	30	50	50	50	40
Birmingham	300	460	200	220	300
Coventry	120	80	70	100	110
Dudley	70	130	80	120	120
Sandwell	60	70	60	60	90
Solihull	50	80	40	50	80
Walsall	110	60	60	80	80
Wolverhampton	70	70	60	70	150
Knowsley	60	60	80	100	40
Liverpool	230	130	150	190	130
St. Helens	60	60	80	70	60
Sefton	100	90	110	140	150
Wirral	120	90	120	130	170
Bolton	110	100	110	120	140
Bury	80	50	60	70	100
Manchester	100	140	140	120	240
Oldham	40	40	60	40	30
Rochdale	110	90	100	110	130
Salford	70	110	90	80	100
Stockport	120	130	60	60	120
Tameside	40	30	40	80	80
Trafford	70	60	40	10	100
Wigan	110	180	190	170	170
Barnsley	120	100	110	140	140
Doncaster	100	70	70	80	100
Rotherham	100	100	110	140	140
Sheffield	150	150	190	190	210
Bradford	180	120	200	260	310
Calderdale	70	50	70	110	80
Kirklees	140	110	150	140	130
Leeds	150	160	170	170	240
Wakefield	100	90	120	140	140
Gateshead	50	60	60	100	130
Newcastle upon Tyne	60	70	80	70	120
North Tyneside	70	60	80	90	100
South Tyneside	50	30	60	60	80
Sunderland	60	110	80	80	80
Isles of Scilly	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
Bath and North-east Somerset	60	30	60	70	60
City of Bristol	220	160	130	230	150
North Somerset	30	80	120	90	70
South Gloucestershire	130	70	80	90	130

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Hartlepool	40	30	50	50	30
Middlesbrough	60	40	50	40	60
Redcar and Cleveland	30	50	50	60	40
Stockton on Tees	90	70	90	100	130
City of Kingston Upon Hull	100	90	80	130	180
East Riding of Yorkshire	80	90	130	110	140
North-East Lincolnshire	80	70	60	60	80
North Lincolnshire	110	90	60	50	70
North Yorkshire	170	130	170	190	270
York	110	80	70	140	100
Former Bedfordshire	290	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Bedfordshire	[4]—	210	80	130	130
Luton	[4]—	80	60	50	420
Total former Bedfordshire area	290	290	140	190	550
Former Buckinghamshire	40	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Buckinghamshire	[4]—	40	30	40	120
Milton Keynes	[4]—	40	60	80	80
Total former Buckinghamshire area	40	80	90	110	200
Former Derbyshire	270	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Derbyshire	[4]—	190	170	240	260
Derby	[4]—	50	40	70	[3]—
Total former Derbyshire area	270	240	210	310	260
Former Dorset	70	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Dorset	[4]—	[3]—	90	100	100
Poole	[4]—	30	30	30	30
Bournemouth	[4]—	40	60	40	80
Total former Dorset area	70	80	180	170	200
Former Durham	230	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Durham	[4]—	220	200	280	270
Darlington	[4]—	10	[3]—	40	50
Total former Durham area	230	230	200	320	330
Former East Sussex	100	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
East Sussex	[4]—	100	150	120	150
Brighton and Hove	[4]—	40	40	50	60
Total former East Sussex area	100	140	190	170	210
Former Hampshire	420	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Hampshire	[4]—	290	310	420	520
Portsmouth	[4]—	40	70	60	70
Southampton	[4]—	50	60	80	100
Total former Hampshire area	420	380	440	570	690
Former Leicestershire	270	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Leicestershire	[4]—	80	120	150	180
Leicester	[4]—	70	70	130	150
Rutland	[4]—	10	10	[3]—	30
Total former Leicestershire area	270	160	190	280	360
Former Staffordshire	340	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Staffordshire	[4]—	250	210	290	320
Stoke on Trent	[4]—	70	100	150	130
Total former Staffordshire area	340	330	310	430	440
Former Wiltshire	120	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Wiltshire	[4]—	70	70	130	120
Swindon	[4]—	40	50	60	50
Total former Wiltshire area	120	110	120	190	170
Former Berkshire	120	130	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Bracknell Forest	[4]—	[4]—	30	50	40
Windsor and Maidenhead	[4]—	[4]—	20	20	20
West Berkshire	[4]—	[4]—	40	30	30
Reading	[4]—	[4]—	20	20	60
Slough	[4]—	[4]—	50	50	60
Wokingham	[4]—	[4]—	50	[3]—	40
Total former Berkshire area	120	130	200	170	230

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Former Cambridgeshire	150	120	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Cambridgeshire	[4]—	[4]—	120	60	90
Peterborough	[4]—	[4]—	[3]—	20	90
Total former Cambridgeshire area	150	120	120	80	180
Former Cheshire	210	150	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Cheshire	[4]—	[4]—	150	180	170
Halton	[4]—	[4]—	30	20	60
Warrington	[4]—	[4]—	100	40	60
Total former Cheshire area	210	150	270	240	290
Former Devon	210	250	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Devon	[4]—	[4]—	170	270	270
Plymouth	[4]—	[4]—	70	110	170
Torbay	[4]—	[4]—	40	40	60
Total former Devon area	210	250	280	410	490
Former Essex	290	240	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Essex	[4]—	[4]—	180	330	480
Southend on Sea	[4]—	[4]—	30	40	60
Thurrock	[4]—	[4]—	20	40	60
Total former Essex area	290	240	230	410	590
Former Hereford and Worcestershire	110	140	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Herefordshire	[4]—	[4]—	50	20	60
Worcestershire	[4]—	[4]—	150	180	160
Total former Hereford and Worcester area	110	140	200	200	210
Former Kent	260	130	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Kent	[4]—	[4]—	330	430	470
Medway	[4]—	[4]—	20	60	130
Total former Kent area	260	130	350	490	600
Former Lancashire	560	510	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Lancashire	[4]—	[4]—	270	370	340
Blackburn with Darwen	[4]—	[4]—	90	70	80
Blackpool	[4]—	[4]—	50	60	100
Total former Lancashire area	560	510	400	510	520
Former Nottinghamshire	310	450	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Nottinghamshire	[4]—	[4]—	400	360	280
Nottingham	[4]—	[4]—	80	130	130
Total former Nottinghamshire area	310	450	470	480	400
Former Shropshire	110	130	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Shropshire	[4]—	[4]—	120	110	100
Telford and Wrekin	[4]—	[4]—	70	80	90
Total former Shropshire area	110	130	190	180	190
Cornwall	100	130	290	260	250
Cumbria	130	130	140	170	180
Gloucestershire	70	80	100	150	130
Hertfordshire	120	90	130	170	120
Isle of Wight	60	40	40	40	60
Lincolnshire	140	140	160	230	230
Norfolk	210	160	140	260	220
Northamptonshire	190	240	130	160	190
Northumberland	170	140	150	130	190
Oxfordshire	140	110	170	120	130
Somerset	150	140	160	220	330
Suffolk	220	230	210	270	240
Surrey	130	130	130	180	260
Warwickshire	110	110	130	140	130
West Sussex	170	100	130	150	210
England	13,610	13,150	14,120	16,660	19,590

[1] Local education authorities created by local government re-organisation in 1997 and 1998 are shown under their parent authority. Data have been aggregated to give totals for the former authority areas, in order to allow comparisons between years.

[2] All figures are rounded to the nearest 10. Totals may not appear to equal the sum of their component parts, due to rounding.

[3] Less than five.

[4] Not applicable.

School Playing Fields

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many applications for permission to develop on school playing fields have been *(a)* submitted to her Department, *(b)* approved and *(c)* rejected since the new scrutiny arrangements were introduced in July 2001. [39555]

John Healey *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* All applications to dispose, or change the use, of school playing fields received since 16 July 2001 have been scrutinised by an independent School Playing Fields Advisory Panel. The panel comprises representatives from the National Playing Fields Association, the Central Council of Physical Recreation, the education organisation Learning through Landscapes, the National Association of Head Teachers and the Local Government Association. The purpose of the panel is to advise on the extent to which applications meet the published criteria, and to recommend either acceptance or rejection.

There have been 25 applications since 16 July 2001 to dispose of areas equal to, or larger than, a sports pitch. We are still assessing 17 of these applications and have approved the other eight, five of which are at school sites that are either closed or due for closure. Of the approved applications at the three operating schools, two will provide sports halls and a new all-weather pitch. The other approved application involves the granting of a lease as part of a Private Finance Initiative scheme to provide modern education facilities.

Television Sets

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many *(a)* analogue and *(b)* integrated digital television sets her Department has purchased in each of the last 24 months; and if she will make a statement; [38172]

(2) how many *(a)* integrated digital and *(b)* analogue television sets have been bought by her Department in each of the last 24 months; and if she will publish the guidance given to officials making decisions on television purchases. [33241]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* Information on the number of television sets purchased by my Department could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

My Department alongside other Government Departments has the ability to call off the contracts, which have been negotiated and set up by the Office of Government Commerce to purchase both analogue and integrated digital television sets.

Science, Engineering and Mathematics Students

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what initiatives the Government have in place to increase the number of students taking mathematics and physics A-level. [39701]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* Mathematics and science are at the heart of our agenda to raise standards. Pupils have a statutory entitlement to study both subjects within the national curriculum. In recognition of their importance for adult and working life, we propose to keep them as 'core' subjects for 14 to 16-year-olds in the Green Paper: "14–19 extending opportunities, raising standards".

Science Year is a key initiative to encourage young people to continue their study of science beyond the age of 16. We want young people to view science as relevant to the modern world and as the basis for rewarding careers. "Science and Engineering Ambassadors" is an initiative being developed through Science Year. Ambassadors—professionals in science, engineering, mathematics and technology—will act as role models and mentors for young people and will offer support to teachers.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the retention rate of students *(a)* on engineering-based GNVQ courses and *(b)* on non engineering-based GNVQ courses. [39705]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* The retention rate (whole length of the course) for students on engineering GNVQ courses is 78 per cent., compared with 76 per cent. for students on non-engineering GNVQ courses.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the effect the student funding system is having upon engineering and science graduates choosing to continue into postgraduate study. [39706]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* The number of home postgraduate students in science, engineering and technology rose from 69,201 in 1994–95 to 87,747 in 2000–01, an increase of 27 per cent. Recent changes to the student funding system apply to undergraduate rather than postgraduate students. The Government have already taken steps to improve the competitiveness of PhD stipends to ensure that doctoral study remains an attractive option for graduates with the minimum level for research councils' PhD stipends rising to £9,000 per year by 2003–04. The Government have also commissioned Sir Gareth Roberts to review the supply of high-level engineering and science skills.

National Training Organisations

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps she is taking to ensure that *(a)* National Training Organisations discharge their outstanding legal and professional obligations before winding-up and *(b)* adequate continuity of business is maintained in the interim before sector skills councils are established to replace them. [40331]

John Healey: Government are withdrawing National Training Organisation (NTO) recognition on 31 March 2002. A body with this status will be free to continue business after this date if its board decides. A board that decides to wind up its organisation will be subject to normal rules, usually discharged through liquidation procedures, to safeguard third party interests. Where public contracts are concerned alternative arrangements will be made for the delivery of this work by another competent body. We have agreed to provide contracts up to 31 August 2002 to ensure that essential work in the public interest will continue after NTO recognition ends and where specific funding has been requested. The Sector Skills Development Agency will be responsible for ensuring the delivery of this work from September 2002.

Drug Abuse

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent representations her Department has received from *(a)* schools, *(b)* local education authorities and *(c)* the police regarding the prevention of drug abuse in schools, since June 2001. [40478]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Successful drug education programmes convey both knowledge and skills, particularly social skills, with the aim of enabling pupils to make informed choices. The Department for Education and Skills works very closely with schools, local education authorities and the police to ensure they are involved in the policy making process. In the last eight months officials have received correspondence from schools and parents; have worked closely with local education authorities on a drug, alcohol and tobacco education training package for teachers and have discussed drug education with the Metropolitan police and the Home Office via correspondence and at several meetings.

Literacy and Numeracy Hours

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if literacy and numeracy hours will be compulsory in schools with *(a)* earned autonomy and *(b)* exemptions related to innovation. [40485]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: There is no statutory duty on primary schools to teach the literacy hour or a daily mathematics lesson. The proposed exemptions available under *(a)* Earned Autonomy and *(b)* the Power to Innovate relate only to exemptions from statutory requirements on schools or LEAs. Therefore, the literacy hour and daily mathematics lesson cannot be subject to exemption under either of these provisions.

School Exclusions (Drugs)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what representations her Department has received regarding exclusions from school in connection with possession of, or dealing in, illegal drugs since June 2001. [40486]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department has received a number of representations on the subject of exclusion from schools in connection with possession of, or dealing in, illegal drugs since June 2001.

The Department's guidance on exclusion in general is set out in Circular 10/99 as amended. The document "Revised Guidance on Exclusion from School—Draft for Consultation" published on 24 January also covers the subject. Copies of both documents are in the Library.

Mobile Phone Thefts

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what criteria are used by school authorities in determining whether to report offences involving the theft of mobile phones to the police. [40007]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The DfES is concerned for the safety and security of school pupils and staff, and in 1997 issued guidance on school security jointly with the Home Office. This guidance, "School Security: Dealing with Troublemakers", deals with incidents, including thefts, that occur on school premises, and advises schools and local education authorities that offences of theft need to be reported to the police. The guidance does not preclude a pupil or parent reporting any such offence independently.

Where a school's insurer lays down terms and conditions for the reporting of theft, we expect a school to meet them.

However, we recognise that school pupils are vulnerable to theft on the way to and from school. If a mobile phone is stolen in such circumstances, it is then a matter for the victim and their parents to report it to the police. They may also wish to inform the school so that the head teacher and local education authority may be able to see if any pattern of crime is arising, and to consider the need for advising pupils and their parents of any consequent action.

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many cases involving the theft of mobile phones were dealt with by school authorities, without the involvement of the police, in the last two years. [40011]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We do not collect these figures, nor would it be economic to request them from schools or local education authorities.

The reporting of criminal incidents to the police is the responsibility of the head teacher of a school. Guidance was issued to head teachers in 1997 by the then Department for Education and Employment, jointly with the Home Office. This guidance, "School Security: Dealing with Troublemakers", advised schools and local education authorities that offences of theft need to be reported to the police.

The procedure by which such offences are reported should be determined by discussion between schools and the police. In the case of the schools which they maintain, local education authorities also have a key role in monitoring overall security policies. But the primary responsibility for planning a school's security arrangements rests with the governing body of the school.

Timeplan

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if her Department is reviewing Timeplan's licence to operate. [36603]

Alan Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

The requirement for employment agencies to be licensed was removed by the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994. I shall shortly be putting forward proposals for revised employment agency regulations that will greatly strengthen the requirements on agencies supplying teachers and others who work with vulnerable people.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Royal Commissions

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will list the Royal Commissions undertaken since 1978, the terms of reference and the total costs for each one. [35962]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

Four Royal Commissions have been established since 1978. These are as follows:

Criminal Procedure [3 February 1978]

Criminal Justice [14 March 1991]

Long Term Care for the Elderly [17 December 1997]

Reform of the House of Lords [18 February 1999].

The terms of reference are set out in the published reports and can be found in the Library of the House.

Details of costs are not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Public Appointments

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people from Warrington, North he has appointed to non-departmental public bodies since 1997. [39452]

Mr. McCartney: My right hon. Friend has appointed no one from the Warrington area to non-departmental public bodies since 1997.

Pensions

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of public sector employees are in *(a)* funded occupational pension schemes, *(b)* non-funded schemes and *(c)* neither. [40113]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent representations he has received on the operation of section 67 of the Pensions Act 1995; and whether this will fall within the scope of the Pickering Review. [39999]

Mr. McCartney: The Pickering Simplification Review is a comprehensive re-evaluation of private pensions legislation, and section 67 of the Pensions Act 1995 is included in the report's remit. The review has held an extensive consultation exercise, which has generated a considerable number of submissions. These submissions have highlighted a number of areas of pensions law, including section 67 of the Pensions Act 1995.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many retirement pensioners are resident abroad, broken down separately for each country with more than five per cent. of the total, and for the remainder collectively; and if he will indicate for each country separately whether a reciprocal payment agreement is in place. [40689]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested is in the table. There are reciprocal agreements with Spain, Republic of Ireland and the USA, as well as some countries included in "Other" in the table.

Number of people in receipt of retirement pension overseas in each country with more than five per cent. of the total at 30 September 2001

thousand

Country	*RP recipients*
Total	874.0
Australia	223.0
Canada	142.5
Republic of Ireland	89.6
Spain	45.6
USA	113.8
Other	259.6

Notes:

1. Figures exclude Northern Ireland and Channel Islands cases.
2. Figures have been rounded to the nearest 100 and are shown in thousands.
3. Based on a 5 per cent. sample from the Pension Strategy Computer System at 30 September 2001.

SERPS (Publicity)

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what further plans he has to publicise the rule changes to inherited SERPS. [40938]

Mr. McCartney: We have taken a series of steps to ensure people are made aware of the remedial measures we have taken to rectify the problems created by the failure to publicise adequately the 1986 legislative changes to Inherited SERPS.

These measures, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced to the House on 29 November 2000, and which subsequently became law on 20 March 2001, were: to postpone any change to the rules on inherited SERPS until October this year; ensure existing pensioners, and people due to reach state pension age before this October were not affected by the change; and phase the reduction for people within 10 years of state pension age—allowing them time to plan ahead.

During the course of last year, the Department wrote to all existing pensioners, and those whose state pension age falls before 5 October 2002 to reassure them that, in the event of their death, the new rules on Inherited SERPS will not affect their spouses.

We are now going further to ensure that people understand the changes. From 11 March, the Department will start writing to some 5½ million people within 10 years of state pension age—those who, under the new rules, can pass on between a maximum of 90 per cent. and 60 per cent. of their SERPS to a surviving spouse.

The letter, and the accompanying leaflet, will not only explain how the changes may affect them, but will also give them the opportunity to request an estimate of the SERPS they can pass on, and impartial information on financial planning.

In addition, from August this year, we will run a media campaign to further disseminate information on the changes to the public at large.

We have taken action to ensure that the Department's staff are aware of the new rules, and the Department will also provide a dedicated helpline 0845 600 6116 or textphone 0845 602 1913 to answer further queries and provide information to members of the public.

Fraud and Error

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the proportion of claims for the children's premium in income support and jobseeker's allowance which have been *(a)* fraudulent and *(b)* incorrect. [25988]

Mr. McCartney *[pursuant to his reply, 4 February 2002, c. 757W]:* There is not a "children's premium" in income support or jobseeker's allowance. People claiming either benefit may claim for dependent members of their household. The latest information on the levels of fraud and error from claiming incorrectly for the number and type of dependents is in the report "Fraud and Error in Claims for Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance from April 2000 to March 2001" a copy of which is available in the Library. However, it is not possible to disaggregate the number of cases in which fraud and error is attributable solely to incorrect claims for dependent children.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Volunteers

Bob Russell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many members of his staff in each of the past two years have been granted a day's paid leave to work as a volunteer; and if he will make a statement. [39731]

Mr. Leslie: A survey of Cabinet Office staff in 2001 indicated that at least 4.7 per cent. of staff undertook a wide range of voluntary activities. Records of special paid leave are not held centrally, however, and it is therefore not possible to say how many applications for special paid leave were specifically for volunteering.

Cabinet Office has always supported the civil service tradition of allowing both paid and unpaid leave for voluntary public duties, and the Department's provisions allow staff the opportunity to do voluntary work of any kind on at least one day a year without loss of pay.

Civil Servants

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister further to his answer of 7 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1130W, on civil service entrants, what is being done to publicise the fast stream development programme to students at institutions of higher education other than Oxford and Cambridge. [38313]

Mr. Leslie: Action taken to publicise the fast stream development programme to students at universities other than Oxford and Cambridge has included the following:

(i) the Cabinet Office Outreach Officer has given careers presentations to promote and raise awareness of the fast stream to ethnic, cultural and religious societies at the following universities: York, Leeds, Bradford, Huddersfield, Birmingham, Leeds Metropolitan, University of Central England and Aston;

(ii) serving fast streamers gave career presentations at 44 other universities throughout the UK in 2001;

(iii) of 60 undergraduates participating in the 2001 summer development programme, which provides a six-eight week work placement, and training at the civil service college, 55 came from 27 other universities other than Oxford and Cambridge;

(iv) 26 of the undergraduates who participated in the 2001–02 winter training course at the civil service college came from universities other than Oxford and Cambridge;

(v) a group of 24 disabled undergraduates, none of them from Oxford and Cambridge universities, participated in "Dunchester's Millions", a civil service policy game organised with Workable in November 2001. In the last 12 months this training and awareness activity has also been facilitated at three other universities;

(vi) 23 disabled undergraduates from other universities accepted work placements in the civil service over the summer vacation 2001. A similar programme in conjunction with the charity Workable will run again this summer.

(vii) career advisers from 38 other universities are scheduled to attend the civil service selection board as observers of the fast stream recruitment process between February and May this year as part of our strategy for raising awareness.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister at which graduate fairs the fast stream development programme was publicised last year. [38314]

Mr. Leslie: The fast stream development programme was publicised last year at the following graduate recruitment careers fairs:

Fair	*Date (2001)*	*Student visitors*
University of Central Lancashire Graduate Fair	6 June	800
Gradunet Virtual Fair	14 June	200
University of Newcastle Careers Fair	18 June	1,400
University of Manchester and UMIST Graduate Fair	21 June	3,000
University of Birmingham Graduate Fair	22 and 23 June	8,362
University of London Careers Service Recruitment Fair	27 and 28 June	11,527
Diversity UK—Ethnic Minority Fair, London	31 July and 1 August	1,500
Manchester Diversity Fair	17 October	1,500
Sheffield Universities Recruitment Fairs	24 October	4,500
University of St. Andrews Graduate Fair, Fife	24 October	850
University of Aberdeen Recruitment Fair	1 November	800
University of Teesside's Careers Fair	2 November	950
ACFF Diversity Fair, London	13 November	2,200
University of Dundee Graduate Fair	14 November	900
Napier University Recruitment Fair, Edinburgh	14 November	830
University of Birmingham Graduate Fair	6 and 7 November	5,157
University of Manchester and UMIST Graduate Fair	13 and 14 November	2,729
University of London Careers Service Recruitment Fair	5 and 6 December	7,000

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what is being done to make the senior civil service more representative of the population; and how this is publicised across Government. [38316]

Mr. Leslie: The latest figures for October 2001 released on 21 February show that the civil service is making progress on tackling under-representation at senior levels:

25.3 per cent. of the senior civil service are women, up from 17.8 per cent. in 1998. The target for 2004–05 is 35 per cent.

21.2 per cent. of those in the top 600 posts are women, up from 12.7 per cent. in 1998. The target for 2004–05 is 25 per cent.

[1]2.3 per cent. of staff at senior civil service level are from a minority ethnic background, up from 1.6 per cent. in 1998. The target for 2004–05 is 3.2 per cent.

[1]1.8 per cent. of staff at senior civil service level have a disability, up from 1.5 per cent. in 1998. The target for 2004–05 is 3 per cent.

[1] These figures exclude data on ethnicity and disability in MOD.

Individual Departments and agencies have specific initiatives in place to tackle under-representation at senior levels. These are supported by a number of central initiatives, all of which are publicised widely across Government.

In June 2001, the Cabinet Office launched the Elevator Partnerships, as a pilot informal mentoring scheme for women. The aim of the scheme is partnership between 50 senior women and 50 junior women who appear to be static in career terms, with the aim of encouraging career confidence.

All Departments were given the opportunity to participate in the pilot. An evaluation of the pilot in the summer will be used to encourage Departments to set up similar schemes.

The Cabinet Office has launched "Pathways", a central development programme targeted at minority ethnic staff with the potential to rise to senior levels. There is an annual trawl across all Departments for participants and there is a page dedicated to the scheme on the civil service website.

There is also an annual bursary scheme for disabled civil servants who have the potential to reach a senior management position (at least Grade 7) in the civil service. The scheme provides access and funding for training opportunities and personal development. Applications are invited annually through advertisements in Government publications.

Working Conditions and Practices

Dr. Cable: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many people are employed in his Department on a job share contract; and what percentage of vacant positions was advertised on this basis in the last 12 months. [35355]

Mr. Leslie: The Cabinet Office currently employs 12 members of staff on a job share contract.

The Cabinet Office is committed to supporting part-time working, job sharing and other forms of alternative working patterns. The flexibility of the pattern is decided in conjunction with local management to suit an individual's need and the needs of their work.

Information on the percentage of vacant positions opened up to job shares is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, since September 2001 it has been my Department's policy that all vacant posts will normally be open to any alternative working pattern, including part-timers and job sharers. The majority of posts advertised in this period will, therefore, have been open to job sharers.

Public Appointments

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list those employees, executives and directors of *(a)* Tesco, *(b)* J. Sainsbury, *(c)* Safeway, *(d)* Asda and *(e)* other food retailers who have been appointed to advisory and other roles on bodies in receipt of public funds since May 1997; and if he will list the terms of each such appointment. [39997]

Mr. Leslie: Information on the career history of people appointed to non-departmental public bodies, task forces, ad hoc advisory groups and reviews is not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

However, the names of the chairs of public bodies are listed in the annual Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies".

The names of the chairs of task forces, ad hoc advisory groups and reviews are listed in the "Report on Task Forces, Ad Hoc Advisory Groups and Reviews". Four of these reports have so far been published in January 2000, July 2000, December 2000 and October 2001. The report published in January 2000 provided information and details between May 1997 and October 1999.

Copies of "Public Bodies" and of the "Reports on Task Forces, Ad Hoc Advisory Groups and Reviews" have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Car Licences

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cars there were with current licences in Northern Ireland in each year since 1997. [39850]

Dr. John Reid: Responsibility for this subject has been devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly and is therefore no longer a matter for the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Ministerial Boxes

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland by what means ministerial boxes are conveyed from private offices in his Department to *(a)* himself and *(b)* his fellow Ministers; how frequently and at what expense private courier firms are employed for such a task; and which courier firms have been used for such duties. [36277]

Dr. John Reid: Ministerial boxes originating from the NIO are transported to the Secretary of State's and Ministers' homes either by Government car or by a service provided by the Royal Mail.

Occasionally, these boxes are transported to the Secretary of State and Ministers' constituencies by a private courier firm using competitive rates. For security reasons, it would not be appropriate to disclose the name of the private courier firm.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Sport England

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will publish the notes taken by her officials at the meeting on 14 June 2001 between the chairman of Sport England and the Minister for Sport. [39798]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* It is not my Department's practice to publish internal records of meetings. In compiling its report on the Sport England accounts, the National Audit Office has had full access to my Department's papers on this matter.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) on what date the Minister for Sport was informed of Mr. Derek Casey's resignation as chief executive of Sport England; [39797]

(2) on what dates she was informed *(a)* that Mr. Derek Casey had resigned as chief executive of Sport England and *(b)* of the value of the severance package. [39802]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport and I were informed on 14 June that Derek Casey agreed to resign. We were informed of the value of the severance package agreed by Sport England on 3 August.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will publish the *(a)* date and *(b)* subject of (i) meetings and (ii) telephone calls between the Minister for Sport and (A) the chief executive of Sport England and (B) the chairman of Sport England, between 1 June and 14 June 2001. [39793]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* The only meeting which the Minister for Sport held with either the chief executive of Sport England or the chairman was on 14 June. The Minister set out his draft plans for a new strategic body for sport. At that meeting, Mr. Casey announced that he felt it important for a new person to take on the long-term task of building the new structures, and offered his resignation from his position as chief executive of Sport England.

There is no record of any telephone calls between the Minister and the chairman or chief executive of Sport England between 1 June and 14 June 2001.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will publish the date of the events, other than meetings, at which the Minister for Sport and the chief executive of Sport England, were both in attendance, between 1 June and 14 June 2001. [39796]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* There were none.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if she will publish the correspondence between the Minister for Sport and the chairman of Sport England in which the resignation of Mr. Derek Casey as chief executive of Sport England was referred to; [39795]

(2) if she will publish correspondence between the Minister for Sport and the chief executive of Sport England between 1 June and 14 June 2001; [39794]

(3) if she will publish the correspondence between the Minister for Sport and *(a)* Mr. Derek Casey and *(b)* Mr. Trevor Brooking regarding the resignation of Mr. Casey from his position as chief executive of Sport England, including Mr. Casey's resignation letter. [39799]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* There has been no correspondence between myself, the Minister of State, the chairman and the former chief executive of Sport England on the subject of Derek Casey's resignation.

Official Visits

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the official visits to *(a)* Paris and *(b)* Brussels made by each Minister in her Department in 2001 and the mode of travel used; and what guidance is provided to Ministers in her Department on the choice of mode of travel for such visits. [38143]

Mr. Caborn: The information you requested is shown in the following table.

Date	*Minister*	*City*	*Mode of transport*	*Purpose*
25–26 January 2001	Minister for the Arts	Paris	Rail	Opening of John Soane exhibition "La Reve de L'Architecte"
1–2 July 2001	Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting	Brussels	Rail	EU Presidency Tourism Summit
30–31 October 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Paris	Air	UNESCO World Heritage Committee elections
5 November 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Brussels	Air-out Rail-return	EU Council of Ministers meeting on Culture and Audiovisual matters
12 November 2001	Minister of State for Sport	Brussels	Air	EU Ministerial Conference on Sport

All travel is made in line with the guidance set out in Chapter 7 of the Ministerial Code and the accompanying guidance document "Travel by Ministers" using the most efficient and cost effective mode of transport and bearing in mind security considerations.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the official visits within the UK outside London made by each Minister in her Department in 2001, giving for each *(a)* the origin and destination and *(b)* the mode of travel used; and what guidance is provided to Ministers in her Department on choice of mode of travel for official visits. [38179]

Mr. Caborn: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Ministers regularly travel throughout the UK in the course of their duties and all travel is made in line with the guidance set out in Chapter 7 of the Ministerial Code and the accompanying guidance document Travel by Ministers using the most efficient and cost effective mode of transport and bearing in mind security considerations.

Museums

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what Government funding has been made available in each of the last five years for museums in *(a)* London, *(b)* the South East, *(c)* Birmingham, *(d)* the West Midlands and *(e)* England; what her projections are for the next three years; and if she will make a statement. [38094]

Dr. Howells: My Department's grant funding to its 20 sponsored museums and galleries in England and their branch museums is shown in the table.

Table 1: Allocation of grant-in-aid to DCMS sponsored museums and galleries

£ million

Region	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2003–04*
England	206	203	219	229	246	268	275
London	184	185	197	205	218	238	243
South East	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Birmingham	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
West Midlands	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

My Department does not provide core funding for other museums, but supports the wider museum sector in England through Resource: the Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries.

Following the creation of the Designated Museums Challenge Fund (DMCF) in 1999 Resource and its predecessor the Museums and Galleries Commission have made the following awards of non-core funding to museums with pre-eminent collections across England:

Table 2: Non-core support for regional museums via Resource

£ million

Region	*1999–2002*
England	15.0
London	2.4
South East	1.6
Birmingham	0.6
West Midlands[1]	0.9

[1] Excluding Birmingham

In the Government Spending Review 2000 Resource was allocated an additional £10 million per year to support regional collections. This will now be used to implement the proposals set out in the report of the Regional Museums Task Force "Renaissance in the Regions".

Royal Parks Police

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what progress has been made on the recommendations made on the Royal Parks Police by Tony Speed and Dan Foley; and when changes will be implemented; [39984]

(2) if she will list the retirement ages and conditions of retirement of *(a)* former police officers serving in the Royal Parks Police and *(b)* officers of the Royal Parks Police who have not served in the police; [39986]

(3) how many retired police officers receiving a police pension are fully employed by the Royal Parks Police; [39985]

(4) when the pay rise, due in September 2001, for the Royal Parks Police will be implemented; and if the pay will be backdated. [39983]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* Responsibility for the subject of these questions have been delegated to the Royal Parks Agency under its Chief Executive, William Weston. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Sandra Smith to Mrs. Cheryl Gillan, dated 4 March 2002:

I have been asked by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to reply to Parliamentary Questions concerning the Royal Parks Constabulary because these are operational matters for which the Royal Parks Agency is responsible.

Most of the recommendations of the Speed Report have been implemented. We are currently discussing with the Metropolitan Police Service the option that the Royal Parks Police should become a ring-fenced operational command unit of the Metropolitan Police Service.

The normal retirement age for officers of the Royal Parks Constabulary, regardless of previous police service, is aged 60. The only exception is for staff in post before 1 January 1994 who have completed less than 20 years service at the age of 60: they have a right to stay on until they have either completed 20 years service or reached the age of 65, whichever is the sooner.

The Agency is not required to hold records of how many serving RPC officers are retired from other police services and receiving a pension from them.

The Department are considering the Agency's pay remit, and as soon as they have agreed it we will begin negotiating this year's pay settlement. Whatever is agreed will be backdated to 1 September 2001.

New Millennium Experience Company

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 592W, for what reason ownership of the sculpture did not accrue to NMEC. [39147]

Tessa Jowell: In common with other sculptures at the dome site, NMEC paid only for construction and installation in order to keep the cost affordable. Ownership rights remain with Anthony Gormley, therefore. He has, however, made it clear that he wishes the sculpture to remain on the site. The necessary permissions are being pursued to make this happen.

Ice Sports (Gloucestershire)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to site new ice sports facilities in Gloucestershire; and if she will make a statement. [40709]

Mr. Caborn: The provision of ice sports facilities is a matter for local authorities to consider. Local authorities are best placed to determine the level of provision required in the light of local needs and the appropriate mixture of public and private provision.

The Government support the provision of sport and leisure facilities through various means including funding from the Sports Lottery Fund, administered by Sport England. It is for local authorities to apply for this funding. No applications have been received for any new ice sports facilities in Gloucestershire.

Sport England have informed us there are no plans for the provision of an ice sports facility in Gloucestershire. Sport England's regional strategy report in 1995 recognised the need for new ice sport facilities in the south-west. As ice rinks are relatively expensive to build, any applications for lottery funding would be considered in the context of Sport England's priorities.

Sports Training

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent representations she has received concerning funding for sports training for those aged 16 to 18 years; and if she will make a statement. [40379]

Mr. Caborn: Following a recommendation in the March 2001 Government's Plan for Sport, a review of the role that further and higher education can play in the delivery of sport was undertaken by a national advisory group. The group reported back to Ministers in December 2001, and funding issues were covered in its conclusions and recommendations. The Government are currently consulting on the report, and expects to respond to it in April this year.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what financial assistance is provided by the Government for sports training for those aged 16 to 18 years. [40378]

Mr. Caborn: The Learning and Skills Act 2000 imposes a duty on the Learning and Skills Council to secure provision of organised leisure time activities connected with the training and education of young people aged 16–18. Funds are allocated to learning providers for this purpose.

Sports Clubs

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of 13 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 409W, on sports clubs, if she will list those sports representative bodies which provided evidence that the majority of local authorities grant 100 per cent. rate relief. [39973]

Mr. Caborn: In my answer of 17 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 472–73W, to the hon. Member, I stated that the majority of local authorities grant rate relief of up to 100 per cent. to local amateur sports clubs. That was not intended to imply that the majority of such clubs receive rate relief at 100 per cent.—simply that the majority of local authorities grant some measure of discretionary relief, and that the majority of amateur clubs benefit from this in some degree.

That statement was based on informal discussions with Sport England and the Central Council for Physical Recreation. As I informed the hon. Member in my answer of 13 February, no detailed figures exist.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many people were employed in a press or public relations function in her Department on 1 January in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000, *(e)* 2001 and *(f)* 2002. [39935]

Dr. Howells: The number of press officers and publicity officers in my Department at 1 January in each of the last six years was as follows:

Date	*Press officers*	*Publicity officers*
1997	8	4
1998	19	14
1999	8	4
2000	9	25
2001	8	24
2002	8	25

Note:

1: Includes two officers working part-time

2. Includes one officer working part-time

Listed Places of Worship Scheme

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make it her policy to include church organs as part of the fabric of the building for the purposes of the listed places of worship scheme. [39692]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* There are no plans to include church organs in the list of eligible criteria for the listed places of worship scheme. In devising a scheme that is as simple and straightforward as possible to operate, the Government have kept as close as possible to the existing VAT law for listed building alterations, so that if and when a reduced rate is introduced, its scope will mirror as nearly as possible that of the grant scheme.

Radio Licences (Religious Broadcasters)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on what basis radio licences are allocated to religious broadcasters. [40358]

Dr. Howells: The Radio Authority, which licences all independent radio services in the UK, is given discretion under the Broadcasting Act 1990 to award local analogue, short-term restricted service, satellite and cable licences to religious bodies.

Religious bodies may apply to the Radio Authority for any of these licences. The Radio Authority will assess such applications against its criteria, as set out in its Code on News and Current Affairs and Programming, and its guidelines on ownership, particularly in respect of compliance with the authority's religious broadcasting guidelines, and ensuring spectrum is available for the service before issuing a licence.

United Christian Broadcasters

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many representations have been received in support of the removal of existing prohibitions on United Christian broadcasters. [39484]

Dr. Howells: We have received over a long period a large number of representations supporting the removal of all prohibitions on ownership of broadcasting licences by religious organisations, including those in support of United Christian Broadcasters. Following my Department's recent consultation on media ownership rules, we received over 8,000 responses from individuals supporting the lifting of the current restrictions. We will announce our decisions on this issue in the draft Communications Bill which we expect to publish in the spring.

Lottery Projects

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list for the end of each financial year from establishment of the fund to the latest date for which figures are available, the amounts of lottery money allocated to projects but not yet transferred by *(a)* the New Opportunities Fund, *(b)* the Heritage Lottery Fund, *(c)* the Millennium Commission, *(d)* UK Sport, *(e)* Sport England, *(f)* the Community Fund, *(g)* the Arts Council of England and *(h)* the Film Council. [30408]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* The following table show the amount committed, but not paid out, to project operators, by each of the lottery distributors mentioned in the hon. Gentleman's question at 31 March in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive. This information is not available prior to 1998.

Outstanding commitments at 31 March each year

£

	1998	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
New Opportunities Fund	0	221,126,000	327,734,699	560,355,483
Heritage Lottery Fund	767,635,904	864,789,300	725,425,525	984,208,744
Millennium Commission	1,517,898,000	1,195,673,000	666,405,000	375,100,000
UK Sport	0	0	2,154,241	71,612,785
Sport England	464,228,095	503,767,997	549,508,000	638,145,000
Community Fund	476,130,613	510,198,796	616,534,332	649,184,443
Arts Council of England	456,527,849	380,842,709	307,865,661	272,902,320
Film Council	0	0	9,361,266	31,964,901

Golden Jubilee

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what meetings have taken place to discuss sponsorship of events related to the Golden Jubilee celebrations; which *(a)* members of the Government, *(b)* companies, *(c)* organisations and *(d)* individuals took part; and what the date was of each meeting; [39404]

(2) if she will list the *(a)* companies, *(b)* organisations and *(c)* individuals who have made donations to the Golden Jubilee project; and what (i) financial and (ii) other donations they each have made; [39385]

(3) which *(a)* companies, *(b)* organisations and *(c)* individuals have been approached with a view to making donations to fund this year's Golden Jubilee celebrations. [39403]

Tessa Jowell: The national events in central London over Jubilee Weekend are being organised by The Queen's Golden Jubilee Weekend Trust which was set up independently of Government. The trust is chaired by Lord Sterling who has responsibility for private sector fundraising. He has approached a number of companies, organisations and individuals about the possibility of their making a contribution. No member of the Government has been involved in that process. Details of the companies that have made donations were released to the press by Lord Sterling on 22 February 2002.

Television Licensing Authority

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) under what powers Television Licensing Authority officers visit households seeking permission to enter those premises; [39353]

(2) whether it is the policy of the Television Licensing Authority to visit the homes of people who do not have television sets. [39352]

Dr. Howells: The BBC, as Television Licensing Authority, contracts the day to day administration and enforcement of the licensing system to its agent, TV Licensing (TVL). While there is clearly no benefit in visiting an address if it is known that there is no television receiver there, this information is not always available without a visit. I understand that, in the past, a declaration that no television was in use at an address was normally accepted by TV Licensing as proof of the matter, but that a significant proportion of such declarations turn out to be false. The BBC has indicated that its current policy is therefore that TV Licensing should visit all addresses in respect of which it has received a declaration that no television is in use.

TV Licensing officials may enter a person's home only with their consent or if authorised to do so by a warrant issued by a magistrate. Under the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949 (as amended), in order to issue such a warrant a magistrate must be satisfied, by information provided on oath, that there is reasonable ground for suspecting that an offence under the Act has been or is being committed.

Culture Online

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how many users she expects the Culture Online project to have *(a)* from its launch and *(b)* in each year until 2010; [39391]

(2) if she will give the full cost and a breakdown of the costs of setting up the Culture Online project; and what is the projected cost for future financial years for which figures are available; [39390]

(3) when Culture Online will be launched; and if she will make a statement; [39388]

(4) which organisations and companies have participated in the Culture Online project; and what their *(a)* financial and *(b)* other contributions have been. [39389]

Dr. Howells: £5 million was allocated to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport as part of the 2000 spending review to allow initial development of the project, including the creation of a business case to support continued investment in Culture Online; the cost of developing our proposals for Culture Online so far is £1,833,555.

We are currently considering a number of alternative options for Culture Online and we hope to make an announcement in the near future. This will include details of any further funding available for Culture Online and what user groups Culture Online will target.

We have involved a large number of cultural educational and ICT organisations in the development of Culture Online. Details of those involved in the Culture Online steering group and Talent Bank are included in the Vision report, which was placed in the Libraries of the House. None of these organisations or companies has made financial contributions to Culture Online.

Inland Revenue

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the *(a)* number, *(b)* type and *(c)* value of items that have been accepted by the Inland Revenue in lieu of tax (i) since May 1997 to the most recent date for which figures are available and (ii) between May 1990 and April 1997. [39392]

Dr. Howells: The information requested is in the following table:

Year	*Number*	*Type*	*Value (£)*
1997–98	18	Archives, paintings, musical clock, manuscript, silver wine set, chattels, Celtic miniature shields	6,892,500
1998–99	29	9th century stone cross, archives, drawings, Handel memorabilia, Phaeton carriage, needlework casket, illuminated manuscript, watercolours, Delft pottery, leather coffer, judicial robe, paintings	25,992,104
1999–2000	13	Military medals, sculpture, antiquities, archive, paintings, silverware, pastel portraits	2,558,740
2000–01	24	Paintings, drawings, furniture, silverware, Limoges enamels, archives, medieval books, sculptures, communion set, ivory mirror back, ceramics, land	16,020,063
1990–91	15	Paintings, drawings, musical instruments, furniture, stamps	1,353,002
1991–92	13	Porcelain, paintings, motor car, motorcycle, silverware, chattels, sporting memorabilia	3,423,446
1992–93	16	Marble busts, chattels paintings, sculpture, silver gilt cup and cover, archive, model gun ship, 17th and 18th century glass, land	6,382,475
1993–94	18	17th and 18th century glass, two surrealist hats, paintings, manuscript, race cup, furniture, sketchbooks, Joseph Hayden Autograph, land	3,115,000

Free Museum Entry

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what impact free museum entry in London has had on admission numbers. [39751]

Dr. Howells: There has been a 76 per cent. increase in visitors on average at those museums and galleries in London which previously charged for admission, in the two months following the introduction of free entry compared with the same period in 2000–01. This is a tremendous endorsement of the Government's free access policy.

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what proposals are being considered to expand the programme of free museum entry across the United Kingdom. [39750]

Dr. Howells: There are no plans to extend free entry to museums beyond free entry to the permanent collections of the main museums and galleries in England to which the Government are committed to ensure universal free access. Entry to the national museums in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is a matter for their devolved Administrations.

Digital Television

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which television channels are subject to a must-carry requirement on *(a)* digital satellite, *(b)* digital terrestrial and *(c)* digital cable. [38956]

Dr. Howells: No television channels are, in practice, subject to a must-carry requirement.

For satellite, access is a matter of commercial negotiation, and is regulated by Oftel under the Advanced Television Services Regulations 1996 (SI 1996/3151), as amended by SI 1996/3197.

In the case of digital services carried by cable, the ITC can, under section 78A of the Broadcasting Act 1990 (as amended), require digital local delivery services to carry public service television channels; but has not considered it appropriate to do so.

In the case of digital terrestrial television, provision exists in section 28 of the 1996 Act, and through the allocation of radio spectrum by the Secretary of State under section 65 of the 1990 Act and section 6 of the 1996 Act, by which sufficient space is reserved on multiplexes for the carriage of public service channels.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what her Department's timetable is for the upgrading of digital television transmitters to widen the distribution of digital television services; [39405]

(2) when the Government plan to allow the upgrading of transmitters in west Yorkshire. [39406]

Dr. Howells: The Digital Television Action Plan, issued on 20 December, sets out a series of actions, with intended completion dates, for Government and stakeholders collectively to determine and agree a target level of coverage for digital terrestrial television and to produce a plan to achieve this. We commenced a three-month consultation on 11 December to inform the spectrum planning process. It is for the digital broadcasters to determine proposals to develop the digital terrestrial transmission network, in consultation with the Independent Television Commission and the Radiocommunications Agency.

English Tourism Council

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to give the English Tourism Council a marketing budget in order to market England; and if she will make a statement. [39506]

Dr. Howells: We are considering how to provide stronger co-ordination of the promotion and marketing of England's tourism assets.

Websites

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many *(a)* unique visitors and *(b)* page impressions have been received by (i) the DCMS website and (ii) the Golden Jubilee website. [39402]

Dr. Howells: From February 2001 to February 2002, the DCMS website received *(a)* 312,150 unique visitors, and *(b)* 4,351,594 page impressions.

Since its launch in June 2001 up to February 2002, the Golden Jubilee website received *(a)* 155,653 unique visitors and *(b)* 6,131,517 page impressions.

Job Advertisements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the job advertisements placed by her Department in the last 12 months specifying where the advertisements were placed and the cost in each case. [39061]

Dr. Howells: Details and costs of the job advertisements placed by my Department in the last 12 months are shown in the table:

Job Advertisements	£
March 2001	
Collection Assistant (Government Art Collection)	
Museums Association Journal	1,760
April 2000	
Assistant Librarian	
Library Association Journal	806
June 2001	
Head of News	
Guardian	4,839
October 2001	
Management Opportunities Recruitment Scheme	
Guardian	
Evening Standard	
Ethnic Media Group	10,386
November 2001	
Director of Strategy and Communications	
Times/Sunday Times	
Guardian	
Ethnic Media Group	20,540
January 2002	
Administration Opportunities Recruitment Scheme	
Evening Standard	
Metro	4,413

Publications

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many publications her Department has published in each of the past seven years; if she will list those publications; what the total cost of each publication was; what the total production run for each publication was; what the total distribution for each publication was; how many of those publications are available for download from her Department's website; and if she will make a statement. [38134]

Dr. Howells: The publications issued by my Department in the last seven years are listed and those published since 1999 are available electronically on the Department's website.

Information on the total cost, the production run and the total distribution run of each document could be supplied only at disproportionate cost. I have, however, included the overall yearly figures spent on publications since 1998 to 1999—the period for which information is available electronically.

	£
1998–99	288,100
1999–2000	448,238
2000–01	448,140
2001–02	[1]182,993

[1] To date

1995–96

A Candidate's Guide booklet

A Board Member's Guide

Library and Information Matters 1994

Sports White Paper

Film policy document

Heritage Green Paper

Building the Audience

Digital TV consultation document

Draft BBC Charter and Agreement

Press Privacy White Paper

GAC Catalogue

Reviewing Committee annual report 1995–96

Sport Raising the Game reprint
Treasure Trove annual report 1994–95
Public Lending Right annual report
DNH annual report 1995
Conservation Unit annual report
What Listing Means
Portable Antiquities Booklet
Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds
Benchmarking for the Small Hotel sector
Whitehall Urban Design Guidelines
Caring for Historic Buildings booklet

1996–97

The Bannister report
BBC Charter booklet
Sport: Raising the Game Part 2
Museums Review
Museum Education report
Public Libraries Review
Competing with the Best booklet
Export of Works of Art 1995–96
Supporting the Voluntary Sector
People Taking Part
National Lottery report
Public Lending Right report 1995–96
Legal Deposit consultation paper
The Deakin report
Treasure Trove annual report 1995–96
DNH annual report 1996
Setting the Level of the TV Licence Fee
Hotels: The Consumer View—reprint
Export Licensing Notice Youth Volunteering Development Grants, Application Forms and Guidelines
Tourism Strategy document
It Could Be Your Good Cause
Youth Volunteering Development Grants Scheme
Youth Challenge document
Health and Safety Guide
Artsmark
ICT document
The First Five Years
National Lottery leaflet

1997–98

National Lottery White Paper and popular version
Export of Works of Art 1996–97
A Guide to the Department
Government response to Select Committee Report on BBC and Future of Broadcasting
Interfaith millennium leaflet
What Listing Means
GAC leaflet
Government response to Library and Information Commission
DCMS annual report 1998
Response to millennium dome select committee
Sustainable Tourism report
Focus on Change report
Tourism Forum Bulletin
Treasure Trove annual report 1996–97
Children's Play leaflet
Library and Information Matters 1997–98
DCMS/Wolfson annual report
Lottery leaflet 1998
NOF consultation paper
Museum Education report
Treasure Act Code of Practice
Underwater Archaeology poster and leaflet
Government Art Collection: Tel Aviv catalogue
National Lottery White Paper
Film Policy Review Group report
UK presidency leaflet and booklet
Poetry and the presidency booklet

1998–99

The Eyre Review
Export of Works of Art 1997–98
Response to the select committee on the multimedia revolution
Creative Industries mapping document
DCMS annual report 1998
Commonwealth and Museums report
Digital Convergence Green Paper
Portable Antiquities annual report
Building a Global Audience
Government response to the LIC report
DCMS/Wolfson fund annual report 1997–98
Children's Play leaflet
National lottery information leaflet
New Opportunities Fund consultation document
Interfaith millennium leaflet reprint
Museums in the Learning Age Sustainable
Tourism document
Tomorrow's Tourism strategy report

1999–2000

Government Art Collection leaflet
Export of Works of Art 1998–99
Government Art Collection Conditions of Loan booklet
Portable Antiquities annual report
World Heritage Sites
Treasure annual report
Finding Our Past leaflet
Building a Global Audience
The Future Funding of the BBC
Review of the BBC's financial projections
Creative Industries—report on the creative industries finance conference

Creative Industries—Exports: Our Hidden Potential

Creative Industries—Internet inquiry: Snapshot of a rolling wave

Creative Industries—Your Creative Future

Creative Industries—UK Television Exports inquiry

DCMS annual report 1999

Local Cultural Strategies

PAT 10—Policy Action Team 10: report to the social exclusion unit

A Sporting Future For All

Libraries for All: Social Inclusion in Public Libraries

The White Book—Option Appraisal of Expenditure Decision: A Guide for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and its Sponsored Bodies

Consumers Call the Tune—The Impact of New Technologies on the Music Industry

Report on the DCMS/Wolfson Fund 1998–99

Libraries and the Regions—A discussion paper

Appraisal of annual library plans 1999

British Library review

Regional Consortium leaflet

Efficiency and Effectiveness of Government-sponsored Museums and Galleries

Report of the Tourism Consumer Group

Guidance on Disposals of Historic Buildings

2000–01

Treasure annual report

Vacant Plinth Advisory Panel report

Broadcasting Command Paper

Review of the Transparency of the BBC

Creative Industries Finance booklet

DCMS annual report 2000

Learning Power of Museums

Government Art Collection—Conditions of Loan Booklet

Public Appointments Guidance

Tax Relief for Charities Booklet

Music Industry report

Library Standard report

Coalfields and the lottery report

Museums Education report

Museums Social Inclusion report

New Opportunities Fund consultation paper

Better Public Buildings

A Sporting Future for All

Tourism Summit leaflet

Creative Industries mapping document 2001

DCMS Recruitment booklet

The Government's Plan for Sport

Culture and Creativity

Local Cultural Strategies

Music Industries Document: Consumers Call the Tune

Marching into the Millennium

2001/02

Portable Antiquities annual report

A Vision for Culture online

London Open House leaflet

Banking on a Hit report

Cricket Disorder report

Operation of the National Lottery—select committee response

Staging International Sports Events—select committee response

Tourism—the Hidden Giant and Foot and Mouth—select committee response

Summer Supplementary Estimates

Lottery Achievements—The first seven years

A Force for our Future—The Government Statement on the Historic Environment

Library and Information Matters—report

DCMS Publicity Guidelines

DCMS Event Guidelines

Report of the Gambling Review Body

Digital TV—Information for Landlords

CIEPAG—Achievements leaflet

Media Ownership Rules consultation paper

Winter Supplementary Estimates

Viewers Panel report

English National Stadium Review

Public Appointments registration form

Reappointments declarations form

Public Reappointments booklet

DCMS Recruitment literature reprint

Audio Visual Industries Training Group Report

Honours Guidance Binder

Equal Opportunities document reprint

DCMS Identity Guidelines

Communications White Paper—select committee response

Biennial Conservation report

Creative Industries Finance Conference report

Export of Works of Art 2000–01.

Tobacco Sponsorship (Darts)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the outcome has been of the Government Task Force set up to help sports find alternative sources of revenue to replace tobacco sponsorship, with particular reference to darts; and if she will make a statement. [40481]

Mr. Caborn: The Tobacco Task Force last met in October 1999. Following that meeting it was agreed that the task force had completed its initial work of identifying the needs of sports affected by the ban on tobacco sponsorship. Those sports included in the task force confirmed that it was too soon to be looking to replace existing contracts, and that the situation should be reviewed before the expiry of current contracts. We have been in contact with the member sports since 1999 and will consider the case for reconvening the task force if requested to.

I have recently been contacted by the British Darts Association. I have confirmed that I am happy to assist the association in discussions with alternative sponsors as and when interested companies are identified.

HEALTH

Parliamentary Questions

Ms Stuart: To ask the Secretary of Health when he will reply to the question from the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston to which he gave holding replies in July. [9705]

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to WPQ numbers *(a)* 9416, *(b)* 9403, *(c)* 8710, *(d)* 10282, *(e)* 10262, *(f)* 11000, *(g)* 10998, *(h)* 11957, *(i)* 12914, *(j)* 12918 and *(k)* 13108. [17827]

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list, in real terms, for each year since 1979 *(a)* the total sums of money spent directly by his Department in Scotland and *(b)* the total sums of money allocated by his Department for spending in Scotland through (i) the Scottish Office, (ii) the Scotland Office and (iii) the Scottish Executive; [16184]

(2) when he will reply to the question from the hon. Member for Beckenham of 14 November (ref. 16184); [21660]

(3) when he will answer questions no 16189 of 14 November and no 21660 of 4 December. [27405]

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham can expect answers to his Questions Ref. *(a)* 7597 (holding answer 15.10.01), *(b)* 7600 (holding answer 15.10.01), *(c)* 7606 (holding answer 15.10.01), *(d)* 24676 (holding answer 15.10.01), *(e)* 24341 (holding answer 15.10.01), *(f)* 12606 (holding answer 5.11.01), *(g)* 19224 (holding answer 29.11.01), *(h)* 26497 (holding answer 11.1.02), *(i)* 26496 (holding answer 11.1.02), *(j)* 26496 (holding answer 11.1.02), *(k)* 24681 (tabled 17.12.01), *(l)* 24310 (tabled 17.12.01) and *(m)* 24326 (holding answer 8.1.02). [37144]

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to Questions 24600, 24601, 24606 and 24576 tabled on 19 December 2001 and Questions 16847, 16848 and 16853 tabled on 21 November 2001. [39955]

Mr. Milburn: I have today replied to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) about delays which have come to light in handling parliamentary questions tabled for this Department.

I apologise for the delay in replying to these questions. A substantive reply will now be given as soon as possible.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many named day parliamentary written questions were tabled to his Department between 15 October and 5 November; and what proportion of these have received holding answers; [13308]

(2) what proportion of those named day parliamentary written questions to his Department that received a holding answer between 15 October and 5 November received the substantive answer *(a)* within three parliamentary days, *(b)* within seven parliamentary days, *(c)* within 10 parliamentary days, *(d)* within 15 parliamentary days and *(e)* over 15 parliamentary days after the holding answer was issued. [13327]

Jacqui Smith *[pursuant to her reply, 16 November 2001, c. 950W]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has today replied to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) about delays which have come to light in handling parliamentary questions tabled for this Department.

In the light of the events described in my right hon. Friend's answer to my hon. Friend, I will let the hon. Member have a revised reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many *(a)* named day written questions and *(b)* ordinary written questions to his Department tabled before 30 November 2001 have yet to receive a substantive reply; [33708]

(2) what the tabling date was of the earliest written question to his Department which is still awaiting a substantive reply. [33709]

Ms Blears *[pursuant to her reply, 5 February 2002, c. 923W]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has today replied to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) about delays which have come to light in handling parliamentary questions tabled for this Department.

In the light of the events described in my right hon. Friend's answer to my hon. Friend, I will let the hon. Member have a revised reply as soon as possible.

General Practitioners

Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of UK medical graduates entered general practice in the last five years. [23893]

Mr. Hutton: We do not hold information centrally on the percentage of UK medical graduates who enter general practice.

The numbers entering general practice registrar posts during the last five years is:

	Number
1997	1,343
1998	1,446
1999	1,520
2000	1,659
2001	1,883

Tobacco Policy Team

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when *(a)* he and *(b)* other Ministers in his Department met the smoking czar, Nikki Wade. [27361]

Yvette Cooper: As a member of the Department of Health's Tobacco Policy Team, Nikki Wade (now Griffiths) is responsible for the co-ordination of the local Alliance Network. Mrs. Griffiths is not and has never been given the title "smoking czar" by the Department of Health. This title was incorrectly attributed to Mrs. Griffiths in an article concerning the launch of the Alliance Network published by the Health Service Journal in November 2000.

Body-building Drugs

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been treated in the NHS for illnesses caused by the overuse of body building drugs in each year since 1997. [28578]

Yvette Cooper: Data on the number of drug users presenting to services for the treatment of anabolic steroids are not held centrally.

Needle exchange schemes that distribute clean needles and syringes have reported they attract steroid users that attend for a supply of clean needles. However, there are no quantitative data available on this across England.

Health Authority Expenditure

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was *(a)* the total bill for salaries and expenses for board members, *(b)* the administrative operating costs and *(c)* the total annual budget in the latest year for which figures are available for each regional health authority in England. [30199]

Mr. Hutton: Regional health authorities were dissolved in 1996. The answer shown in the table provides expenditure by health authority area for *(a)* authority members' remuneration, *(b)* authority administration expenditure and *(c)* total expenditure for 2000–01.

In many health authorities there are factors which distort expenditure figures for comparison purposes. These affect the answers given for part *(c)* and include:

the health authority acting in a lead capacity to commission health care or fund training on behalf of other health bodies;

asset revaluations in national health service trusts being funded through health authorities; and

some double counting of expenditure between health authorities and primary care trusts within the health authority area.

Expenditure cannot therefore be reliably compared between health authorities.

Allocations per weighted head of population provide a much more reliable measure to identify differences between funding of health authorities.

Source:

Health authority audited summarisation forms 2000–01

Primary care trust audited summarisation schedules 2000–01.

Expenditure is taken from health authority and primary care trusts within each health authority area. The majority of General Dental Services expenditure is not included in the health authority or primary care trust accounts and is separately accounted for by the Dental Practice Board.

Health authorities and primary care trusts should account for their expenditure on a gross basis. This results in an element of double counting where one body acts as the main commissioner and is then reimbursed by other bodies. The effect of this double counting within the answer cannot be identified.

£000

Health authority	*Authority members' remuneration*	*Administration expenditure*	*Total expenditure*
Avon	441	19,620	808,107
Barking and Havering	456	4,912	313,841
Barnet	396	5,698	317,222
Barnsley	338	3,830	196,582
Bedfordshire	390	12,247	405,606
Berkshire	454	13,619	585,486
Bexley and Greenwich	551	6,216	386,555
Birmingham	741	25,335	891,730
Bradford	1,013	8,615	387,767
Brent and Harrow	286	6,663	400,214
Bromley	432	5,797	284,221
Buckinghamshire	555	11,202	460,821
Bury and Rochdale	449	3,964	310,554
Calderdale and Kirklees	365	7,671	448,263
Cambridgeshire	1,341	14,862	518,689
Camden and Islington	374	6,094	537,478
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	639	6,351	392,751
County Durham and Darlington	496	6,302	495,693
Coventry	390	9,752	265,956
Croydon	543	4,125	303,260
Doncaster	489	7,127	271,638
Dorset	1,168	14,706	711,560
Dudley	365	3,629	245,172
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	570	16,225	630,055
East and North Hertfordshire	341	22,112	377,290
East Kent	440	10,729	495,988
East Lancashire	583	9,881	416,671
East London and the City	439	46,738	715,153
East Riding and Hull	476	5,498	4151,486
East Surrey	488	8,695	365,566
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	456	9,054	647,275
Enfield and Haringey	457	6,275	421,984
Gateshead and South Tyneside	409	3,849	319,730
Gloucestershire	392	5,451	411,598
Herefordshire	629	4,337	120,606
Hillingdon	747	6,256	186,751

£000

Health authority	*Authority members' remuneration*	*Administration expenditure*	*Total expenditure*
Isle of Wight	470	2,284	118,677
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	486	5,975	509,929
Kingston and Richmond	799	6,411	278,725
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	502	11,575	803,339
Leeds	654	8,860	647,260
Leicestershire	667	10,387	664,488
Lincolnshire	413	7,027	510,114
Liverpool	514	5,757	479,438
Manchester	825	10,468	469,117
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	923	14,876	574,703
Morecambe Bay	415	5,046	424,583
Newcastle and North Tyneside	407	5,803	425,973
Norfolk	606	8,925	598,090
North and East Devon	415	7,172	377,902
North and Mid Hampshire	362	6,289	386,281
North Cheshire	441	3,558	254,458
North Cumbria	439	9,368	250,278
North Derbyshire	414	4,415	271,232
North Essex	1,225	20,191	679,568
North Nottinghamshire	951	9,002	294,850
North Staffordshire	529	9,141	375,815
North West Lancashire	438	11,011	394,099
North Yorkshire	503	8,365	564,991
Northamptonshire	988	7,729	427,464
Northumberland	369	3,320	273,023
Nottingham	471	6,873	536,389
Oxfordshire	371	7,760	446,085
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	430	10,418	404,181
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	377	4,239	408,558
Rotherham	396	3,306	197,645
Salford and Trafford	482	7,600	407,129
Sandwell	518	6,443	255,198
Sefton	460	5,746	310,887
Sheffield	489	10,407	547,408
Shropshire	515	4,451	304,921
Solihull	315	3,059	146,558
Somerset	419	6,973	380,621
South and West Devon	706	6,751	481,570
South Cheshire	470	7,253	513,076
South Essex	748	15,421	552,193
South Humber	787	5,969	247,890
South Lancashire	374	3,186	229,058
South Staffordshire	434	9,609	406,554
Southampton and South West Hampshire	698	6,798	407,875
Southern Derbyshire	705	15,432	421,492
St. Helens and Knowsley	397	4,084	282,894
Stockport	356	3,696	212,670
Suffolk	392	7,479	487,269
Sunderland	375	5,549	251,410
Tees	254	13,547	490,027
Wakefield	491	10,390	286,738
Walsall	309	5,998	205,300
Warwickshire	396	4,043	366,166
West Hertfordshire	471	10,271	401,807
West Kent	641	20,371	700,901
West Pennine	484	14,989	359,807
West Surrey	436	6,843	477,760
West Sussex	269	8,946	588,497
Wigan and Bolton	476	8,974	450,150
Wiltshire	478	5,867	448,801
Wirral	438	3,981	279,106
Wolverhampton	384	4,392	198,476
Worcestershire	357	5,534	394,445
England total	51,523	859,040	41,041,228

Private Finance Initiative Contracts

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total external spend by his Department was on private finance initiative consultants in each of the last four years; how many full-time equivalent consultants were employed over this period; how many billed consultancy days there were per year; what the implied average cost of each PFI consultant was; how many consultancy firms were used by his Department over this period; and if he will make a statement. [31042]

Mr. Hutton: The total external spend by the Department on private finance initiative consultancy work from 1998 to date is £607,701.02; broken down and is shown in the table.

Private finance initiative consultancy work 1998 to date

Year	*Cost (£)*	*Number of firms*
1998	270,219.50	2
1999	108,824.29	2
2000	60,379.66	4
2001	168,277.57	6

The fees charged in the majority of cases was for specific work at an agreed cost with the company. It is therefore not possible to calculate how many consultants were employed, nor how many consultancy days there were per year.

NHS Operations (Private Sector)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations were carried out under the NHS and performed in the private sector in the last 12 months. [33759]

Mr. Hutton: Since November 2000 the Independent Healthcare Association has collected monthly data from independent health care providers about the number of NHS patients treated by them. According to data made available to the Department by the IHA, in the calendar year 2001 at least 71,750 procedures were carried out in the independent sector in England, paid for by the NHS. This includes out-patient appointments, day cases and in-patient treatment.

Public Appointments

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the appointments made by his Department since 1 May 1997 of chairmen of *(a)* non-departmental public bodies, *(b)* commissions, *(c)* inquiries, *(d)* agencies and *(e)* task forces; and if he will list their (i) term of office, (ii) salary and (iii) known political affiliation (A) past and (B) present. [33888]

Ms Blears: Information relating to non-departmental public bodies and special health authorities (both of which includes commissions) and public inquiries has been placed in the Library. This does not include information on the political affiliation of chairs of the bodies listed as this is not collected. None of the agencies for which the Department is responsible have chairs. Information on the number, remit and membership of task forces, ad hoc advisory groups and reviews has been published by the Cabinet Office on a regular basis. The first report was published on 11 January 2000 and gives information for the period between 1 May 1997 to 31 October 1999. A second report was published on 27 July 2000, and covered the period 1 November 1999 to 30 April 2000. A third report was published on 27 December 2000 covering the period 1 May 2000 to 31 October 2000. The most recent report: "Task forces, Ad Hoc Advisory Groups and Reviews", which was issued in October 2001, covers the period of the financial year 2000–01. Copies of these reports are available in the Library.

Wanless Report

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of the recommendations for future health care in the interim report by Derek Wanless and the medicine reclassification initiatives upon plans for the future training of doctors, nurses, pharmacists and other health care professionals; and if he will make a statement on the plans for such training. [36296]

Mr. Hutton: HM Treasury commissioned a report by Derek Wanless, "Securing our Future Health: Taking a Long-Term View" to review the technological, demographic and medical trends over the next two decades that will affect the national health service. An interim report has been issued for consultation. A final report is expected later this year.

The Government are committed to making more medicines more widely available where it is safe to do so and the training and information needs of health care professionals and patients is an integral part in this process.

Public-Private Partnerships

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which public-private partnerships with a capital value in excess of £1 million are under negotiation by his Department; and if he will make a statement. [36368]

Mr. Hutton: The table lists the private finance initiative schemes with a capital value of £1 million or greater which are currently under negotiation. All these schemes have placed an *Official Journal of the European Communities* notice and have yet to reach final close.

Region	*Trust*	*Project description*
Northern and Yorkshire	Newcastle-upon-Tyne Hospitals NHS Trust	Completion of Reconfiguration of Acute Hospital Services in Newcastle
Northern and Yorkshire	Leeds Teaching Hospital NHS Trust	Implementation of Leeds Acute Services Reconfiguration Strategy
Northern and Yorkshire	North Durham Health Care NHS Trust	Chester-le-Street Community Hospital
Northern and Yorkshire	Huddersfield and Calderdale NHS Trusts	EPR (Electronic Patient Record) scheme
Northern and Yorkshire	Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust	EPR scheme
Northern and Yorkshire	Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust	Redevelopment of Wharfdale General Hospital
Northern and Yorkshire	Bradford Hospitals NHS Trust and Airdale NHS Trust	EPR scheme
Trent	Southern Derbyshire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust[2, 3]	Acute Reconfiguration
Trent	Nottingham Healthcare NHS Trust	Elderly Mental Health
Trent	Doncaster and South Humber NHS Trust	Mental Health services
Trent	Nottingham City Hospital NHS Trust	Staff residences
Eastern	East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust	Ambulatory Care Centre
Eastern	Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust	Staff accommodation

Region	*Trust*	*Project description*
Eastern	Hinchingbrooke NHS Trust	DTC
London	Havering Hospitals NHS Trust	Redevelopment of Hospital facilities
London	Newham Healthcare NHS Trust	Rationalisation
London	The Whittington Hospital NHS Trust	Redevelopment of Acute Hospital Services
London	Parkside Health NHS Trust	Willesden
London	West London Pathology Consortium	Pathology Systems
London	Havering Hospital NHS Trust	EPR scheme
London	King's Healthcare NHS Trust	EPR scheme
London	Guy's and St. Thomas' Hospital NHS Trust	EPR scheme
London	Lewisham Hospital NHS Trust	EPR scheme
London	Barts and The London NHS Trust	Acute rationalisation
London	South West London Community Trust	Reconfiguration of Queen Mary's Roehampton
South East	Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust	Acute rationalisation
South East	Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals NHS Trust	Radcliffe infirmary relocation to John Radcliffe Hospital site
South East	Stoke Mandeville Hospital NHS Trust	Partial Redevelopment
South East	Newbury Primary Care NHS Trust	Consolidation of sites in Newbury
South East	Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre NHS Trust	Orthopaedic/Medicines redevelopment
South East	Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Trust	Mental Health Acute Hospital reprovision
South East	East Kent Community NHS Trust	West View Reprovision Joint NHS/Local Authority
South East	Brighton Health Care NHS Trust	Renal Unit Reprovision
South East	Northampton Community Healthcare NHS Trust	Danetre Community Health Centre Joint NHS/Local Authority
South East	Invicta Community Care NHS Trust	Mental Health Reprovision
South East	Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Trust	Acute Mental Health Ward reprovision
South East	Brighton Health Care NHS Trust	Brighton Education Centre
South East	Bournewood Community and Mental Health NHS Trust	Walton and Chertsey Health Centres
South East	Ashford and St. Peter's NHS Trust	Energy Management Scheme
South East	Mid-Sussex NHS Trust	Low Secure Unit
South East	Royal Berkshire and Battle Hospitals NHS Trust	RBBH EPR
South East	Royal Surrey County Hospital	EPR scheme
South East	Heatherwood and Wexham Park NHS Trust	EPR scheme
South East	Milton Keynes General NHS Trust	EPR scheme
South East	South Buckinghamshire NHS Trust	EPR scheme
South East	Stoke Mandeville NHS Trust	EPR scheme
South West	Gloucestershire Royal NHS Trust	Site redevelopment
South West	Exeter and District Community Health Services NHS Trust	Tiverton Hospital
South West	Cornwall Healthcare NHS Trust	Western Mental Health, Cambourne and Redruth
South West	South West Regional Procurement	EPR systems
South West	Swindon and Marlborough	EPR scheme
South West	Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnerships NHS Trust	Reprovision of mental health services
West Midlands	North Staffordshire Hospital NHS Trust	EPR scheme
West Midlands	University Hospitals Warwickshire and Coventry NHS Trust	New DGH
West Midlands	Mid-Staffordshire General Hospitals NHS Trust	EPR scheme
West Midlands	Birmingham City Hospital NHS Trust	DTC
North West	Central Manchester Healthcare NHS Trust	Service Reconfiguration
North West	Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley Healthcare NHS Trust	Site Rationalisation
North West	Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Trust	Staff Residential Accommodation
North West	Christie NHS Trust	EPR scheme
North West	Blackburn NHS Trust	EPR scheme
North West	Burnley NHS Trust	EPR scheme
North West	North Manchester NHS Trust	EPR scheme
North West	Chorley and Preston NHS Trust	EPR scheme
North West	Salford Mental Health NHS Trust	EPR scheme

Speech Therapy

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many students *(a)* successfully completed speech and language therapy courses and *(b)* were recruited to courses in speech and language therapy in 2001. [36773]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not record the number of students who successfully complete training courses.

558 students started speech and language training courses during 2000–01.

NHS Staff

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what qualifications short of professional training are available to health care assistants and unqualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff. [37379]

Mr. Hutton: Extending the skills, potential and careers of NHS staff is a fundamental part of the NHS Plan and "Working Together—Learning Together, a Framework for Lifelong Learning for the NHS". Copies of these are available in the House of Commons Library. Decisions on training are taken by individual staff and local NHS organisations in the light of local, national service frameworks and NHS Plan priorities.

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC), established in April 2001, is responsible for overseeing, planning and funding post-16 education and training in England. The NHS in England is increasingly taking advantage of the full range of national education and training frameworks, particularly national vocational qualifications (NVQs). Healthcare assistants and unqualified nursing and midwifery staff generally undertake NVQ levels 2 and 3 in Care.

Mixed Sex Mental Health Wards

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what targets he has set as regards the ending of mixed sex mental health wards; what progress has been made; and if he will make a statement. [37388]

Ms Blears: We have set a target of December 2002 for the provision of single sex accommodation in 95 per cent. of trusts. Information on mental health accommodation is not kept separately.

On-going monitoring of the progress of the project continues and indicates that progress towards the targets in being maintained. Work is continuing to ensure that this remains the case.

Additional professional and technical support is being made available to those who are finding meeting the targets particularly challenging.

Cancer

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent on chemotherapy in the UK per head of the population in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [38076]

Yvette Cooper: The Department does not collect figures on the cost of national health service services in a way that enables an accurate figure to be calculated for expenditure on chemotherapy.

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list each NHS health authority in England and Wales that *(a)* does and *(b)* does not (i) conduct non-emergency operations relating to cancer on Saturdays and Sundays and (ii) administer non-emergency radiotherapy treatment on Saturdays and Sundays. [38075]

Yvette Cooper: The information requested is not available centrally.

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of cancer patients have developed neutropenia while receiving chemotherapy in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [38084]

Yvette Cooper: There are 220,000 new cases of cancer registered each year.

Analysis on the hospital episode statistics database shows that in 2000–01 there were 6,600 in-patient admissions for neutropenia. Of these, 2,470 admissions had a cause related to chemotherapy.

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many women in each NHS health authority in England and Wales were screened for breast cancer in *(a)* the year prior the implementation of the NHS Breast Cancer Screening Programme and *(b)* during the first year of the programme; and what the average waiting times for radiotherapy were in each NHS health authority for those years. [38078]

Yvette Cooper: The national health service breast screening programme began in 1988 following a successful trial, the United Kingdom trial of the early detection of breast cancer and the publication of the Forrest report in 1986[1]. Before 1988, the only unit undertaking breast screening by mammography in England was the Guildford centre, which was the English site for the trial. In 1987–88, the year before the programme began, it is estimated that 5,000 women were screened at the Guildford centre.

In 1988–89, the first year of roll-out of the national programme, 110,000 women were screened in the UK. These data are not available by health authority.

Data on the average waiting times for radiotherapy in each health authority for 1987–88 and 1988–89 are not held centrally.

[1] Breast Cancer Screening: Report to the Health Ministers of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland 1986

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the NHS health authorities in England and Wales that *(a)* are and *(b)* are not meeting the target in the NHS cancer plan of a maximum one month wait from diagnosis to treatment for patients referred for breast cancer treatment. [38077]

Yvette Cooper: The NHS Cancer Plan targets are only applicable to England. The maximum target wait of one month from diagnosis to first definitive treatment for breast cancer came into effect on 31 December 2001. Central monitoring began on 1 January 2002 and data will be published later in the year.

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce a system of therapy and counselling for *(a)* patients and *(b)* families of patients who have been diagnosed as having cancer; and if he will make a statement. [38083]

Yvette Cooper: As part of the NHS Cancer Plan we are developing a supportive care strategy. The strategy includes ensuring that people affected by cancer are able to access the right professional support, treatment and help, from when cancer is first suspected through to death and bereavement. As part of the strategy, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) has been asked to develop and publish evidence-based guidance on supportive and palliative care. The initial NICE findings will be available from summer 2002 and will include guidance on psychological and social support for patients and carers.

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of *(a)* lung, *(b)* breast, *(c)* prostate, *(d)* ovarian and *(e)* leukaemia cancer patients who have been initially diagnosed as suffering from curable cancer have been considered incurable by the time treatment began in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [38074]

Yvette Cooper: The information requested is not available centrally.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average population served by each UK hospital offering specialised cancer care was in the last 12 months for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement on the variations by *(a)* nation and *(b)* region. [38239]

Yvette Cooper: Information is not available in the form requested. Although efforts have been made to quantify catchment populations at a trust level, all calculations are based on ward-resident populations. Therefore cancer network populations are more appropriate. Cancer services are provided by cancer networks which bring together primary and community care and secondary care services. Data on cancer network populations for England are shown in the table. Further information is available at http://www.canceruk.net/catchment/catchment.htm.

Cancer services catchment populations by network—England March 2000

	Number
Greater Manchester and Cheshire	3,031,185
Mount Vernon (Herts, Beds, NW London)	2,844,717
Four Counties (Berks, Bucks, Northants, Oxford, Wiltshire)	2,760,312
Pan Birmingham	2,578,723
Yorkshire	2,492,752
Avon, Somerset and Wiltshire	2,053,076
Merseyside and Cheshire	2,031,650
Mid Trent	1,837,472
Central South Coast	1,811,372
West London	1,807,752
Northern	1,792,520
Kent	1,706,833
North Trent	1,662,291
Black Country	1,637,248
West Anglia	1,610,806
North West Midlands	1,512,214
Devon and Cornwall	1,473,707
North East London	1,468,266
South West London	1,445,978
Lancashire and South Cumbria	1,428,763
South East London	1,388,034
Arden	1,286,123
North London	1,238,966
Surrey, West Sussex and Hampshire	1,224,704
3 Counties (Gloucs, Hereford, Worcs)	1,198,068
Humber and Yorkshire Coast	994,309
Sussex	983,718
Mid Anglia	909,756
Leicestershire	804,200
Norfolk and Waveney	682,461
Teeside, South Durham and North Yorkshire	660,891
Derby/Burton	640,798
South Essex	617,359
Dorset	613,958
No Network	510,105
Grand Total	52,741,084

NHS Treatment Costs

Barbara Follett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average cost of each NHS treatment with a patient by *(a)* a GP, *(b)* a nurse, *(c)* a consultant and *(d)* a chiropodist or podiatrist was in the last three years. [38223]

Mr. Hutton: The cost information that we hold centrally is not based on the individual staff categories that perform given treatments and procedures, but is linked to the procedures/treatments themselves. We hold annual information on unit costs and activity for services provided by NHS Trusts, Primary Care Trusts and Personal Medical Services plus element.

For chiropody/podiatry the majority of services are provided through clinics in various settings. For example in Reference Costs 2001, which was recently published, the national average cost of a chiropody/podiatry attendance was £18 in a NHS Trust. Chiropody/podiatry attendances in Primary Care Trusts and Personal Medical Service Pilots have an average cost per attendance of £18 and £10 respectively.

This information on chiropody/podiatry services has been collected for the first time for the 2000–01 publication and therefore historic information for these services is not available. The cost of a range of inpatient and day case procedures undertaken by consultants is also available.

£

	Foot procedures	
	Category 1	*Category 2*
Elective inpatient	913	1,104
Non-elective inpatient	1,163	1,443
Day case	527	534

The full range of reference cost information 2001 can be found on the Department's website at *www.doh.gov.uk/nhsexec/refcosts.htm.* The site holds reference cost information from 1998 onwards. Details in hard copy are also held in the Library.

HIV/AIDS

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the HIV prevention moneys allocated to health authorities for 1999–2000 was used for targeted prevention work with *(a)* people with family links to sub-Sarahan Africa, *(b)* injecting drug users, *(c)* women having sex with people in at-risk groups and *(d)* gay and bisexual men based on AIDS Control Act reports submitted to the Department. [38476]

Yvette Cooper: £53.4 million was allocated to health authorities in 1999–2000 for HIV prevention. Approximately 6 per cent. was targeted at people with links to sub-Saharan Africa, 14 per cent. at injecting drug users, 3 per cent. at women partners of men in high risk groups, and 21 per cent. at gay and bisexual men.

General Practitioner

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he has taken to reduce the prevalence of HIV infections in heterosexual males; and if he will make a statement. [37801]

Yvette Cooper: The national strategy for sexual health and HIV prioritises the HIV prevention needs of groups most affected by HIV, including people from, or with links to, high prevalence countries (currently in Africa), injecting drug misusers and men who have sex with men. The strategy also proposes a target to reduce by 50 per cent. the number of previously undiagnosed HIV infected people attending genito-urinary clinics who remain unaware of their infection by the end of 2007.

Latest estimates of the number of adults living in the United Kingdom with HIV infection indicate that nearly half of all infections in male heterosexuals are undiagnosed. These men are therefore unable to benefit from HIV treatment services and health promotion to reduce the likelihood of infecting their partners.

Figures from the Public Health Laboratory Service show that, to date, a total of 5,813 men and 7,630 women diagnosed in the UK are presumed to have acquired HIV through heterosexual sex. This compares to almost 27,000 diagnoses in gay and bisexual men. The majority of heterosexuals with HIV are of African origin and acquired their infection abroad.

In line with the strategy, the Department will launch later this year a new information campaign for the general population on safer-sex, which will cover the prevention of sexually transmitted infections including HIV.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what appeal procedures will be open to general practitioners who disagree with the conclusions of the proposed annual appraisals. [38435]

Mr. Hutton: Primary care trusts will be responsible locally for organising and supporting the appraisal of each of their general practitioners (GPs). The GP appraisal framework, issued by the Department, makes clear that in discharging this function, each PCT will be expected to establish effective procedures to deal with worries or concerns from individual GPs about the process or outcomes of appraisal.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the estimated cost is of the proposed annual appraisal of general practitioners. [38436]

Mr. Hutton: Research commissioned by the Department suggests that the average time commitment for the appraisee will be between 4½ to 6½ hours. However this will vary between different GPs. In addition, the appraisal process will in some cases systemise existing arrangements in GP practices or Personal Medical Services pilots for monitoring and reviewing professional development. The GP appraisal framework makes clear that primary care trusts (PCTs) are responsible locally for organising and resourcing the new appraisal system. The 2002–03 health authority revenue resource limits circular (HSC 2001/024) made clear that PCTs should identify resources to support the new system and that they should have a funded policy on the provision of locum cover.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what opportunity there will be for patients to make representations about their general practitioners for use in annual appraisals. [38434]

Mr. Hutton: The appraisal documentation requires the general practitioner being appraised to include consideration of his or her relationships with patients. Examples of documentation which may be used to inform this aspect of the appraisal includes patient survey data; significant event reports; any complaints or other representations received from patients, including any appreciative feedback.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what standards will be used against which GPs can be measured in making annual appraisals. [38433]

Mr. Hutton: The general practitioner appraisal framework issued by the Department explains that the annual appraisal of a GP will be based on the core headings set out in the "Good Medical Practice" document, published by the General Medical Council. These comprise:

Good clinical care
Maintaining good medical practice
Relationships with patients
Working with colleagues
Teaching and training
Probity
Health.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what sanctions will be available for use against general practitioners who fail the proposed annual appraisal. [38442]

Ms Abbott: The primary aim of appraisal is to help general practitioners consolidate and improve on good performance. Appraisal will support the continuing personal and professional development of GPs.

The appraisal will not result in a pass or fail. It should conclude by setting down, as an action plan, the agreements that have been reached about what each party is committed to doing. This should include the essentials of the personal development plan (PDP). The appraisal should identify individual needs that will be addressed through the PDP. The appraiser and appraisee should review progress against the PDP and these actions during the course of the year and at the next appraisal discussion.

It should be exceptional for serious concerns about performance to be first raised in an appraisal. However, where it becomes apparent, during the appraisal process, that there is a potentially serious performance issue, which requires further discussion, the appraiser must refer the matter immediately to the PCT clinical governance lead or PCT Chief Executive to take appropriate action. This may for example include referral to any support arrangements that may be in place.

Public Health (Municipal Incinerators)

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence he has evaluated concerning the impact on children's health of the proximity of municipal incinerators. [38830]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The Department is aware of relevant epidemiological studies of childhood cancers, birth defects, and respiratory health, chromosomal aberrations, thyroid hormone levels, and pollutant levels in children, in relation to incinerators. Nearly all of these studies were conducted in countries other than the United Kingdom and are of an older generation of incinerators which would fail to meet current requirements for pollution control and emission standards for municipal incinerators in this country. The studies fail to provide convincing evidence that municipal incinerators affect children's health.

A report on "Health Effects of Waste Combustion Products", published in 1997 by the Medical Research Council Institute for Environment and Health, concluded that

> "Epidemiological studies of people who work at or live near incinerators have shown no consistent excess incidence of any specific disease."

Similarly, a report on "Waste Incineration and Public Health", published in 1999 from the US National Research Council, concluded that "Few epidemiological studies have attempted to assess whether adverse health effects have actually occurred near individual incinerators, and most of them have been unable to detect any effects. The studies of which the committee is aware that did report finding health effects had shortcomings and failed to provide convincing evidence."

A 1997 study by Knox and Gilman EA on "Hazard proximities of childhood cancers in Great Britain from 1953–80" claimed that childhood cancers were associated with industrial atmospheric effluents. It was considered by independent expert advisory Committee on Carcinogenicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment, which

> "noted a number of major limitations in the methodology used which we believe prevent any conclusions being drawn from these data",

and advised that

> "we do not consider that any further work is warranted".

A later paper by Knox published in 2000 developed the same methodology and claimed an increased incidence of childhood cancer in children born near incinerators, but was based on the same methodology, and related to exposures from over two decades ago.

Health Expenditure

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for *(a)* Great Britain and *(b)* each health authority area, the expenditure on health by weighted head of population, expressed in real terms, for each year since 1997 for which figures are available. [39544]

Mr. Hutton: Information relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for the devolved Administrations.

The expenditure on health by weighted head of population in real terms for each health authority area in England for each year since 1997 is shown in the table.

Expenditure by health authorities and primary care trusts.

£

Health authority area	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Avon	638.16	683.57	747.51	810.53
Barking and Havering	625.42	640.62	700.84	748.55
Barnett	673.35	673.84	768.20	939.62
Barnsley	563.45	572.70	679.59	739.66
Bedfordshire	597.57	638.42	696.69	739.78
Berkshire	612.07	655.71	718.34	757.49
Bexley and Greenwich	647.29	683.24	793.77	828.82
Birmingham	670.17	691.96	749.03	764.32
Bradford	627.22	620.53	724.17	692.45
Brent and Harrow	676.69	718.59	823.35	804.74
Bromley	594.78	623.30	793.39	791.35
Buckinghamshire	622.91	652.66	685.31	730.37
Bury and Rochdale	625.40	616.49	707.36	740.61
Calderdale and Kirklees	585.69	597.34	691.84	742.27
Cambridge and Huntingdon	628.29	682.69	N/A	N/A
Cambridgeshire	N/A	N/A	702.68	727.68
Camden and Islington	670.94	745.05	834.92	974.71
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	621.90	638.13	751.33	766.48
County Durham	588.54	608.76	675.16	707.44
Coventry	594.35	599.78	676.64	733.34
Croydon	602.78	653.2[illegible]	712.27	896.26
Doncaster	616.50	620[illegible]	711.02	710.42
Dorset	608.70	649.09	743.89	932.50
Dudley	593.34	625.00	684.70	728.03
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	660.69	676.78	747.62	801.92
East and North Hertfordshire	660.28	704.91	707.99	755.61
East Kent	593.74	637.27	703.87	766.12
East Lancashire	625.16	631.03	720.19	706.83
East London and The City	642.21	637.79	789.78	812.98
East Norfolk	639.37	665.87	N/A	N/A
East Riding	620.29	637.16	716.52	770.24
East Surrey	716.22	770.47	837.92	872.74
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	605.10	622.72	780.63	778.73
Enfield and Haringey	596.63	626.60	717.28	791.72
Gateshead and South Tyneside	614.85	613.17	677.22	727.09
Gloucestershire	647.04	659.61	745.23	778.71
Herefordshire	687.03	675.53	825.52	671.61
Hillingdon	612.52	649.09	719.40	614.53
Isle of Wight	680.61	708.73	773.74	836.61
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	691.53	706.81	795.92	878.86
Kingston and Richmond	700.65	739.04	769.12	795.64
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	640.25	668.31	804.71	852.49
Leeds	650.93	646.72	755.50	785.61
Leicestershire	642.73	646.99	739.63	762.11
Lincolnshire	683.05	657.34	725.73	746.46
Liverpool	628.60	640.29	749.48	808.94

£

Health authority area	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Manchester	659.87	693.00	787.86	761.45
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	660.03	699.38	839.01	796.03
Morecambe Bay	680.79	701.70	786.62	794.67
Newcastle and North Tyneside	634.64	664.58	787.25	787.58
Norfolk	N/A	N/A	740.53	760.50
North and East Devon	650.65	664.15	724.43	769.90
North and Mid Hampshire	653.09	686.32	735.98	813.99
North Cheshire	625.46	641.18	721.36	756.15
North Cumbria	625.51	654.38	704.01	757.42
North Derbyshire	638.91	665.18	684.19	719.00
North Essex	623.82	647.87	740.78	777.34
North Nottinghamshire	604.53	612.79	715.05	679.24
North Staffordshire	606.03	610.27	687.60	725.72
North West Anglia	607.39	629.74	N/A	N/A
North West Lancashire	599.01	601.87	721.61	746.26
North Yorkshire	657.16	703.80	722.87	763.24
Northamptonshire	603.11	635.16	713.85	734.29
Northumberland	664.02	677.71	752.58	751.21
Nottingham	598.29	693.34	723.95	780.25
Oxfordshire	614.25	639.92	733.57	779.26
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	567.61	631.87	682.05	733.14
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	651.23	699.27	748.03	812.97
Rotherham	573.85	588.40	702.11	742.99
Salford and Trafford	608.17	630.56	740.20	784.35
Sandwell	625.16	651.68	709.97	744.36
Sefton	620.06	639.29	719.10	1,023.16
Sheffield	639.35	645.20	771.96	769.93
Shropshire	616.71	636.59	729.71	740.94
Solihull	679.92	704.23	700.29	736.55
Somerset	633.21	662.55	709.49	754.86
South and West Devon	619.25	634.98	726.34	735.69
South Cheshire	632.95	673.90	709.08	743.64
South Derbyshire	643.24	648.31	688.78	717.08
South Essex	591.61	614.43	673.43	721.20
South Humber	675.04	713.20	784.66	765.98
South Lancashire	644.54	683.94	748.52	735.88
South Staffordshire	622.63	632.70	699.52	758.07
Southampton and South West Hampshire	632.49	674.77	738.44	706.49
St. Helens and Knowsley	605.61	620.49	670.55	722.31
Stockport	605.20	626.59	728.46	746.47
Suffolk	628.39	667.78	717.21	757.91
Sunderland	597.41	591.13	688.21	760.22
Tees	579.50	608.08	735.18	768.50
Wakefield	711.04	715.51	713.77	801.36
Walsall	596.74	633.92	726.59	739.30
Warwickshire	689.05	691.18	741.27	771.73
West Hertfordshire	659.88	686.68	725.94	765.17
West Kent	624.15	656.07	771.41	744.60
West Pennine	567.85	578.28	674.21	712.85
West Surrey	663.18	698.46	781.74	809.35
West Sussex	605.96	653.17	694.99	742.11
Wigan and Bolton	571.93	587.38	660.84	717.35
Wiltshire	652.32	691.15	776.22	807.29
Wirral	582.48	639.63	717.31	758.47
Wolverhampton	595.73	617.13	698.10	739.83
Worcestershire	687.86	707.86	731.92	801.38

Notes:

1. Expenditure is taken from health authority and primary care trust summarisation forms which are prepared on a resource basis and therefore differ from cash allocations in the year.

2. Allocations per weighted head of population provide a much more reliable measure to identify differences between funding of health authorities.

3. The expenditure is the total spent on commissioning health care by the health authority and by the primary care trusts within each health authority area. The majority of General Dental Services expenditure is not included in the health authority or primary care trust accounts and is separately accounted for by the Dental Practice Board. The majority of drugs expenditure in 1997–98 and 1998–99 and a smaller element in 1999–2000 and 2000–01 is accounted for by the Prescription Pricing Authority and not by health authorities.

4. Health authorities and primary care trusts should account for their expenditure on a gross basis. This results in an element of double counting in 2000–01 where one body acts as the main commissioner and is then reimbursed by other bodies. The effect of this double counting within the answer cannot be identified.

5. Some health authorities act as lead commissioners for particular specialties which inflates their figures when compared with others and also causes differences between years. Other factors may also distort the figures so the results are therefore not all directly comparable with each other and with answers to similar questions for previous years.

Source:

Health authority audited accounts 1997–98 and 1998–99
Health authority audited summarisation forms 1999–2000 and 2000–01
Primary care trust audited summarisation schedules 2000–01
Weighted population estimates for 1997–98 to 2000–01
GDP deflator at market prices with 2000–01 as the base year

European Health Care Integration

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his policy towards the impact of European integration on member states' health care systems with reference to paragraph 30 of the Laeken conclusions. [39634]

Jacqui Smith: The organisation, funding and delivery of care should be a matter for member states to reflect the specific care needs of our population. However, we have much to learn from each other and it is important that we share common experience and best practice to promote a high level of health care and care for all EU citizens in view of the challenges presented by an aging population. This is best achieved by co-operation on a bilateral and multi-lateral level.

The EU Social Protection Committee and the Economic Policy Committee will present an initial report on orientations in the field of health care for the elderly to Heads of Government at the Barcelona Council on 14–15 March.

Salt

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if stakeholders were *(a)* contacted by the SACN and *(b)* asked to submit evidence to the review on salt. [40301]

Yvette Cooper: Interested parties were alerted to the review through information placed on the SACN website, which included a call for submissions on evidence. Four key stakeholders—the Food and Drink Federation, the British Retail Consortium, the Salt Manufacturers Association and Consensus Action on Salt and Health—were alerted to the intended review so that they could submit evidence if they so wished.

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the remit is of the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition's review of the evidence on salt since 1994. [40300]

Yvette Cooper: At the first meeting of the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) sub-group on salt (25 January 2002), the group agreed that its purpose was to review the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy's 1994 recommendation (for a "reduction in the average intake of sodium by reducing salt intake by a third, from 9g to 6g per day") in the light of any new evidence, taking into account the submissions that had been received from interested parties; and to consider making recommendations for children.

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition will publish the evidence received from the stakeholders *(a)* during and *(b)* after the outcome of the dietary sodium review. [40302]

Yvette Cooper: The minutes of the sub group's first meeting will be placed on the SACN website—www.sacn.gov.uk—once they have been agreed by the Chair and members. The agenda of the meeting and a list of papers and submissions submitted to SACN have already been placed on the website. Interested parties can request copies of papers through the SACN secretariat.

Hospital Discharges

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department issues to health authorities on handling situations where patients released after delayed discharge refuse to leave the hospital. [39312]

Jacqui Smith: *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* A patient's discharge is only regarded as delayed when the hospital team's assessment is that the patient no longer needs treatment in a hospital bed and that they can safely be cared for elsewhere. When this assessment has been made the patient does not have a right indefinitely to occupy a hospital bed. A patient can, however, refuse to be discharged to a care home. In this case, social services staff, together with the hospital, community health services, the patient and any family and carers, will need to explore alternatives. Ultimately a package of health and social care to support the patient in their own home (or alternative accommodation, if their own home is now unsuitable), should be put together to allow the patient to be discharged.

Health Authority Funding

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list in *(a)* percentage and *(b)* cash terms the amount by which the funding allocation of each health authority exceeded or fell short of the allocation to which they would have been entitled under the strict application of the weighted capitation formula, in the last year for which figures are available and the preceding five years. [39789]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* Health authority distances from targets determined by the weighted capitation formula for 2002–03 and the preceding five years are shown in the table.

	Distances from target (percentage)						*Distances form targets (£000)*					
Health authority	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Avon	–1.87	0.40	–1.17	–1.13	–1.25	–0.36	–7,805	1,720	–6,924	–7,351	–8,757	–2,992
Barking and Havering	2.43	0.88	–0.75	0.92	145	–0.01	4,299	1,660	–1,934	2,573	4,332	–19

	Distances from target (percentage)						*Distances form targets (£000)*					
Health authority	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Barnet	3.90	5.66	2.25	0.20	−2.82	n/a	5,596	8,333	4,594	447	−7,131	n/a
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	−1.63	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	−12,734
Barnsley	−2.63	−5.24	−2.98	−3.05	−2.95	−2.92	−2,827	−6,088	−4,786	−5,379	−5,616	−6,471
Bedfordshire	−3.83	−3.61	−3.82	−3.90	−4.40	−4.02	−8,492	−8,397	−12,427	−13,980	−16,969	−18,577
Berkshire	−6.23	−3.83	−3.50	−3.17	−3.36	−3.55	−19,561	−12,355	−15,619	−15,847	−18,213	−23,164
Bexley and Greenwich	6.21	6.30	5.31	6.03	7.27	n/a	12,488	13,209	14,573	18,097	23,230	n/a
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	5.22	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	33,251
Birmingham	1.75	−0.03	0.39	0.59	1.18	0.61	8,295	−165	2,656	[illegible]390	9,395	5,734
Bradford	−0.62	−3.18	−1.77	−1.11	−0.96	−1.41	−1,365	−7,528	−5,542	−3,853	−3,604	−6,270
Brent and Harrow	4.75	7.02	3.09	2.11	−0.06	3.59	10,390	15,686	9,296	7,051	−230	15,871
Bromley	0.13	1.55	−0.27	0.11	1.63	n/a	164	2,062	−498	214	3,488	n/a
Buckinghamshire	−3.17	−0.86	−2.48	−2.86	−2.83	−2.25	−8,221	−2,276	−9,343	−11,999	−12,845	−12,201
Bury and Rochdale	−0.92	−3.07	−1.29	−0.[illegible]8	−0.49	−1.02	−1,632	−5,816	−3,241	−1,049	−1,455	−3,587
Calderdale and Kirklees	0.67	−0.95	0.44	−0.17	0.51	−1.35	1,728	−2,621	1,619	−671	2,205	−6,939
Cambridgeshire	n/a	n/a	n/a	−2.36	−3.10	−1.61	n/a	n/a	n/a	−10,687	−14,973	−9,168
Cambridge and Huntingdon	−4.01	−2.08	−1.13	n/a	n/a	n/a	−6,745	−3,614	−2,663	n/a	n/a	n/a
Camden and Islington	7.17	6.56	2.22	1.92	0.21	3.89	16,120	15,494	6,949	6,701	820	18,368
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	0.42	0.18	2.08	1.62	1.12	0.91	901	410	6,454	5,506	4,094	3,955
County Durham	−1.67	−3.36	−2.31	−1.89	−1.20	−2.53	−4,803	−10,393	−9,737	−8,724	−5,971	−14,722
Coventry	−1.18	−3.36	−3.45	−2.71	−0.79	−1.06	−1,613	−4,955	−7,182	−6,172	−1,910	−3,013
Croydon	−2.05	0.01	−1.25	−1.12	−1.33	−2.26	−3,051	17	−2,556	−2,517	−3,237	−6,696
Doncaster	−1.89	−3.50	−0.14	−0.20	1.14	−0.24	−2,535	−5,037	−276	−427	2,623	−653
Dorset	1.01	2.66	2.24	1.89	2.86	2.13	3,143	8,501	9,771	9,035	14,599	12,861
Dudley	−1.13	−1.12	−1.00	−1.50	−0.53	−1.01	−1,462	−1,521	−1,840	−3,044	−1,157	−2,584
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	2.49	3.24	−0.59	−0.03	−1.77	−0.01	8,392	11,284	−2,835	−133	−10,384	−58
East and North Hertfordshire	−1.27	1.58	−0.73	−1.26	−0.98	n/a	−2,516	3,186	−2,118	−4,059	−3,432	n/a
East Kent	−2.48	−0.24	1.83	2.62	2.69	1.63	−7,011	−693	7,108	11,031	12,225	8,756
East Lancashire	−0.09	−2.77	−0.68	−0.73	0.29	−0.01	−227	−7,207	−2,389	−2,822	1,194	−26
East London and The City	−2.32	−4.20	−4.69	−3.69	−7.15	−3.09	−8,266	−16,068	−24,117	−20,945	−45,631	−23,515
East Norfolk	−0.60	−0.60	0.85	n/a	n/a	n/a	−1,562	−1,639	3,198	n/a	n/a	n/a
East Riding	−0.80	−2.04	−0.66	−0.04	1.46	0.37	−2,013	−5,446	−2,397	−159	6,087	1,838
East Surrey	1.33	4.09	2.10	2.20	2.15	4.44	2,299	7,197	5,013	5,777	6,074	14,713
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	0.72	1.07	2.15	2.43	3.01	1.55	2,535	3,958	10,634	13,072	17,372	10,745
Enfield and Haringey	1.13	1.55	0.54	0.41	−1.03	n/a	2,659	3,803	1,731	1,464	−4,000	n/a
Gateshead and South Tyneside	1.35	−0.79	−0.76	−1.03	0.32	−1.04	2,369	−1,497	−1,954	−2,889	953	−3,624
Gloucestershire	1.67	3.28	3.85	2.99	3.71	2.99	3,825	7,708	12,408	10,564	14,047	13,401
Herefordshire	1.92	0.55	0.06	−0.29	0.23	−0.36	1,290	393	61	−319	272	−495
Hertfordshire	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0.96	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	8,191
Hillingdon	−0.63	0.15	0.43	−0.56	−0.88	0.91	−716	179	658	−963	−1,626	1,929
Isle of Wight	8.16	8.64	7.35	7.02	7.70	n/a	4,911	5,407	6,326	6,603	7,725	n/a
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1.15	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	6,743
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	−3.93	−5.13	−8.88	−7.99	−10.90	−8.20	−8,220	−11,480	−27,917	−27,876	−43,475	−40,429
Kingston and Richmond	5.86	6.81	2.25	2.50	0.68	−0.50	8,291	9,988	4,593	5,795	1,724	−1,504
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	0.39	0.34	−0.62	1.96	−0.58	3.93	1,626	1,499	−3,567	12,253	−3,981	32,813
Leeds	0.25	−1.52	0.26	0.61	1.27	1.19	816	−5,231	1,203	3,114	6,984	7,672
Leicestershire	−2.38	−3.42	−2.54	−2.78	−2.44	−2.54	−8,783	−13,432	−13,466	−16,280	−15,334	−19,005
Lincolnshire	1.23	−0.13	0.64	−0.86	−0.33	−0.75	3,231	−360	2,528	−3,733	−1,533	−4,173
Liverpool	1.11	0.24	2.09	1.78	3.13	1.54	2,667	612	7,149	6,603	12,371	7,124
Manchester	5.93	2.04	2.28	2.02	2.89	1.45	13,395	5,013	7,758	7,498	11,467	6,839
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	3.27	4.96	2.31	1.84	3.60	1.40	9,804	15,223	9,553	8,245	17,155	8,133
Morecambe Bay	5.22	4.60	4.40	3.36	4.37	3.63	7,211	6,669	8,671	7,291	10,103	9,884
Newcastle and North Tyneside	2.19	−0.42	0.53	0.89	2.25	0.66	5,041	−1,059	1,752	3,206	8,631	2,970
Norfolk	n/a	n/a	n/a	0.04	−0.46	−0.54	n/a	n/a	n/a	186	−2,514	−3,498
North and East Devon	2.60	2.30	1.84	1.36	1.27	1.21	5,363	4,970	5,434	4,395	4,456	5,005
North and Mid Hampshire	1.96	3.17	1.36	0.51	−0.18	−0.24	4,006	6,626	3,913	1,612	−630	−962
North Cheshire	6.33	4.00	1.80	1.02	2.22	2.21	8,643	5,838	3,561	2,200	5,093	5,954
North Cumbria	0.05	−0.17	0.06	0.20	−0.07	−0.02	73	−249	111	434	−168	−52
North Derbyshire	0.61	0.20	−0.25	−0.44	0.56	0.83	972	329	−575	−1,090	1,561	2,608
North Essex	−3.77	−2.27	−0.69	−0.08	−1.04	−1.52	−13,786	−8,593	−3,480	−436	−6,246	−10,966
North Nottinghamshire	−0.75	−2.61	−1.19	−2.16	−0.65	−0.71	−1,247	−4,691	−2,849	−5,763	−1,843	−2,346
North Staffordshire	−0.89	−2.70	−2.62	−1.70	−1.10	−1.61	−1,884	−6,157	−8,156	−5,796	−4,010	−6,907
North West Anglia	−2.38	−2.73	−1.86	n/a	n/a	n/a	−4,157	−5,046	−4,748	n/a	n/a	n/a
North West Lancashire	−2.03	−3.81	−0.42	0.02	1.52	0.70	−4,612	−9,296	−1,356	54	5,671	3,098
North Yorkshire	−0.53	0.01	−0.40	−0.52	−0.74	−0.85	−1,625	40	−1,736	−2,462	−3,795	−5,205
Northamptonshire	−1.07	0.43	1.51	0.87	0.30	−0.55	−2,610	1,085	4,847	3,079	1,149	−2,520

	Distances from target (percentage)						*Distances form targets (£000)*					
Health authority	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Northumberland	0.18	–0.64	–0.17	–0.31	0.75	0.21	245	–915	–325	–661	1,712	562
Nottingham	–2.44	–3.53	–2.53	–2.34	–1.55	–2.04	–6,807	–10,487	–10,151	–10,245	–7,280	–11,386
Oxfordshire	–4.14	–2.02	–2.84	–2.19	–3.14	–1.83	–9,622	–4,833	–9,569	–8,166	–12,752	–8,880
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	–0.65	0.85	–0.28	0.02	0.49	n/a	–1,506	2,037	–917	60	1,942	n/a
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	3.40	4.43	4.72	3.82	3.39	3.46	7,293	9,808	13,384	11,902	11,435	14,091
Rotherham	–0.86	–3.03	–0.67	–1.12	–0.47	–0.86	–991	–3,746	–1,079	–1,970	–883	–1,910
Salford and Trafford	0.32	–0.93	2.13	1.72	2.48	1.40	676	–2,105	6,440	5,725	8,831	5,859
Sandwell	0.44	–0.87	–1.34	–0.91	–0.09	–0.62	617	–1,285	–2,795	–2,060	–222	–1,759
Sefton	–0.46	0.94	1.05	2.77	4.18	3.50	–640	1,361	1,987	5,688	9,162	8,949
Sheffield	3.33	1.57	1.50	1.19	2.81	1.50	8,285	4,190	5,419	4,686	11,732	7,364
Shropshire	–1.08	–1.19	–0.36	–1.32	–1.39	–1.75	–1,850	–2,145	–905	–3,616	–4,118	–6,173
Solihull	1.95	1.89	1.32	0.37	0.92	0.79	1,535	1,553	1,598	496	1,310	1,331
Somerset	0.03	0.70	1.00	0.58	0.85	0.34	52	1,476	2,866	1,843	2,894	1,388
South and West Devon	1.20	1.09	1.86	1.45	2.80	1.99	3,169	3,033	6,989	5,998	12,310	10,350
South Cheshire	0.22	0.32	0.54	0.91	1.58	1.51	603	948	2,168	4,007	7,467	8,378
South Derbyshire	0.50	–1.01	–2.03	–1.56	–1.91	–1.98	1,164	–2,514	–7,068	–5,958	–7,919	–9,620
South Essex	–4.41	–2.97	–3.42	–1.54	–1.26	–3.03	–13,305	–9,292	–14,809	–7,240	–6,372	–18,325
South Humber	3.20	2.96	3.44	1.97	2.52	2.50	4,303	4,178	6,625	4,180	5,721	6,675
South Lancashire	4.29	3.22	2.38	2.10	0.92	0.85	5,451	4,314	4,328	4,249	2,013	2,196
South Staffordshire	1.71	0.57	0.85	–0.14	–1.24	–1.15	3,848	1,362	2,721	–508	–4,755	–5,237
Southampton and South West Hampshire	–2.65	–0.09	0.10	0.05	0.35	–0.02	–6,067	–209	312	178	1,342	–79
St. Helen's and Knowsley	–2.49	–2.68	–0.43	–0.84	–0.49	–0.95	–3,925	–4,463	–1,013	–2,173	–1,381	–3,115
Stockport	–3.91	–3.68	0.46	0.48	–0.43	–0.47	–4,861	–4,820	802	926	–895	–1,166
Suffolk	0.37	2.68	1.65	0.92	1.06	0.52	985	7,332	6,452	3,950	4,916	2,882
Sunderland	–0.44	–3.02	–0.76	–1.02	–0.34	0.07	–619	–4,597	–1,530	–2,255	–809	194
Tees	–2.32	–2.82	–0.99	–1.13	–0.57	–2.18	–6,062	–7,819	–3,681	–4,624	–2,522	–11,297
Wakefield	3.34	1.66	0.37	0.45	0.04	–0.22	4,684	2,485	771	1,031	96	–650
Walsall	–2.22	–3.87	–1.27	–1.55	–2.35	–1.83	–2,593	–4,844	–2,093	–2,826	–4,653	–4,256
Warwickshire	4.92	3.76	2.66	1.64	1.14	0.97	9,824	7,918	7,616	5,177	3,909	3,925
West Hertfordshire	1.02	2.67	1.59	0.52	–0.11	n/a	2,283	6,118	4,980	1,788	–414	n/a
West Kent	–0.84	1.70	0.65	0.97	0.76	0.97	–3,278	6,779	3,636	5,974	4,998	7,577
West Pennine	–1.86	–3.81	–1.62	–1.69	–1.73	–1.92	–4,076	–8,940	–4,898	–5,594	–6,170	–8,068
West Surrey	1.71	5.49	2.35	2.60	1.74	3.63	4,428	14,279	8,531	10,150	7,354	18,065
West Sussex	–3.65	–0.24	–0.76	–0.51	–0.34	0.92	–12,353	–812	–3,555	–2,609	–1,893	5,940
Wigan and Bolton	–3.40	–4.85	–3.13	–2.92	–2.84	–3.22	–9,094	–13,922	–12,069	–12,351	–12,959	–17,240
Wiltshire	1.54	3.65	1.68	2.07	0.46	0.39	3,665	8,856	5,699	7,725	1,873	1,900
Wirral	–2.09	–1.50	1.97	3.08	3.65	3.51	–3,308	–2,500	4,365	7,386	9,398	10,556
Wolverhampton	–0.51	–1.74	–1.45	–1.85	–0.82	–1.38	–576	–2,095	–2,351	–3,311	–1,570	–3,126
Worcestershire	2.51	2.36	1.75	0.60	0.20	0.17	5,226	5,129	5,228	1,981	724	726

A negative distance from target denotes an under target health authority. A positive distance from target denotes an over target health authority.

Cancelled Operations (Mid-Essex)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations were cancelled in the Mid-Essex Hospital Trust area in *(a)* each of the last five years and *(b)* each of the last nine months for which figures are available; and what proportion they were of the total number of operations carried out. [36821]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is in the table.

Number of cancelled operations in North Essex health authority—1997–98 to 2001–02

		Last minute cancellations for non-clinical reasons in the quarter	
Year	*Quarter*	*Number*	*Percentage*
2001–02	Q2	307	1.3
2001–02	Q1	170	1.2
2000–01	Year	1,246	1.7
2000–01	Q4	534	3.0
2000–01	Q3	158	0.8
2000–01	Q2	277	1.6
2000–01	Q1	277	1.5
1999–2000	Year	1,266	1.7
1999–2000	Q4	411	2.4
1999–2000	Q3	336	1.9
1999–2000	Q2	282	1.5
1999–2000	Q1	237	1.2
1998–99	Year	1,000	1.3
1998–99	Q4	511	2.5
1998–99	Q3	193	1.0
1998–99	Q2	109	0.6
1998–99	Q1	187	1.0
1997–98	Year	700	1.0
1997–98	Q4	297	1.8
1997–98	Q3	112	0.7
1997–98	Q2	113	0.6
1997–98	Q1	178	1.0

Note:

Elective admissions are first finished consultant episodes in general and acute specialties.

Source:

Your Guide to the NHS returns, Patient Charter returns, Common Information Core

NHS Dentists

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of *(a)* adults and *(b)* children living in the Greater London area are registered with an NHS dentist; and what the figures were in May 1997. [37482]

Ms Blears: The numbers of adults registered with General Dental Services (GDS) dentist as a percentage of the population in Greater London at 30 April 1997 and 31 December 2001 were 48 per cent. and 37 per cent respectively.

The number of children registered with General Dental Services (GDS) dentist as a percentage of the population in Greater London at 30 April 1997 and 31 December 2001 were 49 per cent. on both dates.

The registration rates for 30 April 1997 and 31 December 2001 are not comparable. The registration period for adults was changed from 24 months to 15 months for new registrations in September 1996. For children, registrations used to lapse at the end of the calendar year after attendance at the dentist; since September 1996 the registration period is 15 months. These changes began to affect registration numbers in December 1997.

Some patients who are not registered with a GDS dentist choose to attend occasionally. Patients may attend a dentist in a different area from the area in which they live.

Greater London is the area covered by the health authorities in the London health region.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists were practising in the NHS in Greater London *(a)* in May 1997 and *(b)* at the latest available date. [37483]

Ms Blears: The numbers of General Dental Service (GDS) dentists carrying out the majority of their work in Greater London at 31 March 1997 and 30 September 2001 were 2,877 and 3,190 respectively.

The total number of GDS dentists covers principals on a health authority list, their assistants and vocational dental practitioners.

Also 41 dentists were working in the Personal Dental Service (PDS) in the London HAs at 30 September 2001 who were not working in the GDS. The PDS began in October 1998.

Greater London is the area covered by the HAs in the London Health Region.

Care Homes

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department's statistics on care home beds in England include beds in individual domestic dwellings. [37730]

Jacqui Smith: Statistics published by the Department on care home beds relates to beds in care homes registered with the local registration and inspection units. This will include beds in small homes (less than four beds) registered under the Registered Homes (Amendment) Act 1991.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds in care homes have been lost and how many new beds there have been in care homes in England since May 1997. [37731]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested on the number of care beds closed or created is not available centrally in the form requested.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list, by each health authority in England, the number of *(a)* beds lost in care homes and *(b)* care homes that have closed since November 2001. [37990]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested on care beds and homes closures since November 2001 is not available centrally.

Hospital Waiting Times (Mid-Essex)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were waiting *(a)* over six months, *(b)* over nine months, *(c)* over 12 months, *(d)* over 15 months and *(e)* over 18 months for in-patient treatment in the Mid-Essex Hospital Trust area, for (i) the latest available month, and (ii) the previous month. [38349]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

Patients waiting for elective admission, Mid-Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust. All specialties

	November 2001	*December 2001*
Total waiting	8,787	9,228
Of which, number waiting:		
Over 6 months	2,426	2,605
Over 9 months	1,232	1,209
Over 12 months	452	370
Over 15 months	61	58
Over 18 months	0	0

Source:

Department of Health form KH07 and Monthly Monitoring

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the Mid-Essex Hospital Trust area are waiting for treatment; and how many people have been waiting 13 weeks or more for out-patient treatment. [38350]

Mr. Hutton: The information is shown in the table.

Waiting times for first outpatient appointment, Mid-Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust—all specialties

	Quarter	
	September 2001	*December 2001*
Number of GP written referral requests seen	11,179	11,656
Of those GP written referrals seen, the number who waited (in weeks)		
0 to 3	3,248	3,295
4 to 12	4,796	4,907
13 to 25	2,564	2,832
26 plus	571	622
Patients still waiting		
Over 13 weeks	2,439	2,238
Over 26 weeks	394	456

Source:

Department of Health form QM08

Chlamydia

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women have been diagnosed with chlamydia in each of the last 20 years. [40584]

Yvette Cooper: Genitourinary medicine (GUM) clinics provide the best available data on sexually transmitted infections and reported cases of uncomplicated genital chlamydial infection from 1990 are shown in the table. There are no data for chlamydial infection before 1990 as cases were included in the category "non specific urethritis".

Number of cases of uncomplicated chlamydial genital infection: England 1990 to 2000[1]

Year	Male cases	Female cases
1990	13,507	16,677
1991	13,694	16,630
1992	13,089	15,309
1993	12,168	14,053
1994	12,449	15,125
1995	12,761	16,525
1996	13,970	18,551
1997	16,255	22,742
1998	18,997	25,092
1999	21,858	29,378
2000	26,234	34,415

[1] These data are collected from GUM clinics and do not include cases diagnosed in other health care settings. These are aggregate not patient based data and so they are the number of reported cases not the actual numbers of males and females who have been diagnosed with uncomplicated genital chlamydial infection.

Source:

GUM clinic returns (KC60) PHLS.

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many partners of those diagnosed with chlamydia have been traced in each of the last 20 years. [40585]

Yvette Cooper: The best available data are from genitourinary medicine (GUM) clinics, which provide data on the number of cases categorised as

> "epidemiological treatment of suspected genital chlamydial infection".

These are cases who have been given prophylactic antibiotic therapy because they have been exposed sexually to genital chlamydia, whether or not they have become infected. There are no data for chlamydial infection before 1990 as cases were included in the category "non specific urethritis".

Number of cases receiving epidemiological treatment of suspected chlamydial genital infection: England: 1990 to 2000[1]

Year	Male cases	Female cases
1990	3,031	3,088
1991	3,060	3,108
1992	3,374	3,205
1993	3,408	3,231
1994	4,333	3,803
1995	4,984	4,047
1996	6,366	4,924
1997	7,991	6,221
1998	9,041	6,880
1999	11,318	8,253
2000	14,002	10,027

[1] These data are collected from GUM clinics and do not include cases diagnosed in other health care settings. These are aggregate not patient-based data and so they are the number of reported cases not the actual numbers of males and females who have been identified as partners. Those cases found to be infected will also be included in the figures for uncomplicated chlamydial infection.

Source:

GUM clinic returns (KC60) PHLS

NHS Procurement Initiative

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the NHS pilot procurement initiative ProCure21 in the north-west and the midlands; and what the time-frame is for the initiative to be taken up by all regions of the UK. [38689]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* NHS ProCure 21 aims to deliver better capital procurement in the national health service, through programmes on better design, enabling the NHS to be a better client, performance management and partnering. The first three elements apply to all capital schemes in the NHS. Partnering is currently being piloted in the north-west and west midlands regions. The selection of Principal Supply Chain Partners is currently in progress, and an evaluation will be made once the partnering programme is under way and a decision taken on how quickly we will be able to roll it out nationally.

Vaccines

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who the unsuccessful bidders were and what the size of their bids were for the contract to provide anti-TB vaccines. [38679]

Yvette Cooper [holding answer 28 February 2002]: This information is commercially confidential and is not disclosed.

General Practitioners (Vocational Training)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures have been put in place to ensure an increase in the number of vocational training places for general practice; how many places have been available in each of the last 10 years; and what estimate he has made of the number of places available in each of the next three years. the Minister of State, Department of Health, [38460]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* We do not have data available centrally on the number of vocational training scheme places. Doctors on vocational training schemes represent only a proportion of those training for general practice, as there are other training routes.

All doctors training for a career in general practice must undertake a period training as a General Practice Registrar. We have a target to increase General Practice Registrar numbers by 550 by 2004. To accommodate these increases, we are investing significant resources in the general practice training infrastructure (£9 million over three years) and in developing training practice premises (£30 million over the same period). We also removed, last November, the outdated restrictions that had previously prevented overseas doctors receiving NHS funding when undertaking General Practice Registrar training.

Recruitment to General Practice Registrar training is healthy. Numbers have risen, year on year, for the last five years. The attached table shows the figures for the last 10 years. Last year numbers increased by 224 on the previous year, exceeding our target increase of 150. As a result of the measures we have put in place, we expect growth to continue.

GP Registrars in England as at 1 October 1991 to 1999 and 30 September 2000 and 2001

	GP Registrars
1991	1,639
1992	1,613
1993	1,529
1994	1,445
1995	1,404
1996	1,305
1997	1,343
1998	1,446
1999	1,520
2000	1,659
2001	1,883

Source:

Department of Health Personal Medical Services Statistics

Powderject

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which NHS contracts are held by Powderject; and what their value is. [38680]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The NHS contracts held by Powderject are for the supply of BCG vaccines, Tuberculin PPD solutions and influenza vaccine.

Information surrounding the value of individual contracts is commercially confidential and is not disclosed.

Overseas Treatment

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients have travelled to EU countries specifically for NHS funded treatment in each of the last four months. [39780]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* Under the pilot scheme to send national health service patients abroad currently under way in south-east England 18 patients travelled in January and 41 in February. 12 patients are due to travel on Friday 1 March. We expect up to 200 patients to travel overseas for treatment as part of the pilot.

The Department has authorised a total of 327 E112 applications since the beginning of November 2001, permitting patients to receive treatment, maternity care or continuing care in other countries of the European Economic Area, funded by the NHS. 85 applications were authorised in November, 72 in December, 94 in January and 76 have so far been authorised in February. (These figures are GB figures, as the Department administers this scheme on behalf of Scotland and Wales.) However, the fact that a given number of forms were authorised in a given period does not necessarily mean that the same number of patients actually received treatment overseas in that period.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 6 March 2002

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Crown Prosecution Service

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what the turnover of staff, broken down by type was in each region in each year since the inception of the CPS. [35947]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 14 February 2002]:* The available turnover figures are set out in table 1 and table 2.

Table 1: Crown Prosecution Service—staff turnover

Turnover rate

	As at now 1 January 2002	*1 April 2001*	*1 April 2000*
Avon and Somerset	3.6	3.6	13
Bedfordshire	3.9	6.9	15.5
Cambridgeshire	9.6	20.5	5.7
Cheshire	5.7	7.9	8.2
Cleveland	5.9	6.1	7.3
Cumbria	[1]—	[1]—	8
Derbyshire	12.4	8.3	5.3
Devon and Cornwall	2.7	4.1	5.1
Dorset	6	2.4	[1]—
Durham	2.9	5.2	[1]—
Dyfed Powys	5.5	[1]—	17
Essex	7.4	3.1	11
Gloucestershire	1.9	9.3	4.7
Greater Manchester	7.4	6.7	10.5
Gwent	1.3	[1]—	4.7
Hampshire and Isle of Wight	8.6	8.2	10.4
Headquarters	6.4	10.6	12
Hertfordshire	11.7	12.1	11.6
Humberside	10.5	15.3	9
Kent	5	9.6	6.1
Lancashire	2.8	5.4	3.5
Leicestershire	7.2	4.9	5
Lincolnshire	4.1	12.6	4.6
London	8.4	12.9	11.6
Merseyside	5.7	4.1	3.2
Norfolk	8.7	7	6.9
North Wales	14.8	8.2	3
North Yorkshire	8.4	7	9.9
Northamptonshire	1.8	7.9	2.1
Northumbria	5.8	4.8	2.2
Nottinghamshire	6.2	4.8	1.6
South Wales	5.1	4.7	4.3
South Yorks/Admin.	6.8	3.9	8
Staffordshire	3.7	1	5.1
Suffolk	1.4	5.9	2.1
Surrey	8.5	12.1	7
Sussex	4.4	5.2	13.1
Thames Valley	9.9	8.4	17.9
Warwickshire	9.8	10.1	12.6
West Mercia	5.5	7.4	6.6
West Midlands	6.5	5.1	9.8
West Yorkshire	5.4	6.4	6.9
Wiltshire	4	2.4	9.4

[1] Less than 1 per cent.

Table 2: Crown Prosecution Service—staff turnover

Turnover rate

	31 March 1999	*1 April 1998*	*1 April 1997*	*1 April 1996*	*1 April 1995*	*1 April 1994*
Headquarters	7.4	22.7	7.5	0.7	1.3	0.8
Anglia	9.7	8.8	0.6	0.9	0.2	1.0
East Midlands	4.9	6.5	0.8	0.6	[1]—	0.6
Humber	6.8	9.4	1.1	1.1	1.4	0.8
London	10.6	11.6	1.6	0.6	0.9	0.4
Mersey/Lancs	6.8	6.7	0.7	[1]—	0.3	[1]—
Midlands	7.5	11.6	1.8	0.8	0.2	0.3
North	5.0	2.6	0.6	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
North West	7.9	6.5	2.4	0.5	0.3	0.3
Severn Thames	9.4	15.2	2.2	0.3	0.8	0.9
South East	8.5	15.3	1.1	0.5	0.4	0.5
South West	8.4	7.6	0.7	0.3	1.4	0.4
Wales	3.4	5.8	1.9	0.4	0.4	0.3
Yorkshire	9.0	8.7	1.3	0.7	1.0	[1]—

[1] Less than 1 per cent.

Ms Dari Taylor: To ask the Solicitor-General what steps are being taken to assess the feasibility of implementing the recommendation made by Sir Robin Auld that the Crown Prosecution Service should take over from the police responsibility for charging defendants at the outset of a prosecution. [41697]

The Solicitor-General: The Attorney-General has agreed with the Home Secretary that the Crown Prosecution Service and police should pilot the proposals over a period of six months in five different areas: in Bath, the Medway area, Essex, the Wrexham area and in Halifax. The objective of the pilot is to identify the practical implications of implementing Sir Robin's recommendation that the Crown Prosecution Service should determine the charge in all but minor, routine offences or where, because of the circumstances, there is a need for a holding charge before seeking the advice of the Service. Where there may be practical difficulties, the pilot will seek to identify how these can best be overcome. The Crown Prosecution Service and ACPO have been working closely together to set up the pilot which commenced on 18 February 2002. An evaluation report will be produced in autumn 2002.

Further details of the pilot are contained in a background note, copies of which I have caused to be put in the Libraries of both Houses.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what budget was allocated to each CPS region; and how much of the annual budget was allocated to training, in actual terms and as a percentage of the total budget in each year since its inception. [35943]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 14 February 2002]:* The table shows the non-ring-fenced running cost(NRFRC) budget allocated to each Area, the amount of this budget locally allocated by each Area to fund training courses in actual terms and then as a percentage of the NRFRC budget.

The figures are shown for each year since the establishment of a 42 Area structure in the CPS. They exclude the costs of trainee time attending courses and the associated travel and subsistence costs. These are not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Analysis of training budget against non ring fenced running cost budget allocations to areas

		1999–2000			*2000–01*			*2001–02*	
Area	*NRFRC*	*Training*	*Percentage*	*NRFRC*	*Training*	*Percentage*	*NRFRC*	*Training*	*Percentage*
01 Avon and Somerset	3,460,000	20,520	0.59	3,782,397	6,500	0.17	4,426,805	16,500	0.37
02 Bedfordshire	1,464,000	7,000	0.48	1,521,180	10,000	0.66	1,753,584	6,200	0.35
03 Cambridgeshire	1,849,000	7,000	0.38	1,912,600	4,870	0.25	2,363,320	23,000	0.97
04 Cheshire	2,859,025	20,000	0.70	2,911,600	8,806	0.30	3,576,900	20,000	0.56
06 Cleveland	2,046,000	5,000	0.24	2,132,350	1,000	0.05	2,572,056	3,500	0.14
07 Cumbria	1,787,600	6,000	0.34	1,785,500	5,000	0.28	2,056,160	9,000	0.44
08 Derbyshire	2,447,663	13,000	0.53	2,578,450	8,555	0.33	3,136,018	26,800	0.85
09 Devon and Cornwall	3,266,665	17,900	0.55	3,444,300	9,050	0.26	3,964,709	21,725	0.55
10 Dorset	1,442,000	10,035	0.70	1,502,780	2,000	0.13	1,811,252	10,400	0.57
11 Durham	1,794,000	9,000	0.50	1,976,204	12,000	0.61	2,302,056	13,000	0.56
12 Dyfed Powys	1,619,000	8,000	0.49	1,728,500	11,800	0.68	1,973,107	11,250	0.57
13 Essex	3,362,495	3,000	0.09	3,420,800	15,250	0.45	4,100,900	13,750	0.34
14 Gloucestershire	1,380,000	10,000	0.72	1,425,418	5,000	0.35	1,624,686	17,800	1.10
15 Greater Manchester	9,415,075	20,000	0.21	9,752,500	19,706	0.20	11,293,480	40,378	0.36
16 Gwent	1,967,112	19,803	1.01	2,062,500	23,200	1.12	2,483,882	20,100	0.81
17 Hampshire	4,324,158	7,992	0.18	4,831,235	9,000	0.19	5,692,740	20,544	0.36
18 Hertfordshire	2,007,729	5,000	0.25	2,209,060	2,000	0.09	2,731,565	6,700	0.25
19 Humberside	2,463,000	17,738	0.72	2,508,000	8,763	0.35	2,808,450	12,716	0.45
20 Kent	3,943,894	15,444	0.39	4,237,750	6,564	0.15	5,016,453	33,115	0.66
21 Lancashire	5,261,511	20,000	0.38	5,439,141	28,000	0.51	6,323,380	50,000	0.79
22 Leicestershire	2,415,070	11,070	0.46	2,544,600	3,227	0.13	3,085,080	10,900	0.35
23 Lincolnshire	1,585,000	13,085	0.83	1,643,960	17,560	1.07	1,832,528	15,936	0.87
24 Merseyside	5,675,323	4,200	0.07	5,977,367	20,000	0.33	6,957,480	66,000	0.95
25 Metropolitan and City	27,787,531	116,000	0.42	28,585,703	130,000	0.45	34,940,980	160,000	0.46
26 Norfolk	1,876,000	8,000	0.43	2,008,210	4,600	0.23	2,407,060	5,000	0.21
27 Northamptonshire	1,576,430	9,600	0.61	1,710,025	30,050	1.76	1,998,580	52,100	2.61
28 Northumbria	5,430,400	17,000	0.31	5,762,178	16,715	0.29	6,929,696	87,500	1.26
29 North Wales	2,140,400	9,000	0.42	2,132,872	4,500	0.21	2,361,101	5,677	0.24
30 North Yorkshire	1,933,000	0	0.00	2,008,095	6,000	0.30	2,188,262	5,000	0.23
31 Nottinghamshire	3,926,140	17,950	0.46	4,151,900	7,000	0.17	4,773,597	8,799	0.18
32 South Wales	4,977,000	34,329	0.69	5,138,183	9,720	0.19	5,961,745	36,917	0.62
33 South Yorkshire	3,746,000	7,557	0.20	4,004,200	6,000	0.15	4,687,606	8,782	0.19
34 Staffordshire	2,983,400	10,000	0.34	3,129,200	8,500	0.27	3,569,740	15,500	0.43
35 Suffolk	1,530,000	2,000	0.13	1,698,422	0	0.00	2,069,760	4,800	0.23
36 Surrey	1,861,421	21,367	1.15	1,827,633	19,468	1.07	2,130,113	6,900	0.32
37 Sussex	3,203,300	44,172	1.38	3,306,661	5,616	0.17	3,872,722	33,012	0.85
38 Thames Valley	4,452,580	31,174	0.70	4,706,700	22,100	0.47	5,229,848	25,000	0.48
39 Warwickshire	1,003,000	2,400	0.24	1,041,400	3,319	0.32	1,144,080	500	0.04
40 West Mercia	2,737,116	13,730	0.50	2,831,352	4,700	0.17	3,171,313	13,000	0.41
41 West Midlands	8,835,565	46,800	0.53	9,770,500	54,500	0.56	11,360,398	38,100	0.34
42 West Yorkshire	7,315,000	57,500	0.79	7,809,185	31,419	0.40	9,159,749	54,900	0.60
43 Wiltshire	1,365,000	9,247	0.68	1,405,600	7,800	0.55	1,570,400	3,160	0.20
Total	156,514,603	728,613	0.47	164,356,211	609,858	0.37	193,413,341	1,033,961	0.53

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what progress has been made in respect of Cm 3960, Summary of the report, paragraph 26, concerning the shift in CPS priorities from involvement in relatively minor cases to serious crime cases in the Crown Court. [35965]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 14 February 2002]:* The CPS is making steady progress implementing changes to deliver the reforms recommended by Sir Iain Glidewell in his review of the CPS to bring about better justice.

The CPS has been restructuring its front-line operation, working more closely with the police in the preparation of magistrates and Crown Court cases, by establishing co-located criminal justice units and trial units, which focus resources towards the more serious cases and better support for victims and witnesses. By the end of March 2002, the CPS will have 51 dedicated trial units in place across 29 areas, focusing efforts on Crown Court cases. These structural changes are enabling early legal advice before charge, to ensure that prosecutions are built on secure ground. The CPS and police are currently piloting the recommendations of Sir Robin Auld that the CPS should take over responsibility from the police for determining the charge from the outset of the case.

More Crown Prosecutors are benefiting from greater exposure to Crown Court proceedings and their skills, experience and expertise in dealing with the more serious cases are being developed. The CPS is presently training 100 Crown Prosecutors annually to secure accreditation as Higher Court Advocates with full rights of audience to appear in the Crown Court on a more regular basis. They have gained positive feedback from the judiciary.

To support Crown Prosecutors, a modern IT infrastructure has been deployed providing a suite of up-to-date electronic legal reference products and a new electronic case management application is planned for 2003. More lawyers, caseworkers and administrative staff have been recruited in the last 12 months, from resources provided by the last spending review.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Criminal Justice Reports

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he plans to publish draft legislation covering the recommendations of the *(a)* Halliday and *(b)* Auld reports and the results of the subsequent consultations. [40005]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* Responses to the public consultation exercise on John Halliday's report "Making Punishments Work" were published on 4 February 2002. Those to Lord Justice Auld's report on the Criminal Courts have been made available on the Criminal Courts Review website.

The Government are currently considering the recommendations of both reports in the light of those responses, with the intention of setting out its position in a White Paper later this year. Until the legislative programme for next Session has been finalised, it is not clear when there will be an appropriate opportunity to publish legislation in draft.

Miscarriages of Justice

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the departmental report on the aftercare treatment of victims of miscarriages of justice. [38360]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* The report of the independent study has contributed useful material for further development of proposals but it does not stand alone, and was an internal document not designed for wider circulation.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the central unit for the advice for victims of miscarriages of justice. [38363]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* The Home Office has established a working group that is considering how best to provide an advice and information service for wrongfully convicted prisoners. Proposals will come forward from the working group shortly but, as yet, no decisions have been taken.

Taliban/Al-Qaeda

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether any persons believed to have fought in Taliban or Al-Qaeda forces are known to have returned to the UK; and if he will make a statement. [39713]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* No such persons are known to have returned to the United Kingdom to date.

Gun Licences

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many gun licences, and for which type of weapon, are held *(a)* in the Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency, *(b)* in the Teesside area, *(c)* in each police force area and *(d)* in the UK. [38249]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Home Office collects numbers of firearm and shotgun certificates for each police force area in England and Wales. The numbers of certificates, and weapons held on those certificates, are given in the table.

Firearm certificates cover a range of weapons. From incomplete returns, about 73 per cent. of the weapons held under 'firearms' certificates are rifles, with the remainder including section one shotguns and those handguns that remain legal, such as muzzle loading handguns and humane killers.

Information relating to Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Northern Ireland.

Certificates on issue at 31 December 2000, and weapons covered

Police force area	*Firearm certificates*	*Firearms covered by certificates*	*Shotgun certificates*	*Shotguns covered by certificates*
Avon and Somerset	4,812	12,064	21,230	47,570
Bedfordshire	1,323	3,305	6,908	14,920
Cambridgeshire	2,531	5,598	14,238	32,060
Cheshire	2,412	5,525	12,688	27,797
Cleveland	774	1,760	2,503	5,159
Cumbria	3,059	6,478	10,427	21,360
Derbyshire	2,441	5,777	12,237	28,855
Devon and Cornwall	8,171	15,181	34,291	72,516
Dorset	2,682	5,507	10,919	24,241
Durham	2,095	4,795	6,348	12,845
Essex	3,957	10,565	21,291	46,638
Gloucestershire	2,337	5,436	11,591	25,243
Greater Manchester	2,013	4,992	9,067	20,039
Hampshire	4,419	11,440	21,196	48,485
Hertfordshire	1,859	4,866	10,754	24,552
Humberside	2,607	4,938	10,352	25,079
Kent	3,730	[1]9,213	21,731	[1]45,417
Lancashire	2,493	6,233	[2]12,054	27,223
Leicestershire	1,704	3,614	11,109	27,244
Lincolnshire	3,426	7,619	16,100	39,263
London, City of	32	228	38	74
Merseyside	1,091	2,735	4,027	7,778
Metropolitan police	5,399	14,265	28,139	55,099
Norfolk	3,414	9,076	21,144	53,405
Northamptonshire	2,156	5,411	9,547	21,619
Northumbria	3,396	7,550	9,285	20,662
North Yorkshire	5,434	11,310	18,760	38,114
Nottinghamshire	1,633	4,863	9,299	22,567
South Yorkshire	1,566	3,705	8,198	16,602
Staffordshire	2,291	5,885	14,256	31,627
Suffolk	3,505	6,493	17,591	40,946
Surrey	2,710	8,245	13,083	28,297
Sussex	5,443	15,052	22,008	47,962
Thames Valley	6,229	16,794	28,902	65,095
Warwickshire	1,710	4,183	9,069	19,473
West Mercia	5,497	13,369	30,311	65,654
West Midlands	1,703	4,651	9,998	21,043

Certificates on issue at 31 December 2000, and weapons covered

Police force area	*Firearm certificates*	*Firearms covered by certificates*	*Shotgun certificates*	*Shotguns covered by certificates*
West Yorkshire	2,583	6,182	10,993	23,009
Wiltshire	2,633	6,341	12,096	27,762
Dyfed-Powys	3,047	4,855	18,689	35,606
Gwent	940	2,481	6,884	14,510
North Wales	2,326	[1]4,018	13,834	[1]28,083
South Wales	1,780	4,251	9,348	19,390
All forces	125,363	296,849	[2]602,533	1,320,883

[1] Estimate

[2] Revised since earlier publication

Immigration Act Detainees

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Immigration Act 1988 detainees are held in prisons in England and Wales. [38102]

Angela Eagle: The latest available information on the number of persons detained under Immigration Act 1988 powers relates to 29 December 2001. The number of detainees held in prisons in England and Wales is given in the table.

Immigration Act detainees as at 29 December 2001[1]

Place of detention	*Number*
Dedicated Immigration Service wings[2]	330
Other prison establishments[3]	335
Total[3]	665

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest five.

[2] Persons detained at the dedicated Immigration Service wings at Haslar, Lindholme and Rochester

[3] Includes 270 persons detained under dual immigration and other powers.

The temporary use of spaces in a number of local prisons ended in mid-January 2002, as did the use of the accommodation at Her Majesty's Prison (HMP) Rochester. In addition, the dedicated detention facilities at HMP Haslar and HMP Lindholme were redesignated formally as immigration removal centres on 8 February 2002, thus requiring them to operate under Detention Centre Rules rather than Prison Rules. These changes will be reflected in the quarterly asylum statistics which will be published on 31 May 2002 on the Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

DEFENCE

Defence Evaluation and Research Agency

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress of the public-private partnership for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. [41452]

Dr. Moonie: I refer my hon. Friend to the announcement my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence made in the House on 24 July 2000, *Official Report,* columns 77–79 about our decision to implement the Core Competence model for the DERA public-private partnership. Under this approach, on 1 July 2001 around three-quarters of the former DERA organisation was vested with its assets as QinetiQ, a wholly Government owned company. For strategic reasons, the remainder was retained within Ministry of Defence as the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory to carry out functions that could not appropriately be transferred to the private sector.

Since the vesting of QinetiQ as a company on 1 July 2001, work has concentrated on preparing the company for sale, options for which were through a flotation or strategic partnership. We have now completed a comprehensive review of the available options for the transaction route and timing in conjunction with specialist advisers and QinetiQ's senior management. Although flotation has always been our preferred route, as we have consistently stated, the priority is to achieve a successful move into the private sector with a transaction that clearly achieves best value for the taxpayer. We believe that a flotation under current market conditions would not realise this, yet delay could lead to a damaging loss of momentum. We have, therefore, decided that the strategic partner route offers the best potential for a transaction within 2002, offers value to the taxpayer and meets our objective of a successful public-private partnership.

A strategic partner would work closely with QinetiQ and contribute significantly to growing the overall value of its business, from which the taxpayer would benefit through MOD's initial retention of a significant financial interest in the company. MOD will also retain a special share as a means of protecting UK defence and security interests.

Confidential discussions with potential strategic partners will now begin, and it is expected that a preferred partner will be selected, and agreements signed, later this year.

Departmental Leave Entitlements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the average annual leave entitlement of staff in his Department in each of the last four years. [31739]

Dr. Moonie: Within the Ministry of Defence there exist slight differences in annual leave entitlements between members of the Senior Civil Service, non-industrial staff and industrial staff.

Over the whole period, Senior Civil Servants have received the maximum 30 days on entry, whereas non-industrial staff have received 25 days on entry and then the maximum 30 days after 10 years' reckonable service.

Industrial staff are divided into two categories, those at Industrial Technician level and those below. In 1998, Industrial Technicians received 26 days on entry, 28 after five years' reckonable service and 29 days after 10 years' reckonable service. In 1999, the maximum entitlement was increased to 30 days after 10 years' reckonable service. Other industrial staff received 24.5 days on entry in 1998, which was increased to 25 days in 1999. In 1998, they received and still do, 26.5 days after five years' reckonable service. In addition, the maximum entitlement, awarded after 10 years' reckonable service, has been increased annually from 27 days in 1998 to 30 days in 2001.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list his Department's total expenditure by month in each financial year since 1997–98. [32790]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary on 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 692W.

Private Medical Insurance

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many employees in *(a)* his Department and *(b)* his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies have had private medical insurance provided for them in each year since 1997–98; what the total cost is; and if he will make a statement. [32313]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* The Civil Service Management Code specifically precludes the provision of private medical insurance as part of any structured remuneration package. Consequently, private medical insurance is not a feature of Ministry of Defence civil service employment. The employees of MOD's non-departmental public bodies are not civil servants although, in practice, their terms and conditions are partially modelled on civil service lines. One of the MOD's non-departmental public bodies—the Oil and Pipelines Agency—does offer private medical insurance to its employees. The numbers of annual costs since 1997–98 are as follows:

Year	*Number of employees*	*Cost pa (£000)*
1997–98	[1]10	4.4
1998–99	7	5.0
1999–2000	8	5.9
2000–01	8	5.0
2001–02	5	6.2

[1] Estimate

The number of staff taking up the option of private medical insurance has diminished over the years because it constitutes a taxable benefit, which many find increasingly unattractive.

Departmental Website

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total cost of his Department's website was in real terms in each of the last four years; and how many hits it received in each of those years. [36137]

Dr. Moonie: Direct costs for the Ministry of Defence's departmental website http://www.mod.uk are recorded for expenditure on contractual support—web design, maintenance and hosting—and staff costs for the central MOD website team. Total costs for the four-year period from April 1998 to April 2002 are as follows:

Financial year	*£*
1998–99	54,000
1999–2000	100,000
2000–01	153,000
2001–02	202,000

Usage of the MOD website began to be measured on a monthly basis in December 1997. The figures for 2000–01 are rounded extrapolations based on data recorded between June 2000-December 2001. Hits for the four-year period from December 1997 to December 2001 are as follows:

Year	*Number*
December 1997-December 1998	4,576,859
December 1998-December 1999	18,195,760
December 1999-December 2000	20,700,000
December 2000-December 2001	26,200,000

Union Duties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many staff in his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies receive paid leave to undertake union duties; how many days they are allocated; and what has been the cost to public funds in each of the last four years. [36197]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence does not record paid time off for trade union duties by days but by percentage of their overall work time. The following table shows the number of employees who are allowed paid time off for trade union activities, the percentage of their time allowed and the cost for each of the past four years.

Numbers of TU representatives

pecentage

	0–10	*11–49*	*50–99*	*100*	*Total*	*Cost (£)*
1997–98						
Industrial	478	64	11	21	574	788,576
Non-industrial	722	113	13	37	885	1,858,958
1998–99						
Industrial	455	66	12	19	552	920,671
Non-industrial	824	105	17	35	981	2,265,064
1999–2000						
Industrial	426	71	16	24	538	1,228,087
Non-industrial	758	108	27	34	927	2,037,451
2000–01						
Industrial	360	89	17	21	487	1,123,993
Non-industrial	700	106	21	36	863	2,181,641

We do not collect the information for trade union representatives in the Service Museums which are non-departmental public bodies.

Building Works

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the cost of new builds, demolitions, rebuilds and PFI projects in his Department in each of the last 10 years. [39465]

Dr. Moonie: Information available on the cost of new builds is contained in UK Defence Statistics 2001 (Table 1.8 page 18). Information on demolitions and rebuilds could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Gender Free Physical Training

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many women have been injured as a result of gender free physical training; [39502]

(2) how many claims for compensation have been received from female recruits injured during gender free physical testing; [39503]

(3) how many person-days have been lost as a result of injuries sustained in gender free physical training; [39504]

(4) what has been the cost of treating women injured as a result of gender free physical training. [39505]

Mr. Ingram: Numbers of women injured since 1 April 1998, when "Gender Free" testing and training was introduced have not been separately identified. Gender distributions have been monitored on the basis of medical discharges rather than on individual injuries received. For completeness, however, the following table shows the numbers of individuals attending a general practitioner at the various Army Training Regiments (ATRs) recorded as having injuries due to training or with other injuries or disease that could be related to training. The data cover both male and female trainees and trainers alike (although the vast majority are trainees) and is expressed as a rate per 1,000 per month:

Reason	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Injuries due to military training	204.74	188.05	120.70
Musculo-skeletal diseases	74.48	70.70	63.79
Knee disorders	47.41	50.34	47.28

In 1999–2000, the combined rate for female medical discharges due to injury for all Phase 1 training establishments was 4.8 per cent., when the female to male ratio of injuries among trainees was 6:1. In the following year, this combined rate dropped to 3.5 per cent. and the ratio also fell to 3.5:1. This reduction was attributable, at least in part, to changes introduced into the selection and initial training regime, as a result of the recognised higher rate of female injury in the training system.

Similarly, the number of person-days lost as a result of injuries sustained directly as a result of gender free testing and training cannot be easily identified. The following table shows the number of working days lost as a result of injuries due to training or with other injuries or disease that could be related to training injuries and is again expressed as a rate per 1,000 personnel per month at the ATRs:

Reason	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Injuries due to military training	207.55	211.06	165.23
Musculo-skeletal diseases	108.21	97.79	92.43
Knee disorders	62.80	67.73	63.93

With regard to compensation claims, the Ministry of Defence does not record separately those cases brought against the Department by female recruits injured during gender free physical training. Again, the information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Costs associated specifically with treating women injured as a result of gender free physical training cannot be readily identified. The Army training authorities are constantly working to reduce the numbers of individuals injured in training and therefore the costs associated with this, both in actual treatment costs and in respect of the number of training days lost.

Deployments

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the mission types for British Forces. [38509]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The broad missions we have identified for the armed forces, as set out in paragraph 29 of Defence Policy 2001, published in February last year, are:

Peacetime Security

To provide forces needed in peacetime to ensure the protection and security of the United Kingdom, to assist as required with the evacuation of British nationals overseas, and to afford military aid to the civil authorities in the United Kingdom, including military aid to the civil power, military aid to other Government Departments and military aid to the civil community.

Security of the Overseas Territories

To provide forces to meet any challenges to the external security of a British Overseas Territories (including overseas possessions and the sovereign base areas) or to assist the civil authorities in meeting a challenge to internal security.

Defence Diplomacy

To provide forces to meet the varied activities undertaken by the Ministry of Defence to dispel hostility, build and maintain trust, and assist in the development of democratically accountable armed forces (thereby making a significant contribution to conflict prevention and resolution).

Support to Wider British Interests

To provide forces to conduct activities to promote British interests, influence and standing abroad.

Peace Support and Humanitarian Assistance Operations

To contribute forces to operations designed to prevent, contain and resolve conflict, in support of international order and humanitarian principles, and to contribute to efforts to deal with humanitarian crises and disasters.

Regional Conflict and Crisis

To contribute forces for a regional conflict (but not an attack on NATO or one of its members) which, if unchecked, could adversely affect European security or which could pose a serious threat to British interests elsewhere, or to international security. Operations are likely to be carried out under the auspices of the UN or relevant regional security organisations.

Regional Aggression against NATO

To provide forces needed to respond to a regional crisis or conflict involving a NATO ally which calls for assistance under Article 5 of the Washington treaty.

Strategic Attack on NATO

To provide, within the expected warning and readiness preparation times, the forces required to counter a strategic attack against NATO.

These defence missions form a sound basis for planning, but they can be, and are, adjusted from time to time.

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the exercises outside Europe undertaken by the British Armed Forces in 2001 and the unit which took part. [38507]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The exercises that UK Armed Forces took part in outside Europe are listed in the table:

Exercise	*Location*	*Unit*
Atlantic Drive	Ascension	64 CRE
Turtle Heritage	Ascension	CVHQ RE
Turtle Truss	Ascension	71 Engr Regt
Longlook	Australia	Tri-Service Individuals
Suman Warrior	Australia	1 D and D
Initial Link	Bahrain	E3D
Cygnet Goose	Belize	30 Sig Regt
Native Trail	Belize	1 RWF
Native Trail	Belize	7 RHA
Panther Cub	Belize	1 RGBW
Panther Cub	Belize	1 D and D
Panther Cub	Belize	1 D and D
Panther Cub	Belize	2 Para
Panther Cub	Belize	2 Para
Panther Cub	Belize	2 Para
Sailfish	Belize	36 Engr Regt
Thirsty Panther	Belize	521 Stre
Diamond Cutter	Botswana	1 R Irish
Ulu Rajah	Brunei	Cast North
Bass Rock	Canada	22 Regt RA
Cross Check	Canada	C130
Fingals Cave	Canada	KCR
Maple Flag	Canada	10 x JAG, 9 x F3, VC10
Maple Flag	Canada	10 x JAG, 9 x F3, VC10
Medicine Man	Canada	1 Staffords
Medicine Man	Canada	1G
Medicine Man	Canada	KRH
Medicine Man	Canada	RDG
Pond Jump West	Canada	1 RGJ
Pond Jump West	Canada	1 WG
Snow Shoe	Canada	Gren Gds
Snow Shoe	Canada	Gren Gds
Western Vortex	Canada	GR1 Sqns
Western Vortex	Canada	GR1 Sqns
Western Vortex	Canada	GR1 Sqns
Western Vortex	Canada	GR1 Sqns
Western Vortex	Canada	GR1 Sqns
Western Vortex	Canada	GR1 Sqns
Western Vortex	Canada	GR1 Sqns
Western Vortex	Canada	GR1 Sqns, F3 Sqn
Bell Buoy	Chile	NCS Org
Bright Star	Egypt	PJHQ
Cape Petrel	Falklands	CBFFI Forces
Cape Petrel	Falklands	CBFFI Forces
Falkland Sound	Falklands	21 Sig Regt
Kelp Drive	Falklands	12(AS) Engr Bde
Kelp Drive	Falklands	12(AS) Engr Bde
Kelp Drive	Falklands	12(AS) Engr Bde
Kelp Fire	Falklands	12(AS) Engr Bde
Purple Strike	Falklands	CBFFI Forces
Purple Strike	Falklands	CBFFI Forces
Sea Trout	Falklands	29 Regt RA
Red Stripe	Jamaica	1 PWO
Golden Sands	Jordan	1 KORBR
Saffron Sands	Jordan	1 Cheshire
Crab Apple	Kenya	38 Engr Regt
Grand Prix	Kenya	1 LI
Grand Prix	Kenya	1 Para
Grand Prix	Kenya	1 RRF
Mono Prix	Kenya	1 RRW
Oak Apple	Kenya	35 Engr Regt
Pine Apple	Kenya	33 Engr Regt
Sharp Point	Kenya	5 GS Med Regt
Lucky Sentinel	Kuwait	JFHQ, 1 BDE(-)
Lads Adex	Malaysia	HMS Gloucester
Stardex	Malaysia	HMS Gloucester, FDU, Nimrods
Burning Bush	Morocco	Gib Regt
Himalyan Bluebell	Nepal	4 BN REME
Pacific Kukri	New Zealand	1 RGR
Boron Mercury	Oman	JFHQ & SIGS Sqn
Magic Carpet	Oman	Jaguar
Magic Roundabout	Oman	Nimrod
Magic Roundabout	Oman	Nimrod
Magic Roundabout	Oman	Nimrod
Rocky Lance	Oman	1 PWO
Saif Sareea 2	Oman	1(UK), ARMD Div, 1 Mech Bde, 4 Armd Bde, RDG, 4 Regt RA, 21 Engr Regt, 1 IG, 2 CS Regt RLC, 1 CS Med Regt, 1 BN REME, HMS Cornwall, HMS Monmouth, RFA Oakleaf, 11 Sqn RAF, 12 Sqn RAF, 617 Sqn RAF, No 1 ACC
Saif Sareea Mapex	Oman	PJHQ, JFHQ
Adventure Exchange	Turkey	AMF(L) Elements
Anvil Ghost	Turkey	1 RECCE Bde, 1 Arty Bde, 7 AD Bde, 29 Engr Regt, HQ CSSG, 3 Div
UAE CPX	UAE	PJHQ, JFHQ
UAE FTX	UAE	RM Coy
Air Warrior	USA	GR7
Blue Flag	USA	JFAC HQ
Civil Bridge	USA	CA GRP
Cope Thunder	USA	9 x F3, VC10
Cope Thunder	USA	9 x F3, VC10
Flying Rose	USA	12 Engr Bde
Flying Rose	USA	12 Engr Bde
Georgian Cormorant	USA	JSCSC
Impact	USA	58 FD Sqn
Initial Look	USA	HQ JFAC
JEFX	USA	JFACHQ
JIATF	USA	Nimrod
JIATF	USA	Nimrod
JIATF	USA	Nimrod
JRTC	USA	C130
JTFEX	USA	GR4, FA2, SU
JTFEX	USA	E3D, Nimrod
JTFEX	USA	Nimrod
Kernel Blitz	USA	FDG
Leapfest	USA	ITC Catterick
Red Flag	USA	GR4, F3, JAG, VC10
Red Flag	USA	GR4, F3, JAG, VC10
Red Flag	USA	C130, GR7
Red Flag	USA	GR1/4
Red Flag	USA	GR1/4
Red Flag	USA	GR1/4
RM COM GP EX	USA	RM COY
Rum Punch	USA	Nimrod
Sea Dragon	USA	RM COY
Stonewall	USA	42 CDO
Stoneyrun/Millrace	USA	3 Para
Torpedo Focus	USA	GR 1
Unified Endeavour	USA	JFAC HQ

Updated information indicates that British forces took part in 33 exercises (including one multinational exercise) in the USA in 2001 as listed in the table, compared with 29 unilateral and bilateral exercises identified in the answer I gave on 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 831W to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin).

Armed Forces Pensions

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to award armed forces pensions to those who served before 1975; and if he will make a statement. [39486]

Mr. Ingram: I have no plans to award armed forces pensions to those who served before 1975 and left before qualifying for benefits.

Armed Service Pensions were awarded to those who served before 1975 but only to those who completed the necessary qualifying periods of 22 years (from age 18 for other ranks) and 16 years (from age 21 for Officers). Prior to 1975 there was no requirement for pension schemes to preserve benefits for those who left the scheme early. The Armed Forces Pension Scheme is not unique in this respect; the same provisions applied to all pension schemes both in the public and private sector. However, the qualifying periods for the Armed Forces Pension Scheme were less than for most other schemes at that time. In addition, those who left before qualifying for pensions, but had completed nine years (for Officers) 12 years (for other ranks), were paid a gratuity. The provisions were changed in 1975 to meet with the requirements of the Social Security Act 1975 but, in keeping with the policy of successive Governments, the provisions were not made retrospective.

Airships

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made of the potential for airships to contribute to *(a)* airborne early warning, *(b)* large cargo carrying, *(c)* surveillance operations, *(d)* anti-submarine warfare, *(e)* landmine removal and *(f)* naval minesweeping. [39927]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence is monitoring developments in airships and hybrid air vehicle (HAV) technology, as we do other novel concepts. Recent military airship trials and assessments, in the context of a specific surveillance capability requirement, together with commercial progress in this area gives us confidence that the technology is sufficiently mature to contribute to meeting future capability requirements.

Airships and HAVs have a number of generally common characteristics that need to be considered when assessing their suitability for particular roles. They are relatively cheap compared with manned winged or rotary aircraft; can loiter for sustained periods in suitable weather conditions; and are generally significantly larger and slower than other types of aircraft. Potentially, they could carry significantly more payload than a winged aircraft, although increases in lift capacity increase the overall size dramatically. Recent military trials and assessments have indicated that, while their size makes them relatively easy to visually identify and target, they are relatively difficult to target by other means, and difficult to destroy. Airships are generally expected to have less maintenance and infrastructure requirements than conventional air vehicles, and the challenges in manpower intensive ground handling have been largely overcome.

For airborne early warning, which is one type of surveillance operation, the potential to loiter for long periods could be a useful characteristic, although the high speed winds at the altitudes required for large-area coverage can limit this ability. The high visibility of airships limit their suitability for some surveillance roles.

For large cargo carrying, although slower than other aircraft types, the potential carrying capacity of future airships could be attractive, as demonstrated by the commercial interest in developing them in this field. However, we currently plan for the UK's future strategic and tactical airlift requirements to be met from 2010 by a combination of C130 Hercules and A400M aircraft, and have no current endorsed requirement for additional strategic lift.

For anti-submarine warfare, airships and HAVs could in future provide a potent platform for maritime patrol, through, for example, monitoring dispersed sonar buoys. However, we have no additional endorsed requirement for maritime patrol for some time, given the procurement of the Nimrod MRA4 aircraft.

Research has been conducted into the possibility of using airships for the detection of minefields. While this research is primarily intended for military use, the possibility of humanitarian mine-clearance has also been addressed. The ability to detect minefields from an airship remains a probability, but it is unlikely that such a system would be able to find all the individual mines, particularly anti-personnel mines, and a complementary land-based location and clearance system will still be needed.

If HAVs that could land on water and use organic sonars or deploy unmanned underwater vehicles could be developed, their low sonar signature and relatively high speed compared with ships could be expected to have advantages for other types of anti-submarine warfare and naval minesweeping and hunting. Concept work is considering what contribution airships or HAVs might make to the solution for the Future Surface Combatant capability requirements, when the current frigate classes leave service. It is likely that concept work for future minesweeping/hunting requirements will consider what contribution these technologies might offer.

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the operational status is of the Skyship 6000 Airship ZH762; and what plans there are for further RAF trials with airships. [39926]

Mr. Ingram: Airship ZH762 was sold in 1998 following completion of trials for which it was purchased. There are currently no plans for any further RAF trials with airships.

War Graves Commission

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the grave sites the War Grave Commission maintains in Egypt; how much money is allocated to their upkeep; and how many are buried there, broken down by military personnel who fought in the *(a)* Suez Canal zone emergency 1951 to 1954 and *(b)* Suez crisis 1956. [40457]

Dr. Moonie: The graves sites maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in Egypt are:

Abbasiya Indian Cemetery
Alamein Cremation Memorial
Alexandra (Chatby) British Protestant Cemetery

Alexandria (Chatby) Jewish Cemetery No.3
Alexandria (Chatby) Military and War Memorial Cemetery
Alexandria (Hadra) War Memorial Cemetery
Aswan Bandar British Cemetery
Cairo New British Protestant Cemetery
Cairo War Memorial Cemetery
El Alamein War Cemetery
Fayid War Cemetery
Halfaya Sollum War Cemetery
Heliopolis War Cemetery
Ismailia War Memorial Cemetery
Kantara War Memorial Cemetery
Manara Indian Muhammadan Cemetery
Moascar War Cemetery
Old Cairo New Latin Cemetery
Port Said British Protestant Cemetery
Port Said Muhammadan Civil Cemetery
Port Said War Memorial Cemetery
Suez African and Indian Army War Cemetery
Suez War Memorial Cemetery
Tel El Kebir War Memorial Cemetery.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission does not keep financial records by country. However, they have advised that their approximate expenditure on maintaining graves in Egypt for 2001 was in the order of £600,000.

The total number of graves in the twenty four cemeteries is 32,144. This figure includes world war graves, non-world war graves, service dependants, civilians and foreign nationals.

Detailed figures for the two periods are not readily available. I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Macedonia

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many members of the British Armed Forces are stationed in Macedonia; what activities they are involved in; and if he will make a statement; [40611]

(2) how much longer he expects there to be a UK military presence in Macedonia; and if he will make a statement. [40610]

Mr. Ingram: At any one time there are approximately 12 UK Armed Forces personnel working in Macedonia as part of the headquarters of NATO's Task Force Fox and in support of KFOR. Some may be allocated to both. So long as there is a requirement for these or successor forces provided by NATO, we expect to contribute a number of British Armed Forces personnel to them.

In addition, three UK Armed Forces Personnel are providing advice to the Macedonian Ministry of Defence as part of a bilateral Outreach programme; we expect them to remain until the programme is complete.

One UK Army officer has been seconded to the British Embassy in Skopje as Defence Attaché.

Afghanistan

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimates he has made as to the total extra cost to his Department in relation to Afghanistan in the financial year 2001–02; and from where these funds are being made available. [40422]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1133–34W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster). This sum has been made available from the reserve and the conflict prevention budget.

Secondments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many staff in his Department have been seconded to jobs in the *(a)* private and *(b)* public sector in each of the last four years. [31780]

Dr. Moonie: Secondments form a valuable part of the Ministry of Defence's Interchange programme, which promotes the exchange of individuals and best practice between the civil service and other sectors of the economy.

The information requested is as shown.

	Private sector	*Private sector (DESG)*[1]	*Public*
1997–98	28	128	8
1998–99	8	155	26
1999–2000	22	130	16
2000–01	13	104	6

[1] The MOD's Defence Engineering and Science Group (DESG) arranges industrial placements for graduate trainees and students in engineering and science disciplines. These short-term secondments are recorded separately to distinguish them from those longer-term secondments from the Department to the private sector.

Television Sets

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* integrated digital and *(b)* analogue television sets have been bought by his Department in each of the last 24 months; and if he will publish the guidance given to officials making decisions on television purchases. [33238]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* There is no central point within the Ministry of Defence that purchases televisions and the information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

As with the purchase of all of the Ministry of Defence's goods and services, the normal rules and principles of good public procurement apply. Budget holders must ensure that the purchase represents value for money and is supported by a sound business case.

Legal Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what legal costs have been incurred by his Department in each of the last four years. [34284]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Industrial Action

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many days have been lost owing to industrial action by staff in his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years. [36177]

Dr. Moonie: 771 man days were lost as a result of strike action in the Ministry of Defence, its agencies and non-departmental bodies in the past four years. This arose from an industrial dispute in July and August 2000 involving Royal Fleet Auxiliary personnel who were members of the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers. Industrial action short of a strike is not recorded in terms of man days lost.

Strategic Lift Transport Ships

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the dates are for *(a)* lay-down, *(b)* launch and *(c)* delivery of each of the strategic lift transport ships. [40316]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* As announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 26 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 413–14W, the UK's future strategic sealift capability is due to be provided under a PFI contract between the Ministry of Defence and AWSR Shipping Ltd., to come into full effect from June 2003. The lay down, launch and delivery dates for the six vessels involved are as follows:

	Keel lay	*Launch*	*Delivery to AWSR*
1st vessel—Hurst Point	21 January 2002	19 April 2002	16 August 2002
2nd vessel—Hartland Point	8 October 2001	11 April 2002	21 October 2002
3rd vessel—Eddystone	22 April 2002	16 August 2002	1 November 2002
4th vessel—Anvil Point	1 March 2002	23 July 2002	21 January 2003
5th vessel—Longstone	19 August 2002	8 November 2002	31 January 2003
6th vessel—Beachy Head	31 January 2003	14 February 2003	30 April 2003

Airlift/Sealift Capability

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are to improve the *(a)* airlift and *(b)* sealift capability of the Armed Forces; and if he will make a statement. [40615]

Mr. Ingram: We have already improved our strategic airlift and sealift capabilities in the short term, by leasing four C-17 aircraft, which provide a new outsized airlift capability, and by introducing the provisional strategic sealift service, so that there are now three rather than two ships available for this task. In the medium to longer term, we are in the process of procuring a PFI strategic sealift service (which will ensure that the MOD can call upon six roll on/roll off vessels when required, with four permanently available), and 25 A400M aircraft.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what projects are being scaled back as a result of the transfer from capital to resource DEL announced in the supplementary estimates 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [40423]

Mr. Ingram: Budgetary allocations are regularly revised in year to reflect actual progress on capital projects as well as changing priorities and requirements. The transfer from capital to resource DEL is within the Treasury authorised flexibility for the current year. Even after the transfer, there has been an overall net increase to the Ministry of Defence's capital DEL since the main estimates published in April 2001.

Private Military Companies

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what private military companies have licences in Britain; what work they are involved in; and if he will make a statement. [38799]

Mr. MacShane: I have been asked to reply.

Private military companies based in the UK are not at present subject to a licensing regime in respect of the provision of military services. One of the options set out in the FCO's discussion paper "Private Military Companies: Options for Regulation", published on 12 February, is for the introduction of a licensing regime.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Reproductive Health Services

8. **Ms Christine Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department is taking to increase women's access to reproductive health services in Africa. [37322]

Hilary Benn: Increasing women's access to reproductive health services is a high priority in Africa, where women are affected by poverty, high maternal mortality and, increasingly, by HIV/AIDS. DFID is working with national Governments and other organisations to improve sexual and reproductive health. We invested £150 million on this last year, and expect to invest more this year.

West Africa

9. **Mr. Nigel Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her Department's programme of development assistance to west Africa. [37323]

Clare Short: We maintain a substantial development programme to West Africa, and plan to spend around £130 million and contribute £37 million through the EC over the next three years. We provide further support through the World Bank, Africa Development Bank and UN system.

27. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with her European counterparts regarding aid to west Africa. [37341]

Clare Short: I meet my European counterparts regularly, and discuss West African issues with them as appropriate. In particular I have encouraged other European countries to become more deeply engaged in Sierra Leone, both politically and financially. I travelled to Guinea and Sierra Leone with the French Development Minister last May.

Sudan

10. **Mr. Dawson:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the prospects for peace, justice, improved human rights and development in Sudan. [37324]

Clare Short: I believe that 2002 offers a real window of opportunity to bring Africa's longest running conflict to an end. I am convinced that with greater international pressure on the main parties, Sudan can be helped towards a just and lasting peace. The human rights of the people of Sudan can be better protected with peace and a stable social and economic environment in place throughout the country. The same applies to the consideration of Sudan's longer-term development needs. Development partnerships will not be effective without peace and political stability.

16. **Mr. David Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department is taking to promote peace and development in Sudan. [37330]

Clare Short: We are working with the FCO, to increase the international effort to bring about peace in Sudan. Efforts have been stepped up following my visit to the country in January when I was able to discuss the prospects of peace with Sudanese leaders on both sides of the conflict.

I believe the UK can play a significant role in helping resolve the conflict and that our involvement would be welcomed by both sides. The Prime Minister recently announced the appointment of a UK special Representative for Sudan who will be answerable jointly to myself and the Foreign Secretary and supported by a dedicated team drawn from both Departments. He is working closely with the US and Norway and we will maintain close liaison at official and ministerial level.

Long-term development of Sudan cannot be achieved without an end to the war. My Department continues to address urgent humanitarian needs arising from conflict and drought and has provided over £40 million of humanitarian assistance since 1997. We are liaising closely with the World Bank and European Commission to try and ensure that their engagement reinforces the search for peace.

St. Helena

11. **Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress has been made on the construction of an airfield on the island of St. Helena. [37325]

Clare Short: A "Comparative Study of Air and Sea Access" was published last July. A copy of the report was placed in the Library of the House. It identified options, which have since been under consideration by the St. Helena Government. As part of that process, the views of the islanders have been sought in a referendum. The outcome was a majority preference in favour of air access, as an alternative to replacing St. Helena's dedicated passenger and supply ship. Island representatives are currently visiting the UK to discuss next steps.

Replenishment Negotiations

12. **Mr. Hendrick:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her Department's priorities are for the International Development Association's 13th replenishment negotiations. [37326]

Clare Short: Our priority for the International Development Association's replenishment (IDA 13) negotiations is to build on the progress achieved under the last replenishment, particularly in consolidating a sharper poverty focus and embedding the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper process as the Lynchpin of the World Bank's engagement in low-income countries.

The UK has indicated that it is prepared to increase substantially its contribution to IDA 13, depending upon the resolution of policy issues.

The negotiations are still under way and are facing serious difficulties. We will report to the International Development Committee once the negotiations have been concluded.

Zimbabwe

13. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the future role of her Department's projects in Zimbabwe. [37327]

Clare Short: As I informed the House in April 2001, DFID withdrew from projects with the Zimbabwe Government relating to economic management because these could no longer meet their objectives. This has not impacted on levels of assistance to Zimbabwe, rather it has helped us give greater priority to humanitarian assistance and direct help for the poor.

We have of course been preparing strategies for the post election situation and will work with others to provide support for any government committed to responsible reform. If there is no such government we will continue to provide humanitarian assistance.

New Partnership for African Development

14. **Tony Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what support her Department is giving to the New Partnership for African Development. [37328]

Clare Short: We strongly support the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) because it is an African owned and led initiative. We are continuing to work within the international community to ensure an appropriate response, including through the G8, which is preparing an Action Plan for Africa to be presented at the Kananaskis Summit.

We are working closely with the UN Economic Commission for Africa, which has been mandated by NEPAD to develop technical proposals on governance.

Child Poverty

15. **Colin Burgon:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department is taking to combat child poverty in developing countries. [37329]

Clare Short: We seek to reduce the poverty of children, which causes suffering to today's children and jeopardises the well being of future generations, by working to address the causes of deprivation in their communities. Support for children's rights to basic health care, education, nutrition, shelter, protection from violence and abusive labour, along with sustainable livelihoods for their parents, is central to our work towards the millennium development goals.

We are working to energise the international system to achieve the goals. The goals include the target of, by 2015, lifting one billion people out of abject poverty, universal primary schooling, and reducing under-five child mortality by two-thirds.

Senegal

17. **Mr. Plaskitt:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what conclusions she has drawn from Senegal's fight against HIV/AIDS. [37331]

Clare Short: Senegal, like Uganda and Thailand has shown that political leadership to fighting the disease is a vital element in slowing the spread of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. These countries have also demonstrated the importance and effectiveness of strategies which promote awareness and behaviour change through information, education and community mobilisation; prevent infection through condom promotion and treatment of sexually transmitted infections; and support and encourage voluntary counselling and testing.

Sub-Saharan Africa

18. **Mike Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her Department's work in sub-Saharan Africa. [37332]

Clare Short: Sub-Saharan Africa suffers the deepest and most widespread poverty of any continent and faces the greatest challenges in meeting the Millennium Development Goals. We have significant programmes in many countries, supporting where possible nationally-owned poverty reduction strategies, both in particular sectors such as health or education, but also through direct support for national budgets. This country-level support is complemented by work at the regional and sub-regional level to help address cross-border issues such as conflict and trade. In 2000–01, total UK bilateral development assistance to Sub-Saharan Africa was £757 million, up from £445 million in 1996–97.

Afghanistan

19. **Joyce Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on progress on the reconstruction of the Afghan economy. [37333]

Clare Short: We continue to work with the Afghan Interim Administration (AU) to begin the reconstruction of Afghanistan, while continuing to support immediate humanitarian assistance and quick impact recovery and rehabilitation projects. The newly established Assistance Coordination Authority in Afghanistan will be the primary focal point for co-ordination with the AU. The United Nations Development Programme currently administers the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund for the payment of civil service salaries, to which DFID has contributed over £2 million. Later this year the World bank will establish a successor trust fund. We are also participating in missions led by the International Monetary Fund to assess what support could be provided to the Ministry of Finance and the Central bank. At the Tokyo Conference on the reconstruction of Afghanistan in January 2002, I pledged £200 million from DFID's budget over the next five years for both reconstruction and humanitarian assistance.

22. **Hugh Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. [37336]

25. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. [37339]

Clare Short: The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan remains fragile and significant needs will remain for some time to come in challenging and volatile operating conditions. Due to severe weather conditions and continuing security concerns in some areas of the country, there are still pockets of un-met need where vulnerable people cannot be reached. With our support, the United Nations and other humanitarian agencies continue to do what they can to overcome these obstacles and deliver life-saving assistance to those in need. Since October 2001, a record 250,000 tonnes of food aid have been distributed to over 6 million people.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the UN Economic and Social Council report "Discrimination against women and children in Afghanistan"; and if she will adopt its recommendations in respect of UK operations in Afghanistan. [38130]

Clare Short: We welcome the UN Economic and Social Council's report on discrimination against women and girls in Afghanistan and support its recommendations.

We recognise the need to build the capacity of Afghanistan's women to enable them to take full part in the reconstruction of their society, including the new Interim Administration, and to ensure that legal, constitutional and other provisions are not discriminatory against women. Our funding for support of Afghan women during the recovery and reconstruction of Afghanistan is being channelled through United Nations agencies and non-governmental organisations who will work closely with the Interim Administration and who have expressed a commitment to involving Afghan women in the design and implementation of their strategies and programmes.

To date this includes an allocation of $1 million to the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) for a programme to support Afghan women's leadership through awareness raising, capacity building and mainstreaming of gender issues in development activities; $0.5 million to the UN Office of the High Commission for Human Rights (OHCHR) for preliminary human rights assistance activities in Afghanistan; as well as local level, quick impact recovery projects supporting women. We are also in discussion with the Afghan Ministry for Women's Affairs on how we can provide support for its establishment and activities.

Corruption

20. **Mr. Davidson:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what measures her Department is taking to help developing countries combat corruption, with particular reference to the security sector. [37334]

Clare Short: Our partnerships with developing countries increasingly focus on the reduction of corruption through the establishment of Anti—corruption authorities and by the tightening of financial management and budget discipline, including reducing off-budget defence expenditure; the development of procurement systems designed to ensure thorough appraisal of value for money, transparency and probity; the strengthening of parliamentary oversight mechanisms; and acceptance of a role for civil society in such scrutiny. We are also increasing our focus on Security Sector reform and full democratic accountability and transparent management of this sector.

Medicines

21. **Phil Hope:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what policies her Department is pursuing to increase access to medicines in developing countries. [37335]

Clare Short: We are committed to working with our developing country partners and other international organisations to address the four key factors which are recognised by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as effecting access to medicines. These are sustainable financing, affordable pricing, reliable health and supply systems and the rational selection and use of existing drugs.

On sustainable financing, we are supporting, with a commitment of $200 million from DFID's budget over five years, the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, which will help pay for increased coverage of proven interventions for three diseases and some associated health systems strengthening .

The Working Group on Access to medicines, which I chair is working to bring about more affordable pricing. The UK is also supporting work undertaken by the WHO, World Trade Organisation and the European Commission on drug pricing.

We have committed over £1 billion since 1997 to strengthening developing countries' health systems, building their capacity both to deliver medicines to the poor and to make effective choices about the selection and use of drugs.

Great Lakes Region

23. **Ann McKechin:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the prospects for peace and long-term development in the Great Lakes region. [37337]

Clare Short: The vital element in achieving peace in the Great Lakes region is the full implementation of the Arusha and Lusaka Peace Accords. The Government continue to press all parties to these agreements to honour their commitments. I was encouraged from my recent visit to the Great Lakes that there is now a window of opportunity for achieving peace, provided the commitments expressed to us by Heads of Government are translated into real action on the ground and the international community and Security Council also focus on the full implementation of Lusaka. Key will be the successful implementation of MONUC deployment into eastern DRC, and a positive outcome to the Sun City talks currently underway. Progress in the peace process will enable the international community, finally, to concentrate on a partnership with governments in the region for the long-term development of their countries—an outcome keenly awaited and much needed by the long suffering population of the region.

Brazil

24. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the UK's aid contribution is for Brazil. [37338]

Clare Short: DFID's programme for Brazil supports the fight against poverty through promoting social inclusion, addressing inequality and fostering pro-poor, sustainable growth. The current programme is focused on reducing poverty through improved natural resource management, health and good governance, working with government, civil society and other donor partners.

Our role, as in other Middle Income countries is to support more effective use of Brazil's resources and resources available from the EC and Development Banks for the reduction of poverty. The UK provided £7.5 million in 2001–02 for technical assistance and DFID provided approximately £2 million (in 2000) through the EC programme.

Sustainable Fishing

26. **Mr. Carmichael:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to promote the development of a sustainable fishing policy in developing countries. [37340]

Clare Short: Fisheries make a vital contribution to the livelihoods and nutrition of poor people in developing countries. We are therefore pressing for improvements in international fisheries policies through the World Summit for Sustainable Development, through the review of the Common Fisheries Policy and through our contributions to the rural development and fisheries development strategies of the European Commission. More directly, we promote sustainable fisheries by helping West African countries implement the internationally agreed Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries which, if properly applied, can secure the health of fish resources and the livelihoods dependent on them.

DFID also has an explicit objective of achieving coherence between the EU's fisheries and development cooperation policies, especially in the way in which fisheries agreements between Europe and developing countries are implemented. The transfer of excess European capacity through such agreements poses serious risks to fisheries in developing countries, many of whom do not have the necessary management capacity. DFID also funds research to clarify and highlight the impacts of these agreements and is pressing the EU/EC at all levels to introduce measures to safeguard both the short-and long-term interests of poor people in the countries concerned.

World Trade

28. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on helping developing countries increase their trade with developed countries. [37342]

Clare Short: The agreement reached at the Doha WTO Ministerial defining the work programme under the Doha development agenda provides an important potential source of gains to developing countries through international trade. To ensure these gains are realised will require support for continuous improvement of developing countries' capacity to implement and negotiate various elements of international trade agreements. The UK is committed to building capacity in developing countries to increase their gains from international trading arrangements. I recently announced a package of £20 million for trade related capacity building, of which a third will be used to assist developing countries with the new capacity needs arising from the Doha agenda.

The UK is at the forefront of efforts to ensure that trade related technical assistance by all donors and multilateral agencies is provided within a coherent policy framework, so as to avoid duplication of effort and maximise impact.

Kenya

29. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on initiatives to support and promote the implementation of political reforms in Kenya. [37343]

Clare Short: The Kenyan Government have reappointed a Constitutional Review Commission (CRC) to make recommendations on how its constitution might be improved. The international community, including the UK, is supporting the work of the CRC and is also financing initiatives to promote civic education in Kenya. The UK and other donors are also helping to strengthen Parliament, including by building the capacity of Parliamentary committees to hold the executive to account.

Education

30. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action her Department is taking to increase the availability of primary education in the poorest countries. [37344]

Clare Short: We are working hard to mobilise the international development system to focus more sharply on the delivery of the commitment to universal primary education by 2015. We have made clear in all forums our view that this goal can only be achieved if primary education is free. We are also working in 29 countries to support delivery of this policy and have since 1997 committed £650 million. We will do more.

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what recent assessment she has made of the progress being made to achieving the targets set at the World Education Forum at Dakar. [39612]

(2) what progress is being made in achieving the goal set at the World Education Forum of free universal primary education by 2015. [39613]

Clare Short: There are widely different levels of progress against the millennium development goal of achieving universal primary education (UPE) by 2015. In sub-Saharan Africa an additional 88 million children will need to be enrolled in school between 1997 and 2015. This requires a threefold improvement in the rate of expansion achieved from 1990 to 1997. If the current rate of enrolment increase were to be maintained, fewer than half of the 43 countries would achieve even a gross enrolment rate of 100 per cent. by 2015 if this goal is to be achieved. Ten times the previous rate of increase will be needed in countries such as Angola, Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Liberia and Somalia. In South and West Asia the rate of enrolment is less challenging; although the overall numbers of children out of school remains high. It is estimated that an additional 40 million children will need to be enrolled to achieve the UPE target and that this will require the same pace of enrolment increase that was achieved from 1990 to 1997.

Achieving UPE can happen only through reform and action at the country level. But the wider international community, including bilateral and multilateral agencies, have responsibilities and roles in meeting the commitment of the Dakar Framework for Action that

> "no countries seriously committed to education for all will be thwarted in their achievement of this goal by a lack of resources".

The international response to the Dakar commitment has been slow and has lacked effective co-ordination. At the Education for All High-Level Group meeting convened by UNESCO's Director-General in Paris last October, I presented DFID's paper "Children out of School" which identifies the different circumstances of children who are not in school and proposes an eight-point plan of action for accelerating progress towards the 2015 target.

The Government give high priority to addressing this challenge. We believe that UPE can be achieved by 2015 if the lessons of the past are learned and if governments in developing countries put in place the right policies, and receive appropriate external assistance. We have committed over £650 million to support the development of primary education since 1997. We will do more.

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the proportion of Britain's aid budget which is spent on health and education; and if she will make a statement. [39614]

Clare Short: Health and education are key priorities for the UK's development programme. As well as being fundamental human rights, better quality of and access to health and education are essential if poor people are to benefit from globalisation. Since May 1997, DFID has committed about £800 million to support education in developing countries and over £1 billion on strengthening developing countries' health systems to deliver the health-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) agreed by UN Members. Support to health and education has increased steadily as a proportion of the total programme over this period.

In addition to this bilateral support, and the assistance we are providing to health and education through general budgetary support, DFID provides significant support to wider international efforts to tackle the global health and education dimensions of poverty. For example, we are working to ensure that the international community meets the Dakar Framework commitment that "no countries seriously committed to education for all will be thwarted in the achievement of this goal by a lack of resources". The UK also provides significant support to multilateral agencies tackling the major diseases of poverty. We have taken an active role in establishing the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and malaria (GFATM) and pledged US $200 million over five years.

A full report of our work on health, education and the rest of our programme can be found in our Departmental Report (the 2002 edition will appear in April). In addition, my department's education strategy paper, "The Challenge of Universally Primary Education", sets out the UK's strategy for delivering the MDG of universal primary education by 2015. Similarly, the UK strategy paper "Better Health for Poor People" details our approach to tackling health issues as part of our wider strategy to eliminate poverty. Both of these papers are available on *www.dfid.gov.uk.*

Accountancy Contracts

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will publish the *(a)* number and *(b)* value of contracts awarded by her Department to (i) Arthur Andersen, (ii) Deloitte Touche, (ii) Ernst and Young, (iv) KPMG and (v) PricewaterhouseCoopers accountants in each year since 1997. [34990]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 25 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 896W.

Debt relief

Ms Christine Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress has been made on debt cancellation for HIPC countries by multilateral financial institutions. [38087]

Clare Short: 25 countries have so far qualified for debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative. Ghana reached its Decision Point this week, and up to five more countries could be taken by the Boards of the IMF and world bank by the end of the year. Of the 25 countries, 21 have reached Decision Point and are receiving interim debt relief and four have completed the HIPC process, and are receiving full debt relief. We hope that a further five will reach their Completion Point in the next six months. Multilateral financial institutions account for some US$13.7 billion in net present value terms of the HIPC debt relief to these countries. The World Bank is co-ordinating this with the other multilateral financial institutions.

Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what contributions have been made to the global fund to fight AIDS, TB and malaria, broken down by country. [38108]

Clare Short: Pledges to date amount to over US$1.9 billion. The Department for International Development has pledged £138 million (US$200 million) over five years. Contributions pledged to the GFATM listed by country can be found on the GFATM website at: *http://www.globalfundatm.org/contribute.html.*

Governments are now beginning to fulfil their pledges. To date, initial contributions have been received from Italy (US$43.25 million), Belgium (US$4.9 million) and Switzerland (US$3 million). The UK is the process of disbursing its initial contribution of £25 million. Substantial contributions from others should follow shortly. The fund expects to have around US$750 million to disburse in its first year.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with the global fund for AIDS, TB and malaria concerning the aptitude of health systems to deliver programmes for the eradication of TB and malaria in developing countries. [38106]

Clare Short: My officials are involved in intensive ongoing discussions with the global fund to fight AIDS, TB and malaria (GFATM). These discussions have included the issue of the capacity of health systems to deliver programmes for the eradication of TB and malaria in developing countries.

The UK Government are strongly committed to health systems strengthening. We also believe that for GFATM to be effective it needs to focus largely on financing the purchase of drugs and commodities in order to add value to other international efforts.

Broader systems strengthening and multi-sectoral work will continue to require substantial funds which should and will more appropriately come from elsewhere: bilateral and multilateral donors and domestic developing country resources.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her forecast spending is on the UN Global Fund for HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria for each of the next five years. [39468]

Clare Short: The Department for International Development has pledged £138 million to the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and malaria (GFATM) over five years, to be disbursed as follows.

	£ million
2001–02	25
2002–03	25
2003–04	25
2004–05	30
2005–06	33

As the fund gets up and running, we will closely monitor its effectiveness and the value it adds to the international effort against the three diseases, and review our contributions accordingly.

The Global Fund is an independent entity, which draws on the expertise of the UN specialised agencies and others. It is not a UN fund.

Capita

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many contracts the Department has with Capita; and how much they are worth. [38376]

Clare Short: We have one current contract with Capita RAS, to provide a recruitment service for Pillar IV of UNMIK Administration at a cost of £180,000.

Advertising

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the publicity and advertising campaigns run by her Department in each of the last four years, specifying the *(a)* purpose, *(b)* cost to public funds, *(c)* number of staff involved and *(d)* method of evaluation in each case. [39095]

Hilary Benn: DFID does not run publicity and advertising campaigns.

Deforestation

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent representations she has made to the Government of Brazil regarding the deforestation of the rain forests. [38111]

Clare Short: I have not made any direct representations to the Brazilian Government regarding deforestation.

DFID's approach is to support Brazilian efforts to achieve sustainable development in the rain forest regions. Through our bilateral co-operation programme, including the G7 pilot programme to conserve the Brazilian rain forest, to which we have contributed £16 million to date, we aim to support sustainable development initiatives that respond to the development goals of Brazil and its people, particularly the poorest—and maintain environmental benefits. We do this through strengthening the capacity of Brazilian environment and development agencies, piloting new approaches to resource management and increasing knowledge and awareness of the issues.

Civil Servants

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will set out for each civil service grade within her *(a)* Department and *(b)* Department's executive agencies the (i) total number of staff employed, (ii) number aged (A) 16 to 25, (B) 26 to 35, (C) 36 to 45, (D) 46 to 60 and (E) over the age of 60 years, (iii) number of registered disabled and (iv) number of ethnic minorities. [39175]

Clare Short: The information requested is shown in the table and reflects the latest recorded position as at October 2001. Details by age grouping are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

DFID does not have responsibility for executive agencies.

Civil Service grade	*Number of staff*	*Registered disabled*[1]	*Ethnic minorities*[2]
Senior Civil Service	57	0	3
Grade 6	128	2	0
Grade 7	198	0	5
Senior Executive Officer	102	0	3
Higher Executive Officer	251	1	6
Executive Officer	270	6	20
Administrative Officer	318	10	38
Administrative Assistant	104	3	8
Total	1,428	22	83

[1] Based on staff who have recorded a disability under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

[2] Based on information provided to date voluntarily by staff.

Bolivia

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what requests she has had from the Bolivian Government for help in relation to the floods in La Paz; and what action has been taken. [38409]

Clare Short: We have received representations from the Bolivian Government in the aftermath of the flooding, but there was no formal international appeal. We have made an immediate commitment of £10,000 through the British Embassy in La Paz to be directed at assisting and protecting local communities to the south of La Paz which had been the most seriously affected.

LNM Holdings

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many times her Department has supported applications from *(a)* LNM Holdings and *(b)* Mr. Lakshmi Mittal for bank loans. [39141]

Clare Short: We are aware of four loans approved by those international financial institutions that my Department is responsible for: Ispat-Sidex in Romania (EBRD), Ispat-Karmet in Kazakhstan (EBRD and IFC), and Caribbean Ispat in Trinidad (IFC). The UK supported all these loans.

Cameroon

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action her Department is taking to combat urban poverty in Cameroon. [39471]

Clare Short: My Department does not fund any programmes to combat urban poverty in Cameroon. We contribute to poverty reduction efforts in Cameroon through our support to the forestry sector. This is in recognition of the forestry sector's importance to the Cameroonian economy and the fact that a majority of poor people live in the forest zone.

Fair Trade

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether fair trade products are sold in her Department. [39836]

Hilary Benn: I am pleased to confirm that fair trade products are sold in DFID. All coffee provided for official meetings is fair trade, and fair trade coffee is available to staff from our in-house restaurant. In addition, our caterers are looking into providing additional fair trade products, and are actively promoting fair trade fortnight.

Rural Development

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of her Department's development spending in *(a)* sub-Saharan Africa and *(b)* south-east Asia is provided to the rural sector. [39472]

Clare Short: In the last year my Department has committed £374.3 million to projects in support of sustainable rural livelihoods, of which 61 per cent. was in sub-Saharan Africa and 28 per cent. in south Asia.

In addition, contributions to livelihoods in rural areas were made through funding to global public goods research, contributions to multilateral organisations, funding for national infrastructure, and as contribution to policy in support of poverty reduction, including the role of rural economies and international trade. Much of my Department's spend in areas such as education and health is also in rural areas, which reflects the higher proportion of poor people living in rural areas.

Given the multi-sectoral, national and international nature of much of the work of my Department, it would take disproportionate time to allocate these costs against rural, regional and other spend, and therefore to present these figures as a proportion of the Department's development spending.

Africa Private Infrastructure Financing Facility

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what funds have been allocated to the Africa Private Infrastructure Financing Facility; and when it became operational. [39475]

Clare Short: The fund, which is now known as the Emerging Africa Infrastructure Fund (EAIF), comprises both equity and loan finance. Equity is being contributed by a group of bilateral donors including Holland, Sweden and Switzerland, in addition to the United Kingdom. My Department has committed £71 million over the period to March 2004. A consortium of commercial banks is providing both senior and subordinated debt, at a current level of about £140 million.

The first meeting of the board of the company took place on 18 December 2001 in The Hague, while the public launch occurred on 30 January 2002 in London.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the projects being supported by the Africa Private Infrastructure Financing Facility and indicate how much money has been allocated to each project. [39473]

Clare Short: The facility has now been launched as the Emerging Africa Infrastructure Fund. It is currently investigating a number of possible investment opportunities but, since it has been in existence for a short period of time, the board has not yet taken a decision to commit funds to any specific initiative.

The amount of funding available for investment presently stands at over £200 million. An investment policy has been agreed with the fund managers which will ensure that the projects selected are socially and environmentally sound, and contribute to pro-poor development.

Women

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of the micro-credit agencies supported by her Department are allocated to empower women. [39470]

Clare Short: Most clients of micro-finance institutions are women, who use their community banks to make regular saving deposits or to take out loans to expand their manufacturing or trading micro-enterprises. Research shows that micro-finance services can have a hugely positive social and economic impact on poor and socially marginalised women.

DFID funds many such institutions worldwide. While we do not possess detailed, disaggregated data, we estimate that 70–80 per cent. of our funding for micro-finance directly support women. Many organisations that we support explicitly target women clients. For example, BRAC in Bangladesh serves 4.3 million members, over 98 per cent. of whom are female. We are also making progress in countries where women have limited rights. Over the last five years, we supported the rapid growth of Kashf Foundation in Pakistan, a micro-finance institution dedicated to empowering women. It is entirely female-owned and managed, and serves 10,000 women.

Likewise, in several African countries we support FINCA, which provides services almost exclusively to women. We also fund Opportunity International's network of micro-finance institutions in five African countries, serving almost 43,000 women or almost 70 per cent. of its total client base.

Tanzania

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many letters from the public her Department has received regarding the sale of an air defence system to Tanzania. [39469]

Clare Short: DFID has received 94 letters from the public and 23 letters from constituents via their MPs regarding the sale of an air traffic system to Tanzania.

EU Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the European Union directives and regulations relating to her Department that have been implemented in each of the last four years, specifying *(a)* the title and purpose of each, *(b)* the cost to public funds of each and *(c)* the cost to businesses of each. [39125]

Clare Short: The information requested is not held centrally and providing it would involve disproportionate cost. Regulatory impact assessments are produced for all proposals, including those originating in European legislation, likely to impose significant costs on businesses in the UK and are generally made available in the Library of the House. We do not hold information on the costs of implementation to public funds or businesses.

Job Advertisements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the job advertisements placed by her Department in the last 12 months specifying where the advertisements were placed and the cost in each case. [39058]

Clare Short: The information requested on job advertisements which are place through an advertising contract, has been placed in the Library of the House. In addition, advertisements for the position of Director General (Programmes) were placed in "The Times" and "The Economist" at a cost of £11,461.

Catering Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the cost was of *(a)* in-house canteen and *(b)* other catering services provided by her Department in each of the last four years. [38931]

Clare Short: My Department has spent the following amounts on *(a)* in-house canteen and *(b)* catering services since 1 April 1998:

£

	In-house canteen services (a)	*Catering services (b)*
1998	51,025.46	15,118.02
1999	85,728.66	11,242.02
2000	130,495.84	18,177.59
2001	109,303.59	11,363.61

EBRD Projects

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the projects her Department has asked officials at the EBRD to support; and what the value of each of these projects was in each of the last five years. [39142]

Clare Short: The EBRD exists to help restructure the economies of former communist countries in central and eastern Europe. We support all responsible projects that serve this purpose. During the last five years for which figures are available (1996–2000) EBRD made commitments to 482 projects (total value of euro 11.7 billion).

Lists of the projects that EBRD Directors have approved in the years 1996–2000 are available in the Annual Reports on the EBRD website www.ebrd.com. I will place a copy of EBRD's Annual Report for 2001 in the Library when it is published.

Volunteers

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many members of her staff in each of the past two years have been granted a day's paid leave to work as a volunteer; and if she will make a statement. [39744]

Clare Short: Our formal volunteering strategy was introduced in January 2001. All staff are eligible for one day's paid leave a year to allow them to take part in voluntary activities.

I cannot provide statistics for the last two years but following the introduction of our strategy, nine staff were granted paid leave during 2001 to undertake volunteering activities. This figure excludes those staff who have used annual leave to enable them to participate in voluntary activities, or who did so out of working hours. For 2002, we have already approved three days paid leave for one individual.

PRIME MINISTER

Prime Ministerial Visits

Q14. **Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to visit Ramsbottom. [37359]

The Prime Minister: I have no immediate plans to do so.

City of London Corporation

John McDonnell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list those functions, engagements and events which he, his officials and advisers have attended which have been sponsored, funded, promoted and hosted by the City of London Corporation since 1997. [35697]

The Prime Minister: I have meetings with a wide range of organisations and individuals. As with previous Administrations it is not my practice to provide details of all such meetings. Since 1997, I have regularly attended the annual Lord Mayor's Banquet.

John McDonnell: To ask the Prime Minister what communications have taken place between himself, his Office and his advisers and the City of London Corporation in relation to the City of London (Ward Elections) Bill since May 1997. [35660]

The Prime Minister: I and my advisers have received representations on the importance that the City of London Corporation attach to the City of London (Ward Elections) Bill.

Volunteers

Bob Russell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 701W, on voluntary work, how many members of his staff in 2001 were granted a day's paid leave to work as a volunteer. [39549]

The Prime Minister: Our records show that 15 staff who were part of the 2000 project with a school have continued into 2001. There are another 10 staff who have also carried out different activities, including in their local area in 2001.

A400M

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make representations to Airbus to ensure that a British team *(a)* leads the planning and *(b)* provides the powershaft for the A400M heavy lift transport for the RAF. [40563]

The Prime Minister: The Government of course hope that the UK defence industry will be involved as much as possible in this project and recognise the considerable expertise that industry could bring to this project. Ultimately, Airbus Military is free to select its own suppliers on the grounds of performance and cost.

Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting

Tony Baldry: To ask the Prime Minister what his objectives are for the forthcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Coolum, Australia; and if he will make a statement. [39520]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the statement I made in the House today.

Fort William to London Sleeper Service

Mr. Alan Reid: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on departmental responsibility for financial assistance for the Fort William to London sleeper service. [40083]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* The current arrangement is for the Scottish Executive to fund the franchise payments made by the Strategic Rail Authority to ScotRail, the train operating company which holds the franchise to run this service. For that purpose, the Executive receives a matching transfer of funds, under interim arrangements, from the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

Romania

Mr. Chope: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 28 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 1450W ref 39039, (1) whether information on the number of occasions in the past two years he has written to the Prime Minister of Romania about the award of contracts to companies with British interests is available; [40634]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 28 February 2002, ref 39032, for what reason disclosure of the number of occasions in the past two years that he has written to foreign Governments about the award of contracts to companies with British interests would harm the conduct of international relations or affairs; [40636]

(3) pursuant to his answer of 28 February 2002, ref 39032, whether information on the number of occasions in the past two years he has written to foreign Governments about the award of contracts to companies is available; [40635]

(4) pursuant to his answer of 28 February 2002, ref 39039, for what reason the disclosure of the number of occasions he has written to the Prime Minister of Romania would harm the conduct of international relations or affairs. [40637]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 28 February.

British Companies

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 27 February 2002, *Offical Report,* column 1268w ref 38395, on British companies, what his criteria are for deciding whether to support British companies seeking contracts abroad. [40718]

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to my previous answer.

Iraq

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 28 November 2002, *Official Report,* column 966, what discussions he has had with President Bush in relation to Iraq and the pursuit of international terrorism in all its forms. [37657]

The Prime Minister: I regularly discuss all aspects of Iraq policy and the campaign against terrorism with President Bush. We share the concerns of all responsible Governments about Iraq's relationship with terrorism and its development weapons of mass destruction.

Engagements

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his official engagements between 3.30 pm and 4.30 pm on Tuesday 26 February. [39805]

The Prime Minister: As has already been made public I was meeting the heads of all the Regional Development Agencies.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Departmental Staff

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many people her Department employed in each of the past seven years; how many of those employees worked on *(a)* a part-time basis and *(b)* a full-time basis; and if she will make a statement. [38132]

Dr. Howells: The information is set out in the table.

	Average staff in post	*Full-time*	*Part-time*
1995	363	354	9
1996	350	339	11
1997	344	331	13
1998	364	339	15
1999	375	358	17
2000	405	382	23
2001	456	433	23

My Department supports a range of work patterns, including part-time, intended to help staff better manage their work and other responsibilities.

Volunteers

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many members of her staff in each of the past two years have been granted a day's paid leave to work as a volunteer; and if she will make a statement. [39747]

Dr. Howells: My Department does not have a central record of the number of staff who have been granted a day's paid leave to work as a volunteer over the past two years. The Department supports voluntary public service and encourages its staff and managers to take advantage of the extra day's paid annual leave, and other special leave arrangements, which are in place for those who wish to undertake such work.

Parliamentary Questions

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she will answer the question tabled on 22 January Ref. 279, in regard to the New Year's festivities at the Millennium Dome; and if she will make a statement. [39393]

Dr. Howells: This is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. The hon. Gentleman's original question (29586) was transferred to his Department and I understand that he will be replying today.

Aldeburgh Festival

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the work of the Aldeburgh Poetry Festival Trust; and what financial assistance and support her Department is giving to the festival. [39543]

Dr. Howells: The funding of arts festivals is a matter for the Arts Council of England and the Regional Arts Boards. I understand that East England Arts is working closely with the Aldeburgh Poetry Trust to bring about sustainable growth in its activities. The Trust is in the first year of a three year funding agreement with East England Arts which will provide investment of £41,388 over the three years 2001–04.

Gambling

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what *(a)* economic and *(b)* other evaluation has been made of the impact of the independent review of the gambling controls in Great Britain on holiday resorts. [40505]

Mr. Caborn: We intend, when announcing our conclusions on the report of the Gambling Review Body, to publish a partial regulatory assessment which will provide an overall assessment of the benefits and costs of the recommendations in the report for the gambling industry and the economy as a whole.

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many people are employed in the manufacture of gaming machines in Great Britain. [40506]

Mr. Caborn: Evidence submitted by the industry to the Gambling Review Body indicated that about 1,800 people are directly employed in the manufacture of gaming machines in Great Britain.

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment her Department has made of the number of jobs created by the gaming industry in each of the last three years. [40524]

Mr. Caborn: This information is not collected. The available information indicates that about 95,000 are currently employed in the gambling industry as a whole.

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the framework used in the independent review of the gambling controls in Great Britain. [40544]

Mr. Caborn: We hope to be able to announce our conclusions on the report of the Gambling Review Body within the next few weeks.

Lottery Funds

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans the Department has to ensure that unused Lottery money is allocated in the next six months. [40633]

Mr. Caborn: All the income received by the National Lottery Distribution Fund (NLDF) is allocated to the distributing bodies. At the end of December 2001, commitments by the distributing bodies to projects totalled approximately £3.82 billion, some £290 million more than the NLDF balance at the same date.

The Government are working with the distributing bodies to ensure not only that Lottery funds are committed to projects, but that this money is paid over to project operators as quickly as reasonably possible so that good causes derive the greatest possible benefit from the funds raised by the Lottery. We will set out our proposals in more detail in due course.

Rail Journeys (Staff)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make it her policy that rail journeys undertaken by staff in her Department should ordinarily be on standard class tickets. [40436]

Dr. Howells: DCMS travel and subsistence rules encourage staff to use Standard Class travel wherever possible. To obtain best value for money management of the policy is delegated to line management who are responsible for authorisation and economical management of all official travel. While first class travel is permitted for some grades many of them travel at standard class unless, for example, they need extra space or comfort to work during travel.

Capita

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list all contracts awarded by her Department to Capita since 1997, including *(a)* start and finish date of contract, *(b)* value of contract, *(c)* description of work to be carried out, *(d)* evaluation mechanism for successful delivery of contract, *(e)* penalty charges for failure to deliver and *(f)* if penalty charges have been incurred; and if she will make a statement. [40488]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* The information is as follows.

Capita

Year		£
1998–99 (January–April 1998)	Recruitment of Chairman and Members—New Opportunities Fund	14,000
1998–99 (January–April 1998)	Recruitment of Chairman and Trustees—National Endowment for Science and Technology (NESTA)	13,000
1998–99	Recruitment for BBC Appointments	12,000
2001–02 (October–November 2001)	Training for Recruitment Scheme—Middle and Senior Managers	17,000
2001–02 (February–March 2002)	Providing and Marking Standard Civil Service Written Tests	1,000
2001–02 (November 2001–February 2002)	Civil Service Junior Manager Recruitment Scheme	8,000
Total		65,000

Note:

Includes Royal Parks (nil return)

For each contract, DCMS appoints a "Performance Monitoring Officer". His/her satisfaction is the benchmark for success.

There have been no "penalty charges"—but failure to deliver might lead to the contract being determined, moneys being withheld from the contractor, or the employment of a replacement contractor at the outgoing contractors expense.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Building Research Establishment

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what reports she has received from the Building Research Establishment on the disposal of the Building Research Establishment library stock. [36478]

Mr. Wilson: This is a matter for the Building Research Establishment. However I have asked them to write to my hon. Friend and I have received no formal reports from BRE on the disposal of its library stock.

Atlantic Frontier Environmental Network

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the membership of the Atlantic Frontier Environmental Network; and what its terms of reference are. [37747]

Mr. Wilson: The membership of the Atlantic Frontier Environmental Network (AFEN) varies over time. The most recent list of members is:

Agip (UK) Ltd., Amerada Hess, British Gas E&P Ltd., BP Amoco, Chevron UK Ltd., Conoco (UK) Ltd., Department of Trade and Industry, Enterprise Oil plc, Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Phillips Petroleum Company UK Ltd., Scottish Executive—Environment and Rural Affairs Department (Fisheries Research Services), Shell UK Exploration and Production, Statoil and Texaco North Sea UK.

AFEN has a Mission Statement rather than "Terms of Reference". AFEN's Mission Statement is:

"The Atlantic Frontier Environmental Network will co-operatively work as an industry to understand the key aspects of the Atlantic Frontier region environment and implement monitoring programmes and protection measures necessary to minimise or eliminate adverse impact. The strategy will be implemented by:

Reviewing, investigating and understanding the natural and physical environment of the Atlantic Margin including:

Seabed sediments and topography

Hydrographic phenomena

Benthic Fauna

Fishing and associated resources

Sea mammals, particularly large cetaceans

Seabirds.

Identifying parts of the environment vulnerable to routine Exploration and Production operations and planning pollution prevention or minimisation strategies. Operations would include:

Seismic

Drilling

Production

Decommissioning

Assessing the risks and possible impacts of unplanned or emergency pollution incidents and implementing response plans.

Developing a wider dialogue and consensus with local communities and parties with a legitimate interest in the offshore environment of the Atlantic Margin."

Development

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how often the Department has applied the special urgency provisions in paragraph 22 of Circular 18/84 (Development by Government Departments) to a development by the Department; and if she will make a statement. [38708]

Ms Hewitt: My Department has not applied the special urgency provisions of DOE Circular 18/84 since it took over overall responsibility for the property management of its estate in April 1996. The DTI does not hold centralised property records prior to 1996.

Electricity

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what role she or her officials will play in the DTI study into the electricity transmission and distribution system's resilience; if it will be an independent study; and when and to whom the consultants will report. [39196]

Mr. Wilson: The study has been commissioned by the Department of Trade and Industry. It is being carried out by the independent consultants British Power International (BPI), who were appointed following a competitive tender exercise. They are managed by a project management team consisting of officials from the Department's Energy Group and a representative from Ofgem. BPI will produce a report for DTI ministers in April 2002. Ministers' role will be to decide on what follow-up action is appropriate.

Small Businesses

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received concerning extending the Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme to retail businesses; and if she will make a statement. [39814]

Ms Hewitt: I have received representations from a variety of bodies over a period of time about the reintroduction of retailing as an eligible business activity under the Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme.

The Scheme is currently being considered as part of the DTI's wider review of business support.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the role of her Department in the operations of small business/Europe, with respect to *(a)* policy formation, *(b)* lobbying and *(c)* personnel. [39645]

Nigel Griffiths: The Small Business Service of the Department of Trade and Industry manages the contract under which small business/europe operates. Small business/europe is, however, a private company that determines its own policy formation and lobbying strategy through consultation with other UK SME representative organisations, trade associations and small and medium sized businesses themselves. The Director of small business/Europe, Ben Butters, is responsible for personnel for the organisation.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on planned funding arrangements for small business/Europe over the medium term. [39659]

Nigel Griffiths: Small business/europe has full Government funding for the first two years of operation and thereafter must find an increasing proportion of its funding from private sources as the funding from the Small Business Service of the Department of Trade and Industry is reduced.

LNM Holdings

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions took place between her Department and other Government Departments on the takeover of Sidex Steel by LNM Holdings. [38850]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Discussions took place between Trade PartnersUK and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Steel Industry

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what employer recruitment subsidies have been put in place to support those made redundant from Corus in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* the UK as a whole. [39811]

Ms Hewitt: None. Redundant Corus workers, in Wales and the UK as a whole, were offered help to find new employment through the Job Transition Service (now called the Rapid Response Service) which is designed to match worker's skills to local job vacancies. In some circumstances, where the eligibility criteria are met, newly redundant workers have early entry to the national new deal programme that offers a wide range of options, including employer subsidies—designed to encourage the employment of the long term unemployed.

Correspondence

David Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a reply to his letter of 22 January regarding the construction industry. [38456]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The reply in question has been signed by myself and forwarded to my hon. Friend prior to the tabling of his question.

Volunteers

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many members of her staff in each of the past two years have been granted a day's paid leave to work as a volunteer; and if she will make a statement. [39745]

Ms Hewitt: All members of staff in my Department have the right to one day's special leave with pay per year to undertake voluntary activity for the benefit of the wider community.

The granting of paid time off for voluntary activity is delegated to line management level and figures are not held centrally.

Miners' Compensation

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to locate a respiratory specialist in Merseyside to assist with medical assessments of former miners seeking compensation. [38347]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* There are now almost 1,560 claims in respect of living miners registered in Merseyside. Centres have been positioned geographically in areas of high concentration of claimants and where respiratory specialists are available to staff the centres. Claimants are usually invited to attend a test centre within a 25-mile radius from their residence. The centres Merseyside claimants will be directed to are Wrexham, Wigan and Manchester. These are considered to be adequately close to service the needs of Merseyside claimants. However, claimants are given the option to attend a different centre if a more suitable time is available. For those claimants who are not able to travel to a centre, and have a letter from their doctor, Healthcall, the company contracted to undertake the Medical Assessment Process, MAP, can carry out home visits. Where there are pockets of claimants outside the 25 mile radius of a test centre, but insufficient numbers to set up a permanent centre, one of the mobile testing units will be used to assess these claimants.

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made in processing miners' compensation claims in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* the north-east, *(c)* south Tyneside and *(d)* the Jarrow constituency. [39617]

Mr. Wilson: IRISC, the Department's claims handlers, have made the following interim and full and final settlements to date:

Region	*Number of interim payments*	*Number of full and final payments*	*Damages paid (£ million)*
Respiratory disease			
(a) UK	31,163	12,920	172.6
(b) North-east	5,929	1,627	36.6
(c) South Tyneside	499	184	2.8
(d) Jarrow	121	55	0.7
Vibration White Finger			
(a) UK	41,883	22,577	396.2
(b) North-east	9,171	5,167	97.4
(c) South Tyneside	982	305	9.2
(d) Jarrow	249	102	2.5

There has been some good progress lately, particularly in relation to respiratory disease. In January alone, over 2,800 full and final offers, excluding expedited offers, were made worth £21.1 million in relation to respiratory disease. With regards to Vibration White Finger, 3,200 offers have been made in January, worth £29.5 million.

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many outstanding claims for miners' compensation there are in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* the north-east, *(c)* south Tyneside and *(d)* the Jarrow constituency. [39616]

Mr. Wilson: IRISC, the Department's claims handlers have registered the following number of claims and made the following settlements:

Region	*Number of claims*	*Number of full and final payments*	*Number of denied/ withdrawn claims*	*Number of outstanding claims*
Respiratory disease				
(a) UK	131,731	12,920	3,584	115,227
(b) North-east	26,635	1,627	572	24,436
(c) South Tyneside	2,368	184	40	2,144
(d) Jarrow	607	55	9	543
Vibration White Finger				
(a) UK	111,644	22,577	4,510	84,557
(b) North-east	20,677	5,167	931	14,579
(c) South Tyneside	1,916	305	67	1,544
(d) Jarrow	519	102	17	400

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimates have been made about the future potential of CHP in sectors of the economy, with particular reference to industry, in the Department's report, Long-Term Reductions in Greenhouse Gas Emissions in the UK, from the Inter-departmental Analysts Group chaired by the Department. [39383]

Mr. Wilson: The report by the Inter-departmental Analysts Group makes a number of references to the future potential for CHP and micro CHP in all sectors of the economy to contribute to savings in greenhouse gas emissions. For the industry and services sectors this (technical) potential is incorporated within the estimates for potential savings from improved energy efficiency. That potential has been considered on the basis of a scenario approach to 2050, explained within the energy efficiency sections of the paper prepared by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and specifically in annexes C and D. Overall, the report suggests potential for CHP to provide up to 25 per cent. of electricity generation for industry and services by 2050. The full report is found at http://www2.dti.gov.uk/energy/greenhousesgas/index.htm.

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will revise the sustainable development guidelines to reflect the Government's target to double the UK use of combined heat and power by 2010. [39980]

Mr. Wilson: The Department has not issued any guidelines on sustainable development. However the DTI's Sustainable Development Strategy was published in October 2000 and is available on the DTI website. The Government remain committed to supporting CHP and my Department is working with colleagues in DEFRA and industry to improve the economic conditions for CHP and we are actively contributing to the development of the Government's CHP strategy.

E-mail

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what assessment she has made of the common position on Directive COM2000/0385, with particular reference to the compromise agreed on Article 13 regarding unsolicited e-mail marketing; [39458]

(2) if she will include an opt-in system for e-mail marketing in the Government's transposition of the E-commerce Directive. [39457]

Mr. Alexander: At the Telecoms Council on 6 December last year, member states and the Commission reached political agreement on the draft Communications Data Protection Directive, including the provisions on unsolicited commercial e-mail (UCE) in Article 13, where the issue has been whether UCE should be subject to opt-in rules, under which it could only be sent with the prior consent of the addressee, or member states should have discretion to apply opt-out rules, under which UCE can be sent unless the addressee has objected, either to e-mails from a particular sender or on a blanket basis by registering on a central opt-out list.

The Commission's original proposals produced a very divided response, and at the council, a compromise was agreed. Under this, the general principle would be opt-in, but with an opt-out exception for e-mail sent in the context of an existing customer relationship provided, among other things, that the sender has obtained the addressee's contact details in accordance with existing data protection rules. The UK supported this compromise wording at the council, and we believe it offers a sensible and workable regulatory approach. The draft Directive is now going through second reading procedures in the European Parliament.

The Government will shortly be publicly consulting on draft Regulations implementing the E-Commerce Directive.

Regulatory Impact Unit

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many members of staff her Department employs in its regulatory impact unit; and if she will make a statement. [39976]

Ms Hewitt: Two members of staff currently work in the departmental regulatory impact unit (DRIU). Of the two staff, one member works full-time and the other member spends three days of the week with the DRIU team. A new full-time member of staff will be heading the DRIU team from Wednesday 20 March. In addition there are 11 members of staff who work in the Small Business Service on better regulation for small business across Government.

Export Promotion

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the level of support provided for UK export promotion by the Government; and what information she has collated on the level of support provided by other members of the European Union. [40257]

Nigel Griffiths: Government funding for trade development and promotion is the responsibility of Trade Partners UK, an arm of British Trade International which is a joint operation of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department of Trade and Industry. Programme funding for 2001–02 is £68 million. For a more detailed breakdown of Government support for trade development and promotion, please refer to the Expenditure Plans Reports of British Trade International (Cm 5123), the Department of Trade and Industry (Cm 5112), the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Cm 5110) and British Trade International's Resource Accounts for 2000–01 (HC 526).

The export support provided by members of the European Union is broadly similar to that provided by Trade Partners UK. However, member states use different management systems and structures to provide their export promotion services, which make direct comparisons between individual countries very difficult.

Gas Supplies

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will publish a list of the priority end users under the network gas supply emergency procedure. [40051]

Mr. Wilson: DTI does not hold copies of these lists. As the procedures to which my hon. Friend refers state, these lists are held and maintained by Transco Local Distribution Zones. The lists are kept up to date locally with advice from gas shippers and suppliers to ensure that the details are as accurate as possible.

The prioritisation process was agreed after an extensive public consultation period. As the Network Gas Supply Procedures make clear, the first priority is to maintain domestic supply. If it is possible and necessary to implement the priority gas consumer arrangements, generally speaking, hospitals and those caring for the sick will receive priority.

I have placed copies of the categorisation of priorities in the Libraries of the House.

Credit Union

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what research her Department has commissioned to *(a)* assess the potential contribution of the credit union movement to financial inclusion for disadvantaged households and *(b)* assess the role credit unions might have in progress towards meeting the objectives of the Government's fuel poverty strategy. [40070]

Mr. Wilson: The Department has not commissioned research on credit unions. Officials have participated in the steering group of a research project commissioned by Ofgem under its Social Action Plan, and sponsored by Innogy, which includes a study of the feasibility of promoting credit unions as part of a wider strategy to tackle fuel poverty. The report on this work, "Ending Financial Exclusion and Fuel Poverty—A Factor 4 Approach" was published by Ofgem on 5 March.

Parliamentary Question

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will reply to the question from the hon. Member for Cynon Valley of 15 October 2001 (Ref 6545). [40380]

Nigel Griffiths: My response of 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 981–82W said:

> "Inquiries are being made and I shall respond to my hon. Friend as soon as possible".

I am now in a position to respond and apologise for the delay in doing so. Details of all export licensing decisions taken between 2 May 1997 and 31 December 2000 were set out in the Government's 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000 annual reports on strategic export controls, published by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office; copies are in the Libraries of the House.

Components and associated equipment for armoured vehicles are controlled under entries ML1, ML2, ML3, ML4, ML5, ML6, ML11, ML13, ML15 and ML17 in Part 3 of Schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order, commonly known as the Military List. From 1 January 2001 to 24 January 2002, 69 SIELs and no OIEL were issued covering the export of items with the relevant ratings. During that same period one SEIL and one OIEL application were refused. In addition 22 SIEL and one OIEL applications were still awaiting a decision as of 24 January 2002.

In addition, goods on the Military List may have been exported to Indonesia since May 1997 under certain open general export licences; copies of all open general export licences are placed in the Libraries of the House.

Information relating to licences for components and associated equipment for specific armoured vehicles is confidential information, which is exempt from disclosure under Part 2, sections 1, 13 and 14 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

EU Delegations (Scottish Ministers)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether a Scottish Executive Minister will be a member of the UK delegation to the forthcoming Research European Union Council of Ministers meeting on 11 March; and what information is being provided by her Department to guarantee effective pre-council scrutiny by the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament. [40320]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* My noble Friend the Minister for Science normally attends Research European Union Council of Ministers meetings for the UK. A Scottish Executive Minister will not be a member of the UK delegation to the Research Council meeting on 11 March. It is the responsibility of the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament to scrutinise the Scottish Executive's involvement in preparations for EU Council meetings. These arrangements are a matter for the Committee and the Scottish Executive. My Department provides information to Scottish Executive officials as part of that process. In developing the UK Government's position on European research issues, the Office of Science and Technology regularly consults the devolved administrations.

Rail Journeys (Staff)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make it her policy that rail journeys undertaken by staff in her Department should ordinarily be on standard class tickets. [40430]

Ms Hewitt: The Department's policy on travel is set out in its staff handbook "The Guide" which states:

Need for economy (minimum expenses rule)

> Staff travelling on official business must take advantage of any cheap facilities which may be available (e.g. special offers, day returns or season tickets) wherever practical. Line managers and staff should keep total expenses to the minimum, consistent with efficiency.

Road Transport Fuels

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the *(a)* names, *(b)* locations, *(c)* owners, *(d)* total output of refined road transport fuels and *(e)* number of employees of each of the oil refineries in UK. [39853]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* The following table is taken from the 2001 Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics, published by the DTI in July 2001.

Owner	*Name*	*Location*	*Distillation capacity*[1]
Shell UK Ltd.	Stanlow	Ellesmere Port, South Wirral	11.5
Esso Petroleum Co.Ltd.	Fawley	Southampton	15.6
BP Ltd.	Coryton	Stanford-le-Hope, Essex	9.6
	Grangemouth	Grangemouth, Stirlingshire	10.1
TotalFinaElf Ltd.	Lindsey	Killingholme, North Lincolnshire	10.0
TotalFinaElf Ltd./Murco Ltd.	Milford Haven	Milford Haven, Pembrokeshire	5.3
Conoco Ltd.	Killingholme	Killingholm, North Lincolnshire	9.4
Texaco Refining Co. Ltd.	Pembroke	Pembroke, Pembrokeshire	10.1
Petroplus International Ltd.	North Tees	Port Clarence, Cleveland	5.0

Three smaller specialist refineries at Harwich, Eastham and Dundee do not directly produce road transport fuels, and have a combined distillation capacity of 2.3 million tonnes per annum.

The output of refined road transport fuels at each location is commercially sensitive, but some information is available on the UK Petroleum Industry Association website www.ukpia.com.

For the UK as a whole, provisional data for 2001 was made available on the DTI Internet site at the end of February 2002. This indicates that total intake to petroleum refineries in 2001 was 82,323 thousand tonnes, from which a total production of Motor Spirit (petrol) of 21,455 thousand tonnes and Gas diesel oil of 26,564 thousand tonnes was obtained, of which 15,045 thousand tonnes was road diesel (DERV).

According to the Annual Business Inquiry for 2000 carried out by the Office for National Statistics, a total of 13,799 people are employed in the oil refining sector in Great Britain. This survey does not identify employment at individual refinery level for confidentiality reasons, and we have not been able, in the time available, to identify publicly available data at individual refinery level on employment numbers.

Information and Consultation

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the Government intends to implement the European Directive on Information and Consultation. [40975]

Alan Johnson: The directive will be formally adopted in the coming weeks. Each member state will then have three years to bring into force the necessary implementing legislation. We will be consulting in due course on how best to implement it in the UK.

Sellafield

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the incident involving rods being taken out of the reactor core at Sellafield on 8 February. [40077]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* The four reactors at BNFL's Calder Hall power station have been shut down for a prolonged period while BNFL undertakes work to review the safety of defuelling activities at the station. This follows the incident that occurred at the Chapelcross power station (which is similar in design to Calder Hall) where the grab on the hoist inside the defuelling machine failed causing the basket to detach from the hoist and some fuel rods to fall down the discharge well into a water filled fuel transport flask at the bottom of the well.

In accordance with the requirements of the Health and Safety Executive's Nuclear Installations Inspectorate (NII), BNFL is currently carrying out work to recommission the fuel discharge route for the four reactors at the Calder Hall power station. This is part of the planned return to service of the reactors. The recommissioning process provides for particularly careful oversight of these operations in order to ensure that no problems arise as a result of any plant modifications that may have been made during the shutdown.

With NII's agreement, BNFL started to carry out some defuelling of Reactor 1 at Calder Hall as part of that recommissioning process. On 8 February 2002, the first 24 fuel rods had been safely removed from the reactor and were in a fuel basket inside the defuelling machine. The fuel basket was about to be lowered in the normal way when it unexpectedly descended partway down the discharge well before stopping. The basket remained attached to the hoist and all the fuel remained inside the basket within the containment of the fuel discharge route.

BNFL reported the event to the NII on 8 February. The NII observed the subsequent operation to recover the basket by manually lowering it down the discharge well into the flask. This operation was completed on 10 February and the fuel was removed in the normal way. There was no health risk either to members of the public or to personnel on site at any stage.

Defuelling at Calder Hall has been suspended until BNFL reports the outcome of its internal investigation and completes any requirements for remedial action to the satisfaction of the NII.

Fuels Market

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to introduce a regulator for the UK downstream fuels market; and if she will make a statement. [39854]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* The Government have no such plans.

Post Office

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the external financing limit target of the Post Office was in *(a)* 1999–2000 and *(b)* 2000–01; whether it was met; and what proportion of post tax profit the external financing limit represented in each year. [40555]

Mr. Alexander: As set out in the White Paper: "Post Office Reform: A World Class Service for the 21st Century", the Government replaced the setting of external financing limits with a new regime based on commercial dividends. No external financing limit was therefore set in respect of the years 1999–2000 and 2000–01.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the external financing limit target for the Post Office is in *(a)* this financial year and *(b)* 2002–03; and whether she expects those targets to be met. [40556]

Mr. Alexander: As set out in the White Paper: "Post Office Reform: A World Class Service for the 21st Century", the Government replaced the setting of external financing limits with a new regime based on commercial dividends. No external financing limit was therefore set for the current financial year or will be set for 2002–03.

Postal Services

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she will make to the Postal Services Commission in order to ensure the continued availability of postal services in rural areas. [38674]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is in regular contact with the Postal Services Commission. The Government have enshrined the universal postal service in legislation. The Postal Services Commission therefore has a primary statutory duty to ensure provision of a universal postal service. It also has a duty to have regard to the interests of individuals residing in rural areas. In exercising its functions Postcomm must act in accordance with all its statutory duties. These duties provide for continued provision of postal services in rural areas.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Incinerators

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the waste-burning incinerators that are being used in the Greater London area. [37263]

Mr. Meacher: The table details the waste incinerators currently regulated by the Environment Agency in the Greater London area.

Company	*Location*	*Incinerator type*
Johnson Matthey	Enfield	Chemical waste
Clinical Energy	Hillingdon	Clinical waste
London Waste Ltd.	Edmonton	Municipal waste
Thames Water	Beckton	Sewage sludge
SELCHP	Deptford	Municipal waste
Thames Water	Crossness	Sewage sludge
Reichhold (UK) Ltd.	Mitcham	Process water from polymerisation process

Smaller facilities are regulated by local authorities. Each year my Department surveys the 32 London boroughs and the Corporation of London seeking information on the number of incinerators they regulate. 27 authorities responded this year. In total, these 27 authorities regulated 20 crematoria and five other waste incinerators. Rounded up to the 33 authorities, this relates to 23 crematoria and six other incinerators.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she is taking to *(a)* monitor and *(b)* reduce harmful emissions from municipal incinerators. [39212]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Emission standards apply throughout the EU to municipal solid waste incineration facilities(MSWI's), both old and new. Enforcement action will be considered where monitoring reveals breaches of these standards.

MSWI's are required to operate in accordance with best available techniques (BAT). The Environment Agency provides guidance to operators on how to achieve this. This identifies requirements for incinerators' design and operation. To ensure effective destruction of pollutants; residence time, temperature and turbulence are strictly controlled. The Agency is currently updating this guidance and I understand that an early consultation draft has also been placed on the Agency's website.

Additionally the Environment Agency has recently varied the authorisations for existing MSWI's to reduce the dioxin emission limit to 0.1 ng/m^3.

We are currently transposing the new waste incineration directive, which will further tighten emissions standards. The older generation of incinerators has now been replaced with newer, cleaner technology, and most municipal waste incinerators in this country already meet the tough standards that will be introduced with the new directive. Incinerator emissions of all air pollutants are now less than 1.5 per cent. of total UK emissions.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the frequency and methodology of sampling for dioxin emissions at the SELCHP incinerator. [38829]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Dioxin emissions from SELCHP are regularly monitored by the operators on a six-monthly basis to check compliance with the EU-wide emission standards.

Additionally, the Environment Agency carries out independent check monitoring at a minimum frequency of once per year. All monitoring results, including those carried out by the operators, are available on public registers held at the offices listed.

The emissions monitoring methodology is based on US Environmental Protection Agency Method 23. This requires samples to be taken over a period of six to eight hours, at a variety of locations in the stack. Samples are then removed for laboratory analysis using sophisticated and time consuming techniques.

Public registers containing monitoring results for SELCHP are available at:

London Borough of Lewisham
Laurence House
1 Catford Road
Catford

and

The Environment Agency
Swift House
Frimley Business Park
Frimley
Surrey.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the level of dioxin emissions from the SELCHP incinerator. [38826]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Dioxin emissions have been regularly monitored at SELCHP for the last eight years, both by the operator and by the Environment Agency, to check compliance with EU-wide emission standards. Level of dioxins monitored at SELCHP over the last four years are given in the table:

Reporting period	*Dioxin level at stack 1 ng/m^3*	*Dioxin level at stack 2 ng/m^3*	*Monitoring body*
November 2001	0.031	0.008	EA
September 2001	0.003	0.008	SELCHP
April 2001	0.015	0.012	SELCHP
January 2001	0.06	0.14	SELCHP
November 2000	0.01	0.0098	EA
September 2000	0.025	0.034	SELCHP
March 2000	0.008	0.009	SELCHP
September 1999	less than 0.01	less than 0.01	SELCHP
April 1999	0.005	0.005	SELCHP
October 1998	0.005	0.005	SELCHP
September 1998	0.007	less than 0.01	SELCHP
March 1998	0.0	0.01	SELCHP
December 1997	0.01	0.02	EA
September 1997	0.02	0.01	SELCHP

The dioxin emission limit for SELCHP was reduced from 1.0 ng/m^3 to 0.1 ng/m^3 in October 2000.

The result recorded for Stack 2 for January 2001 is numerically above this limit, although the inherent uncertainty of measurement at these very low levels is such that the true concentration cannot confidently be said to be above the limit. Nevertheless, in view of this uncharacteristic result, the Environment Agency required further monitoring which was carried out in April 2001 as shown in the table above. A note was placed on the public register stating, for the January 2001 results:

> "The reported results for dioxins on stream two are shown to be slightly in excess of the recently reduced limit of 0.1 ng/m^3. In view of the uncertainty reported for this result, the exceedance is not considered as a breach of emission limits. Retests are being carried out this will be discussed with the operator."

Public registers containing monitoring results for SELCHP are available at:

London Borough of Lewisham
Laurence House
1 Catford Road
Catford

and

The Environment Agency
Swift House
Frimley Business Park
Frimley
Surrey.

Fuel Poverty

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the most recent available information is on the extent of fuel poverty in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland; what sources have been used to calculate latest statistics; and what progress has been made in reaching a common agreed definition of fuel poverty that can be used on a UK-wide basis. [38212]

Mr. Meacher: The UK Fuel Poverty Strategy was published in November last year. Copies have been placed in the Library.

It is estimated that in 2000 there were 2.8 million households in fuel poverty in England, when fuel poverty is defined as occurring when a household needs to spend more than 10 per cent. of its income on all fuel use to achieve a satisfactory heating regime (where income includes housing benefit and income support for mortgage interest). Using the alternative definition of income (excluding housing benefit and income support for mortgage interest) it is estimated that there were 3.9 million households in fuel poverty. These estimates are based on the 1998 Energy Follow Up Survey taking account of changes in income and energy prices between 1998 and 2000. The method and data sources used to produce these figures are set out in "Fuel Poverty in England in 1999 and 2000" available at www.dti.gov.uk/energy/fuelpoverty/index.htm which can be accessed via www.defra.gov.uk/environment/energy/fuelpov/index.htm.

Fuel poverty is a devolved issue and it is for the Devolved Administrations to comment on their most recent available information. an agreed single definition of fuel poverty is not possible until Wales and Scotland have completed a consultation exercise. However, it is the Government's intention to move to a UK-wide definition in the medium term.

Agriculture Council

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether a Scottish Executive Minister will be a Member of the UK delegation to the Agriculture European Union Council of Ministers meeting on 18 February; and what information is being provided by her Department to permit pre-council scrutiny by the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament. [38037]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* Scottish Executive Ministers did not attend the February Agriculture Council as there was nothing on the agenda of specific interest to Scotland. On the second point, the Department does not provide pre-council briefing direct to the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament.

Composting

Andrew Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects a national composting standard to be put in place. [38402]

Mr. Meacher: Comprehensive standards for compost are a top priority for developing markets for organic waste derived products. They will be vital in achieving both local authority statutory targets for recycling and composting and our obligations under the landfill directive to reduce the landfill of biodegradable municipal waste.

The Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) are currently working with the Composting Association to develop the existing industry standard for compost, launched in 2000, to achieve British Standards Institute (BSI) accreditation. The first stage is the development of a BSI Publicly Available Specification (PAS) which WRAP anticipates will be available in autumn 2002.

Traffic Emissions

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what predicted levels of emissions from traffic the Government are using over *(a)* five *(b)* 10 and *(c)* 20 years periods to meet the Kyoto and successor protocols. [39840]

Mr. Meacher: The latest set of projections was published in the UK's Third National Communication on Climate Change in October 2001. The table provides details of end user emissions from the transport sector. The end user classification re-allocates emissions from the energy supply sector so that a more complete picture is given of transport's contribution to the UK's greenhouse gas emissions. Road transport accounts for over 90 per cent. of the total level of carbon dioxide emissions from the transport sector.

The projections include the effect of the fuel duty escalator to 1999, but they do not include the estimated carbon savings from the EU-level voluntary agreements with car manufacturers to reduce CO_2 emissions from new cars by 2008–09 or from the 10-Year Plan for Transport. We estimate that the voluntary agreements will save 4 MtC and that the 10-Year Plan will save 1.6 MtC in 2010.

End user emissions from transport by gas, MtC

Gases	*Base year*	*2000*	*2005*	*2010*	*2015*	*2020*
Carbon dioxide	39.1	40.0	42.9	45.4	47.7	50.1
Methane	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
Nitrous oxide	0.4	1.3	1.8	2.0	2.1	2.3
HFCs	0.0	0.1	0.2	0.4	0.4	0.5
Total GHGs	39.7	41.6	44.9	47.8	50.4	53.0
Change from 1990 levels (percentage)	—	5	13	20	27	33

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will investigate the use of the enhanced capital allowance scheme to encourage greater take-up of energy efficiency equipment and methods for *(a)* retail/commercial, *(b)* individual and *(c)* domestic applications. [39379]

Mr. Meacher: The Carbon Trust will soon take over the management and promotion of the Government's enhanced capital allowance scheme for energy saving technologies. As part of its responsibilities, the Carbon Trust plan to carry out surveys and stakeholder investigations to assess the impact of the scheme. The retail and commercial sector will be among those which will be invited to participate.

Enhanced capital allowances relieve business expenditure against profits for tax and do not apply to private and domestic expenditure.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what incentives exist for installation of energy efficiency equipment to enable the introduction of measures to control plant more efficiently and effectively. [39380]

Mr. Meacher: The Government are committed to encouraging the installation of energy efficiency equipment through the enhanced capital allowance scheme. The scheme was set up in April last year and provides a fiscal incentive for business to purchase and install energy saving technologies. The Carbon Trust will soon take over the management of the enhanced capital allowance scheme and the Government's energy efficiency best practice programme—that offers businesses advice regarding energy efficient and low carbon technologies.

In addition the Energy Saving Trust provides advice and information to the domestic sector.

Flooding

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if the Government plan to increase the amount of flood defence funds for coastal communities this year; and if she will make a statement. [39401]

Mr. Morley: The Government are committed to sustaining flood and coastal defences and have increased spending plans in both of their spending reviews and again following the severe flooding in autumn 2000. Recognising the severity of the 2000 floods the Government announced a further £51 million over the period to 2003–04.

DEFRA's funding is set to increase from an outturn of £66 million in 2000–01 to £106 million in 2002–03 and £114 million in 2003–04. The amounts allocated to coastal and tidal river defences within these totals will depend on decisions by the operating authorities (Environment Agency and local authorities) on priorities for reduction of risk from flooding and coastal erosion and timing of works.

EU Vessels

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs further to his answer of 4 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 271W, on EU vessels, how many vessels, operating under non-EU flags of convenience but owned by Community companies, receive Community financial support for activity other than modernisation grants. [39754]

Mr. Morley: This information is not available.

Aquatic Pursuits

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on what date each Regional Fisheries, Ecology and Recreation Advisory Committee of the Environment Agency last discussed improving access to water for non-powered craft. [39477]

Alun Michael: The dates that each of the Regional Fisheries, Ecology and Recreation Advisory Committees of the Environment Agency last discussed improving access to water for non-powered craft are as listed.

North East—23 January 2002
Anglian—12 January 2000
Thames—28 January 2000
Southern—27 January 2000
South West—21 January 2000
Midlands—18 January 2000
North West—21 January 2000
Wales—27 January 2000.

Ancient Woodland

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what planning proposals she has to protect ancient woodland. [40353]

Ms Keeble: I have been asked to reply.

The review of Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) note 9 on Nature Conservation will present an opportunity to consider guidance on trees and ancient woodlands, including areas of ancient woodland that are not designated as sites of special scientific interest.

My Department will also provide any planning advice that is required in respect of the proposed best practice guidance on forestry and woodlands, and in the updating of Circular 36/78 on Trees and Forestry.

WALES

Cynon Valley

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last discussed the future development of the former phurnacite plant site in the Cynon Valley with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales; and what conclusions were reached. [40529]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I meet regularly with the First Minister when we discuss a range of issues affecting Wales.

The former Phurnacite plant at Abercwmboi is presently the subject of a mediation process led by the Environment Council. The process is trying to establish whether it is possible for interested parties to reach agreement on how remediation of this site, and the adjoining Ancit plant site, might be taken forward. No decisions on the future use of the site will be taken until the mediation process is completed later this year.

Fair Trade

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether fair trade products are sold in his Department. [39839]

Mr. Paul Murphy: No. My Department has no shops or other outlets where such products could be sold.

External Contracts

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations which previously held contracts with his Department *(a)* won new contracts at the culmination of the existing contracts and *(b)* won new contracts after a period of inactivity with his Department in each of the past five years. [38721]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* There have been no such cases since the creation of the Wales Office in July 1999. For the former Welsh Office, the information requested is not readily available and the question can be answered only at disproportionate cost.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the 30 largest contracts awarded by his Department from *(a)* May 1997 to April 1998, *(b)* May 1998 to April 1999, *(c)* May 1999 to April 2000, *(d)* May 2000 to April 2001 and *(e)* May 2001 to the latest date, indicating in each case the values of the contracts and the companies with which the contracts were placed. [38722]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* For the former Welsh Office (covering the period until June 1999) the information requested is not readily available and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Since its creation in July 1999 the Wales Office has continued these contracts which it inherited from the former Welsh Office:

Cleaning by Appointment (office cleaning)

Securicor Guarding (out-of-hours security)

Government Car and Despatch Service (Ministerial cars)

Sykes and Sons (flying of flags).

It has also had a contract with The Bridge to provide counselling services in connection with the North Wales Child Abuse Tribunal.

The value of these contracts is commercially confidential.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations have won new contracts with *(a)* his Department and *(b)* executive agencies in each of the past five years. [38720]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* For the former Welsh Office the information requested is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The Wales Office, since its creation in July 1999, has only continued existing contracts inherited from the Welsh Office.

Sports

Dr. Francis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales regarding the development of centres of sports excellence in Wales. [34844]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend and I meet regularly with the First Secretary and his Cabinet colleagues to discuss a range of issues affecting Wales.

Wales already has 42 Centres of Regional Excellence and over 170 Centres of Local Development. I understand that the Sports Council for Wales has developed a set of criteria for prioritising the specialist facilities needed by governing bodies of sport.

Correspondence

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many letters were received by *(a)* the Secretary of State for Wales and *(b)* the Under-Secretary of State for Wales in each month since July 1999. [30626]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The information is contained in the table:

Letters received by:	*Secretary of State*	*Under-Secretary of State*	*Inter-departmentals*
July 1999	21	7	360
August 1999	206	68	327
September 1999	174	58	559
October 1999	173	57	636
November 1999	138	46	981
December 1999	115	38	602
January 2000	75	26	870
February 2000	106	35	720
March 2000	102	34	925
April 2000	70	24	592
May 2000	84	28	587
June 2000	72	24	625
July 2000	65	22	620
August 2000	64	22	506
September 2000	49	17	389
October 2000	39	13	540
November 2000	52	17	759
December 2000	13	5	469
January 2001	2	—	405
February 2001	29	4	454
March 2001	34	10	703
April 2001	16	10	368
May 2001	17	4	326
June 2001	11	—	183

Letters received by:	*Secretary of State*	*Under-Secretary of State*	*Inter-departmentals*
July 2001	19	2	546
August 2001	28	1	346
September 2001	25	1	306
October 2001	30	5	581
November 2001	33	2	620
December 2001	13	6	439
January 2002	35	2	340

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Millennium Dome

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the total *(a)* costs and *(b)* revenue were of the (i) 2000 and (ii) 2001 new year's eve functions held at the Millennium Dome; how the events were planned; how the contracts were negotiated; with whom contacts were entered into; if similar events are planned at the Millennium Dome in the future; what the costs for maintaining the Dome and the surrounding site were for each of the past 24 months; and if he will make a statement. [29586]

Ms Keeble: The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) was responsible for the Dome up to the end of June 2001. English Partnerships took ownership of the Dome on 1 July 2001.

The new year's eve events in 2000 and 2001 were both held by the Ministry of Sound.

NMEC received £90,900 from the Ministry of Sound in connection with the new year's eve 2000 event which included payments to cover incremental costs totalling £40,900. NMEC bore costs of £11,000 directly related to the event and the Ministry of Sound met additional costs itself. The event was carefully planned by staff at the Dome and representatives of the Ministry of Sound over a period of several weeks, resulting in an agreement between NMEC and the Ministry of Sound. The event took place in the "Skyscape" building situated on land adjacent to the Dome.

For the 2001 new year's eve event in the Dome, English Partnerships received a total payment of £219,125 from Ministry of Sound—£75,000 as a basic hire charge and the remainder as a share of ticket revenue. In addition, Ministry of Sound paid for all the costs of organising the event.

The records of NMEC show that maintenance costs for the Dome and site (in £000s) as borne by NMEC were as follows (calculated on a cash paid basis):

	£000
2000	
January	2,078
February	1,897
March	2,013
April	1,868
May	1,956
June	1,802
July	1,937
August	1,705
September	1,306
October	1,492
November	1,388
December	1,543
2001	
January	280
February	352
March	357
April	662
May	773
June	–630
July	59
August	121
September	–498
October	82
November	28
December	14

The figures for 2000 include insurance. The available figures for 2001 do not include insurance. It is estimated that the element of NMEC's insurance for 2001 which related to the Dome and site was approximately £700,000. It is not possible to apportion this to individual months. The figures for the last six months in 2001 relate to outstanding invoices and rebates for the first half of the year.

Since English Partnerships took ownership of the Dome on 1 July 2001, their total running cost[1] expenditure incurred (in £000s) in relation to the Dome, broken down by month and calculated on an accruals basis, has been[2]:

	£000
July	223
August	238
September	220
October	229
November	275
December	266

All these costs will be recovered from eventual sale proceeds.

As regards the future use of the Dome, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, to my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Mr. Stewart) on 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 220–21W.

English Partnerships have been asked to explore further short-term events at the Dome and have received a number of approaches for events during 2002, on which discussions are continuing.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will provide a breakdown of the monthly costs of maintaining the Millennium Dome until the contract with Meridian Delta has been completed, including *(a)* the cost of staff, advisers and details of their responsibilities, *(b)* maintenance and *(c)* other costs. [32805]

---

[1] Includes rates, utilities, security and maintenance, and EP staff costs on management and maintenance of the Dome.

[2] Subject to any reassessments by the relevant authorities, of rates or other charges included in the cost of managing and maintaining the Dome.

Ms Keeble: Since English Partnerships took ownership of the Dome on 1 July 2001, their total running cost[1] expenditure incurred in relation to the Dome, broken down by month and calculated on an accruals basis, has been[2]:

	£000
July	223
August	238
September	220
October	229
November	275
December	266

During 2001 English Partnerships also incurred £6.1 million on decommissioning the Dome contents in preparation for a future use and £2.2 million in relation to the current sale process. The cost of the previous competition to find a long-term use for the Dome, which began in March 1999 and ended at the beginning of 2001, was £6.7 million.

All these costs will be recovered from eventual sale proceeds.

I will be pleased to write to the hon. Member informing him of monthly running costs figures in arrears, until the proposed deal with Meridian Delta Ltd is concluded.

[1] Includes rates, utilities, security and maintenance, and EP staff costs on management and maintenance of the Dome.

[2] Subject to any reassessments, by the relevant authorities, of rates or other charges included in the cost of managing and maintaining the Dome.

Strategic Rail Authority Strategic Plan

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what additional private investment is expected under the Strategic Rail Authority Plan between 2001–02 and 2011–12 in addition to the £16 billion in infrastructure enhancement and £7 billion in new trains, referred to on page 25 of the Strategic Rail Authority Strategic Plan. [37523]

Mr. Jamieson: The strategic plan states that the total amount of private sector investment leveraged by this plan is expected to be very similar to that envisaged in the 10-Year Plan.

This investment will cover enhancements to the network, new rolling stock, infrastructure renewals, additional freight infrastructure and the Channel Tunnel Rail Link.

Railtrack

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects Railtrack to complete its asset register. [37243]

Mr. Jamieson: In April 2001 the Rail Regulator amended Railtrack's network licence to require the company to create a complete and accurate register of the condition, capacity and capability of its assets. Railtrack is required to produce regular plans detailing how the company expects to ensure it has access to and knowledge of its assets. The next set of plans is due to be submitted to the regulator in April 2002, covering development of the register over the next two years.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 13 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 376W, on Railtrack, how much public lending is being made available to remunerate these professional advisers. [39418]

Mr. Jamieson: No public lending is being made available.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 783W, on Railtrack, if he will provide an updated schedule of the financial support given to the Railtrack administrator. [39424]

Mr. Jamieson: Approximately £1.8 billion has been made available under the commercial loan agreement.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 8 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1188W, on Railtrack, what assessment of those examples of companies limited by guarantee listed was carried out by his Department; and if he will place all related documentation in the Library. [40269]

Mr. Jamieson: The outline proposal for a company limited by guarantee (CLG) as a possible successor to Railtrack was developed with regard to the model used for Glas Cymru and a variety of other organisations. No assessment of these organisations was carried out because the model needed to be developed to apply to the particular circumstances of the rail network operator, as outlined in the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) on 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 195–97W.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 783W, from which budgets or revenue sources additional finance could be granted to Railtrack in an interim review. [40290]

Mr. Jamieson: Neither the outcome of any interim review nor the appropriate budget sources can be anticipated in advance.

London Underground

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what has been the increase in 2000 prices for fares in the London Underground in each of the last 10 years. [37229]

Mr. Spellar: London Underground advise that data covering the complete range of individual ticket types available can be provided only at disproportionate cost. It has, however, produced the following table, which gives the increase in fares, in year 2000 prices, based upon revenue per passenger journey.

	Revenue per passenger journey at 2000 prices (£)	*Percentage change from previous year*
1990–91	0.911	—
1991–92	0.945	3.80
1992–93	0.996	5.40
1993–94	1.05	5.40
1994–95	1.108	5.60
1995–96	1.114	0.60
1996–97	1.151	3.30
1997–98	1.165	1.30
1998–99	1.18	1.20
1999–2000	1.175	–0.40
2000–01	1.164	–0.90

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the safety case which the Health and Safety Executive is required to produce for the London Underground PPP when the London Underground is transferred to Transport for London and the Greater London Assembly. [40342]

Mr. Jamieson: Health and Safety Executive (HSE) assesses and considers safety cases for acceptance. It is for London Underground Ltd. to submit to HSE any material revision to its railway safety case that may arise from the transfer of the underground to Transport for London. The HSE has not yet received any revision to this effect.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the terms of reference of the original contract relating to the value for money assessment on the PPP carried out for his Department by Ernst and Young; and whether the contract allowed the specification of the final report to be altered by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* Ernst and Young (i) before and (ii) after it was written. [40341]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) on 23 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 493W. The terms of reference referred to in that answer were final and did not change, with the single exception of the deadline by which Ernst and Young were to report. This was necessarily tied to London Underground's own timing on its evaluation of bids.

Housing Benefit

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make it his policy to pay housing benefit for council tenants on the same basis as for tenants of registered social landlords; and if he will make a statement on the reasons for the current arrangements in this regard. [38092]

Ms Keeble: The differences between the financial arrangements for local authorities and registered social landlords are largely a reflection of the fact that council housing finance regime is operated as a national system which seeks to share out the available resources as fairly as possible. We have no plans to change that.

M11 Link Road

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what applications for compensation arising from the building of the M11 Link Road were received by the Highways Agency; how much has been allocated for payment of such compensation; and if he will make a statement; [38997]

(2) how much was allocated to Transport for London to cover compensation commitments of the Highways Agency arising from the building of the M11 Link Road; and if he will make a statement. [38998]

Mr. Jamieson: Papers relating to this scheme have been passed to Transport for London. However, it is unlikely that any claims for compensation for injurious effect by business or residents were received by the Highways Agency, since these must be made between one and six years after completion of the scheme.

The Agency made provision of £19.8 million, over the period 2000–01 to 2004–05, for compensation claims in relation to road schemes transferring to Transport for London. The bulk of this amount related to the Hackney/M11 Link Road.

These estimates were taken into account by Ministers in determining and making provision for GLA transport grant, which is a block grant paid for the purposes of Transport for London.

Traffic

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, what predicted traffic rates over the next (a) five, (b) 10 and (c) 20 years the multi-modal studies are using. [39841]

Mr. Jamieson: The multi-model studies do not use a pre-determined rate of traffic growth. Each study makes its own estimate of how traffic will grow in its study area over the study period. In each case, account is taken of study-specific factors such as changes in the numbers and location of households and workers, the level of current and future congestion, the availability of alternative modes of transport and the implementation of local demand restraint measures.

Bridges (Somerset)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what grants have been made available to North Somerset council for bridge strengthening and related works in each of the last three years. [38459]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The Government are committed to halting the deterioration in local road conditions by 2004 and to eliminating the backlogs in carriageway, footway, bridge and street lighting maintenance by 2010. Over £30 billion for local road maintenance will be provided over the next 10 years, an extra £9 billion (41 per cent.) above the funding levels in the previous 10 years—an increase of 23 per cent. in real terms. This extra money will allow us to tackle the substantial backlog in local road maintenance due to past under-investment.

North Somerset council have received the following grant allocations for highway maintenance and bridge strengthening works over the last three years. The figures for the financial years 2000–01 and 2001–02 have been allocated under the Local Transport Plan process. However the allocation given for the preceding year 1999–2000 was administered under the previous Transport Policies and Programmes process.

Highway maintenance and bridge strengthening

Allocation	*£000*
1999–2000	686
2000–01	895
2001–02	3,173

Railway Industry

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 791W, on the railway industry, up to what total amount the Government will guarantee these loan facilities. [39423]

Mr. Jamieson: The guarantee will be sufficient, within the limits of the state aid clearance, to cover principal, interest and other fees and expenses under the facility.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 1 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 589W, on railway policy, what non-public consultation took place on the change of structure in his Department. [40271]

Mr. Jamieson: This was an internal management matter of re-allocation of resources in response to changes in demand. No other consultations took place.

Shoreham Port Authority

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the occasions on which he has declined to reappoint members of the board of Shoreham port authority or declined to confirm candidates nominated. [39241]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The information requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Airport Security

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how many people were employed in the UK to oversee the security of baggage at UK airports in each year since 1990; [40260]

(2) what investigations are made into the background of potential staff employed to oversee the security of baggage at UK airports; [40263]

(3) what recent assessment the Government have made of the pay levels for people employed to oversee the security of baggage at UK airports; [40259]

(4) what recent discussions he has had with companies in the air transport industry regarding the pay associated with those employed to oversee the security of baggage at UK airports; [40264]

(5) what recent estimate the Government have made of *(a)* the turnover of staff employed to oversee the security of baggage at UK airports; and *(b)* the impact this has on the security of airport baggage; [40261]

(6) what training is required for staff employed to oversee the security of baggage at UK airports. [40262]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department is responsible for prescribing the security measures required at UK airports and for monitoring compliance. Our measures are implemented by the aviation industry, under the requirements of legally binding directions.

Directions have been issued to all UK airports and airlines operating in the UK relating to, among other things, the recruitment and training of staff involved in specified security duties. The specified duties include the screening of baggage. In respect of recruitment, the criteria for security staff require a five year employment record check and a counter terrorist check. Our training directions require staff to undergo appropriate training modules applicable to the security functions they will be undertaking. These requirements apply regardless of whether the airports/airlines use directly employed security staff, or those of private security companies who they have engaged as agents.

Airports, airlines, and security firms are private companies and staffing matters, including pay issues, numbers of staff engaged, and staff turnover, are entirely management issues for those companies. We therefore do not collate figures on total staff numbers or turnover.

Motor Vehicles

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 25 February, 2002 *Official Report*, column 871W, on motor vehicles, why data have not been included for the *(a)* Craigleith, *(b)* Moredun and *(c)* Newington wards. [40023]

Mr. Jamieson: The answer of 25 February said that the vehicle data were available for analysis only by pre-1996 definitions of Scottish wards. Edinburgh constituencies did not include Craigleith, Moredun or Newington wards under this definition.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many motor vehicles are licensed for use on Britain's roads. [40210]

Mr. Jamieson: The number of motor vehicles licensed in Great Britain in September 2001, the latest data available, was 29,676,258.

Pilots

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the *(a)* years and *(b)* pilotage areas of serious pilotage errors since 1980; and how many inquiries have been *(a)* instituted, *(b)* completed and *(c)* published. [40200]

Mr. Jamieson: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Airports

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which consultants have been commissioned in the SERAS study of the economic and environmental impacts of airport expansion; and which studies have been commissioned that are independent of the aviation industry and the Government. [40074]

Mr. Jamieson: At various stages of the SERAS technical work the following consultants have been commissioned to support the core economic and environmental appraisal of a wide range of options:

Halcrow Group Ltd (also acting as the managing consultants of the SERAS study), Scott Wilson Kirkpatrick & Co Ltd, CAA Environmental Research and Consultancy Department, AEA Technology Environment and Qinetiq (formerly DERA).

The SERAS study has been undertaken for the Government alone, advised by a reference group comprising a wide range of external representatives, including regional and local government, environmental organisations and airport consultative committees, as well as aviation industry interests.

I am unaware of the details of other independent studies.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how the SERAS study of the environmental impact of airport expansion reflects criticisms of Leq as a noise measure by the Terminal Five Inquiry report; and how the study will incorporate noise disturbance above the World Health Organisation target level (50dB Leq) but below the primary measure of 57dB Leq. [40071]

Mr. Jamieson: The SERAS study uses Leq as the primary measure for daytime aircraft noise as, on the basis of available evidence, it is the most appropriate single index of the overall noise climate. The study will include information about noise impacts down to the 54 Leq level, as stated in the appraisal framework published in November 2000.

Further research has been commissioned to reassess attitudes to aircraft noise. This was announced in May last year and underlines the Government's commitment to underpin our policy on aircraft noise by substantial research.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what account is being taken in the SERAS study of the environmental impact of airport expansion of *(a)* ozone emissions, *(b)* sulphur dioxide emissions and *(c)* carbon dioxide. [40072]

Mr. Jamieson: The Appraisal Framework for Airports in the South East and Eastern Regions of England published in November 2000 following widespread consultation, sets out the indicators used for assessing impacts of airport development options in the SERAS study.

The study has included an assessment of the impact on carbon dioxide emissions under a range of future scenarios. Ozone and sulphur dioxide emissions were not assessed.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what methodology is being employed in the SERAS study of the employment effects of airport expansion to capture the impact of *(a)* labour scarcity, *(b)* housing scarcity in the South East of England and *(c)* employment in the regions. [40073]

Mr. Jamieson: An appraisal of the employment impacts arising from a wide range of airport development options has been undertaken in SERAS. The objective has been to identify demands on the local labour and housing markets and to assess any resulting urbanisation pressures. The broad appraisal methodology is set down in The Appraisal Framework for Airports in the South East and Eastern Regions of England published in November 2000. The regional airport studies have assessed the effects on employment in the regions of a range of scenarios relating to airport capacity in the South East.

Departmental Expenditure Limits

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to amend his departmental expenditure Limits and running cost limits for 2001–02. [40185]

Dr. Whitehead: Departmental expenditure limits and the administration costs limit are amended throughout the year according to need and the parliamentary timetable for Supplementary Estimates. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions announced changes for 2001–02 in written answers on 22 June 2001, *Official Report*, columns 12–13W, 28 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 948–52W and 13 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 398–401W. There are no plans for further changes until the end of the financial year.

Social Housing

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the allocations of capital housing expenditure for each year since 1992 for each London borough broken down into *(a)* repairs to local authority property, *(b)* repairs to regulated social landlord property, *(c)* new local authority build and *(d)* new regulated social landlord property. [40181]

Ms Keeble: The total allocations made by central Government to London boroughs to support their housing capital programmes in the years since 1992–93 are given in the table. Apart from the major repairs allowance (MRA), which was introduced in 2001–02 to provide resources to meet the on-going capital costs of maintaining the council housing stock, the resources are not generally allocated for particular types of expenditure. Details of the MRA allocations are available in the Library.

Housing capital allocations to London boroughs, 1992–93 to 2002–03

£000

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
London total	539,255	529,146	422,485	410,295	391,598	326,985	390,237	399,263	613,482	730,034	736,701
Barking and Dagenham	7,675	6,832	5,470	5,558	6,091	6,294	9,741	9,550	15,720	20,053	20,738
Barnet	10,245	11,687	10,742	9,033	9,367	6,602	7,380	6,957	10,186	14,323	15,354
Bexley	5,250	4,767	3,626	3,659	3,157	3,525	4,456	3,113	2,665	2,494	2,607
Brent	20,543	16,379	14,875	16,656	16,286	14,159	14,656	13,877	21,309	25,514	24,322
Bromley	10,599	8,163	5,454	5,053	4,124	3,137	2,931	2,911	3,342	2,678	3,074
Camden	25,100	24,495	18,700	18,019	16,977	13,428	18,072	19,450	32,394	41,010	39,817
City of London	705	862	697	836	632	548	620	597	1,050	2,015	2,060
Croydon	20,395	23,105	19,088	17,542	16,975	11,362	9,088	10,082	13,900	17,001	17,802
Ealing	20,191	16,610	13,278	14,077	11,882	10,556	12,352	12,504	19,406	24,045	23,634
Enfield	19,480	15,989	11,620	10,630	9,876	8,009	8,336	7,801	10,368	14,563	15,890
Greenwich	15,973	22,136	18,706	18,615	16,770	13,430	14,393	16,952	28,142	31,907	31,652
Hackney	29,834	29,700	23,538	26,531	25,960	20,256	22,370	25,166	37,481	40,199	42,735
Hammersmith and Fulham	18,007	16,817	13,442	14,296	14,144	11,914	13,572	15,782	23,844	26,134	24,887
Haringey	27,894	23,661	19,749	18,404	15,777	13,928	15,887	15,809	28,199	32,667	34,258
Harrow	7,440	7,600	5,933	5,750	5,137	4,031	4,011	3,878	6,430	8,407	8,648
Havering	6,926	6,053	4,878	4,372	3,716	3,371	4,400	4,507	6,548	11,309	11,707
Hillingdon	14,445	16,924	13,042	12,439	11,383	7,854	7,464	7,798	11,481	14,127	13,923
Hounslow	15,825	13,919	11,819	11,628	10,717	7,757	8,252	7,685	11,098	15,531	15,673
Islington	27,161	24,166	20,970	19,651	16,629	15,084	18,862	18,150	28,557	38,297	40,237
Kensington and Chelsea	12,445	11,325	9,296	10,142	10,504	8,053	9,899	10,625	16,395	18,727	17,829
Kingston upon Thames	5,282	4,305	3,842	4,730	4,417	3,166	3,399	3,238	4,428	5,903	6,351
Lambeth	30,781	32,885	22,841	20,167	20,578	17,849	24,073	23,762	37,832	46,329	45,168
Lewisham	16,180	18,376	14,728	14,499	15,062	14,298	19,574	22,135	32,410	36,837	35,394
Merton	7,602	7,734	6,149	6,287	5,671	4,474	5,014	5,282	6,492	7,728	8,163
Newham	22,534	30,483	26,452	23,266	24,459	19,876	22,536	20,441	36,127	39,475	41,826
Redbridge	9,695	9,271	8,216	7,201	6,631	5,317	5,875	5,643	6,593	8,490	8,539
Richmond upon Thames	9,715	7,493	6,883	6,896	6,674	4,857	5,020	4,287	5,697	2,930	3,243
Southwark	24,596	25,370	17,484	18,859	19,414	20,129	27,752	29,229	45,946	52,921	54,739
Sutton	5,475	5,273	4,981	4,973	5,093	4,145	4,662	5,281	6,063	8,646	8,847
Tower Hamlets	20,674	21,623	16,620	15,083	14,056	13,611	21,211	21,907	34,594	37,844	39,244
Waltham Forest	20,365	14,134	9,726	9,995	9,949	8,749	11,557	12,933	22,418	24,834	23,666
Wandsworth	28,186	25,809	19,022	17,024	16,252	13,874	18,006	16,330	20,832	27,896	26,937
Westminster	22,038	25,196	20,620	18,424	17,238	13,342	14,816	15,601	25,535	29,197	27,737

Note:

Excluding funding for Estate Action, which is now part of the Single Regeneration Budget, and Arms Length Management Organisations.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the value was of the Government's local government financial settlement for Cities of London and Westminster for each year from 1978–79 to 2001–02; and what the percentage increase was in each year. [40186]

Dr. Whitehead: Information on allocations to individual authorities in years before 1990 is no longer held centrally. The table gives figures for Standard Spending Assessments (SSA) for the two authorities from 1990–91 to 2001–02, and the percentage increase in each year after adjusting for changes in function or funding responsibilities:

	SSA £ million	*Increase per cent.*
City of London		
1990–91	41.6	—
1991–92	42.7	2.5
1992–93	44.5	4.2
1993–94	48.3	10.2
1994–95	69.9	44.6
1995–96	65.9	–6.3
1996–97	62.1	–5.9
1997–98	63.0	1.2
1998–99	46.3	–26.6
1999–2000	48.2	4.2
2000–01	49.2	3.1
2001–02	50.8	3.4
2002–03	54.6	9.0
Westminster		
1990–91	172.2	—
1991–92	210.3	22.1
1992–93	228.0	8.4
1993–94	221.4	1.3
1994–95	220.3	–1.6
1995–96	241.8	2.4
1996–97	241.3	–1.8
1997–98	249.4	2.0
1998–99	232.6	–8.0
1999–2000	244.8	5.2
2000–01	257.1	5.4
2001–02	275.3	7.2
2002–03	290.3	8.4

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the increase in *(a)* standard spending assessment and *(b)* council tax between the previous and current financial years was for the Cities of (i) London (ii) Westminster. [40179]

Dr. Whitehead: The table shows the increases in standard spending assessments (SSA) after adjusting for changes in function or funding responsibilities and own band D Council Tax between the previous (2000–01) and current (2001–02) financial years.

Authority	*2000–01* £	*2001–02* £	*Percentage increase*
City of London			
SSA	49.122[1]	50.779[1]	3.4
Own band D council	525	548	4.4
Tax	—	—	—
Westminster			
SSA	256.827[1]	275.285[1]	7.2
Own band D council	235	259	10.2
Tax	—	—	—

[1] £ million.

Rail Punctuality

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reason *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Strategic Rail Authority do not (i) hold centrally, (ii) collate, (iii) make publicly available and (iv) place in the Library the monthly figures on the punctuality of train operating companies as published at mainline stations. [40272]

Mr. Jamieson: The punctuality of the train operating companies and the rail network is measured using the Public Performance Measure (PPM). PPM data are published quarterly by the SRA, are placed in the Library and on the SRA website. The next publication on 18 March will include information on individual train operating companies. The information on train punctuality and reliability published by train operating companies at mainline stations is Passenger Charter data.

PPM replaced the Passenger's Charter as the means of measuring passenger train performance in June 2000 to provide better information on the actual performance of Britain's passenger rail. It combines figures for punctuality and reliability into a single performance measure. It covers all scheduled services, seven days a week. It measures the performance of individual trains against their planned timetable.

Passenger Charter forms the basis of season ticket refunds. It only covers some trains, broadly defined as weekday am and pm peak services in the south-east and all day Monday to Saturday elsewhere. There are some variations between train operating companies.

Railway Investment

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the total public sector investment in the railways was in 1995–96; and what it will be in 2010–11 in real terms based on 2001 prices. [40204]

Mr. Jamieson: Total investment in rail in 1995–96 was around £1.25 billion in 2000–01 prices which, within a mainly public sector rail industry, was all classified as public sector investment. Through the 10-year Plan, total investment in rail in 2010–11 is projected to be £3.6 billion in 2000–01 prices, of which £0.95 billion is estimated to directly funded public sector investment.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if his Department has conducted a sensitivity analysis on the impact of changes to the rate of return required by private sector investment in the 10-year plan. [40231]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department has not carried out such an analysis.

Rail Safety

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much his Department has spent on rail-related safety issues in each of the last three years. [40226]

Mr. Jamieson: Total rail safety expenditure by Government and the rail industry is not recorded in a manner to allow spending on safety to be identified separately. Much transport expenditure simultaneously delivers improvements in safety as well as other benefits.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the ratio between total rail safety spending in the United Kingdom and the number of passenger and freight journeys each year. [40228]

Mr. Jamieson: None.

Road Network

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he plans to privatise the main road network. [40286]

Mr. Jamieson: Private companies have had an important role in road building and maintenance for many years and the 10-year plan assumes that around 25 per cent. of new investment by value will be funded by the private sector. However there are no plans to transfer ownership of the road network to the private sector.

Spring Supply Estimates

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what purpose item lxxiv on page 8 of the Spring Supply Estimates is being transferred. [40235]

Mr. Jamieson: The purpose for which item lxxiv on page 8 of the Spring Supplementary Estimates 2001–02 is being transferred is explained in item lxxxii on page 9 of those estimates.

Western Region Trains

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the Passengers Charter measuring points are for train *(a)* punctuality and *(b)* performance on the Western Region franchise. [40306]

Mr. Jamieson: First Great Western single, return and weekly season ticket holders are compensated for journeys that are delayed by one hour or more. The threshold for compensating other season ticket holders is below 88 per cent. for punctuality and 98.2 per cent. for reliability.

Traffic Management

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment his Department makes of the impact of traffic management schemes in London on overall traffic flows. [39977]

Mr. Jamieson: Assessment of the impact of traffic management schemes in London is the responsibility of Transport for London and the boroughs.

The Department makes forecasts of overall traffic flows, using the National Transport Model, and outputs from TfL's London Transportation Studies model. These are strategic models and do not represent every investment in the transport network in detail. In general, individual traffic management schemes are too small to be represented in either model and their impacts are modelled by the Department in aggregate.

High Hedges

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action he has taken on legislation to control the nuisance caused by Leylandii and other high hedges. [40258]

Ms Keeble: The Government will introduce legislation giving local authorities the power to deal with complaints about high hedges as soon as there is space in the parliamentary timetable. We supported the Private Member's Bill on this issue introduced by the hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) in the last session of Parliament and were disappointed that the Bill failed to complete all its stages before the election.

Guidelines commissioned by my Department, which provide an objective method for assessing whether high hedges block out too much light to adjoining properties, were published on our website in December. These guidelines are likely to be a factor for local authorities to take into account when determining complaints under a future statutory scheme. In the meantime, we want to encourage people to apply the guidelines and use the results to settle disputes with their neighbours amicably. We are preparing a leaflet specifically designed for this purpose, which we expect to launch in the spring.

Road Accidents

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent assessment he has made of the annual cost of road crashes including those crashes not reported to the police. [40549]

Mr. Jamieson: The value of prevention of injury accidents reported to the police in 2000 is estimated to be £12,170 million. A further £4,790 million is attributed to damage only accidents which are generally not reported to the police.

Electoral Register

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will provide advice to local authorities on the supply of copies of electoral registers following the judgment in the Robertson case; and if he will make a statement. [40367]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* The Robertson case raises complex and difficult legal and policy issues in relation to the sale of electoral registers which we and the Electoral Commission are currently considering very carefully. It is for the Electoral Commission to issue advice to local authorities in this matter and it has already posted interim advice on its website.

Traffic Congestion

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how the Galileo navigation system may be deployed to tackle road traffic congestion; and if he will make a statement. [40309]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* How and when Galileo could be deployed to help tackle road traffic congestion will depend on timing and technical decisions yet to be taken.

Satellite navigation is used as an embedded technology in many intelligent transport systems (ITS) such as in-car navigation, passenger and traffic information, vehicle tracking and fleet management systems. It has the potential to be used in road user charging.

At present ITS use data from the US Global Positioning System (GPS) satellites. The European Commission has proposed that Galileo be developed as an independent satellite navigation system but inter-operable with GPS. The Transport Council on 26 March is expected to take decisions on the development and validation phase (2002–05) of Galileo. Subject to this work, further decisions would be required to proceed to deploy Galileo and begin operation in 2008. In principle, therefore, Galileo and GPS could jointly provide a navigation service from that date.

School Bus Schemes

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to implement fully the provisions of the Public Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations in respect of yellow school bus schemes; and if he will make a statement on reasons for which the pilot schemes were exempted from the regulations. [40769]

Ms Keeble: The Public Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations apply to new vehicles used on local or scheduled services where passengers are carried at separate fares. The key features of the yellow bus scheme are that it is only open to children and non-fare paying adults, that each child has a designated seat, and that the scheme is being monitored by my Department. Exemptions were given from two provisions of the regulations dealing with route and destination information, and improved seat dimensions. The exemptions will be reviewed in the light of the results of the monitoring. The vehicles comply with all other aspects of the regulations.

Structure Plan (Gloucestershire)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the Third Review of the Structure Plan in Gloucestershire. [40708]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* Gloucestershire county council have started the process of reviewing their structure plan, following the adoption in November 1999 of Gloucestershire Structure Plan 2nd Review to 2011. The county put out an Issues Paper for consultation, between 12 February and 30 March

2001. Responses to the Issues Paper were considered by the county in July 2001. A Draft Deposit Plan is due to be published during winter 2002. Further details for the structure plan timetable are yet to be confirmed.

Private Finance (Merseyside)

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of local private sector participation in the Merseyside Objective 1 1994–99 programme with reference to the role outlined in the Single Programming Document. [38365]

Ms Keeble: The involvement of the private sector was positively encouraged as part of the partnership implementing of the 1994–99 Merseyside Objective 1 programme, and a representative from the Liverpool chamber of commerce was appointed as the private sector co-ordinator to the programme. The financial tables in the programme also included a private sector contribution and we expect this to be fully delivered.

Congestion Charging

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will approve the general plan for the spending of the net proceeds from the proposed London congestion charging scheme. [41286]

Mr. Jamieson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has today approved the general plan.

In deciding to approve the plan, my right hon. Friend has had regard to the relevant statutory requirements. In particular, paragraph 16(1) of Schedule 23 to the GLA Act 1999 provides that "the net proceeds of the scheme shall, during the scheme's initial period 10 years beginning with the coming into force of the scheme be available only for application for relevant transport purposes". And "relevant transport purpose" is defined in paragraph 1 of Schedule 23 as "any purpose which directly or indirectly facilitates the implementation of any policies or proposals set out in the Mayor's transport strategy". Paragraph 16(5) of Schedule 23 provides that "the net proceeds of charging schemes may only be applied for purposes which provide value for money".

My right hon. Friend has had regard to all the representations to Ministers about the general plan including those set out in the letter of 2 November 2001 from Councillor Kit Malthouse of the City of Westminster to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has also had regard to those representations about the general plan submitted to Transport for London (TfL), to TfL's report which they submitted to the Mayor on 8 February about those representations, and to the Mayor's comments on them set out in his letter of 18 February to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is satisfied that the general plan is consistent with the Mayor's transport strategy (which he has considered previously). He is also satisfied that the general plan enables the net proceeds to be applied for purposes which provide value for money. In this regard, my right hon. Friend considers that the general plan and the transport strategy are consistent with the Government's 10-year transport plan.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list for 1997–98 and each subsequent financial year the amount spent by *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies in respect of hotel and other similar privately provided accommodation (i) in the UK and (ii) abroad for (A) Ministers, (B) staff and (C) other persons; if she will list the proportion of this cost incurred in respect of (x) food and (y) alcohol in each case; and if she will list the average cost per hotel room or similar unit of accommodation provided in each case. [34387]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 560W.

Focus Groups

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many focus groups her Department has convened since June 2001; and if she will list the topics discussed; [36579]

(2) if she will place a copy of the discussions held with focus groups convened by her Department since June 2001 in the Library. [36580]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department commissions research involving focus groups for two main purposes: to help develop and evaluate publicity campaigns; and to understand the attitudes to education and skills issues of key groups, like teachers, parents, students and others affected by the Department's policies.

Research projects involving focus groups convened since June 2001 covered: adult basic skills; higher education; modern apprenticeships; science year; Connexions; young persons' communications; information, advice and guidance branding; matriculation diploma; dads and sons booklet; child care recruitment; foundation degrees; and the money to learn booklet.

I have placed a copy of the report of research into attitudes of key groups to modern apprenticeships in the House of Commons Library. I will place in the Library the report of research into attitudes to various higher education issues in due course when the research and report are completed. All those other research projects which have been completed and which involve focus groups are commercial in confidence as they tested creative work commissioned from advertising agencies as part of the development of advertising campaigns.

Capita

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what information concerning individual learning account holders has been deleted from electronic databases held by Capita; [36942]

(2) when Capita took the decision to delete information relating to individual learning account holders; whether she was informed of such action; and if she will make a statement. [36943]

John Healey: The only information concerning individual learning account holders deleted from the individual learning account centre system has been that resulting from regular housekeeping such as to remove inaccurate information, duplicated entries or data input in error.

Rural Schools

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what funds the rural school grant scheme has to distribute in 2001–02; and by what means these will be distributed. [37627]

John Healey: The Department does not fund a rural schools grant scheme. However, rural schools can benefit from a number of programmes, including those that aim to help small schools. The school standards grant of £7,000 for 2001–02 is paid via local education authorities (LEAs) to schools with 100 pupils or less. There is also the small schools fund worth a total of £80 million a year, guaranteed until 2004. It is allocated to LEAs according to the number of primary and special schools with 200 pupils or less and secondary schools with 600 pupils or less. LEAs have to devolve at least 95 per cent. of the money to schools, either using the Department's threshold for small schools or by setting their own, lower thresholds. The funding is particularly intended to support collaborative projects, such as shared bursars or pooled administrative staff. An element of it can be spent on extending hours of existing administrative staff, buying in staff cover or investing in ICT equipment.

Circulars

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the circular documents that were sent by the Department for Education and Employment to *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools between 1 May 1997 and 6 June 2001; and how many pages each document contained. [38802]

Mr. Timms: The following table 1 shows the total number of documents sent to schools between 1 May 1997 and 6 June 2001. The full lists of titles are contained in tables 2 and 3, updating the list placed in conjunction with a parliamentary answer given to the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) on 6 April 2001, *Official Report,* column 313W.

Table 1: Mailings to all primary or all secondary schools by school year

	Items Primary	*Items Secondary*
1997–98[1]	86	85
1998–99	96	115
1999–2000	146	164
2000–01[2]	64	63

[1] From 1 May 1997

[2] Up to 6 June 2001

Table 2: DfEE communications with all primary or secondary schools 1 April to 6 June 2001

	Page number
April 2001	
The National Numeracy Strategy: Professional Development Pack: 3 and 4	811
Parent governor representatives on local authority committees dealing with education: notification of guidance	1
Policy and Consultation Note on Formula Allocation	16
The School Organisation Proposals by the Learning and Skills Council for England Regulations 2001	15
Key Stage 1–3 Regulations	3
School Teachers' Pay 2001–02. (Confirmation of pay settlement)	7
May 2001	
Key Stage 3 National Strategy: Framework for Teaching English: Years 7, 8 and 9—Management Summary	13
Response to the Consultation on School Governing Bodies (letter from Jacqui Smith)	2
Briefing note on organising teacher training	2
Developing Early Writing—The National Literacy Strategy (booklet and CD)	169
Spectrum 42	12
Survey of Absences in Schools	5

Table 3: Secondary

	Page number
April 2001:	
Parent governor representatives on local authority committees dealing with education: notification of guidance	1
Policy and Consultation Note on Formula Allocation	16
The School Organisation Proposals by the learning and Skills Council for England Regulations 2001	15
Key Stage 1–3 Regulations	3
School Teachers Pay' 2001–02 (confirmation of pay settlement)	7
Key Stage 3 National Strategy—Publication Summary	1
Key Stage 3 National Strategy—Letter from Secretary of State	2
May 2001	
Key Stage 3 National Strategy: Framework for Teaching English: Years 7, 8 and 9—Management Summary	13
Response to the Consultation on School Governing Bodies (letter from Jacqui Smith)	2
Child Protection: Handling Allegations against Teachers and Other Staff: appointment of Coordinators	2
Briefing note on organising teacher training	2
Key stage 3 National Strategy: Framework for teaching English: Years 7, 8 and 9	75
Spectrum 42	12
Survey of Absences in Schools	5
Key Stage 3 National Strategy: Framework for Teaching Mathematics: Years 7, 8 and 9 Management Summary	11

School Federations

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what representations her Department has received from schools wishing to form federations of schools; and if she will list the schools which would be included in each federation. [38856]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* No official representations have been received. As arrangements for the establishment of federations of schools will be governed by regulations under clauses 23 and 24 of the Education Bill, which have yet to be made, there is no statutory mechanism for considering federation proposals.

PFI

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if her Department maintains a list of PFI-funded projects. [39539]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My Department maintains a list of projects, available on the DfES internet website www.dfes.gov.uk/ppppfi, procured under the public-private partnerships/private finance initiative (PPP/PFI).

Design Champion

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what is the role of the design champion in her Department. [39540]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The DfES designated design champion is the Director of Strategy and Communications, whose responsibilities include promoting best practice design principles in the work of the Department. The design champion role involved raising awareness across the Department of the benefits to policy making and service delivery of good design management. In fulfilling this role, the Director of Strategy and Communications worked with the Design Council and other Departments on a series of best practice procedures that were subsequently incorporated into departmental guidance on, and prominence given to, project management. He also helped the Design Council produce a handbook of case studies in which good design had led to better outcomes. This included the creation of the Westminster suite at Caxton house, the learning journey handbook for parents and improved organisation and colour coding, etc. of materials being sent into schools.

Volunteers

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many members of her staff in each of the past two years have been granted a day's paid leave to work as a volunteer; and if she will make a statement. [39746]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department does not keep central records of paid leave which staff have been granted to work as volunteers. The DfES fully supports voluntary public service and offers staff paid leave for some voluntary activities.

Schools (Commercial Activities)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on her Department's policy with regard to the control of commercial activity within maintained schools by companies wishing to sell goods to pupils. [39893]

Mr. Timms: While we welcome business support for education, it is for schools themselves to decide whether to accept business sponsorship of educational activities or the sale of goods to pupils. We issued guidelines entitled "Best Practice Principles: Commercial Activities in Schools" last year to help schools make informed and sensible decisions about the nature of business involvement. The guidelines make clear that schools should satisfy themselves that the educational benefits of the commercial activity outweigh the potential disbenefits; that explicit sales messages should be avoided wherever possible; and that the level of any branding should be appropriate to the activity.

Examination Papers

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures she will take to ensure that all examination papers for A-levels will arrive on time. [40670]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: In its review of Curriculum 2000: Report on Phase Two, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority has stated that it will set challenging targets and performance indicators for the awarding bodies. The Joint Council for General Qualifications—the umbrella organisation for the awarding bodies—will expedite further work that it is undertaking on common labels for question paper packets.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures she will take to ensure that no exam scripts are lost after being returned to the examination board. [40671]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The awarding bodies, which are independent non-profit making enterprises, are responsible for their own arrangements for the storage of scripts.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures she will take to ensure that examination boards inform schools and colleges about re-mark grades before students move on to further and higher education. [40672]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Since 1999, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) has set targets for the awarding bodies to meet all requests for remarking and appeals. The agreed targets for the two stages of the awarding bodies' appeals process are:

Inquiry stage

where requests are received within seven days of the publication of results. Remarking should be completed within 30 calendar days. This service is a priority service available only to A and AS level candidates whose higher education places may be dependent on a remark.

where requests are received after the seven days of the publication of results but before 20 September, they should be completed within 40 calendar days. This service is available for all candidates.

second stage

The second or formal appeal stage should be completed by 14 February.

Data for awarding bodies' performance in 2001 against these targets will be published by QCA later in the month. In 2000 95 per cent. of A/AS level inquiries and 93 per cent. of GCSE inquiries where completed within the target time.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the loss of psychology examination scripts from Runshaw College by Edexcel. [40673]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Runshaw College requested the return of 84 psychology scripts, 78 scripts were sent back to the college. Of the six that were missing, two had been transferred to Edexcel's script archive before the college requested the scripts. These are being returned to the college. Four scripts have been mislaid. Edexcel will continue to search for them urgently.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement *(a)* on the failure of AQA to re-mark scripts from Runshaw College before 17 October 2001 and *(b)* on its provision only of provisional marks. [40674]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Inquiries about A level results received within one week of the publication of results are treated as priority cases. The response time laid down by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority is 30 days from receipt of the inquiry. Inquiries received after one week of publication of results have a target response time of 40 days from receipt. On 17 October there were four inquiries that were unresolved for Runshaw College. The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) received these inquiries on 19 September, one day before the closing date for inquiries. They were completed by 29 October.

All Statements of Results are printed as "Provisional". These results can be subject to amendment and are confirmed by the issue of a Certificate some four weeks after the publication of results.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures she will take to ensure that there is a consistency of marking throughout examination boards. [40675]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority as regulator of the public examination system is responsible for the maintenance of standards. They operate a range of mechanisms to check the examination process, and police and monitor a code of practice, which all awarding bodies must adhere to. The code of practice—which is a public document—is designed to promote quality and consistency in the examining process across all awarding bodies. It helps to ensure that grading standards are constant in each subject across different awarding bodies and different syllabuses from year to year.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures she is taking with respect to the examination boards who have failed to provide the service required in order to ensure that the errors and faults that occurred last year do not occur again. [40676]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), as the regulatory body, is responsible for monitoring the performance of the awarding bodies. QCA has recently published audit reports on two awarding bodies, Edexcel and the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance, which made a number of recommendations for improvements to the delivery of services. QCA is monitoring the implementation of the recommendations to ensure that they improve their performance in coming months and are able to deliver the examinations in summer 2002 and beyond efficiently.

Specialist Schools

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of applications for specialist school status were successful in 2001. [40715]

Mr. Timms: A total of 423 applications for specialist school status were received in 2001 of which 218, or 51.5 per cent., were successful.

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans the Government have to replace the individual learning account. [40627]

John Healey: There will be a replacement ILA-type scheme building on the strengths of the ILA and taking into account the findings of the current stakeholder consultation exercise, which are due in early April.

Modern Apprenticeship Schemes

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what Government initiatives are in place to attract capable young people to advanced modern apprenticeship schemes. [39710]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* Last November, at the launch of the new generation of modern apprenticeships, the Secretary of State announced a £16 million marketing campaign, to be run over three years in England, to promote apprenticeships and boost participation. That campaign, led jointly by the Department and the Learning and Skills Council, started on 4 March. A new television advertisement, aimed at young people, will run throughout March from today.

We have also now agreed with the Learning and Skills Council a detailed implementation plan for the strengthening and expansion of new generation modern apprenticeships, in line with the recommendations of the MA Advisory Committee chaired by Sir John Cassels. From the spring, a range of marketing measures will be introduced to reach not only young people, but also key influencers and employers. At the local level, Learning and Skills Councils, Connexions Partnerships, careers services and other partners will work together to raise awareness of, and foster support for, modern apprenticeships; and to provide young people with essential information and advice on the opportunities available in their communities. This action supports the Government's aims for stronger vocational and work-based learning for young people, as announced in our Green Paper published recently.

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what meetings Ministers in her Department have held with the Minister for Children and Young

People since June 2001; what the date of each meeting was; which Ministers were present; and what subjects were discussed. [40477]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* In accordance with Part II of the Open Government Code of Practice, it is not the practice to disclose details of such internal discussions.

Public Appointments (Warrington, North)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many people from Warrington, North she has appointed to non-departmental public bodies since 1997. [39448]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* Nobody with a home address in the parliamentary constituency of Warrington, North has been appointed to a non-departmental public body sponsored by my Department since 1997.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Romania

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the official diaries of the British Ambassador to Romania, covering meetings with businessmen from Britain over the period June and July 2001, are available. [39512]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* As is the normal practice, the Ambassador's diaries covering the period are held in the British Embassy Bucharest. It is not our policy to release internal diaries.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when his Department invited the Romanian Government to visit Britain in November 2001. [39053]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The Romanian Prime Minister was invited by the CBI in June 2001 to speak at their annual conference on 6 November. On the advice of the FCO, the Prime Minister agreed to a meeting with Mr. Nastase during this visit.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations his Department *(a)* made and *(b)* received regarding Romania's accession to the EU following the successful acquisition of the SIDEX steel plant by LNM/Ispat International. [39016]

Peter Hain: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 14 February 2002, *Official Report,* columns 611–12W.

Non-governmental Organisations

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list non-governmental organisations operating in the South West Region that receive public funds from his Department; and what amount of annual funding they received in the most recent year for which figures are available. [39187]

Mr. Straw: The information is not available in the format requested and could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

Angola

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of the prospects for peace in Angola; and if he will make a statement. [39725]

Mr. MacShane: The recent death of UNITA leader, Jonas Savimbi, offers Angola a unique opportunity to move the peace process forwards, after nearly three decades of civil war. We look to the Government of Angola to take the initiative in building dialogue. We call on the Angolans to respond positively.

This is also a chance for the Government of Angola to turn their full attention to addressing the worsening humanitarian crisis and the rebuilding of Angola's infrastructure.

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to hold discussions with the Angolan Government. [39611]

Mr. MacShane: We have invited Foreign Minister Miranda of Angola to visit the UK at the end of March. During his visit he will hold substantive bilateral discussions with UK Ministers.

Non-Refoulement

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what discussions he has had with his counterparts in the EU on the compliance of national states which receive aid from the EU in respect of non-refoulement; and if he will make a statement; [39870]

(2) which countries in receipt of British or EU bilateral or multi-lateral aid are suspected of breaking international law on human rights, with particular reference to non-refoulement. [39871]

Mr. MacShane: We have not had any specific discussions on aid dispersion in respect of non-refoulement with EU Governments.

However, when considering overseas aid the UK Government and the EU take into account the human rights record of the receiving country.

We are committed to the principle of non-refoulement and support UNHCR's efforts to ensure that states are aware of, and act on, their obligations to protect refugees and persons seeking asylum.

Foreign Investment (Government Assistance)

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many companies employing under 150 people in the UK seeking to invest in a particular country, have been *(a)* granted access to the ambassador, *(b)* granted ministerial attention and *(c)* recommended to the Prime Minister for endorsement during the last three years. [39714]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* Ministers and ambassadors lobby frequently in support of UK commercial interests in overseas markets. I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Members for East

Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) and for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) on 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 610–11W.

The information requested by the right hon. Gentleman is subject to commercial confidentiality (exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information applies).

Far East Prisoners of War

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has held in the last six months with the US Government about the position of Allied POWs held in Japanese prisoner of war camps during World War II. [40613]

Mr. MacShane: None.

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations in the last six months he has received about the status of the 1951 San Francisco treaty with Japan. [40616]

Mr. MacShane: I held a meeting with former far east prisoners of war on 15 January to hear their views on this issue. I have also been in correspondence with members of a former far east prisoner of war group on the subject.

Montenegro

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is on the holding of a referendum on independence in Montenegro by the end of this year; and if he has received representations from the Montenegran Government on the issue. [40638]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* The future of Montenegro is ultimately in the hands of the people of Montenegro. But we and our EU partners have made clear our belief that Montenegro's interests, and those of the wider region, will best be served by a negotiated outcome between Belgrade and Podgorica which leaves intact a single internationally-recognised state. The EU High Representative, Javier Solana, has been working with the parties on this issue since November 2001. We strongly support his efforts and have advised the parties against any abrupt or unilateral moves in this delicate situation. All those concerned, including President Djukanovic of Montenegro, have engaged constructively in this process.

We maintain regular contact with the Montenegrin authorities, and with President Djukanovic personally, on this and on other issues.

Europe Day

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to celebrate Europe day in 2002. [41288]

Peter Hain: The FCO today launched a new website, www.europeday.gov.uk, to raise awareness of Europe day and of Britain's role in Europe. It is hoped that the website format and the style of the content will primarily appeal to teenagers and young adults. It will feature information about Europe day and the European Union, details of Europe day celebrations and a quiz to promote an interest in European affairs.

Hong Kong

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will publish the next report to Parliament on Hong Kong and the Sino-British Joint Declaration. [41289]

Mr. MacShane: The tenth report in this series, covering the period July-December 2001, was laid before the House yesterday. A copy of the report is also available on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website, www.fco.gov.uk. The report includes a foreword by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary. I commend the report to the House.

European Union

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the forthcoming business in the Council of the European Union for March and also the major European Union events for the period between 31 March and August. [41290]

Peter Hain: The information is as follows.

Date	*Venue*	*Event*
March 2002		
1	Brussels	Justice and Home Affairs Council (evening)
1	Brussels	Internal Market, Consumers and Tourism Council
4	Brussels	Eurogroup (evening)
4	Brussels	Environment Council
5	Brussels	ECOFIN
7	Brussels	Employment and Social Affairs Council
11	Brussels	Research Council
11–12	Brussels	General Affairs Council
15–16	Barcelona	European Council
18	Toledo	Meeting of Trade Ministers (Ministerial Informal)
18–19	Brussels	Agriculture Council
19	Toledo	Euromed Trade Ministers Meeting
23–24	Brussels	Defence Minister's Meeting (Ministerial Informal)
25–26	Brussels	Transport and Telecom Council
27–28	Monterry, Mexico	Financing and Development Conference

The following are the principal events in the EU between 1 April and August 2002 (certain relevant events are also included: the list is based on the information available at the date of issue).

Date	*Venue*	*Event*
April		
5–6	Luxembourg	Migrations Council (ASEM Ministerial Informal)
8	Luxembourg	Fisheries Council
13–14	Luxembourg	ECOFIN (Ministerial Informal)
15–16	Luxembourg	General Affairs Council
22–23	Valencia	Euromed Conference
22–23	Luxembourg	Agriculture Council
25–26	Luxembourg	Justice and Home Affairs Council
27–30	Luxembourg	Agriculture Council (Ministerial Informal)
May		
3–4	Brussels	Tourism Council (Ministerial Informal)
6	Brussels	Eurogroup
7	Brussels	ECOFIN
9	—	Europe Day
13	Brussels	General Affairs Council and Defence Ministers Meeting
17–18	Madrid	EU-Latin America and Caribbean Summit
21	Brussels	Internal Market, Consumers and Tourism Council
23	Brussels	Culture and Audio-visual Council
24–26	Brussels	Environment Council (Ministerial Informal)
27–28	Brussels	Agriculture Council
30	Brussels	Development Council
30	Brussels	Education and Youth Council
31–1 June	Brussels	Transport Council (Ministerial Informal)
June		
3	Brussels	Employment and Social Affairs Council
3	Brussels	Eurogroup
4	Luxembourg	ECOFIN
6–8	Brussels	Foreign Affairs Council (ASEM Ministers)
6–7	Brussels	Industry and Energy Council
10–11	Brussels	General Affairs Council
10–11	Brussels	Agriculture Council
11	Brussels	Fisheries Council
13–14	Brussels	Justice and Home Affairs Council
17–18	Brussels	Transport and Telecoms Council
17–18	Brussels	General Affairs Council
21–22	Seville	European Council
24	Brussels	General Affairs Council (Evening)
24–25	Brussels	Environment Council
25	Luxembourg	ECOFIN
26	Brussels	Health Council
July		
6	Copenhagen	ASEM Ministers for Finance
12	Brussels	ECOFIN
12–13	Kolding	Meeting of Employment and Social Policy Ministers (Informal)
15–16	Brussels	Agriculture Council
19	Brussels	Budget Meeting
19–21	Arhus	Environment Ministers Meeting (Informal)
22–23	Brussels	General Affairs Council
August		
31–1	Elsinore	Gymnich (Ministerial Informal)

European Union

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 27 February 2002, Ref 38404, if his Department has conducted an internal analysis of the recurring annual direct and indirect *(a)* costs and *(b)* benefits arising from UK membership of the European Union. [40849]

Peter Hain: No.

Laeken Declaration

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on paragraph 1 of the Laeken conclusions, with particular reference to the inclusion of the concept of irreversibility. [39631]

Peter Hain: The opening paragraph of the Laeken conclusions refers to three of the EU's main projects—the introduction of the single currency, enlargement and the Future of Europe debate. The Gothenburg European Council in June 2001 noted the impressive progress in the enlargement negotiations and observed that

> "The enlargement process is irreversible".

At Laeken, in December, the European Council confirmed the continued good progress of the negotiations and reiterated the irreversible nature of the process. The

Government remain committed to the timetable for enlargement agreed at Gothenburg and reinforced at Laeken.

TREASURY

Tax Evasion

Mr. Wood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue the Treasury estimates has been lost each year since 1997 through *(a)* income tax evasion, *(b)* VAT evasion, *(c)* non-payment of national insurance contributions and *(d)* benefit fraud. [36075]

Dawn Primarolo: There is no reliable measure of the total income tax and national insurance contributions lost to evasion. In his report, published in March 2002, Lord Grabiner QC commented on the scale of the hidden economy and said:

> "By its nature, the size of the informal economy is hard to measure. Most estimates are based on analysing high-level economic aggregates, such as labour market statistics or income and expenditure surveys, and calculate the result as a percentage of GDP. However there is research which suggests that these estimates tend to be exaggerated."
>
> "It would be impractical to arrive at a precise and meaningful figure as to the scale of the problem without a considerable investment of time and resources."

There are no revenue estimates for all VAT evasion since 1997. However, estimates for VAT Missing Trader Fraud have been published and I refer the hon. Gentleman to page 19 of the Customs and Excise paper "Measuring Indirect Tax Fraud" that was published on 27 November 2001 a copy of which is in the Library of the House. This gives estimates for this type of VAT fraud for 1999–2000 and 2000–01. There are no estimates for any earlier years. The most recent estimate of the annual loss to benefit fraud is £2 billion.

New Enterprise Support Initiative Helpline

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the level of usage of the New Enterprise Support initiative helpline. [38513]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The NESI helpline opened for business in April 1999 and is on target to receive half a million calls from employers and prospective employers this year.

Debt (Customs and Excise)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the outstanding debt to HM Customs and Excise at *(a)* 31 March 2000, *(b)* 31 March 2001 and *(c)* the most recent date for which information is available was in respect of (i) assessments being challenged by business, (ii) fraud-related debts where recovery action has been suspended and (iii) debt placed under civil recovery action through the courts; [38601]

(2) what was the total outstanding debt to HM Customs and Excise at *(a)* 31 March 1996, *(b)* 31 March 1997, *(c)* 31 March 1998, *(d)* 31 March 1999, *(e)* 31 March 2000 and *(f)* 31 March 2001. [38602]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* Relevant statistical information concerning debt owed by HM Customs and Excise is published on a routine basis in their Departmental Annual Report.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many parliamentary questions tabled to his Department since July 2001 have yet to receive substantive replies. [40012]

Mr. Boateng: 3,162 of the 3,291 written questions tabled to the Treasury in the present parliamentary session have already been answered substantively. The dates by which answers are due have not yet been reached in the case of 68 of the remaining 129 questions.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many and what proportion of *(a)* ordinary written questions and *(b)* named day questions have been answered by his Department (i) within a week of tabling and (ii) on the named day since June 2001. [40014]

Mr. Boateng: 1,714 of the 2,236 ordinary written questions (76.7 per cent.) tabled in the present parliamentary session were answered within a week, and 780 of the 1,055 named day questions (73.9 per cent.) were answered on the nominated day.

Brownfield Sites

Ms Shipley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what fiscal incentives he provides to encourage the development of brownfield sites. [40421]

Mr. Boateng: Budget 2001 introduced a 150 per cent. accelerated tax credit for the costs of cleaning up contaminated land. It allows companies to claim an enhanced tax deduction for the costs that they incur in cleaning up contaminated sites acquired as part of their trade or schedule A business, and applies to expenditure on or after 11 May 2001.

Construction Industry

Ms Shipley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what taxation and regulatory measures he has applied to the construction industry to encourage environmentally friendly building practices. [40420]

Mr. Boateng: The Government have introduced a number of taxation measures which are intended to have positive environmental impacts, including encouraging environmentally-friendly building practices. These include the following.

The aggregates levy will encourage a shift in demand away from virgin aggregate towards recycled construction and demolition waste, and will promote greater resource efficiency in the construction industry. The aggregates levy-funded sustainability fund in England will include projects to promote more sustainable construction and demolition practices.

Increases in the landfill tax encourage the recycling of construction and demolition wastes, and create incentives to minimise waste.

The 150 per cent. accelerated tax credit for cleaning up contaminated land encourages urban regeneration and reduces pressure on greenfield sites.

The reduced rate of VAT on the installation of energy saving materials supports the introduction of energy efficiency measures in the domestic sector, particularly through Government-funded programmes such as the home energy efficiency scheme.

Regulations on the construction industry are a matter for other Government Departments.

Regulatory Impact Unit

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many members her Department employs in its regulatory impact unit; and if she will make a statement. [38265]

Dawn Primarolo: The Treasury, Inland Revenue and HM Customs and Excise each have separate departmental regulatory impact units in which two, five and three people respectively co-ordinate work on regulatory impact.

The staff in each unit works closely with the officials responsible for developing policies within their department and the regulatory impact within the Cabinet Office. They focus on those regulations which impact on business, charities, and the voluntary sector.

Export Licences

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the expected time limit is on decisions for export licence applications. [40256]

Nigel Griffiths: I have been asked to reply.

The Export Control Organisation (ECO) sets out the Government's commitment to exporters in a Service and Performance Code (available on its website www.dti.gov.uk/export.control). Where, as in almost all cases, it is necessary for a Standard Individual Export Licence (SIEL) application to be circulated to other Government Departments the aim is to provide a response to 70 per cent. of cases within 20 working days, except in special circumstances. Details of performance in processing SIEL applications against the target are published in the Government's annual reports on strategic export controls, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

While there is no time limit placed on decisions for export licences, the Government are committed to processing all export licence applications as quickly as possible, consistent with our determination to manage the transfer of all goods and technology controlled for strategic reasons in a responsible manner.

Financial Questionnaire

Mr. Flook: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the criteria used to determine which companies are required to answer the Annual Business Inquiry-Part II for 2001 Financial Questionnaire from the Office for National Statistics; for what reasons this is compulsory; what the timescale is in which companies are required to answer; what proportion have responded to previous annual inquiries since 1997; how long it will take to process the information for this inquiry; and for what purposes the information will be used. [39959]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mr. Adrian Flook, dated 6 March 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question regarding the criteria used to determine which companies are required to answer the Annual Business Inquiry (ABI) - Part II for 2001 Financial Questionnaire from the Office for National Statistics (ONS). I am replying in his absence. (39959)

The ABI is a vital source of information about the structure of UK industry and the economy. It is used to compile the input/output tables, which underpin the United Kingdom National Accounts, including estimates of GDP, and is increasingly being used as a source of regional economic data.

ONS compiles a register of businesses classified by size, as defined by the number of employees, and by the nature of their business activity. It is important for ONS to ensure representative results from its business inquiries, including the ABI. Representative results have to be based on representative survey samples and, as such, data has to be collected from businesses of all sizes and all sectors of the economy. ONS therefore approaches small, medium and large sized companies. However, ONS is conscious of the need to lighten the form-filling burden for businesses wherever possible, and particularly for smaller businesses, without compromising survey results. Companies with fewer than 10 employees are selected and are subject to a guarantee that they will only be expected to complete one business inquiry form, at most, every 3 years. Small to medium sized businesses are usually included in the sample for 2 consecutive years and are then replaced by another similar sized business in their industry. The largest companies will inevitably always be selected. In 2001, 72,000 UK businesses, out of a total of just under 2 million businesses, received the ABI Part II form.

The ABI is a statutory inquiry conducted under the Statistics of Trade Act 1947. Its statutory nature reflects the importance of the information collected for the monitoring of UK economic trends by the Government. A voluntary inquiry would have to approach a much larger number of businesses in order to ensure a similar level of response, and even then response would be biased towards those companies that were inclined to be co-operative with such business inquiries.

Companies are required to submit data by 31 March or within 2 months of their business year-end. If no figures are available for calendar year 2001, a return may cover a business year ending on any date between 6 April 2001 and 5 April 2002. Contributors to the inquiry are welcome to telephone the ONS contact named on the inquiry form for assistance in making their return.

The proportions of companies responding to Annual Business Inquiries over the three years since it was implemented in 1998 are 85% in 1998, 86% in 1999 and 85% in 2000.

For the 2001 inquiry provisional results will be made available in a First Release in December 2002 with final results in June 2003.

Capital Gains Tax

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which organisations have made representations to the Treasury since 7 June 2001 concerning the structure of capital gains tax taper relief; and if he will make a statement. [39901]

Ruth Kelly: As is normal in the run up to the Budget, the Government have received a number of representations from a variety of organisations. The pre-Budget report said:

> "The Government are considering the various proposals it has received in response to the consultation launched in June 2001 on value for money options to simplify CGT within the existing policy framework. It is also considering whether there is any case for changes to the CGT regime for non-business assets."

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which organisations made representations concerning capital gains tax taper relief between 1 May 1997 and 1 April 1999; and if he will make a statement. [39902]

Ruth Kelly: The Government's reform of capital gains tax generated a large number of representations, some in response to the consultation announced by the Chancellor in his Budget on 2 July 1997, some outside that consultation. A comprehensive list of all the parties concerned could be produced only at disproportionate cost. We are grateful to the many individuals and organisations who took the trouble to let us know their views. Their ideas fed into the reforms that the Government made to capital gains tax in 1998 and subsequently.

Press Releases

Mr. Andrew Turner. To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many press releases were issued by his Department *(a)* between 1 May and 31 December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive. [40042]

Ruth Kelly: The information is as follows:

	Number
1 May-31 December 1997	129
1998	239
1999	283
2000	151
2001	154

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people were employed in a press or public relations function in his Department on 1 January in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000, *(e)* 2001 and *(f)* 2002. [39931]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) on 5 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 328W.

Relocation Expenses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his policy is on the payment of relocation expenses to staff in his Department. [40976]

Ruth Kelly: Treasury policy on the payment of relocation expenses is that assistance can only be given in the form of reimbursement of reasonable vouched expenses actually and necessarily incurred.

Email Mailing List

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of days that the Treasury's email mailing list system has been operational since 1 January 2001; and if he will make a statement. [40813]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury's email mailing list system was set up more than seven years ago and has historically proven very reliable. Since January 2001, the system has encountered some technical difficulties and become difficult to maintain. Over the last 14 months the service has been out of operation for approximately four to six weeks. Where possible, the Treasury internet team have informed subscribers when the service is not available.

The Treasury's Information Services team are currently evaluating alternative systems that should prove more reliable. In the meantime, Members interested in seeing lists of recent Treasury press notices can find them on the Treasury's website at http://www.treasury.gov.uk/Newsroom_and_Speeches/.

Intrastat System

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what use is made by the Government of the statistical information obtained from Intrastat returns. [40836]

Ruth Kelly: HM Customs and Excise collect statistics for intra Community trade via the Intrastat system. Statistical data are supplied to other Government Departments to enable them to carry out their economic and strategic obligations.

Data from Intrastat returns are a necessary component of the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) monthly trade first release and is a significant part of the Quarterly Balance of Payments (BOP) and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) data. The data appear in three economic indicators that are widely used across Government, in particular in HM Treasury and the Bank of England, to assess the economic performance of the UK.

A number of other Government Departments and devolved Administrations with policy interests in overseas trade, such as the DTI and the Welsh Assembly Government use the data for their own needs. It is used to evaluate global markets and in the development of regional international trade strategies.

The Defence Analytical Services Agency uses the data for reporting the export and import of defence equipment and the defence balance of payments for trade in services and for estimating UK employment dependent on defence equipment exports.

The Defence Export Services Organisation uses the information for the reporting of statistics on exports of military equipment, published in the annual report on Strategic Export Controls.

Customs supply data to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) for, among other uses, compiling Government reports, e.g. BSE and foot and mouth.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he plans to simplify the classification system used to identify products under the Intrastat system. [40837]

Ruth Kelly: HM Customs and Excise collect statistics for intra-Community trade via the Intrastat Supplementary Declaration. Declarations can be submitted on paper or electronically.

Intrastat, including the classification system used to identify products, is governed by European legislation. There are currently no plans to simplify the classification system.

Insurance Cover (Overseas Treatment)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on the availability of insurance cover for medical treatment overseas for injuries received from terrorist activities. [41189]

Ruth Kelly: We receive a great many representations from both industry and individuals.

Insurance cover for medical treatment, overseas, including for injuries received from terrorist activities, continues to be available in the UK marketplace.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Publicity Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council what assessment he has made of the total real terms expenditure of his Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies on publicity in each of the years *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01 and *(e)* 2001–02 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole of the present year; and if he will break these figures down to indicate expenditure on (A) advertising and (B) press and public relations. [36169]

Mr. Robin Cook: No expenditure has been incurred by my Department on publicity.

Union Duties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council how many staff in his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies receive paid leave to undertake union duties; how many days they are allocated; and what has been the cost to public funds in each of the last four years. [36199]

Mr. Robin Cook: No staff in my Department have received paid leave to undertake union duties.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council if he will list for 1997–98 and each subsequent financial year the amount spent by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies in respect of hotel and other similar privately-provided accommodation (i) in the UK and (ii) abroad for (A) Ministers, (B) staff and (C) other persons; if he will list the proportion of this cost incurred in respect of (x) food and (y) alcohol in each case; and if he will list the average cost per hotel room or similar unit of accommodation provided in each case. [34377]

Mr. Robin Cook: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 559–60W.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, how much was spent on entertainment by the Lord Chancellor's Department in each year from 1997 to date. [40067]

Mr. Wills: Estimated expenditure by both officials and Ministers on entertainment for the financial year 2000–01 was £60,768, in 1999–2000 was £71,166 and in 1998–99 was £45,087. Information for 1997–98 is not readily available.

These figures differ from those previously provided by the Department in an earlier answer in the previous Parliament on 8 May 2001, *Official Report*, column 55W. The reason for the discrepancy is that a significant amount of expenditure that should not have been included in the total for entertainment had been miscoded as such by officials. The majority of the miscoded amount was for working lunches for panel members conducting interviews of candidates for judicial office. The effect was to overstate the true figure by approximately 20 per cent. for each of the three years covered above in the 8 May 2001 answer.

I apologise to the House for this mistake. The errors resulted from an incomplete understanding of existing guidance by staff and the Department has drawn the attention of budget management staff to the correct procedures to be followed. Comprehensive guidance is to be re-issued before the end of the financial year.

Legal Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council what legal costs have been incurred by his Department in each of the last four years. [34289]

Mr. Robin Cook: My Department has incurred no legal costs during the period mentioned.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Marriage and Relationship Support

Mr. Caton: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what grants she will make towards marriage and relationship support in the financial year 2002–03. [41698]

Ms Rosie Winterton: During the next financial year (2002–03), the Lord Chancellor's Department will spend £5 million on marriage and relationship support, an increase of £0.5 million on the funding for the financial year 2001–02.

This is the first financial year in which the marriage and relationship support fund has been allocated using the new grant programme launched in September 2001. The new programme introduced openly published criteria, which have been used to evaluate all applications received for this round of allocations. The aim of the Department is that the marriage and relationship support grant should be targeted on improving existing service delivery, as well as developing research, innovative projects, and the dissemination of better links and good practice among a wider and more diverse range of service providers than in previous years.

The funding has been allocated as set out in the tables:

Core funding	*Funding allocated (£)*
Parentline Plus	62,000
Relate	2,104,000
Marriage Care	300,000
Family Welfare Association	30,000
One Plus One	242,000
London Marriage Guidance Council	103,000
Tavistock Marital Studies Institute	464,000
Jewish Marriage Council	44,000
Asian Family Counselling Service	50,000
2as 1	150,000
Totnes Family Partnership	58,000
Somerset Family Partnership	50,000
Family Matters York	50,000
The Lesbian and Gay Foundation	48,000
Muslim Women's Helpline	20,000
The Salvation Arm	40,000
Aquila Care Trust	88,000
Project for Advocacy, Counselling and Education	46,000
Basic For Life	34,000
The Cogwheel Trust	4,000
Poole Community Family Trust	50,000
CFP Guildford	40,000
Bristol Community Family Trust	50,000
Total	4,139,000

Research and development funding	*Project title*	*Amount allocated (£)*
University of Exeter, School of Psychology	Money management and marital commitment in new couples: An evaluation of the efficacy of the FOCCUS inventory	43,000
Relate	Accessibility (follow-on bid)	32,000
Relate	Domestic Violence (follow-on bid)	40,000
Care for the Family	Asian Family Matters	19,000
Relate	Quality Assurance (follow-on bid)	30,000
2as 1	Development and Adaptation of Relate Training Material	66,000
London Marriage Guidance Council	Community Development	71,000
The Minster Centre	Aracas Project (domestic violence)	72,000
Tavistock Marital Studies Institute	Brief Psychotherapy	32,000
2as 1	Partnership project (Relate)—Awareness campaign to promote MARS to the Black African and Afro-Caribbean communities	120,000
Sussex Family Mediation Service	One Stop Shop	26,000
The Church of England	Marriage Preparation and Support in the South East	54,000
Brook in Birmingham	Counselling for Young Couples	39,000
Marriage Care	Emotional Literacy: Foundations for a Good Life: Phase 2	30,000
The Richmond Centre	Videos are Valuable	38,000
One Plus One	Investigation of Use and Value of Helpline Services	39,000
One Plus One	Investigation of Relationship Support	46,000
Jewish Marriage Council	Starting Marriage on the Right Foot	40,000
Talking Matters[1]	Infrastructure for Marriage Preparation in the Orthodox Jewish Community	24,000
Total		861,000

[1] Moved from core to R&D

Rail Journeys (Staff)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, if she will make it her policy that rail journeys undertaken by staff in her Department should ordinarily be on standard class tickets. [40434]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Paragraph 8.2.1 of the Civil Service Management Code requires Departments and agencies to ensure that staff use the most efficient and economic means of travel in the circumstances, taking into account any management benefit or the needs of staff with disabilities. In the headquarters of the Lord Chancellor's Department (including associated offices), the Court Service and the Public Guardianship Office, staff at or above the equivalent of senior executive officer level who travel on official business by train may travel first class. Staff at more junior levels may also do so if there is a business need for them to accompany staff who are permitted to travel first class. There are no present plans to change this policy.

Magistrates Pilot (Bristol)

Jean Corston: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, if he will make a statement on the success of the scheme run in conjunction with Operation Black Vote and piloted in Bristol, East which enables members of the ethnic minority community to spend time shadowing magistrates on the Bristol and Northavon circuit. [40351]

Mr. Wills: Bristol is one of seven areas piloting the magistrates shadowing scheme that my Department is running in conjunction with Operation Black Vote. The other areas are Birmingham, Bradford, Cardiff, Inner London, Middlesex and Oldham. It is a little too soon for me to be able to make a general statement on the success of the scheme. A full evaluation of the pilots is due to take place in the summer once all the pilots have been completed. The Lord Chancellor and I have been struck by the enthusiasm of the participants in Bristol and other pilot areas. I hope that participants will go out into their communities and explain and promote the role of magistrates, and so encourage more people from ethnic communities to put themselves forward for appointment.

Court Closures

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department which magistrates courts have closed since 1 May 1997. [39376]

Mr. Wills: The courthouses that have closed since 1 May 1997 are listed in the table.

Magistrates courts committees are not statutorily required to inform the Lord Chancellor's Department of proposed courthouse closures which are not subject to an appeal by its paying authority or authorities.

It is the Government's policy that decisions concerning the number, location and future of magistrates courts are for each magistrates courts committee to determine, in consultation with its local paying authority or authorities.

Magistrates courthouse	*Closure date*
Bromsgrove	31 May 1997
Ledbury	31 May 1997
Hebburn	5 June 1997
South Shields (Keppie street)	5 June 1997
Bargoed	30 June 1997
Chippenham (Market place)	30 June 1997
Monmouth	30 June 1997
Pontlottyn	30 June 1997
Pontypool	30 June 1997
Ashton under Lyne (Manchester road)	31 August 1997
Duckinsfield	31 August 1997
Thorne	31 August 1997
Braintree	31 December 1997
Clacton on Sea	31 December 1997
Saffron Walden	31 December 1997
Stokesley	31 December 1997
Malton	6 February 1998
Appleby	31 March 1998
Bishop's Stortford	31 March 1998
Chertsey	31 March 1998
Farnham	31 March 1998
Hatfield	31 March 1998
Hitchin	31 March 1998
Market Rasen	31 March 1998
Marlborough street	31 March 1998
Oxted	31 March 1998
Lutterworth	31 July 1998
Ripon	1 August 1998
Barnard Castle	31 December 1998
Clerkenwell	31 December 1998
Corwen	31 December 1998
Diss	31 December 1998
Felixstowe	31 December 1998
Haverhill	31 December 1998
Lytham	31 December 1998
Newmarket	31 December 1998
Saxmundham	31 December 1998
Sheerness	31 December 1998
Stowmarket	31 December 1998
West Malling	31 December 1998
Abingdon	31 March 1999
Christchurch	31 March 1999
Henley on Thames	31 March 1999
Morley	31 March 1999
Pudsey	31 March 1999
Windsor	31 March 1999
Stow on the Wold	30 June 1999
March	31 December 1999
Ampthill	1 January 2000
Biggleswade	1 January 2000
Dunstable	1 January 2000
Leighton Buzzard	1 January 2000
Lichfield	31 March 2000
Keighley	1 April 2000
Keswick	30 April 2000
Appleby	31 May 2000
Windermere	31 May 2000
Wigton	31 May 2000
Gravesend	9 June 2000
Wootton Bassett	2 October 2000
Abergele	31 December 2000
Alfreton	1 January 2001
Ashbourne	1 January 2001
Bakewell	1 January 2001
Matlock	1 January 2001
Leigh	31 March 2001
Middleton	31 March 2001
Leek	31 March 2001
Worcester	31 March 2001
Macclesfield Park Green	1 April 2001
Warrington Patten Hall	1 April 2001
Bideford	30 April 2001
Exmouth	30 April 2001
Kingsbridge	30 April 2001
South Molton	30 April 2001
Teignmouth	30 April 2001
Tavistock	30 April 2001
Axminster	4 May 2001
Tiverton	4 May 2001
Newquay	30 June 2001
Wimborne	31 August 2001
Southampton (Commercial road)	31 August 2001
Gillingham	30 September 2001
Bridlington	9 November 2001
Brough	9 November 2001
Driffield	9 November 2001
Hull (Guildhall)	9 November 2001
Hull (Lowgate)	9 November 2001
Pocklington	0 November 2001
Withernsea	9 November 2001

Magistrates

Helen Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many people from the Warrington, North constituency have been appointed to the magistracy in each year since 1997. [39453]

Mr. Wills: The figures sought are set out in the table. This year the Advisory Committee is looking to recommend five new appointments but no decisions have yet been made about who will be recommended. The Advisory Committee normally submits its recommendations in June or July.

	Warrington, North	*Warrington, South*
1997	1	1
1998	4	1
1999	3	0
2000	5	5
2001	2	2

Non-Governmental Organisations

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will list non-governmental organisations operating in the south-west region that receive public funds from her Department; and what amount of annual funding they received in the most recent year for which figures are available. [39182]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Details of grants in aid funding provided directly to non-governmental organisations (i.e. those organisations operating in the charity/voluntary sector) are contained in my Department's annual appropriation accounts. The most recent accounts, those for the financial year 2000–01, were published on 20 February 2002 (HMSO). Overall grants in aid funding totalled £5,673,020, though as funding is often to the national office of the organisation concerned for distribution locally, details of funds received by those in the south-west region could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Funding is also provided to non-governmental organisations through NDPBs sponsored by my Department.

Special Urgency Provisions

Mr. Luff: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how often the Department has applied the special urgency provisions in paragraph 22 of Circular 18/84 (Development by Government Departments) to a development by the Department; and if he will make a statement. [38717]

Mr. Wills: The Lord Chancellor's Department has never made an application to use the special urgency provisions in paragraph 22 of Circular 18/84 (Development by Government Departments).

Auld Report

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received from and on behalf of magistrates *(a)* nationally and *(b)* by region regarding the Auld report; and if he will make a statement on the areas on which most comments focus. [38254]

Mr. Wills: We have received over 400 responses. On behalf of magistrates: *(a)* nationally, we have received responses from: Central Council of Magistrates Courts Committees, HM Council of District Judges (Magistrates Courts) and the Magistrates Association; *(b)* by region, we have received representations from magistrates in 37 of the 42 Magistrates Courts Committee areas. These focus on the establishment of a unified criminal court, and the proposal for an intermediate tier. Representations on all the recommendations in Sir Robin Auld's report are now being carefully considered and analysed in detail. The Government will announce their conclusions by way of a White Paper in the spring.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what has been done to explain the implications of the Auld report's recommendations to magistrates in the Teesside area. [38255]

Mr. Wills: In October 2001 copies of the Auld report were sent to all Justices Chief Executives, to distribute to chairmen of magistrates benches in their Magistrates Courts Committee (MCC) areas. The representative organisations for district judges (Magistrates Courts) and lay magistrates also received copies. On 28 November 2001, a ministerial "roadshow" was held in Newcastle and magistrates from the Cleveland MCC area, which covers Teesside, attended. Written representations have been received from the Cleveland MCC and the Teesside Magistrates' Bench.

Retrospective Legislation

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on the introduction of retrospective legislation. [38121]

The Solicitor-General: I have been asked to reply.

The Government's policy before introducing a legislative provision having retrospective effect is to balance the conflicting public interests and to consider whether the general public interest in the law not being changed retrospectively may be outweighed by any competing public interest. In making this assessment the Government will have regard to relevant international standards including those of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms which was incorporated into United Kingdom law by the Human Rights Act 1998.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Benefits (Epsom and Ewell)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in the Epsom and Ewell constituency receive housing benefit. [23430]

Malcolm Wicks: The available information is in the table.

Housing benefit recipients in August 2001

	Number
Epsom and Ewell borough council	1,790
Mole Valley borough council	2,540

Notes:

1. The data refer to households which may be a family, a couple, or a single person.
2. The figures have been rounded to the nearest 10 cases.
3. Epsom and Ewell parliamentary constituency is covered in part by Epsom and Ewell and Mole Valley local authority areas. Figures are not therefore representative of the constituency area.

Source:

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Management Information System Quarterly 100 per cent. caseload count—August 2001.

Pension Credit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate by how much it would be possible to raise the basic state pension for the over-75s, on a revenue neutral basis, and taking account of offsetting savings in expenditure on means-tested benefits and enhanced income tax revenue, if he were not to introduce the pension credit and were instead to spend the money on the state pension for the over-75s. [27687]

Mr. McCartney: Diverting £2 billion away from the state pension credit to increasing the basic state pension (BSP) for the over-75s would mean standard rate BSP could rise from £72.50 to £87.55 per week for the over-75s. Approximately 75 per cent. of pensioners aged 75 and over who were previously entitled to the minimum income guarantee would remain on the means tested benefits (MIG) if BSP was increased to £87.55 and because this is lower than the current MIG level they would be no better off.

Also, millions of pensioners living on low or moderate incomes, who struggled to put money aside for their retirement, would find themselves little or no better off than people who had saved nothing. Over 4 million pensioners would no longer receive a reward for any savings that lifted their incomes above the minimum income guarantee. In addition, the upper capital limit of £12,000 and the assumed rate of return of £1 in every

£250 would be retained. By introducing pension credit we will tackle poverty among today's pensioners, while not discouraging future pensioners from saving.

Benefits (Yorkshire)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people claimed incapacity benefit in the York and North Yorkshire area in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1999, *(c)* 2000 and *(d)* 2001. [28197]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The available information is in the table.

Number of people claiming incapacity benefit in York and North Yorkshire local authority areas

	York	North Yorkshire[1]
31 August 1997	4,700	14,300
31 August 1999	4,500	14,000
31 August 2000	4,800	13,900
31 August 2001	4,800	14,700

[1] North Yorkshire includes Craven, Hambleton, Harrogate, Richmondshire, Ryedale, Scarborough and Selby.

Note:

Figures are rounded to the nearest 100.

Source:

Figures are taken from a 5 per cent. sample of the incapacity benefit computer system and exclude a small number of cases held clerically.

Fraud

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the basis was for the reference in his Department's recent Targeting Fraud advertisements to the number caught by fraud investigators; and if he will estimate how many of that number were successfully prosecuted. [30372]

Malcolm Wicks: The figures in the Targeting Fraud advertisements were derived from successful prosecutions data. Since the advertisements were made we have improved the data sources used to compile this information. Over 9,000 people were successfully prosecuted in 1999/2000 and over 11,000 in 2002–02. We shall amend the radio advertisements in the final stage of the campaign in March to reflect the new figures.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many cases of benefit fraud were recorded in each of the past five years in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* England and *(c)* Scotland. [32270]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is not available in the format requested.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what powers the Child Support Agency has to obtain child support from a self-employed absent parent who has not contributed maintenance to a parent with care; and how these powers have been used in the case of Elaine Lanchbury, a constituent. [31116]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Huw Edwards, dated 4 March 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply by me.

You have asked firstly what powers the Child Support Agency has to obtain child support from a self-employed non-resident parent who has not contributed maintenance to a parent with care and secondly how these powers have been used in the case of Elaine Lanchbury a constituent.

There are a number of options available which can be considered when the Agency is trying to obtain maintenance payments from a non-compliant, self-employed non-resident parent.

Those options include:

County Court Judgement—entering a Liability Order on the register which is passed to Credit Reference Agencies,

referring a case to Bailiffs,

a garnishee order—which allows recovery from money held in a bank account,

a charging order—which enables the payment of debts to be secured by a charge on land or property and

referral of a case to court for it to consider committal to prison or withdrawal or holding of a driving licence.

Individual cases are a confidential matter and I have written to you separately regarding Ms Lanchbury.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the number of people who have had their driving licences removed by the courts since April 2001 as a result of the provisions introduced under the Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act 2000. [33342]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Steve Webb, dated 4 March 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply by me.

You ask two questions of the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. Firstly, if he will estimate the number of people who have had their driving licences removed by the courts since April 2001 as a result of the provisions introduced under the Child Support Pensions and Social Security Act 2000. Secondly, how many people have been (a) prosecuted and (b) convicted; and what was the average sentence from that conviction under the criminal offence of non-co-operation with the CSA.

No driving licences have been removed by the Courts from non-resident parents. In two cases the Courts ordered a non-resident parent to be disqualified from holding a driving licence but the order was suspended. They are both now making regular payments.

There have been no prosecutions and therefore no convictions made under the criminal offence of non-co-operation with the Child Support Agency. The deterrent effect of a criminal sanction for failing to provide information when requested is an important element of the new system. We strongly encourage parents to co-operate voluntarily with requests for information before referring the case for consideration of prosecution under the new legislation.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average payment is made in child support maintenance by the non-resident parent under the CSA system for *(a)* one child, *(b)* two children and *(c)* three children. [33266]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is in the table.

The average maintenance paid in the current child support scheme

Number of qualifying children	*Average per week (£)*
1	7.98
2	10.65
3	10.23

Note:

Includes nil assessments.

Source:

5 per cent. scan of the Child Support Computer System August 2001.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the *(a)* percentage and *(b)* number of non-resident parents who would see a reduction in their CSA child support maintenance liability under the April 2002 scheme. [33264]

Malcolm Wicks: Based on an assessment made in 1998, had all cases transferred to the new child support scheme at that time, around 65 per cent. of non-resident parents in work would have seen a reduction in their child support liability. This amounts to approximately 425,000 cases. However, it is not possible to make a firm estimate of the impact on non-resident parents for 2003, five years later, given earnings growth and changes in family circumstances.

Note:

New scheme maintenance modelled on 5 per cent. scan of the child support computer system August 1998.

Jobcentre Plus

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many staff have been *(a)* redeployed and *(b)* retrained as a result of the introduction of Jobcentre Plus; and what his estimate is of the costs incurred by his Department in undertaking retraining programmes. [33507]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Approximately 4,000 staff are employed in the 56 Jobcentre Plus pathfinder offices that have opened since October 2001. The majority of these staff were perviously employed by either the Employment Service or the Benefits Agency. All have received some Jobcentre Plus specific training. The amount of training delivered to individual members of staff was largely dependent on their background and experience. The estimated cost of designing, implementing and delivering Jobcentre Plus training for all Jobcentre Plus pathfinder staff is £5 million.

Automated Credit Transfer

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the annual saving in handling costs is anticipated when benefits payments are changed to automated credit transfer. [33068]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 5 February 2002]*: The movement to payment direct into bank and building society accounts assures a safe, convenient, more modern and efficient way of paying benefits and pensions and will bring very substantial savings. Against this, we will incur some additional costs which cannot yet be quantified, including payments to Post Office Ltd. which will depend on the outcome of the current contract negotiations between the Government and the Post Office, and on the number of Post Office Card Accounts.

Universal Bank

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what level of investment the Government have committed themselves to providing for the universal bank project. [34794]

Malcolm Wicks: The Department, together with the Inland Revenue and the Northern Ireland Social Security Agency, are close to finalising contractual terms with the Post Office for universal banking services. The amounts involved will be commercially confidential to the parties.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether the Government have reached an agreement with the high street banks as to the level of funding that they will invest in the universal bank project. [34792]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness on 30 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 589–90W.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many cases were the subject of rolling reviews in each of the last five years in determining the level of fraud in jobseeker's allowance and income support. [36254]

Malcolm Wicks: The total number of sample cases has been around 30,000 since the start of the area benefit review programme. The number for each reporting period is in the table.

The smaller sample size for 2001–02 was introduced as part of the move to a common sample for determining levels of fraud and customer error, and official error. The smaller sample size for 2002–03 is a result of the Department restructuring from 13 areas to 11 Government office regions. Neither of these reductions in sample size will result in a reduction in the confidence levels of the reported results.

Income support/jobseeker's allowance review

Reporting period	*Sample size*
October 1997 to September 1998	31,200
April 1998 to March 1999	31,200
April 1999 to March 2000	31,200
April 2000 to March 2001	31,200
April 2001 to March 2002	27,333
April 2002 to March 2003	26,900

Source:

Area benefit reviews

Minimum Income Guarantee

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the cost of the minimum income guarantee in 2050 in today's prices if it is raised in line with earnings and if the basic state pension is raised in line with prices. [35844]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* The estimated cost of uprating the MIG in line with earnings is approximately £12 billion in today's prices in 2050.

Debt Recovery

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the locations of debt recovery centres within his Department and those after the planned reductions. [37018]

Malcolm Wicks: Debt Management Services, a unit within the Department, currently has responsibility for approximately 1,800 staff based in 127 sites across the country. These sites are generally co-located with existing Benefits Agency offices. The plan is to consolidate these units into 10 debt centres over the period ending March 2005. Departmental staff outside Debt Management Services also process overpayment work for the benefits administered centrally, such as Retirement Pension. This work is carried out at a further three sites, and is currently under review.

Details of the current and planned future sites are in the following list.

Current locations for debt processing work

Barking
Twickenham
Hackney
Bedford
Norwich
Slough
New Forest
Chichester
Weymouth
Plymouth
Derby
Nottingham
Perry Barr
Hereford
Wolverhampton
Wrexham
Porth
Barrow
Warrington
Crewe
Salford
Hull
Mexborough
Hemsworth
Gateshead
Sunderland
Glasgow City
Newlands
Irvine
Falkirk
Bathgate
Balham
Hounslow
Glasgow (for Ealing and Euston)
Watford
High Wycombe
Bury St. Edmonds
Peterborough
Isle of Wight
Bath
Gloucester
Chippenham
Skegness
Lincoln
Halesowen
Shrewsbury
Cwmbran
Newtown
Swansea
Toxteth
Whitehaven
Skelmersdale
Keighley
Leeds
Sheffield
Durham
Stockton
Annisland
Bridgeton
Stornoway
Dumfries
Peterhead
Dundee
Poplar
Stratford
Belfast (for Neasden and South Circular)
Wood Green
Stevenage
Corby
Bexley
Hastings
St. Austell
Bristol
Lichfield
Loughborough
Edgbaston
Smethwick
Walsall
Cardiff
Caernarfon
Blackpool
Breckfield
Preston
Birkenhead
Bradford
York
Doncaster
Newcastle
Middlesbrough
Greenock
Springburn
Ayr
Galashiels
Motherwell
Perth
Harlow
Ilford

Ashton in Makerfield (for Palace)
Edgware
Clacton
Oxford
Lewes
Portsmouth
Barnstaple
Taunton
Worksop
Sutton in Ashfield
Sparkhill
Coventry
Nuneaton
Merthyr
Pembroke Dock
Kirkby
Widnes
Southport
Chorlton
Dewsbury
Rotherham
Barnsley
Hexham
Hartlepool
Renfrew
Cranstonhill
Stranraer
Cowdenbeath
Bellshill.

Sites where benefits are currently administered centrally:

Blackpool, Washington and Newcastle.

Proposed locations for debt centres:

Chorlton, Porth, Stornoway, Nuneaton, Ashton in Makerfield, Corby, Dearne Valley, Bradford, Glasgow and Salford.

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to revise the number of centres for debt recovery in his Department; and if he will make a statement. [37017]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. MacDonald) on 31 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 544W.

Vibration White Finger

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many former mineworkers applied for an award for vibration white finger; and how many were rejected by the Benefits Agency in the last year for which figures are available; [35236]

(2) if he will advise the Benefits Agency to use the test developed to diagnose vibration white finger in former mineworkers by the Department of Trade and Industry, [35237]

(3) how many former mineworkers who applied for vibration white finger were rejected for an award because they had neurological damage in the last year for which figures are available. [35238]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 25 February 2002]*: The information is not available in the format requested.

There is no simple, reliable and universally accepted test for vibration white finger. The test used by the Department of Trade and Industry for the settlement of compensation claims against British Coal fulfils the civil burden of proof in finding that former mineworkers have contracted vibration white finger as a result of their employer's negligence. This process involves litigation in individual cases and as such can be lengthy, detailed and expensive.

The test used for the industrial injuries scheme is simple, straightforward to administer and consistent nationally. We have no plans to adopt the tests being used by the Department of Trade and Industry.

Pension Service

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he intends to launch the Pension Service; and if he will list the locations of the proposed 26 pension centres and their catchment areas. [37520]

Mr. McCartney: The pension service will be launched on 1 April 2002. Pension centres, which will roll out in stages over the next two years, will process work as set out in the table.

Government office region	*Pension centre locations*
East Midlands	Derby, Leicester, Nottingham
Eastern	Norwich (2 sites)
London	Glasgow, Newcastle (Tyneview Park), Dundee (initially)
North East	Stockport, Seaham
North West	Burnley, Stockport, Warrington
Scotland	Motherwell, Dundee
South East	Blackpool, Cwmbran, Liverpool, Wrexham
South West	Bath, Plymouth
Wales	Swansea
West Midlands	Birmingham, Walsall, Wolverhampton
Yorkshire and Humberside	Dearne Valley, Seaham, York

Civil Servants

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many new entrants to the civil service were employed in his Department in each of the last five years; and how many in each year were aged 50 and over. [36498]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by the Cabinet Office on 27 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 875–80W.

Capita

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many contracts the Department has with Capita; and how much they are worth; [38375]

(2) if he will list the contracts that have been awarded to the Capita Group by the Department. [39345]

Mr. McCartney: The Department for Work and Pensions currently has 12 contracts with Capita, with a total value of £134.1 million.

DWP Accommodation and Office Services—North-west and Greater Manchester

DWP Accommodation and Office Services—Tyne Tees and Yorkshire

DWP Accommodation and Office Services—West Midlands and Mercia

Working Age Specification Framework

Consultancy support to Pension Credit Project Central Design Authority

Winter Fuels Payments Project

Recruitment Services

Private Sector Led New Deal—Solihull

Employment Services Estates Corporate Supply

New Deal Next Phase (progress2work)—Birmingham North

New Deal Next Phase (progress2work)—Birmingham South

Disability Marketing in North-west.

HIV

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he plans to extend the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to give protection to people with HIV from the point of their diagnosis. [38474]

Maria Eagle: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer given to the hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) on 12 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 904W.

Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the ability of parents of children who are suffering from attention deficit hyperactive disorder to access disability living allowance. [39434]

Maria Eagle *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* Parents of children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) can claim disability living allowance (DLA) and have their child's entitlement assessed in the normal way. The claimant's medical condition is not, necessarily, the key factor in qualifying for DLA because entitlement to the allowance is based on walking difficulties and/or the need for personal care or supervision which arise from severe disability. For children under age 16, these needs must be substantially in excess of the normal requirements of a child of the same age who is in normal health.

The guidance to decision makers in the disability handbook contains a chapter on behavioural disorders including the likely care, supervision or mobility needs arising from ADHD. Currently, DLA is received by some 42,500 children whose primary disability is recorded as being a "behavioural disorder".

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.

2. Figures are at 31 August 2001.

Source:

ASD Information centre: 5 per cent data.

Foster Carers

James Purnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if foster carers who give up work to care for foster children will be entitled to the Second State Pension; and if he will make a statement. [40335]

Mr. McCartney: Foster carers cannot qualify for state second pension simply because they are fostering a child. This is because they are not entitled to child benefit in respect of foster children.

They may, however, qualify for state second pension in respect of any child under the age of six for whom they receive child benefit. They will also qualify for state second pension where, throughout a complete tax year, they are entitled to invalid care allowance, or qualify for home responsibilities protection because they are caring for a disabled child, whether or not that child is a foster child.

James Purnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to extend home responsibilities protection to foster carers; and whether it will cover the entire length of time they have been fostering. [40336]

Mr. McCartney: Foster carers whose allowance contains a reward element may be liable for national insurance contributions on a self-employed basis. Where there is no liability, they may choose to pay voluntary contributions to assist in qualifying for state retirement pension. Foster carers who receive child benefit for their own children aged under 16 will be eligible for home responsibilities protection. We will keep these arrangements under review as we do with all rules relating to benefits.

James Purnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the cost of extending home responsibilities protection to foster carers *(a)* caring for foster children and *(b)* to cover the entire length of time they have been fostering. [40337]

Mr. McCartney: We cannot calculate the cost of extending home responsibilities protection to foster carers whose retirement pension entitlement is not already protected since this is dependent upon the individual's circumstances at pension age.

Compulsory Retirement

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action the Government will take against companies who enforce retirement on male employees at 60 instead of 65. [37427]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

The Government are currently undertaking a public consultation exercise on implementation of the European employment directive. The directive provides a framework for member states to introduce legislation outlawing unfair discrimination at work on the grounds of age, sexual orientation, religion, and disability. Among the age issues on which we are seeking general views is whether employers should be able to require people to retire at a certain age and, if so, whether legal limits should be placed on their right to do so. We shall carry out a further consultation on specific age proposals later this year, developed in the light of responses to this consultation.

My right hon. Friend the Minister for Pensions replied on 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 781W, explaining that the Government actively encourage employers to value the contribution of older workers and to adopt flexible approaches to retirement.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Rail Journeys (Staff)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make it his policy that rail journeys undertaken by staff in his Department should ordinarily be on standard class tickets. [40443]

Mr. Leslie: The Civil Service Management Code requires all Government Departments and agencies to ensure that employees use the most efficient and economic means of travel in the circumstances, taking into account any management benefit and the needs of staff with disabilities.

Although entitlement to first class rail travel is an agreed condition of service at Band B2 level and above, Cabinet Office policy encourages use of standard class travel for all rail journeys outside the rush hours and for journeys of two hours or less.

First class travel for other journeys recognises the level of work which may need to be carried out by staff in grades B2 and above while travelling by train.

Official Visits

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) if he will list the official visits to *(a)* Paris and *(b)* Brussels made by each Minister in his Department in 2001 and the mode of travel used; and what guidance is provided to Ministers in his Department on the choice of mode of travel for such visits; [38158]

(2) if he will list the official visits within the UK outside London made by each Minister in his Department in 2001, giving for each *(a)* the origin and destination and *(b)* the mode of travel used; and what guidance is provided to Ministers in his Department on choice of mode of travel for official visits. [38192]

Mr. Leslie: Since 1999 the Government have published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government have also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. Details of travel undertaken during the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 will be published in a similar form to previous years as soon as possible after the end of the current financial year. Copies of the lists are available in the Libraries of the House.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

The additional information requested in respect of UK travel is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Global Crossing

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the dates on which Ministers in his Department have received hospitality in their ministerial capacities since 1 January 1999 from Global Crossing; and if he will make a statement. [37685]

Mr. Leslie: Offers of hospitality which are accepted must be registered in line with the requirements of paragraph 139 of the Ministerial Code.

City of London Corporation

John McDonnell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list those functions, engagements and events which Ministers, his officials and advisers have attended which have been sponsored, funded, promoted and hosted by the City of London Corporation since 1997. [35709]

Mr. Leslie: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Secondments

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will place in the Library the written agreements and protocols with the Whitehall and Industry Group governing their secondments to Government; and if he will list all the secondments placed under the auspices of the group since June 2001. [40561]

Mr. Leslie: A memorandum of understanding between the Cabinet Office, as sponsors of the Whitehall and Industry Group (WIG), and WIG is currently under negotiation. Copies of the agreement will be placed in the Libraries of the House in due course. It is open to any organisation to become a member of the Whitehall and Industry Group and some 45 Government Departments and agencies have joined. Copies of the information pack that organisations receive when they join WIG have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Currently two senior civil servants act as non-executive directors of the Whitehall and Industry Group.

Since June 2001 five secondments (lasting three months or more) have been arranged through WIG into Government Departments, comprising:

three into the Lord Chancellor's Department;

one into the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions; and

one into the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

HEALTH

Special Advisers

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many complaints have been reported in his Department under paragraph 11 of the Civil Service Code since 13 May 1999; and how many of them related to special advisers. [25335]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 192W.

The procedures for making complaints under the civil service code are set out in the Department's staff handbook. Civil servants are encouraged, in the first instance, to raise complaints made under paragraph 11 of the "civil service code" with their line manager. If for any reason this is not felt to be possible, perhaps because the line manager is part of the complaint, individuals may take their complaint to a nominated official (or officials). It is not possible to provide a comprehensive figure for the number of complaints made within this Department under paragraph 11 of the code as there is no requirement for managers to report to the centre details of complaints made under the civil service code which are resolved within the management line.

Waiting Lists

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to seek information from the chief executive of each NHS trust about possible inappropriate adjustments to in-patient waiting lists. [25489]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 192W.

Following publication of the National Audit Office report we commissioned the Audit Commission to initiate a system of spot-checks on waiting list statistics hospital-by-hospital.

The Government believe that this approach is the best way to ensure that such inappropriate adjustments do not happen again.

In addition, the Government are identifying a series of measures which will help identify at an early stage any trusts where there appears to be a problem in managing their waiting lists.

Data in waiting lists returns will continue to be routinely validated by the Government statistical service. Any discrepancies will be resolved directly with the trusts prior to finalising the figures for publication.

In future, any manager found to have deliberately distorted waiting figures will face dismissal on grounds of gross misconduct. This will be supported by a new code of conduct for NHS managers. Anyone who breaches that code of conduct will not be re-employed as a manager anywhere in the NHS.

GPs

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of general practitioners are connected to NHSnet. [27473]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 192W.

The latest figures available as at 28 February 2002 show that over 98 per cent. of general practitioners in England have NHSnet connections in their practices.

Ambulance Services

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost per head of *(a)* emergency and *(b)* non-emergency ambulance services in (i) Shropshire, (ii) Wiltshire and (iii) the Isle of Wight in the last financial year. [28228]

Ms Blears: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 192W.

The information requested is shown in the table.

Expenditure per head of population

£

Ambulance trust	*Non-emergency services*	*Emergency services*
Shropshire's community and mental health services NHS trust	0.99	14.88
Wiltshire ambulance service NHS trust	2.44	12.40
Isle of Wight health care NHS trust	3.42	11.45

Source:

Annual financial returns of NHS trusts 2000–01

Weighted population estimates 2000–01

Arthritis

Mr. Havard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in each regional health authority area are being prescribed anti-TNF drugs for arthritis. [28502]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 192W.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence is conducting an appraisal of these treatments. Guidance to the national health service is expected in April 2002. We expect health authorities and primary care trusts to fund treatments from their unified allocations which are increasing on average next year by 7.2 per cent. in real terms. We do not hold information centrally about current usage of these drugs.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to provide funding for the increased supply of the drugs Infliximal and Etanercept; [28617]

(2) what percentage of sufferers of inflammatory arthritis in the UK have been prescribed the drugs Infliximal and Etanercept; and if he will give a breakdown by health authority area of the numbers of people who have been prescribed these drugs; [28619]

(3) what assessment has been made of the cost of prescribing the drugs Infliximal and Etanercept for treatment of inflammatory arthritis *(a)* in total and *(b)* per sufferer of this condition; and what evidence he has assessed on the long-term effectiveness of these drugs compared to other available forms of treatment. [28616]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 18 January 2002]*: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence is conducting an appraisal of these treatments. Guidance to the national health service is expected in April 2002. We expect health authorities and primary care trusts to fund treatments from their unified allocations which are increasing on average next year by 7.2 per cent. in real terms. We do not hold information centrally about current usage of these drugs.

Care Homes

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ensure that the new strategic health authorities from April 2002 take responsibility for patients in nursing homes for whom the present health authority is paying part only. [31153]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Responsibility for funding services for patients will pass to the relevant primary care trust (PCT) in April 2002. Care and funding are provided on the basis of assessed need, so the PCT will take on the same responsibility as the health authority, except where the needs have changed.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the average length of stay of a resident in *(a)* a local authority nursing home and *(b)* a privately owned nursing home; and if he will make a statement. [39171]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested on average length of stay in privately owned nursing homes is not collected centrally.

Local authorities do not own or run nursing homes.

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds in care homes there were in Kent in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* at the latest date for which figures are available. [39459]

Jacqui Smith: Information on the number of residential places and registered nursing beds in Kent, at 31 March each year, is shown in the table.

Residential and nursing care beds in Kent, 1997 and 2001, as at 31 March

	(a) 1997[4]	*(b) 2001*[5]
Number of residential care homes[1]	16,009	15,928
Number of beds in nursing homes[2,3]	4,712	4,868

[1] Excludes places in childrens' homes.

[2] Private nursing homes, hospitals and clinics.

[3] Information is presented for East Kent and West Kent health authorities.

[4] Figures for registered nursing beds relates to registered beds during the period 1 October 1996 to 31 March 1997.

[5] Information is presented for the county of Kent prior to local government reorganisation on 1 April 1998. Figures for 2001 therefore relate to the area corresponding to the unitary authority of Medway Towns and the county area of Kent.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the average length of time it takes to set up a *(a)* residential home and *(b)* nursing home from the time of its original planning application. [39442]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* The information requested is not available centrally.

Correspondence

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Romsey, on orthopaedic waiting lists and the Lord Mayor Treloar hospital in Alton, Hampshire. [31340]

Ms Blears: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer her to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

A reply was sent on 16 February.

Bolton South East Primary Care Group

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the Wigan and Bolton health authority has used its increase in Government funding for the financial year 2002–03 to move the Bolton South East Primary Care Group closer to its target funding. [31233]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

For 2002–03, the allocations received by the new Bolton Primary Care Trust will increase by 10.14 per cent. in comparison to the funding received in 2001–02 by the two Bolton primary care groups.

This is an above average settlement which will help to bring Bolton closer to target by almost 1 per cent. This rate of change is considered to be significant and is one which will not threaten the stability of other areas of the local health service.

Enron

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what meetings *(a)* he and *(b)* his senior departmental officials have had with Enron and its subsidiaries in the last two years. [32429]

Ms Blears: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Ministers and civil servants meet many people as part of the process of policy development and analysis. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the Ministerial Code, The Civil Service Code and Guidance for Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists. Some of these discussions take place on a confidential basis, and in order to preserve confidentiality, it is not the normal practice for Governments to release details of specific meetings with private individuals or companies.

NHS (Directors' Secondments)

Mr. Francois: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 955W, on NHS directors' secondments, if he will list the organisation to which the *(a)* chief executive and *(b)* executive directors listed in the table were seconded as at 1 December 2001. [31804]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

My previous answer of 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 955W, referred to the secondment of executive directors of national health service trusts and health authorities to other organisations excluding secondments within the NHS. The figures provided included secondments within the NHS.

The number of executive directors and chief executives of NHS trusts and health authorities who were on secondment to other organisations as at 1 December 2001 is shown in the table.

Region	*Chief executives*	*Executive directors*	*Total*
West Midlands	0	5	5
Trent	3	7	10
South West	2	5	7
Northern and Yorkshire	1	5	6
South East	6	1	7
North West	2	10	12
Eastern	4	6	10
London	1	10	11
Total	19	49	68

The organisations to which the *(a)* chief executive and *(b)* executive directors were seconded as at 1 December 2001 is shown in the table.

Region	*Chief executives*	*Executive directors*	*Total*
West Midlands		2 to the Department of Health 2 to West Midlands Regional Office 1 to the Workforce Development Council	5
Trent	2 to the Department of Health 1 to NHS Trent Regional Office	4 to NHS Trent Regional Office 1 to the NHS Modernisation Agency 1 to NHS Estates 1 to a University Health Research Department (SCHARR)	10
South West	1 to the NHS Leadership Centre 1 to Education Purchasing Consortium	1 to South West Regional Office 1 to the National Shared Services Project 1 to National Police Training Service 1 to the NHS Leadership Centre 1 to NHS Estates	7
Northern and Yorkshire	1 to Northern and Yorkshire Regional Office	1 to Northern and Yorkshire Workforce Confederation 2 to Northern and Yorkshire Regional Office 1 West Yorkshire Financial Shared Services Project 1 to Tyne and Wear Health Action Zone	6
South West	1 to Commission for Health Improvement 2 to Department of Health 3 to South East Regional Office	1 to the NHS Modernisation Agency	7
North West	1 to NHS North West Regional Office 1 to the Department of Health	9 to NHS North West Regional Office 1 to the Department of Health	12
Eastern	4 to Eastern Regional Office	6 to Eastern Regional Office	10
London	1 to Project Role with Prison Service	7 to London Regional Office 1 to London Health Observatory 1 to the NHS Modernisation Agency 1 to NHS Estates	11
Total	19	49	68

PFI/PPPs

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many contracts and what fees in each financial year since 1997–98 *(a)* PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(b)* Cap Gemini Ernst & Young, *(c)* KPMG, *(d)* PA Consulting, *(e)* WS Atkins, *(f)* Accenture, *(g)* Deloitte & Touche, *(h)* McKinsey, *(i)* Capita, *(j)* AEA Technology, *(k)* Xansa Group, *(l)* Sema Group, *(m)* CMG Admiral, *(n)* ICL Group and *(o)* Logica received for advising his Department on PFI and PPP contracts; and if he will make a statement. [32504]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

1997–98

No fees were paid to any of the companies listed in the question.

1998–99

No fees were paid to any of the companies listed in the question.

1999–2000

Cap Gemini Ernst & Young: 3 contracts, £58,603.03

2000–01

PricewaterhouseCoopers: 1 contract, £13,325

Cap Gemini Ernst & Young: 5 contracts, £40,282.16

Deloitte & Touche: 1 contract, £5,010

2001–02

KPMG: 2 contracts, £50,000

PricewaterhouseCoopers: one contract, £23,818.19.

NHS Walk-in Centres

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list, by centre, the number of people accessing NHS walk-in centres each month since opening. [35862]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The 42 NHS walk-in centres are being piloted as a new initiative to offer convenient access to primary care services.

The Department commissioned an independent evaluation of all NHS walk-in centres. This has been led by Dr. Chris Salisbury at the University of Bristol. The national evaluation final report, including figures on the number of people accessing walk-in centres, is due for publication in the summer 2002.

Estimates show, however, that overall more than 1.3 million people have visited walk-in centres since opening.

Fire Injuries

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have received injuries in the south-west region relating to *(a)* an open fire, *(b)* an electrical heating system and *(c)* a gas central heating system, in the last three years. [35474]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2000, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The information requested is not collected centrally.

Mental Health

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress he has made in reviewing methods of recording calls to NHS Direct about mental health-related matters so as to align them closely with the clinical assessment system. [35509]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

All calls to NHS Direct are logged and recorded; this includes mental health calls. Nurse advisers use decision support systems (algorithms) as part of the national health service clinical assessment system (CAS) to enable them to identify the nature of the call and assess the needs of the caller. Mental health is seen as an integral part of the CAS and mental health callers will be assessed and advised using the CAS through the use of mental health algorithms developed by mental health clinicians. As CAS is available across England, the information available on all calls will become even more robust and will provide a credible data source supporting mental health service development.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 13 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 679W, what the timetable is for selection and implementation of instrumentation for the measurement of clinical outcomes in the mental health services. [39845]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* The selection and implementation of instrumentation for the measurement of clinical outcomes in mental health services is developing as planned.

The instruments to be used were selected in January 2002.

They will consider aspects of morbidity, patient satisfaction and quality of life.

Piloting the instruments is currently in hand.

Data are expected to be flowing from the pilot sites by September 2002.

Routine measurement of outcomes is expected from April 2003.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what proportion of people, broken down by age, were *(a)* admitted and *(b)* discharged from hospital in each of the last five years where the main diagnosis was mental illness. [40577]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* The tables show the estimated numbers of Finished Consultant Episodes and Discharges with a primary diagnosis of mental and behavioural disorders, in England, for 1996–97 to 2001–01. The figures for 2000–01 are provisional, as no adjustments have yet been made for shortfalls in data.

Finished consultant episodes with a primary diagnosis of mental and behavioural disorders (F00-F99), England, 1996–97 to 2000–01

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Under 16	20,210	25,150	20,010	18,170	14,580
16–24	33,880	36,540	31,500	27,870	22,220
25–44	103,540	109,640	106,350	98,890	79,560
45–64	54,390	56,190	56,010	54,550	45,850
65–74	26,090	25,520	24,700	23,720	18,840
75–84	32,310	32,920	33,300	31,560	24,210
85+	18,460	19,180	17,820	17,510	15,060
Not known	2,400	470	730	250	420
All ages	291,280	305,610	290,420	272,520	220,740
Psychiatric diagnosis as a percentage of all diagnoses	2.7	2.7	2.5	2.3	1.9

Notes:

1. Data for 2001–01 have not been grossed for coverage and have a provisional status.
2. Figures may not add up due to rounding.
3. Codes have been taken from the 'International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems' Tenth Revision (ICD-10).

Discharges with a primary diagnosis of mental and behavioural disorders (F00-F99), England, 1996–97 to 2000–01

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Under 16	20,000	24,950	19,620	18,050	14,270
16–24	32,170	35,130	29,940	25,970	20,400
25–44	97,330	104,070	100,000	90,360	72,230
45–64	50,550	52,780	51,990	49,480	40,970
65–74	24,000	23,670	22,740	21,190	16,630
75–84	29,330	30,310	30,250	27,800	20,940
85+	16,660	17,540	16,010	15,230	12,740
Not known	2,350	450	690	230	410
All ages	272,390	288,890	271,230	248,300	198,580
Psychiatric diagnosis as a percentage of all diagnoses	2.7	2.8	2.5	2.2	1.9

Notes:

1. Data for 2001–01 have not been grossed for coverage and have a provisional status.
2. Figures may not add up due to rounding.
3. Codes have been taken from the 'International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems' Tenth Revision (ICD-10).

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what monitoring of compliance with the Human Rights Act 1998 in psychiatric units his Department has undertaken in the last three years; and what resources have been made available for this. [38367]

Jacqui Smith: The Mental Health Act Commission's role is to routinely visit all hospitals and registered nursing homes with detained patients to monitor the operation of the Mental Health Act and interview detained patients in private. It is also their role to monitor complaints made by detained patients through the NHS complaints procedures and monitor the operation of the consent to treatment safeguards and the Mental Health Act Code of Practice. New legislation following the reform of the Mental Health Act 1983 will fully comply with the Human Rights Act 1998.

Correspondence

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when a substantive reply will be given to Dr. R. D. Fouracre's letter of 1 August 2001, concerning continence management services. [36840]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to the question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The Department has no record of receiving this correspondence. The hon. Member's office have been asked to supply a duplicate.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average response time was for responding to departmental correspondence; what percentage of letters took longer than one month for a response; and what percentage took longer than three months for a response in each of the last five years. [37441]

Ms Blears: The available information is in the table, which shows the percentage of letters replied to within the Department's service first targets of 20 working days.

Year	*Volume of letters*	*Percentage increase*	*Percentage of replies sent on target*
1998	10,648	—	61.0
1999	18,346	Up 72.0	47.0
2000	18,621	Up 1.5	50.0
2001	19,665	Up 5.6	60.0

Health Action Zones

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what independent evaluation has been made of the work of health action zones. [37382]

Ms Blears: The national independent evaluation of health action zones (HAZ) is due to be completed by December 2002 and is being conducted by a consortium led by Professor Ken Judge of the University of Glasgow. In addition, each HAZ is carrying out a local evaluation. Some reports have already been published and are available locally and at www.Haznet.org.uk.

Social Work Training

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will issue guidance to social services departments to ensure that care workers will not be charged when undertaking their training for the NVQ level II as set out in the domiciliary care standards. [37694]

Jacqui Smith: There is no intention either implied or stated in the draft National Minimum Standards for Domiciliary Care to levy a charge on home care workers for their NVQ training.

Foot Health Care

Barbara Follett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many chiropodists/podiatrists were employed in the NHS in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [38214]

Ms Blears: The information requested is shown in the table.

Qualified staff employed in chiropody/podiatry in England as at 30 September each year

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Headcount	3,290	3,320	3,370	3,470	3,560
Whole-time equivalents	2,730	2,750	2,770	2,850	2,890

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest ten.
2. Due to rounding totals may not equal the sum of component parts.

Source:

Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census

Herbal Medicines

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) on what basis the decision was made to require 30 years' continuous usage to be demonstrated before a licence could be obtained for herbal medicinal products as specified in the EU traditional herbal medicinal products directive; and if he will make a statement; [38287]

(2) on what basis the decision was made to apply the same testing and manufacturing standards to herbal medicinal products as active pharmaceuticals as specified in the EU traditional herbal medicinal products directive; and if he will make a statement. [38286]

Ms Blears: The recent proposal by the European Commission for a directive of the European Parliament and Council on traditional herbal medicinal products will be subject to the normal processes of scrutiny and negotiation applicable to proposals for European legislation.

The proposed directive would not affect the existing arrangements whereby a marketing authorisation may be obtained for a herbal medicine, based on evidence of safety, quality and efficacy. The directive would, however, put in place an additional route to the market for traditional herbal medicines under which evidence of traditional use would replace the requirement to demonstrate efficacy and, in many cases, also allow a simplified safety assessment. Any figure for a stipulated period of use, such as 30 years, which may be agreed during negotiations is likely to be one which is generally recognised by European Union member states as indicating that a herbal medicine can reasonably be accepted as having genuinely traditional usage.

Herbal medicines with a marketing authorisation and those with a traditional use registration would typically be likely to share similar product characteristics. The proposed quality standards are already successfully met by the many companies, both in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in the European Union, which hold marketing authorisations in relation to herbal medicines. Existing European regulatory guidelines on herbal medicines are intended to be applied in a way that is appropriate to the product under consideration and we envisage that this would continue to be the case under a traditional use registration scheme.

Equipment Leasing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the equipment leasing arrangements entered into by his Department in each of the last four years; and what the cost is to public funds in each case. [39079]

Ms Blears: The only equipment directly leased by the Department (excluding agencies) for its own use is post room equipment at an approximate cost of £76,000 per annum.

Emergency Readmissions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place a copy of the emergency readmission figures for Q3 2001–02 in the Library. [39165]

Ms Blears: Emergency readmission figures for quarter 3, 2001–02 have been placed in the Library.

Domiciliary Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he has taken to address the issues identified in the 10 Annual report of the Chief Inspector of Social Services 2000–01 paragraph 3.71 regarding domiciliary care. [39167]

Jacqui Smith: We expect that the National Minimum Standards for domiciliary care will be implemented from July 2002. Quality issues such as reliability of domiciliary care are addressed in the draft National Minimum Standards, which we published in October 2001. Decisions about registration of domiciliary care agencies by the National Care Standards Commission will take account of compliance with the Standards.

NHS Estate (Repair and Maintenance)

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of *(a)* essential, *(b)* non-essential and *(c)* all buildings in the NHS estate in England are classified as being in Estatecode condition (i) A, (ii) B, (iii) C and (iv) D. [39140]

Ms Blears: Information in respect of the percentage of 'essential' and 'non-essential' buildings in the National Health Service Estate which are classified as being in Estatecode condition A, B, C, D, is not collected centrally. Similarly, information that is collected centrally in respect of the percentage of 'all buildings' relates to NHS trusts and is not broken down into the A, B, C, D classifications.

A figure which is available is the average percentage of the occupied floor area of all NHS trust buildings that is in physical condition C and D (ie. below conditions A and B).

The latest available figure for 2000–01 indicates this figure to be 18 per cent. In comparison with the previous year when the figure was 24 per cent, this indicates a general reduction in the percentage of the estate in which 'all buildings' are below physical conditions A and B.

Please note that these figures exclude empty NHS trust buildings, premises or facilities which may be awaiting disposal.

Alcohol and Drug Misuse

Mr. Hopkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths were attributable to alcohol misuse in each of the last five years. [38653]

Yvette Cooper: Information collected centrally about the cause of deaths does not systematically record whether a death is attributable to alcohol misuse. A number of health and lifestyle factors can contribute to diseases such as cancer, stroke and coronary heart disease, and it can be difficult to isolate alcohol consumption as the most important of these factors.

A research review commissioned by the Department in 1997 concluded that between 5,000 and 40,000 deaths are attributable to alcohol misuse each year in England and Wales.

Mr. Hopkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff in his Department work on measures specifically to tackle *(a)* alcohol misuse and *(b)* drugs misuse. [38652]

Ms Blears: Within the Sexual Health & Substance Misuse branch, there are 20 staff members working on drug treatment, drug prevention and alcohol issues. Within the wider Department, staff from other branches work alongside the dedicated substance misuse team e.g. statisticians and finance experts. It is not possible to quantify numbers as they work in a wide range of policy areas.

Private Hospital Treatment

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the private hospitals which have carried out operations on behalf of the NHS since 1997; what has been the total cost incurred to the NHS in respect of each private hospital which has carried out operations on behalf of the NHS over that time; and what the total cost of all operations carried out in private hospitals in the UK and abroad on behalf of the NHS has been since 1997. [38469]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested in respect of individual private hospitals is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

For information on the total cost of all operations carried out in private hospitals in the United Kingdom and abroad, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) on 15 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 855W.

Cystic Fibrosis

Mrs. Betty Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce or amend regulations in order to provide free NHS prescriptions for medication required to treat cystic fibrosis. [38657]

Ms Blears: Our policy for national health service prescriptions dispensed in England is that, with the exception of contraceptives, exemption applies to a person rather than to the type of medication prescribed. Further, our policy is to give priority to helping people who may have difficulty in paying charges, rather than extending the exemption arrangements to people with other medical conditions including cystic fibrosis. Arrangements for NHS prescriptions dispensed in Wales are a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

Waiting Times

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting times in accident and emergency units were in each *(a)* constituency and *(b)* health authority in England since 1992; and what the most recent 12 month figures are. [38341]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The average waiting time in accident and emergency units is not collected.

However, the NHS Plan set a new target for Accident and Emergency: reduce the maximum wait in Accident and Emergency from arrival to admission, transfer or discharge to four hours by 2004.

With the following interim milestones;

75 per cent. of patients attending Accident and Emergency to wait 4 hours or less from arrival to admission, transfer or discharge by March 2002.

90 per cent. of patients attending Accident and Emergency to wait 4 hours or less from arrival to admission, transfer or discharge by March 2003.

In line with this, from August 2001, the Department has collected data on total time in Accident and Emergency from arrival to transfer, admission or discharge. Information suggests that the national health service is on track to meet the March 2002 milestone. Currently 77 per cent. of all Accident and Emergency attenders spend four hours or less in Accident and Emergency.

Information on the number of patients waiting from admission from an accident and emergency department is also collected and the latest information is available on the Department's website www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for which procedures he guarantees six-month maximum waiting time. [40695]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 5 March 2002]*: At present, no procedures are guaranteed a six-month maximum waiting time. However, from 1 April 2002, all patients waiting for their first out-patient appointment will be guaranteed to be seen within six months. This is in line with the targets set out in the NHS Plan.

The NHS Plan sets out this Government's targets for improving NHS waiting times. By the end of March 2005, the maximum waiting time for all in-patients will have been cut from 18 now down to 15, 12, nine and eventually to six months and the maximum waiting time for initial out-patient appointments will be cut to three months. Urgent cases will continue to [illegible] treated in preference and in accordance with clinical need.

Detailed waiting time data are available in the Library.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if health purchasing authorities set minimum waiting times in contracts with NHS and independent providers; and if he has offered guidance on securing minimum waiting times. [40692]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 5 March 2002]*: Maximum waiting times for first out-patient appointments from GP referral and for in-patient appointments are set out in the NHS Plan. From 1 April 2002, the maximum waiting time from GP referral to a first outpatient appointment will be six months and the maximum waiting time for an in-patient appointment will be 15 months. Maximum waiting times will fall on a staged basis each year up to 2005, when the maximum waiting time for a first out-patient appointment will be three months and the maximum waiting time for an in-patient appointment will be six months.

Primary care organisations and strategic health authorities are expected to purchase adequate care from NHS and independent health care providers in order to ensure patients are treated within the maximum waiting times standards.

There are no minimum waiting times standards set nationally.

NHS Procurement

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the objectives of the NHS procurement initiative ProCure21. [38688]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 28 February 2002]*: The information is as follows:

NHS ProCure21—objectives

NHS ProCure21 aims to improve capital procurement in the national health service through improving design, strengthening the performance of the NHS as a client, benchmarking and promoting better performance, and establishing partnering frameworks to deliver capital schemes. Its objectives are to deliver better facilities, faster and at greater value for money for the NHS, thus delivering significant benefits for patients, staff and visitors. Further details are set out in "Sold On Health", published May 2000, and on the NHS ProCure21 website www.nhs-procure21.gov.uk.

The National Audit Office uses NHS ProCure21 as a case study in its report "Modernising Construction" (January 2001). Details can be found at www.nao.gov.uk/publications.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what procurement methods are available to NHS organisations for projects over the threshold of £1 million in capital value, subject to the approval of the ProCure21 steering group; and what the criteria are for successful application of the alternative methods. [38691]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 28 March 2002]*: HM Treasury's "Constructing a Better Government Client—Achieving Excellence" identifies the procurement methods available to the national health service. In May 2000 we published "Sold on Health" jointly with HM Treasury and the Public Services Productivity Panel, which set out our proposals for improving capital procurement in the NHS, NHS ProCure 21, and includes details for the piloting of partnering in the north west and west midlands areas.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who the principal supply chain partner is in each of the regions where the NHS pilot procurement initiative ProCure21 is in place; who the core suppliers are; and what the selection criteria are for those core suppliers for each of these regions where the initiative is in place. [38690]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 28 February 2002]*: We are currently undertaking the selection process to identify principal supply chain partners for the two pilot areas for the partnering element of NHS ProCure21. The selections reflect the European Community works directive and include technical and commercial criteria as well as commitment to working closely with the national health service, delivering continuous improvement and innovation, and the ability to deliver high quality facilities for the NHS.

Three Star Hospitals

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research the performance management unit has conducted into three star hospitals; and how many of them have been found to be failing. [38461]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 28 February 2002]*: No research has been done on the performance of three star national health service trusts since the performance ratings were published last September. Their performance will be re-assessed as part of the next national annual rating exercise.

Autism (West Sussex)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what facilities are available in the West Sussex health authority area for children with autism disorders. [39232]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 28 February 2002]*: Children with autism will benefit from a range of initiatives we are taking to improve services for disabled children. As part of the quality protects programme, we set new national objectives for children's services which for the first time set out clear outcomes for children and, in some instances, give precise targets which local authorities are expected to achieve. These were updated in "Valuing People".

Disabled children have been made a priority area in quality protects. The last spending review made substantial additional funding available for the children's services grant which now totals £180 million in 2001–02,

£220 million in 2002–03 and £290 million in 2003–04. Of this, £60 million has been earmarked for services for disabled children and their families—£15 million in 2001–02 and 2002–03 and £30 million in 2003–04.

Currently in West Sussex, there are a number of specific provisions for children with autism. For example, in the Mid Sussex NHS Trust area, a recently developed Joint Assessment Team to diagnose children with these needs. This includes, a consultant paediatrician, a clinical psychologist, a speech therapist and a diagnostic services. Treatment is usually given in conjunction with education and there are special schools in the area where this joint approach can be implemented effectively.

Another example comes from the Sussex Weald and Downs NHS Trust area, where the Community Paediatric Service runs a child development centre for autistic children who are under five, and work is undertaken with schools who have pupils with these needs. The over fives are dealt with by CAMHS. The trust also works with the Autistic Society to ensure that all treatment is suitable for each individual's needs.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions on the designation of the cases of children who suffer from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder as eligible for disability living allowance. [39386]

Jacqui Smith: I have had no such discussions but understand that parents of children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder can claim disability living allowance and have their child's entitlement assessed in the normal way.

Elderly Care

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the spending on care of the elderly per resident of pensionable age in each social service authority was in England and Wales *(a)* this year and *(b)* in each of the previous five years; what the average of the spending on care of the elderly per resident of pensionable age in (i) England, (ii) Wales, and (iii) the north-west of England was (A) this year and (B) in each of the previous five years. [39456]

Jacqui Smith: Information on spending on social care for the elderly per resident of pensionable age is not available centrally. Table 1 shows spending per financial year on social care of the elderly per resident aged 65 or over for each council with social services responsibilities in England from 1995–96 to 1999–2000 (the latest year for which data are available). As a result of local government reorganisation, there are differences in the councils in existence during this period. Table 2 shows the average spend on care of the elderly per resident aged 65 or over for England and north-west England. Data for Wales are the responsibility of the National Assembly for Wales.

Table 1: Expenditure per financial year on social care of the elderly per resident aged 65 or over for each council with social services responsibilities

£

	1995–96	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
Avon	516	—	—	—	—
Barking and Dagenham	631	702	766	831	933
Barnet	633	669	730	789	848
Barnsley	505	543	542	569	616
Bath and North East Somerset UA	—	421	544	557	594
Bedfordshire (old)	541	592	—	—	—
Bedfordshire (remaining)	—	—	610	615	643
Berkshire	534	555	720	—	—
Bexley	551	662	714	722	760
Birmingham	628	695	781	842	915
Blackburn with Darwen UA	—	—	—	890	971
Blackpool UA	—	—	—	723	755
Bolton	552	642	750	755	809
Bournemouth UA	—	—	606	602	595
Bracknell Forest UA	—	—	—	650	681
Bradford	564	614	840	894	942
Brent	756	798	881	847	880
Brighton and Hove UA	—	—	672	730	795
Bristol UA	—	741	712	859	943
Bromley	434	474	504	657	719
Buckinghamshire (old)	514	540	—	—	—
Buckinghamshire (remaining)	—	—	592	621	671
Bury	689	838	740	806	864
Calderdale	735	801	858	924	963
Cambridgeshire (old)	409	372	434	—	—
Cambridgeshire (remaining)	—	—	—	511	558
Camden	1,148	1,254	1,317	1,589	1,599
Cheshire (old)	459	601	653	—	—
Cheshire (remaining)	—	—	—	691	747
City of London	2,102	2,241	2,216	2,227	2,167
Cleveland	452	—	—	—	—
Cornwall	348	458	543	569	548
Coventry	525	594	611	670	737
Croydon	590	730	775	787	814

Table 1: Expenditure per financial year on social care of the elderly per resident aged 65 or over for each council with social services responsibilities

£

	1995–96	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
Cumbria	427	509	541	556	597
Darlington UA	—	—	435	398	695
Derby UA	—	—	698	747	792
Derbyshire (old)	558	633	—	—	—
Derbyshire (remaining)	—	—	671	481	673
Devon (old)	465	539	585	—	—
Devon (remaining)	—	—	—	566	629
Doncaster	654	769	817	857	908
Dorset (old)	349	409	—	—	—
Dorset (remaining)	—	—	435	413	437
Dudley	526	541	642	699	719
Durham (old)	479	539	—	—	—
Durham (remaining)	—	—	597	630	849
Ealing	627	668	800	744	1,024
East Riding of Yorkshire UA	—	477	591	612	774
East Sussex (old)	377	491	—	—	—
East Sussex (remaining)	—	—	462	505	536
Enfield	608	697	787	723	705
Essex (old)	453	507	516	—	—
Essex (remaining)	—	—	—	519	580
Gateshead	613	694	855	890	963
Gloucestershire	297	343	340	474	478
Greenwich	742	784	941	1,004	1,055
Hackney	1,386	1,399	1,439	1,501	1,542
Halton UA	—	—	—	790	855
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,105	1,166	1,325	1,454	1,831
Hampshire (old)	433	502	—	—	—
Hampshire (remaining)	—	—	478	479	488
Haringey	1,027	1,060	1,108	1,160	1,158
Harrow	600	602	627	715	765
Hartlepool UA	—	638	696	625	663
Havering	500	581	631	634	627
Hereford and Worcester	414	457	447	—	—
Herefordshire UA	—	—	—	350	502
Hertfordshire	494	535	570	595	659
Hillingdon	602	624	636	653	708
Hounslow	639	685	717	844	929
Humberside	523	—	—	—	—
Isle of Wight UA	383	504	521	558	605
Isles of Scilly	549	540	577	718	844
Islington	1,279	1,439	1,597	1,417	1,577
Kensington and Chelsea	930	944	1,014	1,013	1,067
Kent (old)	504	567	548	—	—
Kent (remaining)	—	—	—	580	625
Kingston upon Hull UA	—	675	646	875	1,005
Kingston upon Thames	606	691	718	808	858
Kirklees	616	684	698	761	822
Knowsley	472	466	531	593	522
Lambeth	973	1,037	1,132	1,119	1,068
Lancashire (old)	527	613	691	—	—
Lancashire (remaining)	—	—	—	707	734
Leeds	571	602	650	664	701
Leicester UA	—	—	482	782	761
Leicestershire (old)	499	530	—	—	—
Leicestershire (remaining)	—	—	514	525	547
Lewisham	887	955	1,000	1,056	1,125
Lincolnshire	344	357	390	534	556
Liverpool	827	876	825	937	1,005
Luton UA	—	—	700	759	802
Manchester	802	905	905	1,014	1,138
Medway Towns UA	—	—	—	641	734
Merton	554	636	670	777	900
Middlesbrough UA	—	561	603	658	851
Milton Keynes UA	—	—	672	703	781
Newcastle upon Tyne	533	568	680	709	779
Newham	1,160	1,138	1,167	1,139	1,172
Norfolk	448	527	568	618	647
North East Lincolnshire UA	—	533	542	615	727
North Lincolnshire	—	691	709	692	744
North Somerset UA	—	453	503	536	561
North Tyneside	350	385	551	586	621
North Yorkshire (old)	453	—	—	—	—
North Yorkshire (remaining)	—	510	547	581	636

Table 1: Expenditure per financial year on social care of the elderly per resident aged 65 or over for each council with social services responsibilities

£

	1995–96	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
Northamptonshire	486	533	544	597	609
Northumberland	505	661	781	811	869
Nottingham UA	—	—	—	798	934
Nottinghamshire (old)	630	705	733	—	—
Nottinghamshire (remaining)	—	—	—	734	743
Oldham	676	746	816	831	920
Oxfordshire	438	480	538	568	613
Peterborough UA	—	—	—	477	615
Plymouth UA	—	—	—	740	754
Poole UA	—	—	458	488	503
Portsmouth UA	—	—	766	808	867
Reading UA	—	—	—	612	793
Redbridge	517	575	631	672	723
Redcar and Cleveland UA	—	584	613	659	682
Richmond upon Thames	622	707	763	762	792
Rochdale	635	675	721	769	830
Rotherham	575	615	756	807	895
Rutland UA	—	—	488	512	554
Salford	605	815	873	946	1,029
Sandwell	609	725	828	887	956
Sefton	531	595	624	715	767
Sheffield	641	701	716	783	820
Shropshire (old)	443	521	582	—	—
Shropshire (remaining)	—	—	—	580	620
Slough UA	—	—	—	867	935
Solihull	402	422	425	442	470
Somerset	306	320	333	347	466
South Gloucestershire UA	—	403	420	461	502
South Tyneside	587	653	705	721	767
Southampton UA	—	—	638	689	772
Southend UA	—	—	—	546	554
Southwark	1,194	1,227	1,290	1,756	1,503
St. Helens	594	659	698	833	992
Staffordshire (old)	505	555	—	—	—
Staffordshire (remaining)	—	—	538	582	654
Stockport	598	683	676	749	788
Stockton on Tees UA	—	623	634	775	830
Stoke-on-Trent	—	—	755	815	894
Suffolk	466	547	568	596	641
Sunderland	563	628	652	856	963
Surrey	442	485	493	565	570
Sutton	606	658	693	772	841
Swindon UA	—	—	551	453	551
Thameside	560	672	741	773	864
Telford and Wrekin UA	—	—	—	732	815
Thurrock UA	—	—	—	657	688
Torbay UA	—	—	—	642	713
Tower Hamlets	1,203	1,294	1,338	1,318	1,483
Trafford	417	556	609	651	728
Wakefield	499	560	561	609	671
Walsall	508	610	670	724	884
Waltham Forest	679	750	890	996	1,037
Wandsworth	922	1,021	1,090	1,133	1,184
Warrington UA	—	—	—	718	799
Warwickshire	421	477	507	527	550
West Berkshire UA	—	—	—	672	711
West Sussex	432	490	529	514	523
Westminster	1,009	1,049	1,144	1,148	1,206
Wigan	520	580	626	692	743
Wiltshire (old)	382	482	—	—	—
Wiltshire (remaining)	—	—	474	472	631
Windsor and Maidenhead UA	—	—	—	555	616
Wirral	555	590	656	662	770
Wokingham UA	—	—	—	454	562
Wolverhampton	688	791	843	879	938
Worcestershire	—	—	—	490	550
York UA	—	516	545	575	617

UA = Unitary Authority

Sources:

1. Population data—Office for National Statistics
2. Expenditure data—form RO3

Table 2: Expenditure per financial year on social care of the elderly per resident aged 65 or over for England and north-west England

£

	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000
North-west (old)	544	647	695	740	—
Merseyside	631	675	693	770	—
North-west (new)	—	—	—	—	806
England	526	590	633	671	725

Sources:

1. Population data—Office for National Statistics
2. Expenditure data—form RO3

Gynaecologists

Joyce Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* female and *(b)* male gynaecologists are employed by each local health authority in England. [39515]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

There has been a 42 per cent. increase in female obstetric and gynaecology consultants since 1997.

Number of hospital medical staff, of which consultants within the obstetrics and gynaecology specialty by gender and health authority[1], *as at 30 September 2001*

		All staff			Consultants		
		All	Male	Female	All	Male	Female
England		4,150	2,170	1,980	1,220	930	290
Health authority							
Avon	QD8	100	40	60	20	20	10
Barking and Havering	QAP	50	20	30	20	10	10
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	QEW	40	20	20	10	10	0
Barnsley	QCG	20	10	10	0	0	[2]—
Bedfordshire	QA6	40	20	20	10	10	0
Berkshire	QA7	70	30	40	10	10	0
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich	QEY	60	40	30	20	20	0
Birmingham	QD9	130	70	60	40	40	10
Bradford	QDD	50	20	20	10	10	0
Brent and Harrow	QAR	40	20	20	10	10	0
Buckinghamshire	QA8	60	30	30	10	10	0
Bury and Rochdale	QCT	30	10	20	10	10	0
Calderdale and Kirklees	QDT	50	20	30	10	10	0
Cambridge	QER	70	40	30	20	20	0
Camden and Islington	QAT	120	50	70	40	20	20
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	QDV	20	10	10	10	0	0
County Durham	QDE	40	30	10	20	10	0
Coventry	QEA	30	20	10	10	10	0
Croydon	QAD	20	10	0	10	0	0
Doncaster	QCK	30	20	20	10	10	0
Dorset	QDW	50	30	20	10	10	[2]—
Dudley	QEC	20	10	10	10	0	0
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	QAV	110	50	60	30	20	10
East Kent	QAE	50	40	10	20	20	0
East Lancashire	QCX	40	20	20	20	10	10
East London and The City	QAW	100	50	50	40	30	10
East Riding	QDF	40	30	20	10	10	0
East Surrey	QAK	30	20	10	10	10	0
East Sussex	QAM	50	30	20	20	10	0
Gateshead and South Tyneside	QDG	50	20	20	10	10	0
Gloucestershire	QDY	30	20	20	10	10	0
Herefordshire	QED	10	10	0	0	0	[2]—
Hertfordshire	QEX	70	40	30	20	20	0
Hillingdon	QA2	20	10	10	10	0	0
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	QEV	50	30	20	10	10	0
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	QA3	80	40	40	30	20	10
Kingston and Richmond	QAG	30	10	20	10	0	0
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	QAH	180	80	100	30	20	10
Leeds	QDH	80	40	40	20	20	0
Leicestershire	QCL	80	40	40	20	20	0
Lincolnshire	QCM	40	20	20	10	10	[2]—
Liverpool	QC2	70	40	40	20	20	10
Manchester	QC3	80	30	50	20	10	10
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	QAJ	60	30	30	20	10	10
Morecambe Bay	QC4	30	20	10	0	0	[2]—
Newcastle and North Tyneside	QDJ	50	30	30	10	10	0
Norfolk	QET	60	40	20	20	10	0
North and East Devon	QDX	30	20	20	10	10	0
North and Mid Hampshire	QD1	30	20	10	10	0	0
North Cheshire	QCV	20	10	10	10	10	0
North Cumbria	QDK	20	20	10	10	10	0
North Derbyshire	QCH	20	10	10	0	0	0
North Essex	QAX	60	30	20	10	10	0
North Nottinghamshire	QCN	20	10	10	10	0	0

Number of hospital medical staff, of which consultants within the obstetrics and gynaecology specialty by gender and health authority[1], *as at 30 September 2001*

		All staff			*Consultants*		
		All	*Male*	*Female*	*All*	*Male*	*Female*
North Staffordshire	QEH	30	20	10	10	10	0
North West Lancashire	QCY	50	20	20	10	10	0
North Yorkshire	QDR	60	40	30	20	10	0
Northamptonshire	QCC	40	20	20	10	10	0
Northumberland	QDM	40	20	20	10	10	0
Nottingham	QCP	70	30	40	20	10	10
Oxfordshire	QCE	60	30	30	20	20	0
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	QA5	20	10	10	10	0	0
Rotherham	QCQ	20	10	10	10	0	0
Salford and Trafford	QC6	30	20	20	10	10	0
Sandwell	QEE	20	10	10	0	0	[2]—
Sefton	QC7	40	20	10	10	10	0
Sheffield	QCR	50	20	30	20	20	10
Shropshire	QEF	20	10	10	10	0	0
Somerset	QD5	30	20	10	10	10	0
South and West Devon	QD6	50	30	20	10	10	0
South Cheshire	QCW	60	30	30	20	10	0
South Derbyshire	QCJ	30	10	20	10	10	0
South Essex	QAY	30	20	20	10	10	0
South Humber	QDL	30	20	10	10	10	0
South Lancashire	QC1	10	0	0	0	0	[2]—
South Staffordshire	QEJ	30	20	10	10	10	0
Southampton and South West Hampshire	QD3	50	20	30	20	10	0
St. Helens and Knowsley	QC5	20	10	10	10	0	0
Stockport	QC8	20	10	10	10	0	0
Suffolk	QCF	40	20	20	10	10	0
Sunderland	QDN	30	10	20	10	0	0
Tees	QDP	50	30	20	20	10	10
Wakefield	QDQ	20	10	10	10	10	[2]—
Walsall	QEK	20	10	10	0	0	0
Warwickshire	QEL	30	10	10	10	10	0
West Kent	QAF	60	40	30	20	20	0
West Pennine	QC9	30	20	10	10	10	0
West Surrey	QAL	70	30	40	20	10	10
West Sussex	QAN	60	30	20	10	10	0
Wigan and Bolton	QDA	40	20	20	10	10	0
Wiltshire	QD7	30	20	20	10	10	[2]—
Wirral	QDC	30	20	10	10	10	0
Wolverhampton	QEM	20	10	10	10	10	0
Worcester	QEN	40	20	20	10	10	0

[1] Staff holding appointments in more than one HA are included separately in each HA. The sum of HA totals therefore differ slightly from the England total and a direct comparison between England total and HA totals is not advised.

[2] Denotes zero

Notes:

1. 0 denotes 5 or less
2. Figures rounded to the nearest 10

Source:

Department of Health 2001 medical and dental workforce census

Compensation

Joyce Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the total amount of compensation paid in out of court settlements for patients in each local health authority area in each of the last 10 years. [39516]

Ms Blears: The Department does not hold figures for all aspects of litigation made against the national health service and therefore the information requested is not held centrally.

Dentists

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists in England were trained at dental schools in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Northern Ireland; and what proportion each represents of the total. [39818]

Ms Blears: The number of General Dental Service (GDS) dentists in England trained at dental schools in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and the percentage of the total number of dentists is shown in the table.

The total number of dentists covers principals on a HA list, their assistants and vocational dental practitioners.

	Area of qualification			
	Scotland	*Wales*	*Northern Ireland*	*Dentists working in England*
Principals				
Number	1,099	444	91	16,124
Percentage of principals	7	3	1	—
Assistants				
Number	43	4	3	1,214
Percentage of assistants	4	0	0	—
VDPs				
Number	25	15	7	599
Percentage of VDPs	4	3	1	—
Total				
Number	1,167	463	101	17,937
Percentage of total dentists	—	—	—	—

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists in England were trained at dental schools outside the United Kingdom; and what proportion they represent of the total. [39817]

Ms Blears: The number of General Dental Service (GDS) dentists in England trained at dental schools outside the UK and the percentage of the total number of dentists in England at 31 December 2001 is shown in the table. The figures exclude dentists whose title of registration is shown as Statutory Exams and dentists awaiting entry.

The total number of dentists covers principals on a HA list, their assistants and vocational dental practitioners.

General Dental Service: Number of dentists trained at dental schools outside the UK and the percentage of the total number of dentists in England at 31 December 2001

	Dentists qualified overseas	*Dentists working in England*	*Percentage of dentists who work in England qualified overseas*
Principals	2,094	16,124	13
Assistants	717	1,214	59
VDPs	1	599	0
Total	2,812	17,937	16

Hearing Aids

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to announce in which health authorities his Christmas Eve announcement on hearing aids will be implemented; and what criteria will determine his choice of health authority. [39815]

Jacqui Smith: We have invited expressions of interest by 8 March 2002 from all health communities not yet involved in the modernising hearing aid services project. Decisions will be made shortly thereafter, based on a number of criteria including geographical distribution, preparedness, and the support of the whole local health community.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists in the Isle of Wight were trained at each Scottish dental school; and what proportion they represent of the total. [39816]

Ms Blears: Out of a total of 40 General Dental Service (GDS) dentists working in the Isle of Wight at the end of January 2002, 7 or 18 per cent. were trained in Scotland.

Of the seven dentists who were trained in Scotland, four were trained in Dundee, two in Glasgow, and one in Edinburgh.

Dentists include principals on an HA list, their assistants and vocational dental practitioners.

Health Expenditure

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of expenditure on health was spent in the last 12 months of patients' lives in the latest year for which figures are available. [39626]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not held centrally.

Asthma

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children have been treated for asthma in each London borough, in each of the last five years. [39966]

Mr. Hutton: The figures shown represent the number of admissions to national health service trusts within the London health authorities, where the main diagnosis was asthma[1] in the last five years. Figures represent children aged up to 14 years.

Number of admissions to NHS Hospitals in England where the main diagnosis was asthma[1] by health authority of treatment, (London health authorities); finished episodes; children aged 0–14, 1996–97 to 2000–01.

Health authority of treatment	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*All 5 years*
QA2 Hillingdon	426	384	351	162	126	1,449
QA3 Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	523	480	357	196	255	1,811
QA4 Enfield and Haringey	403	292	273	257	224	1,449
QA5 Redbridge and Waltham Forest	509	395	286	226	222	1,638
QAA Bexley and Greenwich	395	306	288	211	204	1,404
QAC Bromley	173	166	120	142	122	723
QAD Croydon	252	271	215	154	173	1,065
QAG Kingston and Richmond	0	0	0	135	122	257
QAH Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	967	796	722	645	552	3,682
QAJ Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	775	539	553	473	378	2,718
QAP Barking and Havering	244	195	179	149	136	903
QAQ Barnet	175	220	224	232	206	1,057
QAR Brent and Harrow	272	219	198	213	125	1,027
QAT Camden and Islington	452	401	311	297	325	1,786
QAV Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	395	423	532	428	398	2,176
QAW East London and The City	579	588	678	655	508	3,008
Total	6,540	5,675	5,287	4,575	4,076	26,153

[1] Asthma (ICD-10: 'J45' thru 'J46X'

Notes:

1. Admissions are defined as the first period of in-patient care under one consultant within one healthcare provider. Please note that admissions do not represent the number of in-patients, as a person may have more than one admission within the year.

2. The main diagnosis is the first of seven diagnosis fields in the Hospital Episode Statistics data set, and provides the main reason why the patient was in hospital.

3. Figures have not yet been adjusted for shortfalls in data (i.e. the data are ungrossed).

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

NHS Catering

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the applicants for the national franchise for NHS catering; and if he will name the successful applicant. [39776]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* The initial exercise to examine his proposal identified that further work was required to fully explore the significant and complex issues which a franchise option raises. This work is continuing and, as previously noted any franchise arrangements will be subject to European Union regulations on open competition within the community. Since we have not yet reached this stage there are no applicants.

Quality Protects

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much each local authority responsible for implementing the Quality Protects programme under LAC(98)28 and subsequent circulars budgeted to spend in 2001–02; and what the *(a)* actual and *(b)* budgeted spend was in the previous two years. [39311]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* The tables set out the quality protects grant allocations made to local authorities with social services functions for 1998–99, 1999–2000, 2000–01 and 2001–02, together with the actual amounts spent by each authority on implementing the programme in the first three years.

Quality Protects—1998–99

£

	Grant allocation	*Expenditure incurred*
Barking and Dagenham	31,000.00	38,214.00
Barnet	32,500.00	25,347.00
Barnsley	32,500.00	35,296.00
Bath and North East Somerset	32,500.00	40,299.00
Bedfordshire	32,500.00	32,674.41
Bexley	32,500.00	32,848.00
Birmingham	32,500.00	32,500.00
Blackburn with Darwen	32,500.00	33,897.00
Blackpool	32,500.00	31,637.00
Bolton	32,500.00	32,691.41
Bournemouth	32,500.00	14,154.00
Bracknell Forest	32,500.00	32,500.00
Bradford	32,500.00	31,790.00
Brent	32,500.00	34,466.75
Brighton and Hove	32,500.00	32,943.00
Bristol	32,500.00	34,494.12
Bromley	32,500.00	32,747.00
Buckinghamshire	32,500.00	45,153.00
Bury	32,500.00	49.807.00
Calderdale	32,500.00	32,934.38
Cambridgeshire	32,500.00	35,680.00
Camden	32,500.00	34,825.00
Cheshire	32,500.00	32,500.00
City of London	3,000.00	5,000.00
Cornwall	32,500.00	45,563.00
Coventry	32,500.00	33,213.00
Croydon	32,500.00	34,973.00
Cumbria	32,500.00	33,110.00
Darlington	32,500.00	34,242.00
Derby	32,500.00	32,980.00
Derbyshire	32,500.00	32,816.00
Devon	32,500.00	32,500.00
Doncaster	32,500.00	25,544.89
Dorset	32,500.00	34,502.00
Dudley	32,500.00	34,544.00
Durham	32,500.00	34,542.42
Ealing	32,500.00	32,500.00
East Riding of Yorkshire	32,500.00	35,820.00
East Sussex	32,500.00	32,500.00
Enfield	32,500.00	32,979.00
Essex	32,500.00	32,500.00
Gateshead	32,500.00	31,731.00
Gloucestershire	32,500.00	32,100.00
Greenwich	32,500.00	32,756.00
Hackney	32,500.00	34,369.22
Halton	32,500.00	35,696.82
Hammersmith and Fulham	32,500.00	32,831.37
Hampshire	32,141.00	33,035.18
Haringey	32,500.00	37,046.00
Harrow	32,500.00	32,584.00
Hartlepool	32,500.00	24,801.00
Havering	32,500.00	32,774.00
Herefordshire	32,500.00	37,345.14
Hertfordshire	32,500.00	49,257.00
Hillingdon	32,500.00	9,531.95
Hounslow	32,500.00	48,093.00
Isle of Wight	32,500.00	32,510.00
Isles of Scilly	3,000.00	3,000.00
Islington	32,500.00	30,435.00
Kensington and Chelsea	32,500.00	32,500.00
Kent	32,500.00	32,500.00
Kingston upon Hull	32,500.00	32,500.00
Kingston upon Thames	32,500.00	32,633.62
Kirklees	32,500.00	30,062.64
Knowsley	32,500.00	28,347.00
Lambeth	32,500.00	32,885.00
Lancashire	32,500.00	39,783.00
Leeds	32,500.00	32,500.00
Leicester City	32,500.00	34,424.00
Leicestershire	32,500.00	33,871.57
Lewisham	32,500.00	33,754.00
Lincolnshire	32,500.00	32,653.16
Liverpool	32,500.00	34,541.00
Luton	32,500.00	32,561.72
Manchester	32,500.00	32,500.00
Medway	32,500.00	32,500.00
Merton	32,500.00	28,252.00
Middlesbrough	32,500.00	32,753.00
Milton Keynes	32,500.00	33,221.00
Newcastle upon Tyne	32,500.00	33,812.36
Newham	32,500.00	32,804.00
Norfolk	32,500.00	42,691.00
North East Lincolnshire	32,500.00	31,225.14
North Lincolnshire	32,500.00	35,322.31
North Somerset	32,500.0[illegible]	32,544.00
North Tyneside	32,500.00	33,095.00
North Yorkshire	32,500.00	27,199.00
Northamptonshire	32,500.00	32,500.00
Northumberland	32,500.00	34,072.00
Nottingham	32,500.00	38,107.00
Nottinghamshire	32,500.00	38,123.00
Oldham	32,500.00	38,652.00
Oxfordshire	32,500.00	32,500.00
Peterborough	32,500.00	32,464.00
Plymouth	32,500.00	32,160.00
Poole	32,500.00	32,500.00
Portsmouth	32,500.00	29,616.00
Reading	32,500.00	35,109.00
Redbridge	32,500.00	32,717.43
Redcar and Cleveland	32,500.00	32,613.09
Richmond upon Thames	32,500.00	33,316.00
Rochdale	32,400.00	32,508.00

Quality Protects—1998–99

£

	Grant allocation	*Expenditure incurred*
Rotherham	32,500.00	32,529.00
Rutland	32,500.00	33,195.00
Salford	32,500.00	23,827.00
Sandwell	32,500.00	32,266.00
Sefton	32,500.00	32,500.00
Sheffield	32,500.00	25,662.47
Shropshire	32,500.00	29,299.77
Slough	32,500.00	16,867.27
Solihull	32,500.00	34,505.00
Somerset	32,500.00	32,500.00
South Gloucestershire	32,500.00	34,734.00
South Tyneside	32,500.00	23,052.00
Southampton	32,500.00	33,189.39
Southend-on-Sea	32,500.00	40,515.00
Southwark	32,500.00	34,360.00
St. Helens	32,500.00	30,968.00
Staffordshire	32,500.00	34,085.00
Stockport	32,500.00	34,713.00
Stockton-on-Tees	32,500.00	35,342.00
Stoke-on-Trent	32,500.00	35,677.67
Suffolk	32,500.00	38,950.89
Sunderland	32,500.00	30,181.00
Surrey	32,500.00	54,612.00
Sutton	32,500.00	32,752.00
Swindon	32,500.00	32,503.00
Tameside	32,500.00	36,302.00
Telford and the Wrekin	32,500.00	32,500.00
Thurrock	32,500.00	34,860.00
Torbay	32,500.00	32,613.00
Tower Hamlets	32,500.00	42,513.71
Trafford	32,500.00	32,934.00
Wakefield	32,500.00	33,535.00
Walsall	32,500.00	32,185.00
Waltham Forest	32,500.00	47,143.00
Wandsworth	32,500.00	50,533.00
Warrington	32,500.00	34,160.00
Warwickshire	32,500.00	32,178.06
West Berkshire	32,500.00	34,500.00
West Sussex	32,500.00	33,210.00
Westminster	32,500.00	28,139.00
Wigan	32,500.00	32,841.00
Wiltshire	32,500.00	33,783.00
Windsor and Maidenhead	32,500.00	34,324.00
Wirral	32,500.00	35,055.00
Wokingham	32,500.00	34,954.00
Wolverhampton	32,500.00	20,200.00
Worcestershire	32,500.00	32,500.00
York	32,500.00	32,508.00

Quality Protects—1999–2000

£

	Grant allocation	*Expenditure incurred*
Barking and Dagenham	378,953.00	379,302.00
Barnet	540,110.00	504,748.00
Barnsley	278,096.00	278,096.00
Bath and North East Somerset	154,973.00	184,663.00
Bedfordshire	356,687.00	366,929.00
Bexley	280,521.00	291,000.00
Birmingham	2,591,786.00	2,898,652.28
Blackburn with Darwen	273,182.00	262,138.00
Blackpool	236,835.00	238,381.00
Bolton	396,975.00	397,000.00
Bournemouth	229,845.00	231,331.00
Bracknell Forest	117,522.00	132,308.00
Bradford	884,401.00	900,285.62
Brent	976,211.00	985,653.00
Brighton and Hove	429,491.00	429,470.00
Bristol	713,666.00	719,140.39
Bromley	358,039.00	358,851.00
Buckinghamshire	387,837.00	388,279.00
Bury	219,510.00	232,419.00
Calderdale	259,611.00	276,897.00
Cambridgeshire	455,000.00	455,000.00
Camden	876,424.00	879,962.00
Cheshire	592,040.00	592,040.00
City of London	16,286.00	11,130.00
Cornwall	488,072.00	488,000.00
Coventry	541,941.00	542,000.00
Croydon	717,253.00	812,613.00
Cumbria	444,301.00	464,002.00
Darlington	132,436.00	140,870.00
Derby	386,441.00	386,838.00
Derbyshire	604,045.00	735,009.00
Devon	624,424.00	624,423.00
Doncaster	395,605.00	408,032.91
Dorset	302,431.00	302,777.00
Dudley	324,165.00	350,641.00
Durham	599,079.00	413,704.00
Ealing	838,296.00	939,685.00
East Riding of Yorkshire	215,630.00	202,183.00
East Sussex	540,272.00	540,360.00
Enfield	522,279.00	522,718.00
Essex	1,268,060.00	1,281,958.00
Gateshead	297,693.00	305,222.00
Gloucestershire	523,690.00	422,352.00
Greenwich	760,609.00	1,111,456.00
Hackney	1,227,189.00	1,187,987.47
Halton	226,711.00	226,711.00
Hammersmith and Fulham	698,515.00	713,096.63
Hampshire	1,075,112.00	1,399,134.00
Haringey	987,351.00	935,986.00
Harrow	305,314.00	313,712.00
Hartlepool	147,244.00	147,261.00
Havering	252,220.00	253,926.50
Herefordshire	153,445.00	154,712.08
Hertfordshire	1,066,840.00	1,096,700.00
Hillingdon	380,758.00	459,984.00
Hounslow	514,769.00	529,483.00
Isle of Wight	150,553.00	146,269.00
Isles of Scilly	12,261.00	13,160.00
Islington	1,023,002.00	1,043,385.00
Kensington and Chelsea	560,122.00	560,122.00
Kent	1,458,706.00	1,458,706.00
Kingston upon Hull	499,512.00	502,223.00
Kingston upon Thames	174,194.00	174,194.00
Kirklees	547,178.00	551,729.00
Knowsley	422,471.00	432,643.00
Lambeth	1,573,817.00	1,590,658.00
Lancashire	1,365,835.00	1,474,651.00
Leeds	1,048,900.00	1,276,450.00
Leicester City	686,801.00	688,298.00
Leicestershire	411,678.00	461,898.00
Lewisham	1,111,262.00	1,111,262.00
Lincolnshire	565,509.00	579,047.00
Liverpool	1,149,943.00	1,150,061.00
Luton	359,059.00	380,737.35
Manchester	1,394,058.00	1,394,058.00
Medway	299,593.00	300,103.00
Merton	323,737.00	324,354.00
Middlesbrough	313,474.00	317,586.00
Milton Keynes	293,645.00	186,105.82
Newcastle upon Tyne	539,359.00	793,068.00
Newham	1,070,696.00	1,072,986.00
Norfolk	722,580.00	760,075.72
North East Lincolnshire	224,251.00	225,105.00

Quality Protects—1999–2000

£

	Grant allocation	*Expenditure incurred*
North Lincolnshire	158,955.00	166,489.81
North Somerset	151,981.00	158,211.00
North Tyneside	278,868.00	278,868.00
North Yorkshire	438,571.00	439,000.00
Northamptonshire	659,698.00	660,000.00
Northumberland	296,640.00	262,759.00
Nottingham	701,493.00	703,983.00
Nottinghamshire	712,558.00	713,150.00
Oldham	374,513.00	375,010.00
Oxfordshire	586,043.00	544,518.94
Peterborough	246,202.00	248,789.00
Plymouth	438,917.00	436,756.00
Poole	140,267.00	141,318.00
Portsmouth	345,827.00	345,827.00
Reading	254,616.00	249,277.00
Redbridge	375,752.00	258,973.00
Redcar and Cleveland	222,123.00	223,894.91
Richmond upon Thames	[illegible]9,650.00	192,684.00
Rochdale	371,504.00	391,712.00
Rotherham	327,544.00	346,518.00
Rutland	32,573.00	33,178.00
Salford	425,589.00	417,187.00
Sandwell	544,269.00	544,035.00
Sefton	411,861.00	394,443.00
Sheffield	761,467.00	811,922.00
Shropshire	209,125.00	209,125.00
Slough	250,111.00	250,168.00
Solihull	223,969.00	212,64[illegible].00
Somerset	436,982.00	446,236.00
South Gloucestershire	178,281.00	186,677.00
South Tyneside	275,020.00	275,020.00
Southampton	411,525.00	439,783.00
Southend-on-Sea	259,093.00	260,576.00
Southwark	1,269,129.00	1,244,778.00
St. Helens	233,469.00	244,736.00
Staffordshire	674,749.00	695,807.00
Stockport	294,530.00	294,530.00
Stockton-on-Tees	267,578.00	267,578.00
Stoke-on-Trent	347,894.00	357,048.00
Suffolk	602,421.00	614,941.00
Sunderland	497,704.00	588,099.00
Surrey	868,583.00	956,223.00
Sutton	249,730.00	249,730.00
Swindon	201,610.00	200,214.00
Tameside	314,349.00	319,189.00
Telford and the Wrekin	206,945.00	208,529.02
Thurrock	194,469.00	196,586.84
Torbay	174,772.00	174,648.00
Tower Hamlets	1,034,484.00	1,008,313.81
Trafford	289,088.00	289,088.00
Wakefield	367,119.00	367,119.00
Walsall	462,560.00	462,560.00
Waltham Forest	669,924.00	770,139.00
Wandsworth	866,095.00	1,115,666.00
Warrington	194,551.00	250,672.65
Warwickshire	426,028.00	475,478.00
West Berkshire	112,417.00	116,624.00
West Sussex	676,043.00	737,735.00
Westminster	755,373.00	752,691.00
Wigan	360,316.00	337,962.00
Wiltshire	357,641.00	362,613.00
Windsor and Maidenhead	123,163.00	130,990.00
Wirral	542,273.00	716,388.00
Wokingham	85,864.00	85,864.00
Wolverhampton	470,718.00	510,181.00
Worcestershire	493,543.00	493,543.00
York	164,894.00	165,715.00

Quality Protects—2000–01

£

	Grant allocation	*Expenditure incurred*
Barking and Dagenham	608,000.00	611,455.00
Barnet	861,000.00	893,098.00
Barnsley	440,000.00	440,000.00
Bath and North East Somerset	243,000.00	280,140.00
Bedfordshire	560,000.00	560,990.02
Bexley	443,000.00	453,000.00
Birmingham	4,097,000.00	5,218,092.00
Blackburn with Darwen	430,000.00	430,000.00
Blackpool	379,000.00	385,893.00
Bolton	625,000.00	643,729.00
Bournemouth	365,000.00	367,974.00
Bracknell Forest	182,000.00	181,975.00
Bradford	1,398,000.00	1,433,280.00
Brent	1,540,000.00	1,915,281.00
Brighton and Hove	684,979.00	693,342.00
Bristol	1,134,000.00	1,260,884.00
Bromley	563,000.00	563,313.00
Buckinghamshire	609,000.00	609,033.00
Bury	351,000.00	364,262.00
Calderdale	410,000.00	417,905.00
Cambridgeshire	718,000.00	766,472.00
Camden	1,404,000.00	1,406,438.00
Cheshire	930,000.00	950,552.00
City of London	26,000.00	29,143.17
Cornwall	764,000.00	942,122.00
Coventry	853,000.00	972,269.00
Croydon	1,140,000.00	1,147,234.00
Cumbria	706,000.00	922,012.00
Darlington	212,000.00	219,974.00
Derby	612,000.00	612,937.00
Derbyshire	957,000.00	1,673,176.00
Devon	986,000.00	985,999.00
Doncaster	618,000.00	623,050.55
Dorset	479,000.00	492,973.00
Dudley	507,000.00	507,000.00
Durham	951,000.00	1,057,617.00
Ealing	1,334,000.00	1,334,000.00
East Riding of Yorkshire	344,000.00	333,481.00
East Sussex	857,000.00	864,520.00
Enfield	822,000.00	822,650.00
Essex	1,990,000.00	2,116,430.00
Gateshead	470,000.00	496,699.00
Gloucestershire	821,000.00	821,000.00
Greenwich	1,211,000.00	1,211,000.00
Hackney	1,954,000.00	1,955,166.00
Halton	357,000.00	359,638.00
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,124,000.00	1,142,347.00
Hampshire	1,687,000.00	2,042,846.49
Haringey	1,572,000.00	1,582,662.00
Harrow	485,000.00	486,752.00
Hartlepool	234,000.00	235,458.00
Havering	395,000.00	396,171.90
Herefordshire	244,000.00	247,263.23
Hertfordshire	1,674,000.00	1,676,854.00
Hillingdon	605,000.00	646,175.00
Hounslow	815,000.00	815,000.00
Isle of Wight	241,000.00	244,593.00
Isles of Scilly	14,000.00	34,838.00
Islington	1,648,000.00	1,647,993.00
Kensington and Chelsea	916,000.00	916,000.00
Kent	2,302,000.00	2,764,100.00
Kingston upon Hull	795,000.00	796,810.00
Kingston upon Thames	277,000.00	277,000.00
Kirklees	861,000.00	901,324.26
Knowsley	669,000.00	699,825.00
Lambeth	2,525,000.00	2,601,897.00
Lancashire	2,167,000.00	2,642,885.00
Leeds	1,661,000.00	1,679,286.00
Leicester City	1,082,000.00	1,082,000.00
Leicestershire	646,000.00	710,468.00

Quality Protects—2000–01

£

	Grant allocation	*Expenditure incurred*
Lewisham	1,768,000.00	1,768,000.00
Lincolnshire	890,000.00	930,627.00
Liverpool	1,834,000.00	1,914,036.00
Luton	561,000.00	567,250.00
Manchester	2,221,000.00	2,221,000.00
Medway	470,000.00	470,000.00
Merton	512,000.00	502,405.00
Middlesbrough	495,000.00	502,598.00
Milton Keynes	457,000.00	456,173.42
Newcastle upon Tyne	854,000.00	996,393.06
Newham	1,701,000.00	1,843,266.00
Norfolk	1,149,000.00	1,180,423.57
North East Lincolnshire	356,000.00	355,976.00
North Lincolnshire	250,000.00	251,764.09
North Somerset	238,000.00	238,981.00
North Tyneside	443,000.00	443,000.00
North Yorkshire	700,000.00	707,999.00
Northamptonshire	1,035,000.00	1,035,000.00
Northumberland	467,000.00	467,220.00
Nottingham	1,108,000.00	1,108,000.00
Nottinghamshire	1,128,000.00	2,901,208.00
Oldham	588,000.00	601,020.00
Oxfordshire	925,000.00	939,298.21
Peterborough	387,000.00	388,193.00
Plymouth	694,179.00	694,179.00
Poole	218,000.00	218,000.00
Portsmouth	544,000.00	592,575.00
Reading	403,000.00	417,917.00
Redbridge	593,000.00	758,776.00
Redcar and Cleveland	346,000.00	346,247.50
Richmond upon Thames	319,000.00	319,838.00
Rochdale	589,000.00	588,976.00
Rotherham	512,000.00	512,294.00
Rutland	45,000.00	45,723.00
Salford	669,000.00	680,518.00
Sandwell	849,000.00	849,000.00
Sefton	654,000.00	670,780.00
Sheffield	1,207,000.00	1,225,668.00
Shropshire	328,000.00	333,060.00
Slough	389,000.00	389,000.00
Solihull	350,000.00	347,096.00
Somerset	688,000.00	759,562.00
South Gloucestershire	278,000.00	303,963.00
South Tyneside	435,000.00	435,000.00
Southampton	651,000.00	663,079.00
Southend-on-Sea	411,000.00	412,465.00
Southwark	2,025,000.00	2,066,349.00
St. Helens	369,000.00	391,049.00
Staffordshire	1,059,000.00	1,189,904.00
Stockport	467,000.00	524,336.00
Stockton-on-Tees	423,000.00	469,565.00
Stoke-on-Trent	555,000.00	560,646.83
Suffolk	951,000.00	961,689.00
Sunderland	779,000.00	862,870.00
Surrey	1,358,000.00	1,371,619.00
Sutton	392,000.00	392,000.00
Swindon	319,045.00	374,704.00
Tameside	498,000.00	602,510.00
Telford and the Wrekin	329,000.00	329,023.00
Thurrock	309,000.00	307,426.09
Torbay	278,000.00	282,249.00
Tower Hamlets	1,633,000.00	1,631,601.00
Trafford	455,000.00	473,152.00
Wakefield	581,000.00	581,304.00
Walsall	726,000.00	734,203.00
Waltham Forest	1,056,000.00	1,093,252.00
Wandsworth	1,374,000.00	1,783,815.00
Warrington	306,000.00	377,608.84
Warwickshire	669,000.00	727,910.00
West Berkshire	176,000.00	176,003.00
West Sussex	1,062,000.00	1,501,822.00
Westminster	1,234,000.00	1,237,813.00
Wigan	566,000.00	612,741.00
Wiltshire	564,000.00	610,375.00
Windsor and Maidenhead	193,000.00	209,907.00
Wirral	858,000.00	857,313.67
Wokingham	133,000.00	137,081.00
Wolverhampton	737,000.00	845,092.00
Worcestershire	779,000.00	779,000.00
York	261,000.00	267,779.00

Quality Protects—2001–02

£

	Grant allocation
Barking and Dagenham	1,632,988.00
Barnet	2,057,315.00
Barnsley	1,142,954.00
Bath and North East Somerset	593,912.00
Bedfordshire	1,430,673.00
Bexley	1,198,185.00
Birmingham	9,655,311.00
Blackburn with Darwen	1,065,518.00
Blackpool	978,614.00
Bolton	1,535,893.00
Bournemouth	904,237.00
Bracknell Forest	455,457.00
Bradford	3,363,661.00
Brent	3,430,645.00
Brighton and Hove	1,677,490.00
Bristol	2,777,929.00
Bromley	1,470,905.00
Buckinghamshire	1,502,091.00
Bury	907,997.00
Calderdale	1,025,748.00
Cambridgeshire	1,761,439.00
Camden	3,356,252.00
Cheshire	2,304,651.00
City of London	82,563.00
Cornwall	1,917,024.00
Coventry	2,069,504.00
Croydon	2,767,307.00
Cumbria	1,781,595.00
Darlington	514,503.00
Derby	1,521,252.00
Derbyshire	2,475,919.00
Devon	2,470,550.00
Doncaster	1,566,459.00
Dorset	1,190,383.00
Dudley	1,295,132.00
Durham	2,426,324.00
Ealing	3,215,189.00
East Riding of Yorkshire	863,087.00
East Sussex	2,169,433.00
Enfield	2,087,477.00
Essex	5,023,904.00
Gateshead	1,226,995.00
Gloucestershire	2,043,753.00
Greenwich	3,017,843.00
Hackney	4,503,350.00
Halton	889,886.00
Hammersmith and Fulham	2,864,562.00
Hampshire	4,180,823.00
Haringey	3,705,070.00
Harrow	1,156,863.00
Hartlepool	580,453.00
Havering	1,008,188.00

Quality Protects—2001–02

	£ Grant allocation
Herefordshire	605,137.00
Hertfordshire	4,090,242.00
Hillingdon	1,609,311.00
Hounslow	1,943,464.00
Isle of Wight	631,612.00
Isles of Scilly	16,703.00
Islington	3,992,342.00
Kensington and Chelsea	2,379,035.00
Kent	5,974,305.00
Kingston upon Hull	1,980,321.00
Kingston upon Thames	763,996.00
Kirklees	2,061,623.00
Knowsley	1,664,574.00
Lambeth	6,005,303.00
Lancashire	5,433,080.00
Leeds	4,152,471.00
Leicester City	2,475,945.00
Leicestershire	1,605,199.00
Lewisham	4,196,109.00
Lincolnshire	2,162,767.00
Liverpool	4,573,026.00
Luton	1,356,539.00
Manchester	5,280,917.00
Medway	1,221,478.00
Merton	1,293,921.00
Middlesbrough	1,190,012.00
Milton Keynes	1,178,019.00
Newcastle upon Tyne	2,154,096.00
Newham	3,931,866.00
Norfolk	2,924,401.00
North East Lincolnshire	902,525.00
North Lincolnshire	644,589.00
North Somerset	611,398.00
North Tyneside	1,163,286.00
North Yorkshire	1,702,211.00
Northamptonshire	2,624,204.00
Northumberland	1,232,552.00
Nottingham	2,657,610.00
Nottinghamshire	2,768,099.00
Oldham	1,479,374.00
Oxfordshire	2,225,509.00
Peterborough	997,387.00
Plymouth	1,679,210.00
Poole	574,483.00
Portsmouth	1,342,536.00
Reading	980,588.00
Redbridge	1,427,212.00
Redcar and Cleveland	833,365.00
Richmond upon Thames	799,982.00
Rochdale	1,450,451.00
Rotherham	1,315,989.00
Rutland	93,367.00
Salford	1,721,616.00
Sandwell	2,117,629.00
Sefton	1,629,565.00
[illegible]	2,998,839.00
Shropshire	805,546.00
Slough	945,849.00
Solihull	905,895.00
Somerset	1,721,509.00
South Gloucestershire	738,464.00
South Tyneside	1,130,676.00
Southampton	1,598,346.00
Southend-on-Sea	1,098,103.00
Southwark	5,071,690.00
St. Helens	968,376.00
Staffordshire	2,680,547.00
Stockport	1,206,047.00
Stockton-on-Tees	1,048,730.00
Stoke-on-Trent	1,501,346.00
Suffolk	2,318,876.00
Sunderland	1,924,230.00
Surrey	3,409,520.00
Sutton	978,215.00
Swindon	826,353.00
Tameside	1,253,245.00
Telford and the Wrekin	836,362.00
Thurrock	812,839.00
Torbay	740,053.00
Tower Hamlets	3,937,273.00
Trafford	1,085,639.00
Wakefield	1,564,260.00
Walsall	1,710,437.00
Waltham Forest	2,548,677.00
Wandsworth	3,354,460.00
Warrington	766,475.00
Warwickshire	1,699,102.00
West Berkshire	412,229.00
West Sussex	2,681,810.00
Westminster	3,201,093.00
Wigan	1,437,294.00
Wiltshire	1,394,412.00
Windsor and Maidenhead	494,625.00
Wirral	2,141,008.00
Wokingham	332,082.00
Wolverhampton	1,815,910.00
Worcestershire	1,975,395.00
York	630,353.00

Note:

The figures for expenditure for each local authority for the years 1998–99 and 1999–2000 are wholly based on audit forms provided by the authority's chief finance officer and an auditor appointed by the Audit Commission. The figures for 2000–01 include a small number of figures from pre-audit certificates and may therefore be subject to change.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what arrangements *(a)* his Department and *(b)* local authorities have made to publicise the reporting and referral system established in line with the quality protects programme under LAC(98)28 and subsequent circulars; [39310]

(2) how many local authorities *(a)* have full compliant policies and procedures, *(b)* have draft policies and procedures and *(c)* are not compliant with the protection of children guidance, quality protects programme under LAC(98)28 and subsequent circulars. [39309]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* Local Authority Circular (98)28 gave councils and their partners details of the quality protects programme. It explained that the Department would be publishing further guidance covering issues such as reporting and referral systems and child protection procedures.

The Department published the "Framework for Assessment of Children in Need and their Families" in April 2000. It has undertaken an extensive programme of dissemination at local, regional and national levels. The quality protects regional development workers have played a key role in ensuring agencies know about and are implementing the assessment framework. The Department has worked with local councils and consulted software suppliers to develop and publish "Core Information Requirements" for children's social services to help improve councils' capability in managing information.

The Department held a series of regional roadshows in the autumn of 1999 on the final draft version of the "Working Together to Safeguard Children" guidance, following which 100,000 copies of the revised guidance were distributed to child protection professionals through the area child protection committee network. The social services inspectorate is currently participating, together with other statutory inspectorates, in a series of themed inspections looking at the effectiveness of safeguards for children across all relevant statutory agencies.

Developments and best practice under quality protects are publicised in a number of ways, including the quality protects newsletter and website www.doh.gov.uk/qualityprotects.

Local authorities' progress in implementing quality protects is monitored through a number of mechanisms, including inspections, position statements and annual management action plans. In their autumn position statements, 83 per cent. of councils stated that they had implemented the assessment framework by 30 September 2001. A further 13 per cent. expect to have done so by 1 April 2002 at the latest. The remaining six authorities expect to implement during 2002–03.

Local authorities submitted their fourth quality protects management action plans in January 2002. These set out their progress in and plans for delivering the quality protects programme. The social services inspectorate is currently assessing these plans. We will be publishing an overview report of the plans and their evaluation later in the year. Copies of the national overview reports for the previous three years' management action plans are available in the Library.

Strategic Health Authorities

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance has been issued concerning public consultation over the proposed locations of the headquarters of the new strategic health authorities; and if he will make a statement. [36750]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* The location of new health authority headquarters is regarded as a matter for the chairman (designate) and chief executive (designate) of those authorities to determine. As part of the consultation on health authority boundaries held last autumn, the Department advised that option appraisals should be conducted for appropriate national health service and Government Office for the regions accommodation available within the area. Decisions will have been made in the light of these appraisals.

Community Health Councils

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 8 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1238W, on community health councils, if he will list the CHCs in England which submitted representations supporting their abolition. [36822]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* The listening exercise did not ask stakeholders whether community health councils should be abolished. The information requested is not available centrally.

Free Nursing Care

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many people who were receiving nursing care on 1 October 2001 are waiting to be assessed for free nursing care; [38351]

(2) what the average time for an individual to be assessed for free nursing care has been in the last three years; [38353]

(3) how many people were receiving nursing care on 1 October 2001. [38352]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* The likely number of those self funders eligible for national health service funded nursing care at any one time is based on the results of a survey carried out in June 2001. The total number of self funders identified through the survey was 42,700.

At 31 December 2001 around 80 per cent. of determinations had been competed. Around 95 per cent. had been completed by the end of February. These figures would include those in a home on 1 October 2001, when NHS funded care was introduced, as well as those who had entered a home after that date.

Determinations for NHS funded nursing care were only introduced with effect from 1 October 2001.

Heart Services

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many purchasing health authorities regularly purchase heart services from *(a)* private providers and *(b)* the King Edward VII Hospital, Midhurst. [40691]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The Department has recently conducted a survey of national health service bodies on the levels of activity being commissioned in the independent sector and the accompanying cost. Findings from the survey will be published shortly. The published results are likely to include details on the number of NHS organisations within the returning sample that commissioned specific heart procedures during the survey period. It is not our intention to publish information in respect of individual hospitals, since it was not collected for that purpose.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the capacity is for tertiary heart surgery in the south-east region; and what the average waiting times were at each centre in the last 12 month period. [40696]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* Our aim is that in time the national health service should be able to offer all heart patients fair access to the surgical and other specialist services they need in a local unit and within an acceptable time. This is why we have developed a national strategy to expand the capacity to perform heart operations. The capital investment programme means that we are investing £230 million in 12 schemes to provide new and bigger heart surgery facilities.

Currently, cardiac surgery is carried out in Brighton, Southampton and Oxford. Capacity is flexible as it depends on a number of factors, including availability of staff, Intensive Treatment Unit beds and hours of theatre usage. Approximately half of the tertiary cardiac procedures for South-east residents are carried out in London centres.

Average waiting times, by month, for south-east centres over the last 12 months are shown in the table.

Datayear 2000–01—Mean waiting time (days)—Revascualisations by operation type

CABG	*RGU Brighton health care NHS Trust*[1]	*RHM Southampton University hospital*	*RTH Oxford Radcliffe hospital NHS*
Month of admission			
April	60	319	157
May	63	292	102
June	96	282	152
July	112	258	163
August	101	221	131
September	128	282	113
October	143	205	113
November	91	147	161
December	82	177	123
January	126	219	146
February	118	156	141
March	140	171	241

[1] Activity was building up from April 2000

Source:

HES

Television Sets

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* analogue and *(b)* integrated digital television sets his Department has purchased in each of the last 24 months; and if he will make a statement. [38171]

Ms Blears: The Department does not record centrally or separately the numbers of televisions, analogue or integrated digital, that it purchases for use within the Department. Specific guidance on the purchase of televisions is not published or disseminated to officials, but buyers are required to follow normal departmental procurement guidance and procedures whenever purchasing such goods.

Capita

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many contracts the Department has with Capita; and how much they are worth. [38374]

Ms Blears: Since April 2001, five separate business areas within the Department have commissioned work from Capita Business Services and Capita SHG Resourcing, to a total value of £271,700.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 7 March 2002

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Non-Governmental Organisations

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list non-governmental organisations operating in the south-west region that receive public funds from her Department; and what amount of annual funding they received in the most recent year for which figures are available. [39184]

Clare Short: We have offered funding support to the following organisations in the south-west during the financial year 2001–02.

	£
Action on Disability and Development	422,908
Action for Conservation through Tourism	83,030
African Initiatives	62,695
Motivation	28,815
Prompt	10,206
Resources Project	34,330
Development Education in Dorset	95,005
GLADE Global and Development Education	16,095
Gloucestershire Development Education Centre	105,333
Cornish Association for Development Education	4,875
Somerset Goes Global, county council	99,120
Gloucestershire county council	17,000
Gloucester Development Education Centre	31,674

The total amount of funding offered for 2001–02 is £1,011,086.

Capita Group

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the contracts that have been awarded to the Capita Group by the Department. [39346]

Clare Short: The information requested is in the table.

	Contract	£
Capita RAS	Recruitment consultants for Pillar IV of United Nations Interim Administration in Kosovo	180,000
	Open recruitment exercise for DFID	15,101
Capital Business Services	Ethiopia police development assistance programme	1,204,616
Capita Grosvenor Ltd.	Assistance with resource accounting and budgeting overview training	34,377
	Efficiency scrutiny of accounts department	34,050

Angola

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the humanitarian situation in Angola, with particular respect to children; and if she will make a statement. [39610]

Clare Short: The humanitarian consequences of the continuing conflict in Angola are appalling. The forced displacement of people by both sides continues, with children and other vulnerable groups bearing the brunt of the suffering. The death of Jonas Savimbi may provide a chance for the Government and UNITA to make a lasting peace and we urge both sides to respond to this opportunity. The UK has contributed £2.5 million in the last year to the humanitarian relief effort through UN agencies and NGOs, as well as our contribution through the EU.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many people were employed in a press or public relations function in her Department on 1 January in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000, *(e)* 2001 and *(f)* 2002. [39942]

Clare Short: We currently employ four press officers, and this number of posts has remained the same since January 1997. We also have small teams working to raise awareness and understanding of international development issues through educational work, publications, policy forums and other related activities.

Press Releases

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many press releases were issued by her Department *(a)* between 1 May and 31 December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive. [40036]

Clare Short: The number of press releases issued is as follows:

	Number issued
1997[1]	47
1998	74
1999	82
2000	29
2001	38

[1] May to December

South Africa

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with Ministers in the South African Government with regard to the HIV/AIDS situation in South Africa. [40662]

Clare Short: During my last visit to South Africa in October 2001, I met Deputy President Jacob Zuma, who heads the South African National AIDS Council (SANAC) to discuss the HIV/AIDS situation in South Africa. I also discussed the situation with former President Nelson Mandela.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to provide support and assistance to the Nations Trust in South Africa. [40661]

Clare Short: My Department has no plans to provide support and assistance to the Nations Trust in South Africa.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent meetings her Department *(a)* has had and *(b)* proposes to have with the Nations Trust in South Africa. [40660]

Clare Short: My Department has had no meetings with the Nations Trust in South Africa. No such meetings are planned.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Breast-Feeding

Jean Corston: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if she will make a statement about breast-feeding facilities in the House. [41788]

Mrs. Roe: The Administration Committee recommended to Mr. Speaker that the House should give a lead to the country in promoting breast-feeding by allowing mothers to feed their babies wherever it is appropriate to them in the Palace of Westminster and associated buildings; that suitable, non-toilet facilities should be made available for feeding babies; and that staff should be provided with information in order that they can answer queries from breast-feeding mothers about available facilities.

On the Speaker's instructions the Serjeant at Arms has undertaken a comprehensive study with a view to improving the facilities that are available in the House for nursing mothers. The study has identified a number of improvements. I will ask the Administration Committee to examine these at its next meeting with a view to recommending early implementation.

Mr. Speaker has informed the Committee that, after undertaking broadly-based consultations within the House, he has decided to make no change to the current regulations under which breast-feeding is not permitted in the Chamber, in Committees or in the public galleries.

A copy of Mr. Speaker's letter and details of the improvements identified by the Sergeant at Arms have been placed in the Library.

Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

Peter Bottomley: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, how many days were added to the pay of the former Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards after 1 January. [40199]

Mr. Kirkwood: Details of pay for any individual employed by the House of Commons Commission are confidential. I refer the hon. Gentleman to my previous reply to him, 27 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1277W.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, if he will make a statement on how and when the Commission first had the information that the former Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards was not being paid for every day she was working. [39629]

Mr. Kirkwood: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave him on 2 May 2001, *Official Report*, columns 640–41W. The House as a good employer would always wish to ensure that work done is properly remunerated. Arrangements to reimburse the former Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards were made administratively following claims submitted by her, as the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) informed the House on 13 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 267.

TREASURY

National Insurance Fund

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the expenditure of the excess surplus in the National Insurance Fund for each of the past four years. [41278]

Dawn Primarolo: Any balance in the Fund is invested. Estimates of the income from investments in specific years are given in the Government Actuary's annual report on the level of the Fund.

Taxation

Mr. Swire: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the tax burden was in real terms at the end of financial years *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 2000–01. [40833]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Historical series of net taxes and social security contributions as a per cent. of GDP are available in table B22 of the November 2001 pre-Budget report.

Euro

David Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the value of euro-based transactions in the United Kingdom since the introduction of the currency. [41421]

Ruth Kelly: The Government have not made any estimate of the value of euro-based transactions in the UK.

It is entirely a commercial decision for UK business to determine whether or not they wish to accept the euro or any other foreign currency.

Guaranteed Equity Bond

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the accounting arrangements are for National Savings and Investments' Guaranteed Equity Bond. [41860]

Ruth Kelly: As with most other National Savings and Investments instruments, the Guaranteed Equity Bond is a liability of the National Loans Fund (NLF). In order to avoid exposing the Exchequer to movements in equity prices, a matching equity index swap is being executed on the Debt Management Account (DMA) and managed by the debt management office.

Both NLF and DMA accounting officers are content that appropriate risk management processes are in place and that, overall, the GEB will provide cost-effective financing for the Government that is consistent with National Savings and Investments' primary role.

London Underground

Harry Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether capital expenditure on London Underground by means of *(a)* private sector companies and *(b)* bond funding raised by London Underground falls within the general Government financial deficit; whether such capital expenditure is included in the public sector borrowing requirement; and if he will make a statement. [34901]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Capital expenditure by London Underground Ltd. (LUL), financed by its own borrowing, would increase public sector net borrowing. It would not increase general Government net borrowing because LUL is a public corporation: these are outside general Government but inside the public sector.

In accordance with generally accepted accounting practice, capital invested in London Underground (LUL) by the private sector would not count as public expenditure, and would not be included in the public sector net borrowing, if LUL's accountants and auditors judged that the assets should be off LUL's balance sheet. If the accountants judged it was on balance sheet then it would count as public expenditure and be included in public sector net borrowing. The PPP saves £2 billion of public money over the first 15 years of the contracts, in comparison to funding the same projects through conventional public investment. The plans will mean £16 billion of investment over the next 15 years.

Advertising

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the expenditure was per campaign for the five most expensive media advertising campaigns his Department undertook in the past five parliamentary Sessions including the current parliamentary Session in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland; and for the last two parliamentary Sessions and the current Session, when each advertising campaign (i) began and (ii) ended in (A) Scotland, (B) England, (C) Wales and (D) Northern Ireland; [37400]

(2) what the cost was of media advertising in each of the past five parliamentary Sessions including the current Session, for his Department in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Northern Ireland; and for the last two parliamentary Sessions and the current parliamentary Session, what the media advertising expenditure was per month in (i) England, (ii) Wales and (iii) Northern Ireland. [37412]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) on 17 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 423W, and also to the answer given to the then hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn) on 18 May 2000, *Official Report*, column 258W, by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary.

As to further breakdown of expenditure, such figures could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Lakshmi Mittal

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reason *(a)* Mr. Lakshmi Mittal and *(b)* LNM Holdings do not pay tax in the United Kingdom. [38399]

Dawn Primarolo: Under Section 182 of the Finance Act 1989 the Inland Revenue cannot comment on the tax position of particular individuals or companies.

Foreign Nationals (Tax Status)

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will implement his plan to end non-domiciled tax status for foreign nationals resident in the UK. [38772]

Dawn Primarolo: The Chancellor keeps all aspects of the tax system under review.

Staff Promotion

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the criteria are for the promotion of staff in HM Customs and Excise in Northern Ireland who have served less than one year in their previous job band. [40402]

Mr. Boateng: The criteria for the promotion of staff in HM Customs and Excise in Northern Ireland vary depending on the specific job requirements, as defined in the role profile for each job, and the business requirements which the vacancy seeks to address.

Staff serving less than one year in their current job band may apply for a post in a higher job band providing they meet the criteria for the post and their conduct, performance and attendance clearly meet the required standards. In a promotional situation no time in band restriction applies.

Smaller Quoted Companies

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the barriers to institutional and retail investment in smaller quoted companies. [40247]

Dawn Primarolo: A number of assessments have been made. The Government commissioned the Myners Review in 2000 to look at factors that may be distorting the investment decision-making of institutions. The Review reported in March 2001 and found weaknesses in the investment process that affected all quoted companies, including smaller quoted companies. In addition, a working group on smaller quoted companies was set up in August 1998 and reported to the Treasury in October 1998. The Department of Trade and Industry also participated in two tranches of work dealing with SQC issues with findings from both published in 1999.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if a platform to encourage a wider shareholder base actively interested in investing in smaller quoted companies has been established. [40254]

Dawn Primarolo: In 1995 the London stock exchange created the Alternative Investment Market (AIM). This has helped to create a focus to encourage investor interest in smaller quoted companies with growth potential. Over 850 companies have used AIM since it was created. The Government have taken further steps to encourage investment in smaller quoted companies by introducing attractive capital gains tax taper relief for investors investing in AIM.

Tax Losses

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the tax losses due to tax-free non-domicile status in each of the last three full financial years, distinguishing between the general categories of taxation. [40562]

Dawn Primarolo: Individuals who are not domiciled here are liable on UK income and gains as they arise and on overseas income and gains which are remitted or brought to this country.

Any estimate of comparative tax yield would depend on what it was assumed would apply in place of the current rules.

Rail Journeys (Staff)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy that rail journeys undertaken by staff in his Department should ordinarily be on standard class tickets. [40437]

Ruth Kelly: Treasury officials' travel is carried out in accordance with Paragraph 8.2.1. of the 'Civil Service Management Code'.

Pensioners

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the total cost to the Exchequer of NIC rebates for those contracting out of the state earnings related pension scheme; and if he will provide separate estimates for *(a)* employees and *(b)* employers, identifying within each subtotal the rebates applicable in the case of (i) salary-related schemes and (ii) money-purchase schemes. [40766]

Ruth Kelly: This information is contained in the "Report by the Government Actuary on the Social Security Benefits Uprating Order 2002 and the Social Security Contributions Re-rating and National Insurance Funds Payments 2002" (Cm 5383).

Gender Pay Gap

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the extent of the gender pay gap among staff in his Department. [40990]

Ruth Kelly: In response to the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) task force "Just Pay" report, the Government have committed Departments and agencies to review their pay systems by April 2003 and prepare action plans to close any equal pay gaps. The Cabinet Office issued comprehensive guidance in January 2002 to assist Departments and agencies in carrying out these reviews. All Departments and agencies have until April 2003 to complete an equal pay review and prepare the necessary action plans to close any equal pay gaps.

The Inland Revenue has begun analysing its pay systems with a view to identifying any gender pay gaps. HM Treasury will shortly be developing their strategy for carrying out the review. HM Customs and Excise will be carrying out an equal pay audit during 2002.

Inflation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the basket of items used to calculate inflation was last reviewed; and what changes were made. [40941]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mr. John Bercow, dated 7 March 2002:

> The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question asking when the basket of items used to calculate inflation was last reviewed; and what changes were made. I am replying in his absence.
>
> The Retail Prices Index (RPI) is the main domestic measure of inflation in the UK. In order to keep the RPI basket representative of consumer spending patterns it is reviewed and updated annually.
>
> The RPI basket was last updated in February 2001. The changes were published in a News Release on 19th March 2001, the day before the publication of the February 2001 RPI figures. I enclose a copy of this News Release, which is also available on the National Statistics website.
>
> The next changes to the basket will be announced in a News Release on the 18th March 2002, one day before the publication of the February 2002 RPI figures. The News Release will be available on the ONS website at www.statistics.gov.uk.

Open Market Annuity Options

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to publicise open market annuity options to savers and financial advisers. [40890]

Ruth Kelly: The FSA already draw the attention of annuitants to the advantages of the open market option in their explanatory material for those buying a pension annuity.

In addition, the FSA has consulted recently on proposals that firms should be obliged to tell their personal pensions customers, at an appropriate time before their retirement, that their annuities can be bought from a different provider firm. This proposal is designed to ensure that consumers are made aware of their right to shop around to get the best annuity deal on offer to suit their circumstances.

The FSA's consultation process (which started in August 2001) recently closed. The FSA plans to publish the results of the exercise, with its decisions on next steps, shortly.

The Association of British Insurers (ABI) issued, also in August 2001, a "Statement of Good Practice for Pension Maturities".

The ABI standards give further detail about how in practice provider firms offering pension saving and income products should communicate with their customers. The guidelines should ensure that customers are more aware of the choices available to them when they begin their retirement, and are thus able to make more educated choices.

The Modernising Annuities consultation paper published by the Inland Revenue and Department for Work and Pensions in February 2002 also explains how exercising the open market option can help pensioners get better value from their pension savings. It discusses how those benefits might be more widely understood, and whether there are any further steps that might be taken to encourage people to use the open market option. The Government are keen that those with an interest think creatively about this and other ways that the annuities market might be made to work better, and would encourage those with views to submit responses to the consultation.

Contributions Agency

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what assessment he has made of the availability of staff at the Contributions Agency to people calling by telephone; and if he will make a statement. [41280]

(2) what assessment he has made of the time taken by the Contributions Agency to provide information; and if he will make a statement. [41281]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to page 112 of the Inland Revenue's annual report for the year ending 31 March 2001, which was presented to Parliament by the Paymaster General in December 2001.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the accuracy and consistency of information provided by the Contributions Agency; and if he will make a statement. [41279]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to pages 111 and 112 of the Inland Revenue's annual report for the year ending 31 March 2001, which was presented to Parliament by the Paymaster General in December 2001.

Spirits Frauds

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what studies he has commissioned into the experience of other countries in using tax stamps to deter and prevent spirits frauds. [40860]

Mr. Boateng: HM Customs and Excise are considering a wide range of issues as part of their on-going consultation on the costs, benefits and practicalities of introducing a tax stamps system, including the experience of other countries.

DEFENCE

Reserve Forces

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he plans a further call-out of members of the reserve forces; and if he will make a statement. [41787]

Dr. Moonie: In order to sustain military operations against terrorism, up to 49 members of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force will be called out compulsorily next month under the call-out order made on 11 October 2001 and Section 54 of the Reserve Forces Act 1996. The majority of those called out will undertake aircraft movements duties at the air transport main operating bases in the UK.

In addition, a new call-out order has been made under Section 56 of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 to enable reservists to continue to be called out to support operations in Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This took effect from 2 March 2002, the date the previous order expired. Only reservists who volunteer will be called out under this order.

We continue to call out members of the reserve forces to support operations in the Balkans and the no-fly zones in the region of Iraq; overall they make a very valuable contribution to our operational requirements.

HMS Fearless

Mr. Bailey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his plans are for HMS Fearless; and if he will make a statement. [41862]

Mr. Ingram: After over 36 years, HMS Fearless, the last steam-driven surface ship in the Royal Navy, will be withdrawn from service upon her return from a successful deployment on operations in support of the campaign against international terrorism later this month.

Her replacement HMS Albion will commence sea trials later in the year, before entering service in January 2003. HMS Albion and her sister ship HMS Bulwark, which on current plans will enter service towards the end of 2003, will be significantly more capable than their predecessors HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid.

The new vessels represent a major step forward in the modernisation of our amphibious shipping called for the strategic defence review. They will be equipped with vastly more sophisticated command, control and communication systems. They will also be able to deploy embarked forces much more quickly—by air and sea—and will use landing craft with 20 per cent. more landing capability and a Ro-Ro type configuration for rapid embarkation of vehicles.

Plans for the disposal of HMS Fearless are currently under review.

Chemical/Biological Weapons

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much expenditure he has incurred in the *(a)* dismantling, *(b)* management and *(c)* verification of (i) chemical and (ii) biological weapons in the states of the former Soviet Union since 1996. [40574]

Mr. Hoon: As part of Spending Review 2000, the Government decided to make available up to £12 million over the three years 2001–02 to 2003–04 for assistance to Russia with chemical weapon demilitarisation and biological non-proliferation projects. We have given priority to assistance with chemical weapons destruction, where we plan to support the provision of infrastructure which is needed for the construction and operation of the major chemical weapons destruction facility at Shchuch'ye. An essential pre-requisite to allow this work to proceed was negotiation of a legally-binding agreement with the Russian Federation. Following extensive negotiations, I signed the agreement in London on 20 December on behalf of the Government. Dr. Pak, Director-General of the Russian Munitions Agency, signed on behalf of the Russian Federation. We hope to conclude negotiations shortly on the necessary Implementation Arrangement which will allow our first project to proceed in the near future, subject to agreement of contract. Our first project will be to provide a water supply for the destruction facility, which will also benefit the local population. As a result of the need first to complete these sets of negotiations, it has not yet been possible to start implementation of assistance projects. Expenditure of some £250K has been incurred to date on setting up the assistance programme.

Verification of the destruction of chemical weapons in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention is the responsibility of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, based in the Hague. There are no agreed provisions for the verification of biological weapons.

The Ministry of Defence monitors the biological and chemical weapons capabilities of all relevant states. The costs of such monitoring in relation to the states of the former Soviet Union can not be separately identified.

War Graves (Somme)

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the French Government regarding the impact on war graves of the revised proposals to build an international airport on the Somme. [41457]

Dr. Moonie: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given on 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 166W to the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson).

Parliamentary Questions

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many answers to parliamentary questions have not been answered by his Department under exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information in each year since 1994. [29417]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* Records are not kept of the number of occasions on which Defence Ministers have not been able to answer parliamentary questions wholly or in part on grounds of commercial confidentiality. This information could be extracted from the thousands of answers given in a typical year only at disproportionate cost.

European Rapid Reaction Force

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many uniformed staff will be allocated full-time to duties connected with the European rapid reaction force. [38944]

Mr. Hoon: There is no standing European rapid reaction force. EU member states have identified a pool of forces from which units could be drawn as necessary for EU-led operations. Forces would be assembled only for the duration of any mission.

Non-Governmental Organisations

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list non-governmental organisations operating in the south-west region that receive public funds from his Department; and what amount of annual funding they received in the most recent year for which figures are available. [39190]

Dr. Moonie: This information is not held centrally in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. I am therefore unable to provide a substantive answer under the terms of Exemption 9 (voluminous and vexatious requests) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Defence Projects

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is *(a)* the estimated total project cost, *(b)* the total expenditure to date and *(c)* the planned expenditure in each of the next three years on (i) the Conventionally Armed Stand-Off Missile project, (ii) the Hercules C130J project, (iii) the Spearfish Heavyweight Torpedo project, (iv) the Astute Class Submarine project, (v) the Nimrod Maritime Reconnaissance and Attack MK4 project, (vi) the Attack Helicopter project, (vii) the Merlin HM MK1 Maritime Helicopter project and (viii) the Eurofighter project; [41268]

(2) what is *(a)* the estimated total project cost, *(b)* the total expenditure to date and *(c)* the planned expenditure for each of the next three years on the (i) Sting Ray Lightweight Torpedo Life Extension project, (ii) Seawolf Mid-Life Update project, (iii) Swiftsure and Trafalgar Class Submarine Update project, (iv) Merlin MK 3 Helicopter project, (v) Loading Platform Dock (Replacement) project, (vi) Extended Range Ordnance/Modular Change System project, (vii) Airborne Stand-off Radar project, (viii) Advanced Shortrange air-to-air missile project, (ix) High Velocity Missile project and (x) Tornado Mid-Life Update project. [41193]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Departmental Underspends

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence by how much his Department underspent its expenditure limits in the financial year 2000–01. [40829]

Mr. Hoon: The Ministry of Defence underspend against the Departmental Expenditure Limit in financial year 2000–01 was £73 million, less than 0.4 per cent. of the budget for the year. This outcome reflects sound forecasting and management action in the year.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Recycling

11. **Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she has made an assessment of the cost of implementing the Government's recycling strategy. [38003]

Mr. Meacher: Regulatory impact assessments are developed by the Department to assess the costs and benefits of proposed measures to increase recycling. These RIAs are published in consultation documents and are available on the DEFRA website http://www.defra.gov.uk/.

25. **Mr. Blizzard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what contribution she expects the commercial composting of household waste to make in reaching recycling targets. [38018]

Mr. Meacher: The Government and the National Assembly have set challenging targets in "Waste Strategy 2000" to recycle or compost at least 25 per cent. of household waste by 2005. We hope that composting will play a major role in helping local authorities reach these targets.

30. **Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received regarding the implementation of the EU directive on the recycling of refrigerators. [38023]

Mr. Meacher: We have received a number of representations about the EC regulation on substances that deplete the ozone layer. The representations have mostly been from local authorities regarding funding; from retailers about take-back on delivery systems; and from the waste management industry about technical and environmental standards for storage and treatment of refrigerators.

31. **Sue Doughty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department has taken to prepare for implementation of the waste electrical and electronic equipment directive. [38024]

Mr. Meacher: My hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy has the lead responsibility for negotiating the waste electrical and electronic equipment directive. However, Ministers and officials in both Departments have been working together closely. An initial Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) was placed in the Libraries of both Houses on 7 December 2000. A revised RIA is likely to be ready later this month. Both Departments have had significant dialogue with business throughout the negotiation of the directive and will continue this process during the remaining stages of negotiation and while devising implementing regulations.

32. **Mr. Syms:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the cost of implementing the waste electrical and electronic equipment directive. [38025]

Mr. Meacher: My hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy has the lead responsibility for negotiating the waste electrical and electronic equipment directive. However, Ministers and officials in both Departments have been working together closely. An initial Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) was placed in the Libraries of both Houses on 7 December 2000. A revised RIA is likely to be ready later this month. Both Departments have had significant dialogue with business throughout the negotiation of the directive and will continue this process during the remaining stages of negotiation and while devising implementing regulations. Based on the principle of producer responsibility, these directives provide that producers will be responsible for financing the costs which arise.

35. **Mr. Page:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the plans for recycling plants for refrigerators will be finalised and local authorities informed. [R] [38028]

Mr. Meacher: Plans for recycling plants for refrigerators are a matter for industry. However, a mobile treatment plant is expected in the country within a week or two and further static treatment plants should be operational by the end of June. The Local Government Association is being kept informed of the progress.

Hazardous Chemicals (Exposure)

15. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to reduce the exposure of farmers to hazardous chemicals. [38007]

Mr. Meacher: The Government take safety of users of chemicals seriously, and in doing so strictly regulate and enforce the use of chemicals on farms. This is on the basis of scientific advice. Regulation includes an assessment of the risk from exposure of the user to the chemicals, and clear instructions on the personal protective clothing and equipment that must be worn when using specific chemical products.

Livestock Movements

16. **Tony Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects to make a decision on the control of sheep movement; and if she will make a statement. [38009]

Mr. Morley: Controls on the movement of sheep continue. They were relaxed from 11 February 2002 and may be further relaxed after the lambing period.

20. **Hywel Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the licensing scheme for the movement of livestock. [38013]

Mr. Morley: In view of the continued improvement in the disease situation, relaxations in the rules governing animal movement controls were introduced from 11 February 2002.

Beef Exports

18. **Mr. McLoughlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the resumption of beef exports to France. [38011]

Mr. Morley: The Government have made it clear that we expect France to comply with the judgment of the European Court of Justice and lift its ban on British beef exports as soon as possible. The Secretary of State has discussed this issue with Commissioner Byrne and we are confident that the Commission will take further action in the court as necessary.

EU Environmental Directives

21. **Mrs. Brooke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her Department's role in the implementation of European directives on the environment at present under consideration. [38014]

Mr. Meacher: DEFRA has responsibility in the main for ensuring that the UK meets its obligations to implement EU legislation on the environment, and particular responsibility in respect of legislation where we have the policy lead.

IACS

22. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the delays of the delivery of integrated control and administration system cheques to farmers. [38015]

Mr. Morley: IACS payments were not made as early as in previous years and our target of paying at least 96 per cent. of payments was not met by the regulatory deadline of 31 January. This was the result of industrial action in the autumn and winter months. The unions however suspended industrial action on the 11 January and through overtime and some redeployment of staff we succeeded in paying 94 per cent. of AAPS claims by the end of the payment window.

Energy Crops

23. **Norman Lamb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the Government's plans to promote the growing of energy crops. [38016]

Mr. Morley: The Government have welcomed the publication of the Energy Review by the Performance and Innovation Unit, which draws attention to the key role of renewable energy sources, including energy crops, in moving to a low carbon economy. The Government plan a public consultatio[illegible]n the key recommendations of the report leading to a White Paper in the autumn. This Department has allocated support of £29 million to solid biomass crops through the energy crops scheme, part of the England Rural Development Programme. The Renewables Obligation will permit the co-firing of energy crops with fossil fuels. We are working with other Departments to put in place further schemes with funding of £70 million which will develop markets for biomass, including purpose grown energy crops and material from forests, in heat, combined heat and power and electricity generation.

Rio Plus Ten Conference

24. **Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what preparations are being made for the Rio Plus Ten conference. [38017]

Mr. Meacher: A Cabinet Committee (MISC 18), chaired by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, has been established to coordinate, develop and deliver the Government's strategy for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). DEFRA, working closely with other Departments, is leading on UK preparations. At official level DEFRA chairs a High Level Steering Group, and an Inter-Departmental Group to discuss WSSD. My officials are fully involved in the international preparations for the summit.

A communications strategy to raise awareness of the summit has also been agreed. We are working closely with local authorities, NGOs, business and other organisations to ensure that we engage a wide range of stakeholders. A key element of our communications strategy is the development of the Government sustainable development website www.sustainable-development.gov.uk, to include information on WSSD.

Water Framework Directive

26. **Mr. Gareth R. Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the benefits to the UK of the water framework directive. [38019]

Mr. Meacher: It is difficult to place a financial value on many of the benefits of the Water Framework Directive which include: improvements in the quality and availability of raw water; protection and enhancement of aquatic wildlife; more coherent management of river basins; better targeting of water protection measure; and accountability and transparency in the river basin management planning process.

A study undertaken in 1998 by consultants on behalf of DETR and the National Assembly for Wales made a preliminary assessment of the value of some of the tangible benefits the directive will bring in informal recreation, angling, general amenity, non-use values and low flow alleviation. On this basis, benefits for England and Wales were estimated at between £1.6 billion and £6.2 billion.

Implementation of the directive and the assessment of its benefits in Scotland and Northern Ireland, and with respect to the devolved functions in Wales are matters for the Scottish Executive and the Northern Ireland Executive and the National Assembly for Wales. In Scotland and Northern Ireland, implementation of the Directive and the assessment of its benefits are being managed wholly by the Scottish Executive the Northern Ireland Executive.

Livestock Markets

27. **Mr. Swire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement regarding the impact of the regulations governing animal movements on the viability of livestock markets. [38020]

Mr. Morley: I am pleased to say that a number of livestock markets have met the new bio-security rules introduced on 11 February and have now re-opened. I expect more to do so as the disease situation continues to improve. Livestock markets have an important role to play in the marketing of farm animals between the various stages of production and some are developing a broadened range of services to farmers. We will be considering carefully the recommendations from the Policy Commission on future developments in livestock marketing.

Foot and Mouth

28. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she next expects to meet representatives of the livestock sector to discuss policies to combat further outbreaks of foot and mouth disease. [R] [38021]

Mr. Morley: My ministerial colleagues and I meet industry representatives on a regular basis to discuss a range of disease control arrangements.

The next meeting of the foot and mouth disease stakeholder group will be held on 14 March.

A high-level imports forum will be held in March to consider the next steps for intensifying our efforts to reduce the risks posed by illegal imports of meat and other animal products, and to agree further priorities and action.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how many people have been *(a)* prosecuted and *(b)* convicted of deliberately infecting livestock since 20 February 2001; [37796]

(2) how many people have been *(a)* prosecuted and *(b)* found guilty of obstructing Government culls of livestock since 20 February 2001; [37797]

(3) how many people have been *(a)* prosecuted and *(b)* found guilty of obstructing Government inspections of farm premises since 20 February 2001. [37798]

Mr. Morley: *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* There is no specific offence of deliberately infecting livestock at present, although the Animal Health Bill, currently being considered by Parliament, would create such an offence.

Responsibility for the enforcement of animal health legislation lies with my Department and the local authorities. My Department has taken one prosecution for obstructing a Government inspection of a farm premises. The defendant was found guilty.

There is currently no complete record of local authority prosecutions taken during the foot and mouth outbreak. However, we are not aware of any local authority prosecution for the above offences. My Department is liaising with the Local Authority Co-ordinating Body on Food and Trading Standards (LACOTS) to a compile a complete record of local authority prosecutions.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what figures she has collated on the origin of those animals destined for re-stocking of UK farms following foot and mouth culls. [38639]

Mr. Morley: All animals used for controlled restocking must come from farms which are free from any animal healths restrictions including foot and mouth disease. No figures are collected on the geographical origin of animals used for restocking.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many cases of animals known to have the foot-and-mouth antibody there have been since 30 September 2001. [38524]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Antibody to foot and mouth disease virus has been detected in 177 animals on 18 farms since 30 September last. All cases were thoroughly investigated and no evidence of foot and mouth virus was found in any of these animals.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on what dates since 30 September 2001 *(a)* tests have been carried out for foot and mouth disease, *(b)* the diagnosis of those tests has been received and *(c)* those animals tested and found to be dangerous contacts have been slaughtered. [38659]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* Since 30 September, and before, samples have been taken from premises to investigate the presence of foot and mouth virus on a daily basis. Sample types may include the following material; epithelium from the feet and mouth, blood and probang samples. Results from initial tests on epithelium are usually returned within 24 hours of receipt. Results from the completion of final virology and serology tests, if negative, usually take up to four days, sometimes longer.

There have been 18 cases (farm premises) since 30 September where foot and mouth antibodies have been detected in animals and these animals were slaughtered as dangerous contacts on the dates set out as follows:

All of these cases were thoroughly investigated and no evidence of foot and mouth virus was found.

13 October 2001: 1 case
17 October 2001: 1 case
24 October 2001: 1 case
26 October 2001: 1 case
27 October 2001: 1 case
31 October 2001: 1 case
10 November 2001: 3 cases
13 November 2001: 1 case
20 November 2001: 1 case
27 November 2001: 2 cases
10 December 2001: 1 case
22 December 2001: 1 case
9 January 2002: 1 case
24 January 2002: 1 case
22 February 2002: 1 case.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she was informed *(a)* of the suspected outbreak of foot and mouth on St. Agnes Farm at Hawnby and *(b)* that veterinary tests proved negative; and what the average time was between testing and negative result during last year's outbreak. [40308]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* I was notified by my officials of the suspected outbreak of foot and mouth disease on St. Agnes Farm, Hawnby at around 5.00 pm on 26 February and was informed at around 7.00 am the following day, 27 February, that initial tests had returned negative results. Results of the final set of tests were received on 3 March.

During last year's outbreak, results from initial tests on epithelium were usually returned within 24 hours of receipt. Results from the completion of final virology and serology tests usually took up to four days, although it was not uncommon for a longer period to pass in some circumstances.

Fishing

29. **Vera Baird:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress she is making in negotiating a derogation for the UK inshore fishing fleet, from this year's increase in fixed-net mesh sizes. [38022]

Mr. Morley: Norway and the EU agreed last year to increase mesh sizes in fixed fishing gear from 1 January 2002. We have drawn the Commission's attention to the fact that Norway seems to have exempted its inshore fleet from this requirement. The Commission have raised this with the Norwegian authorities and are awaiting their response.

36. **Shona McIsaac:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on recent changes to total allowable catches. [38029]

Mr. Morley: The Commission originally proposed large cuts for a wide range of total allowable catches, in many cases going further than science would justify. At the December Fisheries Council, after lengthy negotiations, we achieved an outcome which closely followed the scientific advice. This did not avoid severe measures where they were justified but met the UK's criticisms of what the Commission had proposed.

17. **Andrew George:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the future of low impact fishing methods. [38010]

Mr. Morley: The review of the Common Fisheries Policy provides an opportunity to recognise the role of fishermen using selective and environmentally friendly fishing techniques. We raised this issue in our public response to the European Commission's Green Paper on the future of the CFP. We will look to support ways of encouraging low impact fishing in negotiations on the future of [illegible] CFP this year.

Flood Defences

33. **Norman Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects adequate flood defences to be in place to protect Lewes. [38026]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 22 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 803W. I understand that the Environment Agency plans to consult on a preferred option for improved flood alleviation measure for Lewes in May. Subject to relevant consents and funding, the Agency hopes that work will commence in Lewes within 18 months.

37. **Mike Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on plans to improve flood prevention in the vicinity of the River Roding. [38030]

Mr. Morley: Operational responsibility rests with the Environment Agency and the London Borough of Redbridge as far as the River Roding catchment is concerned. I understand that, since flooding occurred in October 2000, the Agency has repaired a bank that was overtopped and drawn the attention of Thames Water Utilities to concerns about surface water drains. The Agency has also commissioned consultants to prepare a flood defence strategy for the Roding catchment with a view to identifying sustainable defence options.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to improve protection against flooding; and what assistance she is giving to those affected by recent floods. [38006]

Mr. Morley: The flood and coastal defence operating authorities have major programmes of work throughout the country to reduce flood risk, supported by ever increasing Government funding. DEFRA support for flood and coastal defence will increase by over 70 per cent. from £66 million in 2000–01 to £114 million in 2003–04. The overall annual expenditure on flood and coastal defence in England now exceeds £400 million.

Air Pollution

34. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the rate of progress in achieving the Government's targets on air pollution. [38027]

Mr. Meacher: We are broadly on track to meet our policy objectives for carbon monoxide, benzene, 1,3 butadiene, lead and sulphur dioxide, but we will need to do more to meet our targets for nitrogen dioxide, particles and ozone. Emissions of most pollutants have fallen over the last decade, and levels of air pollution are falling steadily in most urban areas of the UK. The headline air quality indicator, which gives the total number of days of poor air quality recorded each year through our national monitoring network, shows a steady reduction in the total number of days of poor urban air quality from 59 days in 1993 (when the dataset began) to 21 days in 2001. The pattern in rural areas is less clear since the main pollutant in rural areas is ozone, which is strongly influenced by the weather and by emissions of ozone precursors in continental Europe.

Fuel Poverty

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action her Department is taking to combat fuel poverty among people in rural areas. [37992]

Mr. Meacher: The UK Fuel Poverty Strategy, published in November last year, set out the Government's goal to seek and end to fuel poverty, with the first target to ensure that by 2010, no vulnerable household need risk ill health due to a cold home.

The strategy's aim is to improve the energy efficiency of fuel poor households, to maintain the downward pressure on fuel bills, to tackle poverty and social exclusion.

The fuel poor in rural areas will benefit from these measures and from a number of pilot projects to help homes that are off the mains gas network and pilot the use of micro Combined Heat and Power.

Slaughtered Farm Animals

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many farm animals have been slaughtered since 30 September 2001; and what the reasons for their slaughter were. [38640]

Mr. Morley: In total 6,113 animals have been slaughtered since the last case of foot and mouth disease on 30 September 2001. These animals have been slaughtered as either dangerous contacts as a result of sero-positive blood samples or as slaughter on suspicion cases.

Source: DEFRA's disease control system database as at 4 March 2002. Figures may be subject to revision as more data becomes available and as DEFRA's data cleansing exercise is carried out.

Ministerial Speeches

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many public speeches on agriculture she has given since her appointment; and how many of them were made to audiences of farmers and those working in agriculture. [20000]

Margaret Beckett: Since my appointment in June I have made three major speeches on agriculture, all to farming audiences. In addition I have made six other speeches, for example while on regional visits or on visits abroad, in which agricultural issues have been addressed. The audience for some of those speeches included farmers. I have also attended six Agriculture Councils and spoke at last December's EU conference on FMD in Brussels.

Aquatic Pursuits

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will consider making Environment Agency funding to improve angling opportunities dependent on improving access for non-powered craft to the same waters. [39478]

Alun Michael: It is difficult to see how this would work. The Government provide grant-in-aid to meet the general duty of maintaining, improving and developing fisheries rather than to improve angling opportunities specifically. There is no specific requirement to improve angling opportunities when doing recreation or navigation work that benefits non-powered craft.

Plastic Sheeting

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason the scheme that provided a free collection service of plastic sheeting for farmers was stopped; and what the cost of the scheme was in its last 12 months. [39563]

Mr. Meacher: A self-financing voluntary scheme for the collection of farm plastics operated between 1994 and 1997. The scheme operated by charging producers of farm plastics a levy of £100 per tonne. I understand that the scheme collapsed because some importers of this material refused to participate. Collection of farm plastics is still carried out by a small number of local voluntary schemes.

Toxic Substances

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what environmental inspections are made of *(a)* contaminated, *(b)* radiated and *(c)* toxic material associated with the Ministry of Defence and defence equipment plants. [40572]

Dr. Moonie: I have been asked to reply.

It is the policy of the Ministry of Defence to comply with all environmental legislation and only to invoke exemptions from such legislation where compliance would adversely affect military operations. Issues of pollution prevention and control, including those related to contaminated, radioactive and toxic material, are addressed within the framework of the Department's overarching safety management system.

Guidance on the management of safety and environmental protection in the Ministry of Defence, including liaison with pollution control authorities and other regulatory bodies on inspections of our sites, and any activities which may impact on the environment, is published in Joint Service Publication (JSP) 418 (the Environment Manual). JSP 392 (Instructions for Radiation Protection) an JSP 375 (the MOD Health and Safety Handbook) also contain guidance and information on these issues. Copies of these three publications are in the Library of the House.

PRIME MINISTER

Cabinet Committees

Ms Ward: To ask the Prime Minister what the membership is of each Cabinet Committee. [41942]

The Prime Minister: Since the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) and my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) on 10 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 452W, I have established six new Cabinet Committees and made a number of minor changes to the membership and terms of reference of existing Cabinet Committees. I have placed a copy of the current list of Cabinet Committees, their membership and terms of reference in the Library of the House. Details will also be updated on the Cabinet Office website.

Public Services

Mr. Patrick Hall: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the Government's strategy for the reform of the public services. [41287]

The Prime Minister: I am today publishing a pamphlet, entitled "Reforming Public Services: Principles into Practice", which sets out the Government's strategy. Copies of this document have been placed in the Libraries of the House today.

Volunteers

Bob Russell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 25 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 701W, on voluntary work, how many members of staff he had in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001. [39548]

The Prime Minister: For figures for 2001 I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on 5 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 8W. As of 1 September 2000 170 staff were on the No. 10 payroll.

Special Advisers

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister how many civil servants reported within his office ultimately to a special adviser on 1 January and in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2002; and what proportion they represented of all civil servants at No. 10 Downing Street. [40717]

The Prime Minister: The Order in Council in 1997 provides for my Chief of Staff and my Director of Communications and Strategy to manage civil servants. No other special advisers in No. 10 manage civil servants directly. I also refer the hon. Gentleman to the No. 10 organogram, a copy of which is in the House Library.

Jo Moore

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister what evidence he has collated of civil servants in the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions undermining the credibility of Jo Moore. [41275]

The Prime Minister: I have nothing to add to the detailed statements made by the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and his permanent secretary.

Chief Press Officer

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister when his officials were informed that exchanges involving the Chief Press Officer of the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions, about announcements on Friday 15 February, were not as suggested at his spokesman's lobby briefing the previous morning; when he informed the President of the Council of this; and who was responsible for the inaccuracy. [41276]

The Prime Minister: The PMOS has fully explained the position in the lobby. Copies of the lobby notes are available on the Number 10 website. The President of the Council has made his position clear and I refer the hon. Member to his personal statement on 28 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 842.

Steel Imports

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had with President Bush about the possible imposition of tariffs on steel imports by the United States; and if he will make a statement. [41091]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) in the House on 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 281–82.

Privacy and Data Sharing Report

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Prime Minister when the PIU will issue its privacy and data sharing report. [40862]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) on 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 204W.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Lost/Stolen Property

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list those items valued at more than £50 which have been stolen or lost from her Department in each of the last four years. [27997]

Ms Hewitt: The Department of Trade and Industry's log of missing items is a mix of lost, stolen or misplaced items belonging to the Department or its workforce. In the majority of cases the value of items is not recorded and it is not possible to answer this question in detail without incurring disproportionate cost. However, I refer the hon. Member to parliamentary questions answered on 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 847W and on 24 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1071W.

Postal Services

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to ensure the universal postal delivery service in rural areas since the publication of the Postcomm report on competition in postal services. [40713]

Mr. Alexander: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Stewart) on 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1125W.

Postcomm's document "Proposals for effective competition in UK postal services", published on Thursday 31 January, is a public consultation and we would expect concerns about the universal service obligation to be thoroughly considered as part of the consultation process.

Postcodes

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry by what means the Post Office enables the public to consult a list of alpha-numeric postcode suffixes matched to a word-based local descriptor; and if she will place such a list covering Northern Ireland postcodes in the Library. [38297]

Mr. Alexander: I am informed by Consignia that postcode information is available from a number of sources; online at www.postcodes.royalmail.com and through a telephone helpline charged at local rates. Postal address books are available at public libraries. Postal address books for local postcodes are available to businesses free of charge and to members of the public for a small fee.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on her Department's plans to encourage the use of renewable energy. [37993]

Brian Wilson: The Government are providing substantial support to industry to encourage the use of renewable energy.

Introducing the new renewables obligation, exempting renewables from the climate change levy and protecting existing non-fossil fuel obligation (NFFO) contracts will together create a long-term market incentive for renewables worth over £1 billion per year by 2010.

We are underpinning the obligation with direct Government funding for renewables worth over £260 million between 2001 and 04. We are setting up extensive capital grants programmes, in particular for offshore wind and energy crops projects, initiating a major photovoltaics demonstration programme, and boosting research and development.

We recently introduced an order to allow locational flexibility for NFFO 3, 4 and 5 projects that have not yet been commissioned. This will allow more appropriate locations to be found in order to overcome problems in securing planning permission.

We have initiated studies of each UK region's capacity to generate electricity from renewable sources. Once all these assessments are completed, it is expected that specific regional targets for renewable energy will be adopted across the UK. We are also publishing an overview of those regional assessments.

The Government are also exploring the scope for upgrading the electricity distribution system to enable the UK's huge renewable energy resources to be exploited to the full. For example, an initial study of the feasibility of an underwater cable to connect parts of the western seaboard of the UK directly to the national grid has recently been completed. We shall be moving to a more detailed study of all the options and their costs.

EU Delegations (Scottish Ministers)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether a Scottish Executive Minister will be a member of the UK delegation to the Internal Market, Consumer Affairs and Tourism European Union Council of Ministers meeting on 1 March; and what information is being provided by her Department to guarantee effective pre-council scrutiny by the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament. [40318]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* I represented the UK at the Internal Market, Consumer Affairs and Tourism Council on 1 March. It is the responsibility of the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament to scrutinise the Scottish Executive's involvement in preparations for EU Council meetings. These arrangements are a matter for the Committee and the Scottish Executive. The Department provides information to Scottish Executive officials as part of that process.

Print Industry

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she is taking to implement the seven aims of the UK print industry contained in the recent report 'Print 21: Coming of Age'. [40287]

Mr. Alexander: The seven aims contained in the report "Print 21; Coming of Age" are addressed not to Government, but to the printing industry itself. The industry has formed a steering group to take forward the seven aims and I am pleased to say that the Department is part-funding a project proposed by the group to draw up a strategy to achieve this.

Exchange Direct

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what reports her Department has produced on Exchange Direct during the last year; and if she will make them available to the police investigation into the company. [39998]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* The Department has produced no reports on Exchange Direct plc.

A winding up order was made against the company on 23 January 2002 and the Official Receiver is now responsible for investigating the reasons for the company's failure and the conduct of its directors. The Official Receiver is aware of the police investigation and will provide assistance as appropriate.

Bankruptcies

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many bankruptcies there were in each of the last 20 years. [40359]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The number of bankruptcy orders made in each of the last twenty years is as follows:

Bankruptcies

Year	*Number*
1982	5,319
1983	6,576
1984	7,726
1985	6,730
1986	7,093
1987	6,994
1988	7,717
1989	8,138
1990	12,058
1991	22,632
1992	32,106
[illegible]93	31,016
1994	25,634
1995	21,933
1996	21,803
1997	19,892
1998	19,647
1999	21,611
2000	21,550
2001	23,477

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average time was for a bankrupt to be discharged in each of the last five years. [40363]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Bankrupts are discharged under the terms of the section 279 of the Insolvency Act 1986. Bankrupts are generally discharged three years after the commencement of the bankruptcy except in the following circumstances:

> Where the court has issued a certificate for summary administration of the bankrupt's estate (and that has not been revoked before discharge), the bankrupt will be discharged two years after the commencement of the bankruptcy.
>
> Where an individual has been an undischarged bankrupt at any time in the period 15 years ending with the commencement of the bankruptcy or where an individual is subject to a criminal bankruptcy order, an application for discharge has to be made to the court, but not until at least five years after the commencement of the bankruptcy.
>
> The court can suspend these discharge provisions where it is satisfied that an undercharged bankrupt is failing to co-operate with his trustee and/or the official receiver.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average time taken was by the Official Receiver to complete his inquiries into bankrupts in each of the last five years. [40364]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Insolvency Service does not hold statistics on the amount of time taken to complete inquires; this is largely dependent on the complexity of the case. The Insolvency Service has set targets for the percentage of reports to creditors to be issued within certain time limits. During the last five years The Service has issued of reports to creditors within 8 weeks and 12 weeks of the bankruptcy order respectively as follows:

Per cent.

Year ended	*Eight weeks*	*12 weeks*
31 March 2001	99.3	99.6
31 March 2000	98.7	99.8
31 March 1999	98.2	99.7
31 March 1998	98.1	99.5
31 March 1997	98.3	99.6

Insolvency Practitioners

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many insolvency practitioners are in practice in England and Wales. [40275]

Miss Melanie Johnson: A total of 1,623 individuals are currently authorised to act as insolvency practitioners by the Secretary of State and by the recognised professional bodies in England and Wales. Of this number some 1,020 are currently bonded to take appointments as office-holders in insolvencies.

Small Business Banking

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she expects to publish the Competition Commission report into small business banking. [41094]

Ms Hewitt: The supply of banking services by clearing banks to small and medium-sized enterprises was referred to the Competition Commission for investigation by the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The Chancellor and I will publish the report as soon as practicable.

Vehicle Speed Limiters

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will bring forward plans to introduce speed-limiters in motorised road vehicles. [40545]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

In Great Britain, there are already legal requirements to fit top-speed limiters to goods vehicles, buses and coaches weighing more than 7.5 tonnes maximum permitted weight. These measures are more extensive than is currently required by existing European Union law. A proposal currently under consideration by the European Parliament and the Council Ministers would extend the European requirement to buses and coaches with more than eight passenger seats irrespective of weight, and to goods vehicles of over 3.5 tonnes maximum permitted weight. We are not convinced that the safety and environmental consequences of fitting limiters to lighter vehicles would be beneficial—bunching of vehicles could cause added congestion and create safety hazards—and voted against the proposal when it was considered by the Transport Council in December last. The proposal is, however, likely to be adopted later this year.

Financial Services

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the Financial Services Authority proposals regarding polarisation in the provision of financial services; if she will ask the Social Exclusion Unit to assess the report in terms of its impact on people on low incomes; and if she will make a statement. [40712]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The proposals in CP121 to reform the polarisation regime for the distribution of financial service products are a matter for the FSA. They are subject to consultation and the government would encourage all those with views to look at the consultation paper and supporting research reports, and let the FSA have their views by 19 April. Any proposals the FSA brings forward following consultation will be subject to detailed cost benefit analysis.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Departmental Policies (Bristol, East)

Jean Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Bristol, East constituency, the effects on Bristol of her Department's policies and actions *(a)* from 5 May 1994 to 2 May 1997, *(b)* from 2 May 1997 to 7 May 1998, and *(c)* since 7 May 1998. [35595]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, the Regional Co-ordination Unit have provided data and I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office on 4 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 80W.

Correspondence

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average response time was for responding to departmental correspondence; what percentage of letters took longer than one month for a response; and what percentage took longer than three months for a response in each of the last five years. [37445]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The correspondence standard in the Department for Education and Skills is to reply to 95 per cent. of all correspondence within 15 working days of receipt. Figures reflecting our performance on all departmental correspondence are shown at Tables 1a and 2a. These were published, in the annual service standards report, by Cabinet Office each year up until 2001 to show performance against the correspondence standard which is one of the six Whitehall standards set for central Government on 1 April 1997.

For the period from April 2000, when we introduced an electronic case tracking system (Correspondence Handling System), we are able to provide more detailed information on performance as shown in Tables 1b, 2b and 2c. This covers most correspondence but not emails sent direct from Ministers' offices.

Ministerial correspondence (calendar years)

Table 1a

	Target for response (working days)	*Total volume*	*Percentage of responses within target*
2001[1]	15	18,237	76
2000	15	22,318	72
1999	15	21,196	75
1998	15	19,766	70
1997	15	22,460	71

[1] The figures on this table are the figures reported to Cabinet Office. They will differ from that of the Correspondence Handling System as they include correspondence not handled via this system, i.e. emails sent direct from Ministers' offices.

Table 1b—Ministerial correspondence figures taken from Correspondence Handling System on 22 February 2002 to show performance from 1 January 2001 to 31 December 2001

Final reply sent	*Number*	*Percentage*
Less than 15 days (within target)	9,364	67.98
Between 16 and 30 days	3,672	26.66
31 days and over	738	5.36
Total	13,774	100.00

Departmental correspondence answered by officials (Financial Years)

Table 2a—Figures reported to Cabinet Office for performance relating to the periods prior to the introduction of the Correspondence Handling System

Operational year	*Response target (working days)*	*Total volume*	*Percentage of responses within target*
April 1999—March 2000	15	96,009	90
April 1998—March 1999	15	108,000	89
April 1997—March 1998	15	116,417	88

Table 2b—Figures taken from Correspondence Handling System on 22 February 2002 to show performance from 1 April 2001 to 22 February 2002

Final reply sent	*Number*	*Percentage*
15 days or less (within target)	47,065	93.39
Between 16 and 30 days	2,520	5.00
31 days and over	812	1.61
Total	50,397	100.00

Table 2c—Figures taken from Correspondence Handling System on 22 February 2002 to show performance from 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001

Final reply sent	*Number*	*Percentage*
15 days or less (within target)	73,954	93.36
Between 16 and 30 days	3,481	4.39
31 days and over	1,782	2.25
Total[1]	79,217	100.00

[1] Total volume of correspondence reported to Cabinet Office and published in the annual report for this period was 85,929. This figure included residual cases not input on to the new Correspondence Handling System.

Financial Literacy

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if there are plans to require *(a)* further education colleges and *(b)* schools to include financial literacy courses in their curricula. [38791]

John Healey: There are no plans for financial literacy activity to be a mandatory part of further education provision. But we have developed and tested financial literacy learning materials and guidance for tutors and these will be available to further education colleges when they are launched later this year.

Personal finance education is already covered in the national curriculum as part of the Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) framework. The framework has been in place since September 2000 for pupils aged five to 16 and was introduced to support the personal and social development of young people, including the development of financial capability, in today's complex and changing world.

Guidance for teachers, "Financial Capability through Personal Financial Education", was published in April 2000.

Rapid Response Funding

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many bids there have been; what sums have been allocated; what the budget is for Rapid Response funding in 2001–02; and if she will make a statement. [39421]

John Healey: To date in 2001–02, 79 bids for Rapid Response funding have been approved providing a total of £5.1 million of additional support for people involved in large-scale redundancies. The following table sets out the sums allocated for each bid. The budget for the Rapid Response Fund in 2001–02 is £7 million. From April 2002, the administration of the Rapid Response Fund will transfer to Jobcentre Plus. I am making this change so that the fund can be run alongside the Job Transition Service. This should result in an effective and co-ordinated response to redundancies which will be in the interests of both employers and individuals.

Project title	£ *RRF funds approved 2001–02*
Yorkshire and Humberside	
Rawmarsh foods	44,799
Acordis	56,500
Crosrol Ltd.	44,100
Transbus International	159,565
Pace	36,500
Ericson—Scunthorpe	92,079
SSL International	70,030
Fishers Frozen Foods	60,000
South West	
The Link Group	87,938
Cuprinol	3,000
Nortel	254,454
Motorola	410,999
Kruger Tissue	37,326
North Devon Foods	27,730
Sifam Fibre Optics	16,873
KTH & Aram Engineering	69,035
TISSP UK Ltd.	29,750
Spur Shelving	30,650
North Devon Meats Ltd.	9,000
Aardman Animation	18,674
Renault Swindon	42,668
Watts, Blake & Bearne Mann Fee Dartingtin Tech	18,621
Marconi	32,143
UK Safety Group Ltd.	21,200
Xerox	89,014
SCA Packaging	12,585
Rolls Royce	90,696
Wincanton Logistics	23,451
Devon Training for Skills	13,900
New Zealand Milk	44,100
Agusta Westlands	135,975
Devon Desserts	79,800
North East	
Via Systems	58,000
Gill Aviation Air Normandy	£25,000
Sanyo	3,750
Akzo Noble	29,400
East of England	
Vauxhall	104,056
East Midlands	
Dema Glass	24,000
Baker Refractories	143,262
Ericcson	427,239
Cinch Connectors Ltd.	44,860
Airflow Streamlines	51,040
British Timken	53,767
Rolls Royce	150,794
West Midlands	
HP Hydraulics	20,700
Akso Noble	3,300
Barton Engineering	28,500
Sterling Tubes	31,500
Chubb	48,000
KTH	75,000
Dowdeswell End Co. Ltd.	32,250
Ceramics:	
Staffordshire Royal Doulton Churchill China H&R Johnson Tiles	50,000
IMI Norgren	21,800
SAI	9,500
Breed Steering Systems	148,400
Sun Valley Foods	105,000
Collins & Aikman Plastics Ltd.	23,855
Goodyear	16,000
Stratford Foods	21,000
Rolls Royce	29,250
IHW Engineering	12,850
Fujitsu—Solihull	107,480
Ceramics 3	39,600
Dana Su Automotive	25,800
Richmond Frozen Confectionery	21,250
Celestica—Telsford	35,270
Celestica—Kidsgrove and Bradwell Wood	102,600
Accident Assistance	16,440
KTH Nuneaton Ltd.	14,500
Dunn & Bradstreet Ltd.	13,500
Novern	10,600
Goodyear 2	19,000
Leisure Consumer Products	13,500
North West	
Harris Bacon	131,100
The Ravenhead Company	171,881
Ineos Chlor Diversey Lever Bush Boake Allen	103,615
BAE Systems	50,000
Rolly Royce	103,950
Cammel Laird	201,500

Note:

The amounts represent RRF funding approved for 2001–02. Many of the projects will continue in 2002–03. Additional funds for these bids have already been secured but are not shown in the table.

EMTA Labour Market Survey

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the proportion of engineering and manufacturing establishments examined in the 1999 EMTA labour market survey which reported a shortage of technical engineering skills. [39709]

John Healey *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* per cent. of engineering and manufacturing establishments examined in the 1999 EMTA labour market survey reported a technical engineering skills gap. This figure is based on responses from 591 of the 2000 establishments surveyed.

School Playing Fields

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what criteria are used in determining an application for disposal of school playing fields, as to whether playing field provision and curriculum requirements at the school and other schools in the area will be met. [40299]

John Healey: Applications to the Secretary of State to dispose of school playing fields are assessed against three main criteria. These are:

(i) schools' needs: that playing field provision and curriculum requirements at the school making the disposal, and at other schools in the local area, will be met;

(ii) community needs: that community use of school playing fields is taken into account, with alternative facilities made available if necessary; and

(iii) finance: that any sale proceeds are re-invested to provide new or improved sports facilities at schools, or are used otherwise to help raise standards by providing better educational facilities.

The criteria are set out in the Department's Guidance 0580/2001: "The Protection of School Playing Fields and Land for City Academies". The criteria enable the Secretary of State to take into account the team game playing field provision at other local schools. This is to ensure that where there are surplus fields at one school, other local schools are given the opportunity to use those surplus fields. As part of the schools' needs criterion, applicants are asked to say what impact the proposed disposal will have on the curriculum, and to demonstrate clearly how the curriculum will continue to be met if consent is given.

The School Playing Fields Advisory Panel provides advice on the extent to which applications meet the published criteria.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answers of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 730–34W and 27 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1298w, what the proceeds of sale were for each playing field development application approved by the Secretary of State since 1998; and what *(a)* sports and *(b)* education facilities those proceeds were used to finance. [40382]

John Healey: The information requested in respect of the proceeds arising from the sale of school sports pitches is shown in the table.

Use of proceeds for approved applications to sell school sports pitch areas

Local education authority	*School*	*Closed or closing*	*Estimated proceeds (£)*	*Use of proceeds*
Barnet	Ashmole	No	8,650,000	Teaching accommodation; all-weather pitch
Bedfordshire	Ashton St. Peter VA	No	100,000	School consolidation
Bedfordshire	Silver Jubilee middle	Yes	72,000	Teaching accommodation
Birmingham	Broadway	No	900,000	Improve pitches; new clubhouse and changing facilities
Bolton	St. James's CE	No	800,000	Sports facilities
Bristol	Monks Park secondary	No	2,200,000	Sports hall, all-weather pitch. Capital works at other schools
Buckinghamshire	Bellfield first and middle	Yes	468,000	Education capital programme
Buckinghamshire	Downley middle	Yes	2,500,000	Education capital programme
Buckinghamshire	Heights first	Yes	1,350,000	Education capital programme
Buckinghamshire	Terriers county first	Yes	650,000	Education capital programme
Calderdale	Brooksbank	No	1,038,000	Sports hall
Cheshire	Brookside county infant	Yes	83,000	School amalgamation
Cheshire	Colshaw CP	No	75,000	Nursery accommodation
Cheshire	Manor Park infant	Yes	225,000	School consolidation
Cheshire	St. James CE junior	No	Payment in kind	Teaching accommodation
Cheshire	Westlands high	Yes	3,100,000	Teaching accommodation; pitches
Croydon	Haling Manor high	No	3,000,000	Teaching accommodation
Derbyshire	Noel Baker community	No	18,000	Changing facilities
Derbyshire	Pingle	No	363,000	Improve pitches
Derbyshire	Western Mere	Yes	200,000	Education capital programme
Devon	Highweek primary	No	150,000	Teaching accommodation; pitches
Dorset	Fosters	Yes	1,500,000	Improve pitches; new schools
Durham	The Avenue comprehensive	Yes	32,600	Education capital programme
Durham	Westwood primary	Yes	6,520	Education capital programme
Essex	Moulsham high	No	1,000,000	Improve pitches; teaching accommodation
Essex	Oakview special	No	1,000,000	Teaching accommodation
Essex	Tabor high	No	3,000,000	School consolidation
Essex	The Stanway	No	7,500,000	Improve sports facilities; teaching accommodation
Gloucestershire	The Catholic school of St. Gregory the Great	No	900,000	All-weather pitch; teaching accommodation
Halton	Ashley special	No	50,000	Sleeping accommodation for adults with learning difficulties
Hammersmith and Fulham	Gibbs Green special	No	400,000	All-weather pitch
Havering	Frances Bardsley for girls	No	6,850,000	Sports hall; all-weather pitch; consolidate school sites

Use of proceeds for approved applications to sell school sports pitch areas

Local education authority	*School*	*Closed or closing*	*Estimated proceeds (£)*	*Use of proceeds*
Kent	Allhallows first	Yes	75,000	Education capital programme
Kent	St. Thomas' special	Yes	480,000	Education capital programme
Lancashire	Baines high	No	315,000	Sports hall
Lancashire	St. Richards RC high	Yes	1,000,000	Sports hall; education capital programme
Lancashire	St. Thomas Aquinas RC high	Yes	225,000	Education capital programme
Leeds	Oakwood primary	No	Payment in kind	Teaching accommodation
Leeds	Wetherby high	No	720,000	All-weather pitch; sports hall
Liverpool	Childwall comprehensive	No	2,500,000	New school; sports hall; improve pitches
Milton Keynes	Castles first	Yes	480,000	Consolidate school sites
Milton Keynes	Denbigh	Yes	5,000,000	Education capital programme
Norfolk	Redgate middle	No	175,000	Sports hall; teaching accommodation
North Tyneside	St. Mary's Roman Catholic	No	95,000	Grass playing fields; playground
North Yorkshire	Settle CE primary	No	Payment in kind	New school
Northamptonshire	John Lea secondary	Yes	4,000,000	Education capital programme
Northumberland	Gallowhill Hall special	Yes	5,850	Teaching accommodation
Northumberland	St. Benet Biscop RC aided high	No	1,350,018	Teaching accommodation; improve pitches
Nottinghamshire	Manor comprehensive	No	140,000	Sports hall
Oxfordshire	Wallingford	No	3,700,000	School consolidation
Peterborough	The King's	No	1,000,000	Sports hall; all-weather pitch
Rochdale	Middleton technology	No	400,000	Sports hall
Rochdale	Spring Hill high	No	300,000	Sports hall
Shropshire	Lower Grove	Yes	600,000	School amalgamation
Staffordshire	Sir Graham Balfour high	No	1,700,000	New school; sports hall; improve pitches
Surrey	Banstead county junior and St. Anne's RC primary	No	40,000	Education capital programme
Surrey	Boxgrove primary	No	Payment in kind	School consolidation
Surrey	Merland Rise CP	No	1,608,000	Education capital programme
Surrey	Okewood C of E	Yes	10,000	Education capital programme
Surrey	Park Mead junior	No	550,000	Grass pitches;teaching accommodation
Surrey	Rosebery	No	1,400,000	All-weather pitch; sports hall
Tameside	Egerton Park high	No	Payment in kind	Sports hall
Telford and Wrekin	Blessed Robert Johnson	No	300,000	Sports hall
Wakefield	Kinsley first	Yes	55,000	Education capital programme
Wakefield	South Elmsall middle	Yes	50,000	Education capital programme
Walsall	Beacon	Yes	2,000,000	Teaching accommodation
Walsall	St. Thomas More Catholic comprehensive	No	3,100,000	School consolidation
Warwickshire	Attleborough first	Yes	245,000	Consolidate school sites
Warwickshire	Binley Woods first	Yes	800,000	Consolidate school sites
Warwickshire	Exhall first	Yes	300,000	Consolidate school sites
Warwickshire	Marie Corelli	Yes	2,000,000	New school
Warwickshire	Stratford-upon-Avon high	Yes	1,000,000	New school
West Sussex	Hazelwick	No	2,945,000	Teaching accommodation; all-weather pitch
Wigan	Hindley Borsdane Brook special	Yes	500,000	Consolidate school sites
Wigan	Orrell Holgate primary	No	600,000	Education capital programme
Wigan	Rose Hill special	Yes	500,000	Consolidate school sites
Wigan	Tyldesley Highfield special	Yes	380,000	Consolidate school sites
Wiltshire	Castle Combe primary	Yes	10,000	Education capital programme
Wolverhampton	Aldersley	No	2,387,500	Teaching accommodation
Worcestershire	Callowbrook first	Yes	2,000	Education capital programme

Notes:

1. 'Sports pitch' means areas of open grassed land which are equal to, or larger than, the Football Association's recommended area for games played by under-10s, that is 2,000m^2, and which have a configuration making them suitable for sports pitches (whether they are so laid out or not).

2. The table excludes applications withdrawn by the applicant and applications where schools would retain the same, or a better, level of access to the same sports pitch or to an equivalent sports pitch.

3. The table includes applications in respect of foundation and voluntary schools considered under Schedule 22 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 since 1 September 1999.

4. Prior to July 2001, local authorities were not required to specify what sports or education facilities were to be financed from proceeds of sale. It was sufficient for them to give an undertaking that any proceeds of sale would be allocated to their schools' capital programme. A requirement to provide details of the sports or education projects to be funded from sale proceeds was introduced by the revised guidance published in July 2001.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills in respect of each application for disposal of a school sports pitch since July 2001, if the application was supported *(a)* by the representative of (i) the National Playing Fields Association, (ii) the Central Council of Physical Recreation, (iii) Learning Through Landscapes, (iv) the National Association of Head Teachers and (v) the Local Government Association on the School Playing Fields Advisory Panel and *(b)* by the School Playing Fields Advisory Panel as a whole. [40475]

John Healey *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* The advice of the School Playing Fields Advisory Panel is presented as the collective view of the Panel. Of the applications to dispose of school sports pitches received by the Department since 16 July 2001, the Panel has expressed collective support for the eight applications that have been approved.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent representations her Department has received from the National Playing Fields Association relating to the sale of school playing fields. [40476]

John Healey *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* The Department has not received any recent representations from the National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) relating to the sale of school playing fields. The NPFA is, however, a member of the School Playing Fields Advisory Panel which advises the Department on the extent to which individual applications to dispose of school playing fields comply with the published criteria.

Connexions

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what information obtained by the swipecards of children registered with Connexions may be passed to other businesses and agencies *(a)* with and *(b)* without the agreement of the data subject. [40895]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Connexions Card is only available to young people aged 16 to 19. Registration for the Connexions Card is separate and independent from any registration with the Connexions Service.

In order for the Connexions Card scheme to run effectively a young person's details, such as their name and date of birth, may be shared with Connexions Services, LEAs, Learning Centres and commercial partners. The specific information provided will depend on the nature of the arrangement but any such agreement is subject to the approval of my Department. The arrangements governing the sharing of the information comply with the Data Protection Act and Section 114 of the Learning and Skills Act.

The Privacy Statement distributed to all young people when they register as Card members provides them with an opportunity to choose whether or not they are content for information about them to be passed to commercial partners. This permission can be altered at any time via the Connexions Card website.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether the reward card for young people involves an element of *(a)* product endorsement and *(b)* commercial risk to her Department; and if she will make a statement on progress in distributing it. [40891]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Rewards, discounts and other commercial arrangements offered as part of the Connexions Card initiative are negotiated by our private sector partner, Capita, under the terms set out in the Connexions Card contract and involve no product endorsement. The management of risk in the project is subject to formal contract controls and is handled by my Department. The Card has been successfully trialled in a number of schools in the north-east. It is currently being rolled out in the East Midlands, Yorkshire and Humberside, north-west and south-west regions.

Class Supervision

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will issue guidance as to the circumstances in which staff other than qualified teachers or those seeking qualified teacher status should be placed in sole charge of school classes. [41202]

Mr. Timms: Possible roles for support staff in schools are being considered by a working party, which includes representatives of teachers and support staff, the local government employers and other government bodies. The Education Bill currently before Parliament provides for there to be regulations specifying the conditions under which staff other than qualified teachers may be allowed to teach.

Vocational GCSEs

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what funds she proposes to make available for the introduction of vocational GCSEs; and if specific provision will be made for the cost of training teachers in the new subject areas. [41205]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department will fund a £38 million programme over 2002–04 to expand vocational opportunities at key stage 4—including support for the introduction of the new GCSEs in vocational subjects in September 2002. A programme of training and support for teachers in each of the new GCSEs' subject areas is already under way and will continue into the new academic year.

Teachers

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what additional resources she proposes to assist schools to reduce teacher workload in the next school year. [41206]

Mr. Timms: On 4 January 2002 my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills announced that some £4 million would be made available to fund School Workforce Pathfinder Projects. The projects will explore innovative ways of working to tackle workload so that teachers can concentrate more on teaching and raising standards. Lessons learned from these projects will be shared with all schools. We have also asked the STRB for recommendations by the end of April on how to address workload issues. We will consider those recommendations in the summer.

Learning and Skills Council

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when the Learning and Skills Council will announce its revised sixth form funding allocations for 2002–03. [41943]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Learning and Skills Council is announcing its revised sixth form funding allocations for 2002–03 today. For LEAs with allocations which have been increased compared with those announced previously, LSC grant will be increased commensurately. For LEAs with reduced allocations, LSC grant will be reduced but the Department will pay post-16 budget support grant equal to the reduction, so that no LEA will lose money.

Union Duties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many staff in her Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies receive paid leave to undertake union duties; how many days they are allocated; and what has been the cost to public funds in each of the last four years; [36217]

(2) when she intends to answer the question of 13 February from the hon. Member for Buckingham regarding staff involvement in union duties. [41576]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information requested is as follows:

	1998	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Staff numbers	18	18	18	18
Number of days	495	495	495	495
Costs (£)	40,378	41,202	42,043	42,883

These figures represent the maximum leave allowance of 25 days (40 days for members of Trade Union National Executive Committees and Councils) which may be granted in each year for individuals engaged in trade union business in DfES and its predecessor DfEE.

There are no members of National Executive Committees or Councils in NDPBs for which DfES is responsible.

This compares to an average figure of 23 staff, with average costs of £45,788 per annum, in the four years prior to 1998.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Nova Hut Steelworks

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contacts have taken place between HM Ambassador to the Czech Republic and the Czech Government about the future of the Nova Hut steelworks. [39669]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* The restructuring of the Czech steel industry is an important part of the EU enlargement negotiations. The Ambassador and her staff do discuss the state of the Czech steel industry and Nova Hut steelworks with the Czech Government, but have made no representations.

Prisoners of War (Far East)

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations the Government have made in the last six months to Japan about the compensation paid to British POWs held in Japanese prisoner of war camps during World War II. [40612]

Mr. MacShane: Following the Prime Minister's initiative to make an ex-gratia payment no further representations have been made to the Japanese Government. I continue to meet representatives of the former Far Eastern Prisoners of War groups to discuss other issues.

British Prisoners (Guantanamo Bay)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many visits have been made by *(a)* his officials and *(b)* officials of Government state agencies to British nationals detained at Camp X Ray. [40570]

Mr. Bradshaw: I refer my hon. Friend to my statement in the House on 21 January 2002, *Official Report,* columns 623–32, and to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) on 4 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 69W.

EU Meetings (Scottish Scrutiny)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reason a devolved Administration Minister did not attend the 2409 European Union Council of Ministers meeting (General Affairs) on 18–19 February; which particular suggestions or matters of concern from the Scottish Executive were raised in their absence by the UK Government delegation; and what information or evidence is being provided by his Department to guarantee effective post-council scrutiny by the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament. [40323]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* Decisions on Ministerial attendance at Council meetings are taken on a case-by-case basis by the lead UK Minister. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I attended this meeting, representing all parts of the UK.

It is the responsibility of the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament to scrutinise the Scottish Executive's involvement in preparations for EU Council meetings. These arrangements are a matter for the Committee and the Scottish Executive. This Department provides information to Scottish Executive officials as part of that process.

Gibraltar

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy that there will be no joint authority with Spain over Gibraltar. [40667]

Peter Hain: The Government stand by the commitment set out in the preamble to the 1969 Gibraltar Constitution that we will not enter into arrangements under which the people of Gibraltar will pass under the sovereignty of another state against their freely and democratically expressed wishes.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received regarding the exchange rates used by the British Embassy in Harare for fees paid by British citizens with joint Zimbabwe citizenship wishing to waive their British citizenship. [40480]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* Foreign and Commonwealth Office Ministers have received a small number of letters on this topic from Members representing their constituents.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements have been made for the funding of an emergency air-lift of British citizens from Zimbabwe. [40482]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* No funding arrangements have been made for an emergency air-lift of British citizens from Zimbabwe. We have a Civil Contingency Plan in place for Zimbabwe, as we do for many other countries. This is kept under constant review given the rise in tension in the country.

Israel

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is on the designation of Israel as a nuclear weapon state; and if he will make a statement. [40795]

Mr. Bradshaw: We continue to encourage Israel to resolve international concerns about its nuclear status by acceding to the Non-Proliferation Treaty as a non-nuclear weapon state, and concluding a fullscope safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency. We also support the creation of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East, as demonstrated by our consistent support for relevant United Nations resolutions.

Middle East

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will investigate the circumstances in which Israeli troops have delayed the return to Ramallah of Palestinian teachers from the Friends School who were on the visit to Birmingham between 22 February and 2 March organised by the British Council; and if he will make a statement. [41207]

Mr. Bradshaw: Officials at the British Council have informed me that the teachers have returned to their school in Ramallah. Their journey was difficult because of problems they encountered crossing Israeli Defence Force checkpoints.

I am deeply concerned about the humanitarian and economic impact of closures. Sustained closures continue to restrict the free movement of people and essential supplies between the Occupied Territories and Israel and other countries, as well as within the Occupied Territories. The suffocation of the Palestinian economy, growing unemployment and the disruption of public service and normal social activity in the territories can only fuel hatred and violence. The lifting of closures form part of the recommendations of the Mitchell Committee report. We have expressed our serious concerns to the Israeli Government on political, legal and humanitarian grounds, and will continue to do so.

Immigration

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many applications have been received to enter and reside in the UK on the basis of *(a)* being married to a UK citizen and *(b)* intending to marry a UK citizen; and if he will list by the country of applicants the number of (i) successful and (ii) unsuccessful applications in each category in each of the last three years. [40640]

Mr. Bradshaw: We do not maintain centrally statistics on the number of applications received to enter and reside in the UK on the basis of either being married to or intending to marry a UK citizen.

Such applicants are recorded under the general category of settlement. The figures within this category include dependants and those seeking to reside in the UK on the basis of marriage to someone already resident in the UK but not necessarily a British citizen. to differentiate between these type of applications, we would need to ask all posts to conduct a manual check of all applications.

Figures for total number of settlement applications received, issued and refused in 1999, 2000 and 2001 are attached. Those for 1999 and 2000 are already in the House Library; those for 2001 are based on monthly statistical returns from the largest 110 entry clearance posts handling 98 per cent. of all visa applications.

Settlement applications

	1999			*2000*			*2001*		
Country	*Receive*	*Issued*	*Refused*	*Received*	*Issued*	*Refused*	*Received*	*Issued*	*Refused*
Albania	23	17	3	90	70	20	137	163	26
Algeria	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Angola	5	5	0	10	6	0	1	0	1
Argentina	49	47	2	77	76	0	—	—	—
Armenia	6	6	0	12	12	0	—	—	—
Ascension Island	0	0	0	0	0	0	—	—	—
Australia	5,329	5,201	1	5,353	5,149	3	2,076	3,896	1
Austria	6	6	0	8	7	1	5	241	0
Azerbaijan	55	47	3	29	32	0	14	27	3
Bahamas	30	30	0	26	26	0	—	—	—
Bahrain	26	26	0	74	72	1	71	131	0
Bangladesh	4,769	3,289	1,293	5,127	4,941	1,729	3,626	4,793	1,466
Barbados	128	109	7	181	178	8	—	—	—
Belarus	38	33	0	50	57	3	43	70	1
Belgium	34	33	0	17	16	3	15	26	0
Belize	6	6	0	11	11	0	—	—	—
Bermuda	16	16	0	15	15	0	—	—	—
Bolivia	10	10	0	5	5	0	—	—	—
Bosnia Herzegovina	20	19	1	26	25	1	22	30	0
Botswana	17	18	0	34	34	0	—	—	—
Brazil	236	227	10	179	165	14	0	0	0
Brunei	33	33	0	47	47	0	—	—	—

Settlement applications

	1999			2000			2001		
Country	*Receive*	*Issued*	*Refused*	*Received*	*Issued*	*Refused*	*Received*	*Issued*	*Refused*
Bulgaria	177	0	0	180	165	0	67	153	10
Burma	10	10	1	18	12	0	—	—	—
Cameroon	37	14	10	41	33	15	143	35	16
Canada	1,404	1,359	2	1,312	1,263	5	303	1,225	10
Chile	54	54	0	23	23	0	—	—	—
China	1,111	817	70	1,069	782	55	1,037	968	68
Colombia	198	182	16	160	140	8	82	120	18
Costa Rica	8	8	0	9	9	0	—	—	—
Croatia	74	73	1	55	55	0	47	64	7
Cuba	102	103	7	97	78	7	66	99	3
Cyprus	410	389	9	371	348	5	156	310	5
Czech Republic	320	2	2	2,039	1,862	44	226	311	0
Democratic Republic Congo	81	16	5	119	49	6	—	—	—
Denmark	16	15	1	3	3	0	2	9	2
Ecuador	45	44	0	48	38	10	18	69	13
Egypt	188	194	35	174	152	11	97	152	38
El Salvador	4	4	0	7	6	0	—	—	—
Estonia	37	37	0	37	37	0	—	—	—
Ethiopia	334	156	26	200	274	147	669	597	528
Falkland Islands	2	1	0	304	298	5	—	—	—
Fiji	22	20	2	42	42	0	—	—	—
Finland	5	6	0	2	4	0	—	—	—
France	73	6	16	96	87	2	65	79	1
Georgia	17	17	0	17	17	0	10	17	0
Germany	122	114	12	89	83	6	61	87	18
Ghana	851	739	109	1,049	671	247	768	978	936
Gibraltar	3	3	0	6	6	0	—	—	—
Greece	52	48	0	44	45	0	—	—	—
Guatemala	23	23	0	16	16	0	—	—	—
Guyana	73	83	8	115	116	3	59	102	13
Honduras	5	5	0	4	4	0	—	—	—
Hungary	180	165	1	127	126	8	103	149	0
Iceland	5	5	0	1	1	0	—	—	—
India	5,613	5,290	1,118	5,039	4,665	1,000	3,406	4,988	1,072
Indonesia	169	136	3	135	129	6	36	177	6
Iran	397	385	0	380	379	0	336	446	62
Ireland	134	120	0	126	95	7	33	41	17
Israel	210	209	1	196	186	0	—	—	—
Italy	54	52	3	59	55	5	35	50	1
Ivory Coast	67	50	30	38	31	4	1	78	8
Jamaica	348	305	86	328	351	94	205	296	50
Japan	454	416	17	441	423	15	180	255	111
Jerusalem	57	50	2	76	39	1	5	13	0
Jordan	188	173	15	253	199	20	104	182	34
Kazakhstan	61	57	4	36	31	5	11	73	1
Kenya	1,419	1,229	36	1,437	1,063	30	727	1,574	158
Korea	57	56	1	62	60	0	—	—	—
Kuwait	138	63	3	87	73	6	25	27	11
Latvia	53	52	1	50	47	2	37	65	3
Lebanon	115	101	3	147	135	12	69	95	7
Lesotho	11	10	0	4	3	0	—	—	—
Libya	113	115	0	107	106	1	21	23	7
Lithuania	75	68	2	78	76	0	—	—	—
Luxembourg	12	12	0	16	16	0	—	—	—
Macedonian	1	1	0	1	1	0	49	59	13
Madagascar	7	4	3	7	6	1	—	—	—
Malawi	66	57	0	89	79	2	0	0	0
Malaysia	525	532	9	328	512	8	242	444	12
Malta	161	161	0	164	148	1	—	—	—
Mauritius	182	164	15	138	118	5	80	78	23
Mexico	80	80	0	86	85	0	54	104	1
Mongolia	6	6	0	4	4	0	—	—	—
Morocco	343	291	20	368	351	24	307	404	45
Morocco	0	0	0	0	0	0	—	—	—
Morocco	0	0	0	0	0	0	—	—	—
Mozambique	15	15	0	12	13	0	—	—	—
Namibia	20	18	2	10	9	0	—	—	—
Nepal	74	59	7	100	94	3	86	75	22
Netherlands	128	119	8	115	111	2	73	115	0
New Zealand	1,989	1,922	2	2,075	1,918	4	698	1,836	1
Nicaragua	1	1	0	2	2	0	—	—	—

Settlement applications

	1999			*2000*			*2001*		
Country	*Receive*	*Issued*	*Refused*	*Received*	*Issued*	*Refused*	*Received*	*Issued*	*Refused*
Nigeria	165	126	9	125	96	19	87	146	67
Nigeria	1,379	667	366	1,108	1,228	248	629	1,077	348
Norway	8	0	0	14	14	0	2	4	0
Oman	70	70	0	57	55	1	7	12	1
Pakistan	10,840	6,649	2,643	10,515	12,042	2,094	6,564	9,753	3,579
Panama	6	6	0	6	6	0	—	—	—
Papua New Guinea	15	14	0	93	94	5	—	—	—
Peru	61	59	1	72	67	3	31	55	0
Philippines	808	737	44	879	647	42	525	732	71
Poland	307	299	6	309	292	109	203	298	2
Portugal	36	34	1	27	27	0	—	—	—
Qatar	11	9	1	16	15	2	4	16	0
Romania	194	180	8	244	173	35	180	251	36
Russia	707	643	30	822	775	42	419	790	28
Rwanda	0	0	0	0	0	0	—	—	—
Saudi Arabia	232	214	10	163	134	10	73	123	28
Senegal	48	27	21	29	26	0	14	17	3
Seychelles	22	22	0	26	26	0	—	—	—
Sierra Leone	0	0	0	164	101	25	—	—	—
Singapore	290	289	0	287	280	1	79	134	0
Slovak Republic	254	254	3	238	225	3	75	173	4
Solomon Islands	3	3	0	5	5	0	—	—	—
South Africa	2,236	2,214	23	15	15	0	1,381	2,160	43
Spain	55	55	0	46	46	0	16	32	0
Sri Lanka	683	541	80	878	843	35	1,032	921	189
Sudan	22	22	0	96	94	27	63	80	39
Swaziland	7	7	0	9	9	0	—	—	—
Sweden	20	20	0	11	9	0	8	6	0
Switzerland	143	131	2	129	127	1	47	86	5
Syria	170	129	12	142	73	14	361	185	45
Taiwan	54	54	0	61	61	0	37	52	9
Tanzania	148	118	12	169	134	23	43	130	19
Thailand	1,190	997	63	1,557	1,471	98	1,014	1,894	248
The Gambia	305	245	23	313	239	26	214	290	57
to Domingo	39	27	4	30	42	2	26	36	4
Tonga	0	0	0	1	1	0	—	—	—
Trinidad and Tobago	138	139	4	0	0	0	56	86	5
Tunisia	244	219	25	250	227	32	226	282	58
Turkey	1,052	754	128	1,325	836	39	556	941	78
Turkmenistan	5	5	0	10	10	0	—	—	—
Uganda	108	86	15	254	170	40	314	388	135
Ukraine	171	157	5	336	327	6	256	373	27
United Arab Emirates	219	184	7	205	177	18	90	156	25
United States of America	2,793	2,688	17	2,722	2,637	4	1,298	2,321	9
Uruguay	7	7	0	3	3	0	—	—	—
Uzbekistan	36	33	4	23	23	0	3	40	3
Vanuatu	5	5	0	4	4	0	—	—	—
Venezuela	41	40	1	48	48	0	235	347	50
Vietnam	72	49	20	128	109	7	56	109	17
Yemen	309	197	54	317	289	92	205	345	74
Yugoslavia	23	22	1	110	100	0	41	58	3
Zambia	123	76	1	123	102	15	45	70	5
Zimbabwe	448	447	1	861	853	18	337	635	3
Total	79,469	63,819	10,734	79,342	77,105	10,033	47,165	72,131	14,531

Overseas Representatives (Business Promotion)

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who initiated, and on what date, the draft letter for the Prime Minister submitted by the British Ambassador to Romania in support of the acquisition of Sidex by Mr. Lakshmi Mittal's company. [39716]

Peter Hain: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 610–11W.

Romania

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what meetings were held between Romanian officials and Ministers and British Ministers and officials during the Romanian Government's visit to Britain in November 2001. [39052]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The Romanian Prime Minister met my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary, the Home Secretary, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, and the Secretary of State for International Development. Mr. Nastase was accompanied by his Ministers and officials and British Ministers were accompanied by officials. The Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane), and I had separate meetings with the Romanian Foreign Minister. There were further meetings in the margins of the visit between officials and members of the Romanian delegation, as is our usual practice. The main topics for discussion included EU enlargement and Romania's progress with her application, including political and economic reforms.

SCOTLAND

Electoral Register

Mr. Tom Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps the Government are taking to allow local authorities to make the electoral register available for commercial purposes. [31217]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, on 31 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 450W.

Consultants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the total cost to her Department was of the use of external consultants in each of the last four years. [35028]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

In 2000–01 the Department spent £5,465 on external consultants and in the current year spending to date is £17,484.

Working Conditions and Practices

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases of work-related stress have been reported in her Department; how much compensation has been paid to employees; how many work days have been lost due to work-related stress, and at what cost; what procedures have been put in place to reduce work-related stress, and at what cost, in each of the last three years; and if she will make a statement. [35941]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

No cases of work-related stress have been reported in my Department since that date. The Scotland Office is committed to providing a safe and healthy working environment for all its employees. This includes ensuring that work practices are safe and free from hazards to health and that effective occupational health policies and good health management practices are developed.

Departmental Website

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the total cost of her Department's website was in real terms in each of the last four years; and how many hits it received in each of those years. [36145]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

The cost and number of page impressions for my Department's website is as follows:

Period	*Cost (£)*	*Numbers of page impressions*
1 July 2000 to 31 March 2000	293.75	26,092
1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001	293.75	194,991
1 April 2001 to 31 January 2002	269.75	356,122

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the statutory instruments issued by her Department in the last 12 months, indicating *(a)* the purpose of each and *(b)* the cost of each to (i) public funds, (ii) businesses and (iii) individuals. [36225]

Mrs. Liddell: The following is a list of the statutory instruments made by the Scotland Office in the 12 months to 31 December 2001:

SI reference	*SI title*
SI 2001/1399	The Scottish Parliament (Elections etc.) (Amendment) Order 2001 (Amends SI 1999/783)
SI 2001/1400	The Scotland Act 1998 (Consequential Modifications) Order 2001
SI 2001/1456	The Scotland Act 1998 (Modification of Schedule 5) Order 2001
SI 2001/1748	The Scottish Parliament (Elections etc.) (Amendment) (No. 2) Order 2001
SI 2001/1750	The Scottish Parliament (Elections etc.) (Amendment) (No. 3) Order 2001
SI 2001/2478	The Scotland Act 1998 (Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001) Order 2001
SI 2001/2748	The Transport (Scotland) Act 2001 (Conditions attached to PSV Operator's Licence and Competition Test for Exercise of Bus Functions) Order 2001
SI 2001/3504	The Scotland Act 1998 (Transfer of Functions to the Scottish Ministers etc.) (No. 2) Order 2001
SI 2001/497	Representation of the People (Scotland) Regulations 2001
SI 2001/1749	Representation of the People (Scotland) (Amendment) Regulations 2001
SI 2001/2817	Representation of the People (Form of Canvass) (Scotland) Regulations 2001

The purpose of each instrument is described in its explanatory note.

There are no separately identifiable costs for the following statutory instruments to public funds, businesses or individuals, but I expect it to be minimal in each case:

SI 2001/1400

SI 2001/1456

SI 2001/2478

SI 2001/2748

SI 2001/3504

SI 2001/1748

SI 2001/1750

SI 2001/2817.

Most of the costs of implementing the remaining instruments are not separately identifiable and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Voting devices for blind voters introduced by SI 2001/497 were provided centrally for the UK parliamentary election in Scotland in 2001 at a cost of £46,300. Other costs incurred by returning officers under SI 2001/497 and SI 2001/1399 can be reclaimed through the relevant Returning Officers' Charges Order. No extra provision has been made within the local government public expenditure plans for electoral registration officers implementing the new measures introduced by SI 2001/497, SI 2001/1749 and SI 2001/1399.

Ministerial Boxes

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland by what means ministerial boxes are conveyed from private offices in her Department to *(a)* herself and *(b)* her fellow Ministers; how frequently and at what expense private courier firms are employed for such a task; and which courier firms have been used for such duties. [36285]

Mrs. Liddell: Ministerial boxes originating from my Department are transported to Ministers' homes either by Government car or by a service provided by the Royal Mail, if necessary.

Ministerial boxes are also transported along with other mail between offices in London, Edinburgh and Glasgow by the inter-office van service. The contract for this service was awarded to Securitas by the former Scottish Office and it is now maintained by the Scottish Executive.

Health and Safety (Computers)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many employees in her Department who regularly use computers have taken up the provision of a free eye test; and how this service is advertised to *(a)* current and *(b)* new staff. [36695]

Mrs. Liddell: My staff are reimbursed for the cost of eyesight tests to ensure full compliance with Health and Safety legislation. Further to this, assistance in the purchase of spectacles or contact lenses to prescribed limits is also available to staff. This scheme is advertised on the departmental intranet site. All staff who regularly use computers have access to this site. Details of the numbers of Scotland Office staff who have taken up this provision of a free eye test are not available.

Nuclear Power Stations

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what responsibility she has for planning consent for new nuclear power stations in Scotland. [40460]

Mrs. Liddell: Planning law is devolved. In addition, the power to grant authorisations for the construction of new power stations, under section 36 of the Electricity Act, has been executively devolved to the Scottish Ministers.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prison Population

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the Home Office in the last 12 months has revised its predictions of the growth in the prison population. [40002]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* Statistical bulletins concerning the long term prison population projections are issued every May; the last one was published on 23 May 2001. Short term projections are issued every May and November.

A copy of the most recent long term projection is kept in the Library. Details of the current short term projection are included in the monthly "Prison Population Brief", which is available on the Home Office website at the following address: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/prisons1.html

Custody

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when and in what form he intends to publish his proposals in relation to part-time custody. [40004]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* Intermittent custody (part time custody) is being worked up as part of the package of sentencing reforms currently being considered by the Government in response to the "Making Punishments Work" report written by John Halliday. My intention is to publish a White Paper later this year.

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* independent custody visitors' groups and *(b)* lay observers' panels published their annual reports in the last year; and if he will make a statement. [40003]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* Information about the number of independent (police) custody groups publishing annual reports in the last year is not kept centrally. However, each police authority's annual report should contain a reference to independent custody visiting within the relevant area.

There are eight (prisoner escort) lay observers panels in England and Wales and all of them have published their annual reports in the last year.

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to bring boards of visitors, lay observers and independent custody visitors under a single umbrella organisation; and if he will make a statement. [40010]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* There are no plans at present.

Experience Corps

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what senior appointments have been made to the board of Experience Corps; and on what terms. [39803]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* The Experience Corps is an independent company. Its appointments are subject to the memorandum and articles of association of the company. The current list of directors is listed on its website or is available from the company.

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much has been allocated to the Experience Corps; over what period; and how much had been spent by 31 December 2001. [39804]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* The Experience Corps company has been allocated a total of £19.9 million pounds for the period until 31 March 2004 to deliver the initiative. The first instalment of grant-in-aid was paid in September 2001. By 31 December 2001, the Home Office had paid a total of £2.8 million in grant-in-aid to the Experience Corps company.

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the performance of the Experience Corps to date. [39728]

Angela Eagle: The Experience Corps company was established in March 2001 and signed a financial agreement with the Home Office in September 2001. It is organising separate launches in each of the nine government regions of England; the first took place in November 2001 and they will be completed by April 2002. It has the objective of 250,000 volunteers over the lifetime of the initiative. We will receive a report on the first six months' progress by the summer.

Date Rape

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he gives police authorities on investigating allegations of date rape involving use of gammahydroxybutyrate. [14288]

Mr. Denham: Guidance on good practice in rape investigation is available to the police from the National Crime Faculty, who are able where necessary to draw on expertise elsewhere in the service on the investigation of cases where rape may have been facilitated by the administration of drugs. In addition, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary will shortly be publishing the report of a thematic inspection of rape investigation. The Government have accepted in principle that gammahydroxybutyrate (GHB) should be controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, and the Home Office published on 4 March 2002 a consultation letter on this proposal.

Human Rights Act

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what monitoring of compliance with the Human Rights Act 1998 in young offenders institutions his Department has undertaken; and what resources have been made available for this. [38366]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 6 March 2002]:* All prison service policies have been audited for compliance with the Human Rights Act 1998 and all prison service activities, both in relation to prisoners and staff, have to comply with the Act. The Prison Service monitors young offender institutions and other establishments by means of some 60 performance standards. Independent Boards of Visitors are present in all establishments, whose members have a right to visit all parts of the establishment at any time of day or night. Her Majesty's Inspector of Prisons inspects establishments on a regular cycle and also makes unannounced visits. Prisoners and young offenders may make complaints to the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman. An operational area manager at Assistant Director level was appointed on 1 April 2001, specifically to oversee the juvenile estate. A unit in Prison Service headquarters disseminates information about the Human Rights Act and monitors challenges under the Act. All these activities take account of human rights among other matters but the costs cannot be separately identified.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what monitoring of compliance with the Human Rights Act 1998 in asylum accommodation centres his Department has undertaken; and what resources have been made available for this. [38369]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 6 March 2002]:* Trial accommodation centres have not yet been established. However, the process of establishing them will include an assessment of all the relevant factors including compatibility with the Human Rights Act.

Immigration

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the immigration status of a person who is given permanent leave to remain in the UK because they are marrying a British citizen who divorces that person a number of years later; and if such a person then has a right to a claim on public funds. [41277]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* A person granted indefinite leave to remain on the basis of their marriage to a British Citizen does not forfeit that status if they later divorce. They will retain their settled status and their eligibility for public funds.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of people whose immigration status is irregular in terms of *(a)* visitors who have overstayed, *(b)* students who have overstayed, *(c)* asylum seekers who have exhausted their appeal rights and *(d)* illegal entrants who have made no attempt to regularise their stay; what information he has on the average length of stay of such people; and what his policy is for regularising their situation. [39493]

Angela Eagle: No estimates have been made of the number of persons in the categories requested and information on the average length of stay of such persons is not available. No Government have ever been able to give reliable estimates of this nature. However, the Home Office has commissioned a study which will consider methods of estimating the size and characteristics of the illegal population.

It remains our policy that overstayers and illegal entrants are liable to removal from the United Kingdom. The Immigration Service seeks to remove from the United Kingdom all persons who no longer have any basis of stay.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the level of violent crime was in each constituency in Wales in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001. [32111]

Mr. Denham: Recorded crime data are not collected by parliamentary constituency. Information on numbers of certain offences, including violent crime, has been collected centrally at police Basic Command Unit (BCU), and Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership level, since 1 April 1999. The Home Office statistical bulletin "Recorded Crime England and Wales, 12 months to March 2001", published on 19 July 2001, includes details of recorded crimes in these areas.

The British Crime Survey has shown that, in England and Wales as a whole, victimisation for the violent crime in the survey which is comparable to recorded crime decreased by 19 per cent. between the 1999 and 2000 calendar years, whereas comparable violent crime recorded by the police increased by 9 per cent. Violent crime recorded by the police may therefore not necessarily be a reflection of real changes in the level of victimisation.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to establish a mandatory central database for registering animal experiments to enable the sharing of results. [40373]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* It is already Home Office policy to encourage the publication of the findings of research licensed under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. The Animals (Scientific Procedures) Inspectorate, which assesses and advises on licence applications made under the 1986 Act, uses a range of resources to keep abreast of developments and results in research. The scientific community also maintains and uses databases to the same end.

However, the establishment of a mandatory central database for this purpose would be problematic. There would, in particular, be significant difficulties in ensuring the completeness and quality of the data and in ensuring that intellectual or commercial confidentiality were not compromised.

We believe that there is scope for further reducing the risk of duplication in the use of animals in scientific procedures by encouraging companies to share data. To this end, in August 2000, we announced an inter-departmental concordat on data sharing to enable Government Departments to reduce the duplication of tests on animals. The concordat commits United Kingdom regulatory authorities to help resolve legal and other obstacles and encourage data sharing between clients and thereby reduce animal tests. Progress in implementing the concordat will be reviewed in the next few months.

Moreover, there are a number of international and national initiatives to encourage data sharing. Most recent European directives under which regulatory work is done provide for the sharing of data. International assessment programmes have well-established and effective methods for data sharing, ensuring mutual acceptance of data and dissemination of information on chemicals. This also extends to dissemination of data to developing countries.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps his Department is taking to promote investment in alternatives to animal experiments; and if he will make a statement. [40372]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* The use of alternatives is widely encouraged and the use of animals in regulated procedures is prohibited by the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 in cases where a scientifically valid non-animal alternative is available. Any lack of progress in research into alternatives is more often due to the limitations of science rather than inadequate funding.

Most work on alternatives is neither done by Government nor with Government money, as industry spends many millions of pounds each year on the search for and development of alternatives. None the less, every year the Home Office makes available to the Animal Procedures Committee a budget for research aimed at developing or promoting the use of alternatives which replace animal use, reduce the number of animals used, or refine the procedures involved to minimise suffering. Details of completed research projects are published in the annual report of the Animal Procedures Committee, which is available from The Stationery Office. The amount made available to the Committee for 2001–02 for this specific purpose has increased to £280,000.

This is not the only money spent by the Government on the development of alternatives, as other Departments are also active in this area. Indeed, it is estimated that the total spent by the United Kingdom Government is in the region of £2 million each year. To take this further on an international level, we will continue to support the European Centre for the Validation of Alternative Methods (ECVAM) through contributions to the European Union.

Working Conditions and Practices

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment has been made of the effect of the working time directive on his Department's employees; how many employees are working in excess of 48 hours per week; what steps he is taking to reduce this number; and if he will make a statement. [35889]

Angela Eagle: No formal assessment of the effect of the working time directive has been undertaken but it forms part of the Department's drive to reduce long-hours working by its staff. The Home Office is committed to achieving a proper work life balance for all staff as one part of its plans for greater diversity. Guidance to staff issued in November 2001 highlighted the requirements of the directive and emphasised the importance the Department places upon ensuring that employees are not required to work excessively long hours and the steps that managers should be taking to reduce them. Standard terms and conditions for staff employed by the Home Office are well within the limits set by the Working Time Regulations.

Centrally held records show that 83 Home Office staff have signed voluntary waivers, indicating that they have agreed to work in excess of 48 hours per week, averaged over a 17 week period. Records of staff signing these waivers in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate and the Home Office agencies are not currently available centrally though the information is held locally.

Europol

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the activities of the European Task Force of Police Chiefs, as identified in Council Document 13416/2/01, JA1 133. [39660]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Council Document referred to reports on the achievements of the Tampere action plan, when Heads of State and Government agreed, at Tampere in October 1999, to an ambitious programme of measures, which amplify and supplement the Amsterdam Treaty obligations but serve also to support the Treaty goal of creating an "area of freedom, security and justice". One of the areas for action is the Union-wide fight against international organised crime. The Police Chiefs Task Force (PCTF) was established to redress the problem that there was no forum in which senior police officers could decide to launch police operations against organised crime on the basis of Europol analyses.

The task force has met on four occasions. Work still needs to be done to ensure that it focuses on the planning and execution of actual law enforcement operations at Union level, though these operations need not involve all member states. We also need to ensure that the task force is adequately supported, and that it has a defined place within the institutional architecture of the European Union. This could mean it having a similar role and status to the existing working groups, such as that on Police Co-operation and Europol. The possibility that Europol, as well as providing intelligence could also provide a secretariat, serving both the Europol Management Board and the PCTF is being examined.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the report to the Justice and Home Affairs Council by the Director of Europol on the coalition against terrorism. [39655]

Angela Eagle: The Justice and Home Affairs Council (JHA) of 20 September 2001 urged member states' police and intelligence services to ensure that relevant information on terrorist activity be passed to Europol and invited the Director of Europol to report to the JHA Council on 6/7 December 2001 on member states' input. In his report, the Director noted member states' increased willingness to share information with Europol. The Government are committed to enhanced international co-operation against terrorism both within and outside the European union and fully supports Europol's counter-terrorist remit. This commitment is reflected in the Europol Director's recognition of the level of contributions offered by the police and intelligence services, in accordance with the terms of the Europol Convention, to Europol's counter-terrorism effort.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Europol-US agreement. [39654]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: This agreement concluded on 6 December 2001 provides for exchanges of information between Europol and the United States of America, covering strategic information including trends and developments in the methods used to commit offences, prevention strategies, threat assessments and crime situation reports. It specifically excludes the transmission of personal data. The Government attach importance to this agreement in the fight against organised crime.

Laeken Summit

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what programmes are envisaged under paragraph 40 of the Laeken conclusions, combating discrimination and racism. [39638]

Angela Eagle: Paragraph 40 of the conclusions of the Laeken Council identifies areas in which further work is needed in order to progress towards a common European Union immigration and asylum policy. It was agreed at the Tampere Council in October 1999 that measures to ensure the fair treatment of third country nationals, including measures to tackle discrimination and racism and xenophobia, should form part of such a policy. Key developments in implementing the Tampere Conclusions in this respect have included the adoption by the Council of two equal treatment directives in June 2000 and November 2000 respectively and the adoption of a Council Decision in November 2000 on a Community Action Programme (2001–06) to support member states' efforts in this area.

The Community Action Programme will explore practical ways of overcoming the barriers created by discrimination in many areas of everyday life by comparing and contrasting experiences in different parts of the European Union. The programme will work with national, local and regional bodies, social partners, non-governmental organisations, universities and research institutes, national statistical offices and the media on issues such as equality in public administration and the media, equal participation in political, economic and social life; equal access to housing, transport, culture, leisure, sport etc., and the monitoring and mainstreaming of anti-discrimination policies.

The Council has also recently started to consider a Commission proposal for a Framework Decision on combating racist crime.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy towards increasing the number of JHA sessions under paragraph 37 of the Laeken conclusions, with reference to an increase in legislation and parliamentary scrutiny requirements. [39636]

Angela Eagle: The Laeken European Council concluded that holding more frequent meetings of Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Ministers would help to overcome delays in implementing the conclusions of the Tampere European Council of October 1999. The Government attach great importance to the implementation of the Tampere European Council's conclusions and support more frequent meetings of JHA ministers provided that such meetings are focused on resolving obstacles to agreement on key measures in the Tampere programme. We also consider that two-day JHA Council meetings should be the exception rather than the rule.

The legislative work programme agreed at the Tampere European Council is substantial. Measures under negotiation in the Council are subject to scrutiny by

Parliament, and some will require domestic legislation to implement. The increasing volume of justice and home affairs business at European Union level will have implications of our Parliament.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy towards paragraph 43 of the Laeken conclusions, on the Public Prosecutor. [39640]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Commission Green Paper on Criminal Law protection of financial interests of the Community and the establishment of a European Public Prosecutor was published in December 2001. Its purpose is to launch a wide-ranging public debate about the possible creation of a European Public Prosecutor, responsible for investigating and prosecuting cases of fraud against the Community budget. Member states have been asked to provide responses to the paper by 1 June 2002, and the Commission intends to hold a public hearing for interested parties in 2002.

A European Public Prosecutor as proposed by the Commission could be created only after amendment of the European Community Treaty. The Government remain unconvinced of the need for a European Public Prosecutor, and sees difficulties of both principle and practice in this proposal. We are preparing a response to the Green Paper, in consultation with interested departments and agencies, including non-governmental organisations.

Schengen Agreement

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the purpose of Council Document 11896/01, amending UK participation in the Schengen Agreement. [39658]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Council Document 11896–01 contains a proposal to amend Article 40.1 and 40.7 of the Schengen Convention. It is currently under negotiation within the Justice and Home Affairs Council and has been deposited for scrutiny by the European Scrutiny Committees of both Houses.

The purpose of the proposed amendments is to remove existing restrictions to the operation of cross-border surveillance between participating member states. The proposal would amend Article 40.1 to allow cross-border surveillance not only of the person suspected of having taken part in an extraditable criminal offence but also of other persons in the context of the criminal investigation. Article 40.7 would be amended to extend the list of extraditable offences for which cross-border surveillance may be carried out. Adoption of the proposal will be subject to unanimity. The United Kingdom (UK) broadly supports the amendment. Implementation in the UK will be subject to the requirements of Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) and practical operation will be subject to UK police control.

The terms in which the UK will participate in certain areas of the Schengen Convention are set out in the council decision of 29 May 2000 (2000/365/EC). The UK will participate in Article 40 of the Schengen Convention and under the terms of Article 8 of the decision of 29 May 2000, the UK is participating in the adoption of the amendment. Preparation for UK participation in the specified areas of Schengen are under way, and will be subject to parliamentary scrutiny.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what penalties will be imposed by him against those who escaped from Yarl's Wood following the fire but were recaptured; [38670]

(2) what penalties including loss of asylum rights are available to him to impose on those who are at large following the Yarl's Wood fire who are asylum seekers. [38661]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The Immigration Acts do not at present provide for adverse inferences to be drawn from behaviour such as absconding or escaping from a removal centre. However, in the case of persons who were held pending removal, their removal could of course proceed once they are apprehended. Individuals who have outstanding applications or appeals would be detained pending the outcome of those matters. In the case of individuals who remain at large, the consideration of any outstanding asylum applications would proceed on the basis of the information available and this could well result in refusal. Similarly, appellants who fail to attend the hearing of their appeals would damage their chances at appeal.

Under the new arrangements set out in the White Paper, "Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain", all asylum seekers will be expected to comply fully with the more managed systems that are being put in place. If they do not do so, it will adversely affect the credibility of their claim for asylum and will increase the chances of their claim being refused.

Correspondence

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average response time was for responding to departmental correspondence; what percentage of letters took longer than one month for a response; and what percentage took longer than three months for a response in each of the last five years. [37448]

Angela Eagle: The available information on public correspondence relates solely to volumes, the number, and proportion of replies sent within the 20 working day target. The information is not held in such a way as to provide the more detailed breakdown requested, and has been collected only since 1999. It does not currently include information on public correspondence received by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate.

Table A gives the information available for public correspondence:

Table A: Letters received from the public through 1999 to 2001

	Volume of letters received	*Performance—percentage answered within 20 working days*
1999	26,616	57
2000	34,471	71
2001	35,549	76

The following tables give the information requested for MPs' correspondence. Information on letters on immigration and nationality matters, which make up roughly half the postbag, is set out in table C. Non-immigration and nationality correspondence is set out in table B.

Table B: Letters received from MPs through 1997 to 2001[1]

	Number of replies sent	Average response time in working days	Performance—percentage of replies taking more than: One calendar month	Three calendar months
1997	8,517	33	56	4
1998	11,954	24	47	6
1999	11,471	17	14	2
2000	11,206	19	18	2
2001	8,341	22	25	2

[1] Non-immigration and nationality correspondence

Table C: Letters received from MPs through 1997 to 2001[1]

	Number of replies sent	Average response time in working days	Performance—percentage of replies taking more than: One calendar month	Three calendar months
1997	7,423	32	64	5
1998	8,167	34	53	10
1999	7,501	40	75	13
2000	9,596	51	67	24
2001	8,954	43	60	16

[1] Immigration and nationality matters

The Home Department receives large amounts of correspondence from hon. Members, right hon. Friends, hon. Friends and members of the public. We aim to send a substantive reply to all letters as soon as possible. I am determined to achieve a high level of performance in dealing quickly with correspondence and to deliver a greater standard of service to all Members of Parliament and the public.

We are working with our information technology partners to develop a long term strategy for handling correspondence, e-mails and telephone inquires. In the short term we are implementing a number of organisational and process changes to bring about improvements in the quality and timeliness of replies. I am monitoring the situation closely and am committed to further improvements.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Rail Journeys (Staff)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the *(a)* percentage and number of rail journeys undertaken on first class tickets, *(b)* average cost of a first class journey by rail and *(c)* total cost of rail travel in each of the past four years broken down by grade of civil servant. [37505]

Dr. John Reid: As we do not hold the information requested in the format required, an answer could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Plastic Baton Rounds

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 878W, how many plastic baton rounds have been *(a)* expended and *(b)* decommissioned at the end of their active lifespan; and what the maximum life is of a plastic baton round. [29943]

Jane Kennedy: The Chief Constable advises me that: *(a)* During the period 1981 to 21 November 2001 a total of 41,839 baton rounds were discharged by the police.

(b) No L21 baton rounds have been decommissioned: they are not at the end of their life span. Stock rotation ensures that rounds nearing the expiry of their shelf life are used for training purposes only. The recommended shelf life of the current L21 baton rounds is 1.5 years.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 878W, by what process unspent plastic baton rounds are disposed of; what body carries out this function and at what cost; and what proportion of disposed pbrs leave the armoury in their original container as supplied. [29944]

Jane Kennedy: The Chief Constable advises me that as operational stocks are recycled through training baton rounds are only disposed of when there has been an official change in the specification. In these circumstances the rounds are boxed in metal H83 containers which are inspected and sealed by the Army at no cost to the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Baton rounds for disposal leave the Police Service of Northern Ireland in H83 metal ammunition boxes only. When handed over to the Army the rounds are removed from plastic 'outers' and are packed loose in bathes of 25. None of the original containers as supplied leave police premises.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 878W, in what type of containers plastic baton rounds are supplied to the police. [29945]

Jane Kennedy: The Chief Constable advises me that baton rounds are received by the police service of Northern Ireland in UN approved packaging. The packaging is reinforced cardboard boxes, marked UN 4G/Y23/S/99/GB/4031. Each box contains five clear plastic, custom made, carrying bags (GPL SPEC 2757).

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 878W, how and in what condition plastic baton rounds are stored *(a)* upon supply, *(b)* following distribution to barracks and *(c)* following issue to individual officers. [29946]

Jane Kennedy: The Chief Constable advises me that: *(a)* Upon receipt by the police service of Northern Ireland baton rounds are stored in their original UN approved packaging within a temperature controlled and secure ammunition magazine.

(b) In preparation for distribution the baton rounds (still within their individual plastic carrying bags) are repackaged, in batches of 16, into metal ammunition boxes known as 'H83s'. The H83s are UN approved and carry the marking UN 4A1/Y19/S/90/GB/0355. On arrival at police stations it has been customary to remove the plastic outer bag within the H83 box. The boxes are stored in the police station armoury until required.

(c) Individual officers requiring access to baton rounds outside the police station are supplied with an H83 box for that purpose.

Press Releases

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many press releases were issued by his Department *(a)* between 1 May and 31 December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive. [40037]

Dr. John Reid: Press releases issued by my Department are as follows:

Month/year	*Number*
1 May to 31 December 1997	844
1998	1,313
1999	1,055
2000	231
2001	248
2002 as of 1 March	60

Police Injuries

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many police officers were injured in the course of performing their duties in Northern Ireland in 2000. [35338]

Jane Kennedy: The table provides details of police officers injured as a result of terrorism or serious public disorder. Statistics on the number of police officers injured by other means (eg RTAs, and assaults while dealing with routine inquires) are not included.

Security situation statistics 2000

Police officers injured as a result of the security situation/serious public disorder	*Number*
Regular	350
Reserve	96
Total	446

Consultants

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations have won new contracts with *(a)* his Department and *(b)* executive agencies in each of the past five years; [38735]

(2) if he will list the 30 largest contracts awarded by his Department from *(a)* May 1997 to April 1998, *(b)* May 1998 to April 1999, *(c)* May 1999 to April 2000, *(d)* May 2000 to April 2001 and *(e)* May 2001 to the latest date, indicating in each case the values of the contracts and the companies with which the contracts were placed; [38737]

(3) which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations which previously held contracts with his Department *(a)* won new contracts at the culmination of the existing contracts and *(b)* won new contracts after a period of inactivity with his Department in each of the past five years. [38736]

Dr. John Reid: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Capita Group

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many contracts the Department has with Capita; and how much they are worth. [38373]

Dr. John Reid: None.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Fair Trade

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department whether fair trade products are sold in his Department. [39824]

Mr. Wills: The Lord Chancellor's Department also replies on behalf of its associated offices and the Court Service.

Within the context of the Department's limited opportunity to buy fair trade goods, we take every opportunity to encourage their purchase in line with Government policy.

For instance, at our headquarters building, our caterers currently offer fair trade coffee. In addition, our caterers in our courts in the northern, north-eastern and north Wales regions offer both fair trade tea and coffee.

Both these suppliers have also agreed to promote the Fairtrade Foundation during Fair Trade Fortnight that runs from 4 to 17 March.

CAFCASS

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make a statement on how the recommendations of the Advisory Board on Family Law: Children Act Sub-Committee to the Lord Chancellor on the question of parental contract in cases where there is domestic violence have been adopted by the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service. [40408]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) have ensured that the Advisory Board on Family Law: Children Act Sub-Committee's guidelines on parental contact where there are allegations of domestic violence have been promulgated to its staff. The Lord Chancellor's Department are monitoring the effectiveness of the guidelines, including their use by CAFCASS. CAFCASS is also a member of the Lord Chancellor's Working Group on Child Contact Centres to improve procedures for referral to contact centres in cases, including those where there has been domestic violence.

Human Rights

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he will review the United Kingdom's position under the various international human rights instruments. [42171]

Mr. Wills: The Lord Chancellor's Department will conduct a review with the following terms of reference:

> "To review the United Kingdom's position on international human rights instruments in the light of experience of the operation of the Human Rights Act, the availability of existing remedies within the UK, and law and practice in other EU member states; and to report by spring 2003".

The review will consult widely within and outside Government. We hope to report the outcome in about a year's time.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Sports Bodies

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of 13 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 409W, on sports clubs, (1) on what evidence base the Government drew up proposals for reforming the system of rate relief for voluntary sports clubs contained in the White Paper, "Strong Local Leadership-Quality Public Services"; [39971]

(2) whether official figures on rateable values define non-profit making sports bodies as a distinct category; and on what evidence the Government drew up the proposals for reforming the system of rate relief for voluntary sports clubs contained in the White Paper, "Strong Local Leadership-Quality Public Services". [39975]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

Rateable values for all non-domestic properties are published in the rating list for each billing authority in England. These indicate the type of each property, but do not record information about the occupiers of those properties. Sporting properties are identified by a number of categories, including bowling greens, clubhouses, cricket grounds/pitches, pavilions, golf courses, polo grounds, sports grounds, tennis courts/clubs, football grounds, football pitches, rugby union grounds. However, the rating lists do not show whether or not the occupiers of those properties are non-profit making sports bodies.

The proposals on rate relief for voluntary sports clubs in the White Paper "Strong Local Leadership—Quality Public Services", follow consultation in the Green Paper, "Modernising Local Government Finances", which was published in September 2000. They are based on discussions with sports representative bodies and representations from many individual sports clubs. The White Paper proposals also take account of the decision of the Charity Commission, announced on 30 November 2001, to recognise community amateur sports clubs for charitable status. Both the White Paper proposals on rates and the Charity Commission announcement took account of evidence proved by the sports bodies and other sports clubs.

Public Appointments (Warrington, North)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many people from Warrington, North she has appointed to non-departmental public bodies since 1997. [39451]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* Since 1997 my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) and I have made around 280 public appointments to non-departmental public bodies. Our records indicate that, while two of these live in Warrington, none live in the Warrington, North constituency.

WALES

Secondments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many staff in his Department have been seconded to jobs in the *(a)* private and *(b)* public sector in each of the last four years. [31772]

Mr. Paul Murphy: In respect of the former Welsh Office (up to June 1999): figures are not available for 1998–99; there was one secondment to the private sector and 30 secondments to the public sector in 1999–2000.

In respect of the Wales Office (since July 1999): there were no secondments in 1999–2000; there have been two secondments to the public sector in 2001–02.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the names of staff who have been seconded to his Department from the private sector since May 1997, indicating *(a)* the names of the organisation from which each has come, *(b)* their responsibilities and civil service grades within his Department, *(c)* the organisation responsible for paying their salary and *(d)* the start and end dates of their secondment. [35832]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* Figures are not available for 1997–98.

For 1998–99—Nil.

For 1999–2000 there were three people seconded to the Welsh Office (up to 30 June 1999) from the private sector.

For 2000–01 and 2001–02 there were no staff seconded to the Office of the Secretary of State for Wales from the private sector.

Cockle Gathering

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has held with Secretaries in the National Assembly for Wales on the prohibition on cockle gathering in the Burny Inlet caused by diarrhetic shellfish poisoning. [34532]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I regularly meet Assembly Ministers and cockle gathering is an issue which has been discussed.

In addition, I recently met representatives of the cockle-gathering industry in the Gower together with the Assembly Member for that constituency, Edwina Hart.

I have been made fully aware of the problems that the cockle gatherers are facing, the difficulties caused by the cockle beds being closed for eight months and the impact that that has had on their industry and livelihood.

Asthma

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many local education authorities in Wales are implementing an asthma policy. [36903]

Mr. Paul Murphy: This is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

Cynon Valley

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* job losses have been announced and *(b)* new jobs have been created in the Cynon Valley for each year since 1997; and what percentage were unemployed in February (i) 2002 and (ii) 1997. [40531]

Mr. Paul Murphy: There is no authoritative record of announced job losses and gains.

The percentage of unemployed claimants in the Cynon Valley Parliamentary Constituency stood at 7.1 per cent. in January 2002 (the latest available figure). The equivalent figure in January 1997 was 16.1 per cent.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales about the use of European structural funds to create employment in the Cynon Valley. [40537]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I meet regularly with the First Minister when we discuss a range of issues affecting Wales.

The Cynon Valley is within the designated Objective 1 area. A key aim of the Objective 1 programme is to promote growth in employment and increase economic activity by developing small and medium sized businesses and encouraging community economic regeneration and rural development.

Two major projects under the Rhondda Cynon Taff Partnership have been approved. Funding of £2.5 million has been made available for the Glamorgan Centre for Information and £1.4 million for a grant scheme for small to medium sized enterprises.

It is also appropriate to mention that the Assembly's Wales European Funding Office itself has a significant presence in the Cynon Valley.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what recent discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales regarding prospects for manufacturing growth through inward investment in the Cynon Valley; [40530]

(2) what recent discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales regarding prospects for employment growth in areas other than manufacturing through inward investment in the Cynon Valley. [40536]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I meet regularly with the First Minister to discuss a range of issues affecting Wales. The National Assembly and their partners in Team Wales are committed to promoting all areas of Wales to potential overseas investors. Their aim is to encourage manufacturing growth alongside service sector developments to ensure a diverse, successful Welsh economy.

Welsh Development Agency

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales about the work of the Welsh Development Agency in *(a)* Cynon Valley, *(b)* Rhondda, Cynon, Taff and *(c)* Wales. [40535]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I meet regularly with the First Minister to discuss a range of issues affecting Wales.

The Welsh Development Agency has an all-Wales remit to further economic development, promote industrial efficiency and international competitiveness, and to improve the environment. In drawing up its plans and policies, the agency takes account of the balance of need between the regions in Wales, in terms of the amount and nature of the assistance that each requires in order to maximise its potential and that of Wales as a whole.

The Cynon Valley, and Rhondda Cynon Taff as a whole will benefit from being within the Objective 1 area, giving it priority for economic regeneration.

Relocation Expenses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what his policy is on the payment of relocation expenses to staff in his Department. [41015]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The permanent civil servants in my Department are all secondees from elsewhere and so would ordinarily qualify for (temporary) detached duty terms rather than (permanent) relocation. If ever it became appropriate, however, the Wales Office would pay relocation expenses in accordance with the approach set out in the Terms and Conditions of Service of the National Assembly for Wales.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the statutory instruments issued by his Department in the last 12 months, indicating *(a)* the purpose of each and *(b)* the cost of each to (i) public funds, (ii) businesses and (iii) individuals. [36235]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

From 1 March 2002, explanatory memoranda will be provided for all affirmative instruments as announced by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, 1 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 585.

Disability Benefits

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if the remuneration of SchlumbergerSema Medical Services under the contract with his Department to assess entitlements to disability benefits is linked with the proportion of claims for disability benefits which are successful. [40789]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: There is no link between the charges for services provided by SchlumbergerSema, for medical advice and guidance, and the outcome of claims for disability benefits.

Employer Direct

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the performance of Employer Direct in finding work for unemployed people. [34661]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Employer Direct is a new service that enables employers to notify job vacancies to the Department using a unique telephone number. It provides a more efficient and effective service, available for longer hours than previously when employers notified vacancies through their local jobcentres.

Employer Direct is still under development. However, evidence from an earlier pilot suggests that it does attract more vacancies and that the information collected about those vacancies is more comprehensive and clear, thus presenting unemployed people with a wider and better choice of job vacancies. The Department began to collect statistics about the number of calls to Employer Direct in March 2001. Since then, over 875,000 calls have been received by this telephone helpline (figures correct to the end of December 2001).

Benefits Offices (Facilities)

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his policy is towards the provision of *(a)* toilet and *(b)* child facilities for claimants using benefits offices; and if he will make a statement. [29746]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Public toilets have not traditionally been a feature in Jobcentres and Benefits Agency offices. However staff are sympathetic to the needs of customers, especially those with children, and can and do make staff toilets available where possible. This position has been reviewed with the introduction of the Jobcentre Plus Pathfinder offices, and the generic design includes the provision of toilets for both disabled and able-bodied customers. However, space limitations in the 56 recently completed Pathfinder offices has meant that the provision of toilets has not been possible in most sites.

The new Jobcentre Plus design and layout is being evaluated and we will endeavour to ensure that the provision of toilets becomes a more prominent and consistent feature.

The presence of children in Jobcentre/Jobcentre Plus offices has been an increasing consideration in their design over recent years, especially since the introduction of the new deal for lone parents. All public Employment Service offices have acknowledged this presence in the design of furniture components with rounded edges and concealed cable management arrangements. Child facilities have not traditionally been a feature in Benefits Agency offices.

However the introduction of Jobcentre Plus has allowed for this need to be further addressed. Many of the Pathfinders have children's play tables installed both in waiting areas and adjacent to the parent adviser desks. These allow for parents and guardians to participate in interviews with less distraction while still keeping a close eye on the children. Customer waiting times have been reduced by arranging timed appointments for advisory interviews.

Departmental Expenditure (Publications)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 150W, what has been the cost to public funds of the publications issued by his Department between 8 June and 26 October 2001. [30121]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Assaults

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what measures his Department has in place to protect Benefits Agency staff from assault. [31714]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Regular health and safety risk assessments and safety inspections are conducted to ensure the safety of staff in Benefits Agency offices. These assessments are reviewed whenever new services are introduced.

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* Benefits Agency and *(b)* Job Centre staff have been assaulted at their place of work in each of the last seven years in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Wales, *(d)* Northern Ireland and *(e)* the Uxbridge constituency. [31728]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information requested is in the table. These cases cover all case of physical contact of any kind including throwing of small items or touching of any kind. Data are not held at constituency level and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

In recent years a possible under-reporting of incidents concerned both management and trade unions. An improved reporting form was introduced in April 1999, followed by a campaign by the Public and Commercial Services Union on reporting in 2000. The rise in reported incidents in the years from 1999 reflects this.

Data from before 1997 in the Benefits Agency and 1999 in the Employment Service are not broken down by country. The Department does not hold information on Northern Ireland as this is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

	Employment Service			*Benefits Agency*			
	England	*Scotland*	*Wales*	*England*	*Scotland*	*Wales*	*Unknown*
1997	—	—	—	73	6	8	13
1998	—	—	—	24	5	4	8
1999	225	14	6	108	13	8	—
2000	222	7	4	142	10	12	—
2001	210	2	10	110	7	18	—

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many Benefits Agency staff have been *(a)* threatened and *(b)* assaulted in each of the past five years. [32971]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* Over 20 million people pass through BA offices every year. Against that background, the table shows the number of cases of physical contact of any kind between a member of staff and a client (which could include spitting, the throwing of small items such as paper clips or rolled up forms, or touching of any kind), and those which did not involve any such contact. The second category includes verbal abuse, threats or incidents where clients damaged equipment.

In recent years, both management and trade unions became concerned by a possible under-reporting of incidents. An improved reporting form was introduced in April 1999, followed by a PCS campaign on reporting in 2000. As the PCS accepts, in their evidence to the Social Security Select Committee, the rise in reported incidents in the calendar years 2000 and 2001 reflects this.

Year	*Cases of physical contact*	*Cases not involving physical contact*
1997	100	3,426
1998	41	3,092
1999	129	3,561
2000	164	5,148
2001	134	4,863

Notes:

1. Following further investigation of data held for 1999 and 2000 these figures have been revised.

2. For 2001 the figures are based on information to date. These figures are based on the reports so far received, other incidents may have occurred but may not yet have been reported.

Jobcentre Plus

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what discussions he has had with staff representatives about the impact of the introduction of Jobcentre Plus on staffing levels; [33504]

(2) how many jobs have been lost to date as a result of the introduction of Jobcentre Plus; and how many have been lost from the *(a)* Benefits Agency and *(b)* Employment Service; [33503]

(3) whether job losses will result from the integration of the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service; and how many of these will be *(a)* enforced redundancies, *(b)* voluntary redundancies and *(c)* early retirement; [33505]

(4) how many people employed by the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service will be moving to take up employment in new Jobcentre Plus offices; and what the timetable for such movements is. [33506]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Chief Executives of the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service wrote to all staff on 23 April 2001. They reassured staff that a key aim in developing plans for Jobcentre Plus and the Pension Service would be to enable all current staff to have a job in the new organisations or one of the other agencies in the Department.

Currently some 112,000 employees work in the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service. In April this year some 90,000 staff will move from the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service to Jobcentre Plus with the remainder moving to the Pension Service and a small number moving to other parts of the Department.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much has been paid in interim payments to benefit claimants who would otherwise have been affected by the strike in Jobcentre Plus offices; and how many claimants have received interim payments. [35288]

Malcolm Wicks: As at 11 February an estimated £3.2 million had been paid in interim payments to customers affected by the industrial action since the dispute began. The number of customers in total that have received interim payments since the start of industrial action is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Around 4,700 customers are currently in receipt of weekly or fortnightly interim payments.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 8 January 2002 to the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb), *Official Report*, column 688W, on incapacity benefit, what information the Government collect about people who claim incapacity benefit at Jobcentre Plus offices. [35296]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Jobcentre Plus collect information about people claiming benefits according to which client group they belong to. Information collected about the incapacitated or disabled persons client group, which includes incapacity benefit customers, includes the number of these people:

Making a claim through Jobcentre Plus;
Attending work-focused interviews;
Failing to attend work-focused interviews;
Having their work-focused interview deferred or waived;
Attending review meetings;
Referred to the new deal for disabled people;
Applying for a job;
Moving into work;
Taking a place on training courses; and
Leaving the system and, where possible, the reasons why.

Information is collected about the number of claims there are to incapacity benefit and the speed and accuracy of processing these claims. This data are not collected in a way that would allow claims made through Jobcentre Plus pathfinder sites to be disaggregated from those made through normal Benefits Agency offices. In addition to statistical data, personal information is collected from incapacity benefit claimants in order to process their claims.

Benefits (Single Parents)

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what action the Government will take to facilitate the provision of *(a)* housing and *(b)* council tax benefit to single mothers who are deemed ineligible for such benefits on the grounds of co-tenanting the same premises with a member of the opposite sex with whom they have no relations; [33915]

(2) what action the Government will take to ensure that a single parent co-habiting premises with an unassociated member of the opposite sex is placed in the same position for provision of *(a)* housing and *(b)* council tax benefit as single parents co-habiting the same premises with a same sex partner. [33916]

Malcolm Wicks: Housing benefit and council tax benefit (HB/CTB) are income-related benefits and entitlement is calculated by looking at an individual's circumstances and income. HB/CTB claims from people who are joint tenants are treated in the same way as any other HB/CTB claim. It is a long-standing principle of the benefits system that where a person is a member of a married couple, or of an unmarried couple who are living together as husband and wife, the income and circumstances of their partner are taken into account when considering income-related benefit entitlement.

We have no current plans to change these arrangements. The benefit treatment of same-sex couples will however be examined in the context of the interdepartmental study of civil partnership registration, announced by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office, on 28 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 903W.

Benefit Appeals

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many appeals have been launched against loss or reduction in *(a)* disability living allowance, *(b)* attendance allowance and *(c)* incapacity benefit; and what percentage were successful in each year since 1996 in the Stroud constituency. [34422]

Maria Eagle: The information is not available on a constituency basis, but only on the basis of the Appeals Service Agency Regional Centre in Cardiff.

	Attendance allowance	*Disability living allowance*	*Incapacity benefit*
1998			
Caseload (UK)	1,241,700	2,014,200	2,301,700
Number lodged at Cardiff Regional Centre	620	7,285	12,750
Percentage of hearings found in favour	47.5	47.3	33.9
1999			
Caseload (UK)	1,266,900	2,084,000	2,275,300
Number lodged	885	8,230	8,115
Percentage of hearings found in favour	48.6	49.9	35.9
2000			
Caseload (UK)	1,270,500	2,160,300	2,286,200
Number lodged	1,895	15,560	6,780
Percentage of hearings found in favour	41.6	48.2	36.6
January 2001-end October 2001			
Caseload (UK)	1,294,300	2,271,100	2,337,800
Number lodged	1,450	10,410	5,800
Percentage of hearings found in favour	42.5	52.5	40.5

Notes:

All figures are subject to change as more up to date data becomes available.

Caseload figures (UK) are rounded to the nearest 100.

Lodged figures are rounded to the nearest 5.

All caseload figures used are at 31 August of each year.

Information prior to 1998 is not available.

Source:

Lodged and percentage of hearing figures: 100 per cent. download of the Generic Appeals Processing System

Caseload figures: from 5 per cent. samples of the benefit computer systems.

Carers

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the financial assistance given to carers was last reviewed. [38203]

Maria Eagle: In autumn 2000 a substantial package of measures to help carers was announced. This amounts to over £500 million of extra support in the first three years covered by the announcement.

It includes a number of improvements to the main carer benefits aimed in particular at helping older and poorer carers, as well as helping carers to keep in touch with work by making part-time employment more worthwhile financially.

The package also included measures to remove the barrier that prevents people aged 65 or over from claiming invalid care allowance; ensure entitlement to ICA will continue for up to eight weeks after the death of the disabled person; and rename ICA as "carer's allowance".

Occupational Pension Schemes

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when a draft Bill will be produced on reforming minimum funding requirement arrangements for occupational pension schemes. [38463]

Maria Eagle: The Government have consulted widely on the future of the minimum funding requirement (MFR), and has announced their proposals to replace it with a long-term scheme specific funding standard in the context of a regime of transparency and disclosure, with additional measures to strengthen security. We are working closely with the pensions industry, consumer organisations, employers and trades unions to develop the details of our proposals, and will introduce primary legislation to replace the MFR as soon as parliamentary time is available.

Incapacity Benefit

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many incapacity benefit recipients there were in each financial year since 1997, on a quarterly basis. [39377]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is published in the Incapacity Benefit and Severe Disablement Allowance Quarterly Summary Statistics: August 2001, a copy of which is available in the Library. The information is also available on the Department's website, www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/online.html.

Disability Discrimination Act

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 13 February 2002 to the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable), *Official Report*, column 506W, on the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, if he will make available in the Library the research which indicates an increase in awareness levels and changes to the policies and practices of employers and service providers. [39755]

Maria Eagle: Through research, the Government are monitoring awareness of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 among a range of groups, including the general public, employers and service providers. We are also seeking to monitor the Act's impact on the policies and practices of employers and service providers. A number of DWP research reports exploring these issues are due to be published in the next few months. All these reports will be available in the House of Commons Library on publication.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the outcome of Government consultation on extending the scope of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to cover the police service, with specific reference to the recruitment and retention to the police of people with diabetes. [40642]

Maria Eagle: Last year we issued a proposal for consultation on covering police officers within the employment provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). This year we have proposed a number of other changes to the DDA in a current consultation document called "Towards Equality and Diversity". Some of these changes would have a bearing on the way in which disabled police officers and recruits, including any disabled by diabetes, are protected against discrimination.

HEALTH

Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what decisions have been made on the future of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham heart and lung transplant unit; and if he will make a statement. [8265]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Our proposals for developing the adult heart and lung transplantation service are set out in the discussion document: National Adult Heart and Lung Transplant Service, published on 21 September 2001. A copy is available in the Library.

Motor Neurone Disease

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the current regulations which do not permit sufferers of motor neurone disease to obtain tissues required for their care by prescription. [26948]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Neither our medical advisers nor the Motor Neurone Disease Association are aware of any particular requirement for tissues to be used to treat patients with motor neurone disease. We shall not, therefore, be making any changes to the regulations.

Lung Disease

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to establish a national strategy for lung disease. [29357]

Yvette Cooper: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

We consider the provision of first class services for people with lung disease as very important. We are taking forward a number of initiatives to drive improvements in prevention, access and delivery of services. These include:

Our £53 million investment in smoking cessation services, which has helped us exceed our "successful quitters" targets by over 50 per cent. in 2000–01—61,500 against a target of 40,000.

£4.9 million has been spent on asthma projects throughout the United Kingdom through the national research and development programme.

We have the launched the biggest ever campaign to immunise people against flu with targets to vaccinate 65 per cent. of over 65-year-olds.

By 2003–04 an additional £570 million will have been invested in cancer care.

Incidence and mortality rates for lung cancer are falling for men and incidence is falling for women.

Administrative Forms

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many administrative forms *(a)* have been and *(b)* are proposed to be introduced by his Department in (i) 2000–01 and (ii) 2001–02. [37375]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the overall numbers of administrative forms is not held centrally. However, the Department's Review of Central Returns Steering Committee (ROCR) Secretariat regulates the numbers of approved central returns from the NHS, and Statistics Division, acting for the Office for National Statistics Survey Control Unit, approves all non-NHS surveys and local authority returns.

The table shows the number of returns for 2000–01, and 2001–02 to the end of February 2002 (the latest date for which figures are available).

Department of Health numbers of information requests by year

	One-off	*On-going*
2000–01		
Statistical and financial NHS	33	205
Personal social services and other surveys	3	24
Total	36	229
2001–02[1]		
Statistical and financial NHS	7	215
Personal social services and other surveys	2	24
Total	9	239

[1] To end February 2002

Notes:

One-off requests are generally to meet short-term information demands. On-going returns include annual censuses, quarterly performance data and other information for which there is a continuing need.

Foot Health Care

Barbara Follett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence the Department has of the level of satisfaction of patients with chiropody and podiatry treatment. [38218]

Jacqui Smith: We have no national collected evidence of patients' levels of satisfaction with chiropody/podiatry treatment.

Barbara Follett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence the Department has collated of the effect on quality of life that effective foot health care can provide to *(a)* children, *(b)* the elderly and *(c)* other adults. [38219]

Jacqui Smith: We recognise the importance of effective delivery of chiropody/podiatry care especially helping older people maintain their mobility and independence. The National Service Framework for older people says that: specialised falls services which are established should include chiropodists/podiatrists; specialist mental health services for older people should have agreed working and referral arrangements with chiropodists and podiatrists; and it sets a performance measure for numbers/rates of people aged 75+ who access chiropody/podiatry services.

We also recognise the necessity of access to chiropody/podiatry services for other groups including children and others in the adult population.

Barbara Follett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to issue guidance to *(a)* PCTs and *(b)* health authorities regarding (i) the minimum level of chiropody or podiatry service that should be available to patients and (ii) what level of chiropody or podiatry service should be available to patients wherever they live; [38216]

(2) what assessment he has made of the appropriate level of chiropody and podiatry services that each primary care trust should commission; [38226]

(3) what guidance he plans to provide to strategic health authorities regarding the appropriate level of chiropody/podiatry services that each primary care trust should commission. [38211]

Jacqui Smith: No guidance has been issued to strategic health authorities (StHAs) or primary care trusts (PCTs) on levels of national health service chiropody/podiatry services to be commissioned, nor has any assessment been done.

However, the Department has launched a "National Primary and Care Trust programme (NatPaCT)" designed to support PCTs in delivering their key functions which will be:

Improving the health of the community

Securing the provision of high quality services

Integrating health and social care locally.

As local organisations, PCTs are best placed to understand the needs of their patient populations. This will ensure that the right services are delivered to the right people in the right location at the right time.

Barbara Follett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what information his Department has collated on the extent to which the podiatry and chiropody needs of the population are being met by the NHS; [38217]

(2) what information the Department has, and what research his Department has assessed, on the need for chiropody and podiatry services among the general population. [38220]

Jacqui Smith: We recognise the importance of effective delivery of chiropody/podiatry care especially for older people, who make up approximately 18 per cent. of the general population, to maintain their mobility and independence. Other groups using chiropody/podiatry include children, pregnant women, people with diabetes and those with learning disabilities. Many national health service services are increasingly prioritising to ensure that these high-risk groups are treated and access chiropody/podiatry services before others.

The Department has part funded, with the Society of Chiropodists and Podiatrists, a research project by University College Northampton "Do 'low risk' older people need podiatry care". The results are awaited.

Barbara Follett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many foot operations have been undertaken in each of the last five years by *(a)* orthopaedic surgeons and *(b)* podiatric surgeons; [38221]

(2) what the average cost is of a foot operation when undertaken by *(a)* an orthopaedic surgeon and *(b)* a podiatric surgeon. [38222]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not collected in this form.

Barbara Follett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what information his Department has collated on the percentage of the population who have consulted a chiropodist or podiatrist in each of the last five years; and what percentage of the population have ever been treated by a chiropodist or podiatrist; [38215]

(2) in each of the last five years, how many *(a)* face to face contacts there were between patients and chiropodists or podiatrists, *(b)* new courses of treatment were started and *(c)* individual podiatry patients were treated. [38224]

Jacqui Smith: No information on the percentage of the population who have consulted a chiropodist or podiatrist is collected centrally. Information is collected annually on total face to face contacts with chiropody services, the numbers of new episodes of care in the year are contained in the statistical report "Chiropody services, summary information for 2000–01, England". A copy of the report is in the Library and it is also available on the Department's website www.doh.gov.uk/public/kt230001. The previous five years of this data are also available in the Library.

Barbara Follett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the implications for NHS chiropody/podiatry provision of the publication of *(a)* the NHS policy on older people and *(b)* the guidelines for the NSF for diabetes. [38213]

Jacqui Smith: The national service framework for older people was published on 27 March 2001. It sets new national standards and service models of care across health and social services for all older people whether they live at home, in residential care or are being cared for in hospital. The NSF recognises the role of chiropody/podiatry services in that:

> chiropody/podiatry is a service which is important to older people as it assists in maintaining mobility and independence. There is concern that ageism/age discrimination may take the form of low overall levels of provision to this care group.
>
> specialised falls services which are established should include chiropodists/podiatrists.
>
> specialist mental health services for older people should have agreed working and referral arrangements with chiropodists and podiatrists.

and it sets a performance measure for numbers/rates of people aged 75+ who access chiropody/podiatry services.

We published standards for the diabetes NSF in December 2001. The delivery strategy will follow in summer 2002, with the 10-year implementation programme to begin in April 2003. Milestones for delivery, including workforce, will be based on the available resources. The strategy will be informed by the work of the long-term conditions care group workforce team, which will be taking a national view of the workforce implications of the standards and intervention. The workforce team has a podiatrist in its membership to ensure consideration of chiropody/podiatry requirements and contribute to these care groups.

Podiatrists have been members of the external reference groups for both these NSFs.

Barbara Follett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence his Department has of *(a)* local and *(b)* regional variations in the provision of NHS chiropody or podiatry treatment. [38225]

Jacqui Smith: We acknowledge that there are local and regional variations in national health service chiropody/podiatry services. For example, we know from data collected that trusts have different staffing structures and employ different numbers of staff.

These variations may result from NHS organisations having to clinically prioritise the services they provide to meet local demand for chiropody/podiatry services. Although local demographics may affect service provision levels, for example high level older people population, many services are prioritising for those most at risk such as older people, children, pregnant women, people with diabetes and those with learning disabilities.

Long-term Care

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the additional cost of implementing the recommendations of the royal commission on long-term care in full. [37941]

Jacqui Smith: In the NHS Plan we announced new investment in intermediate care and associated services rising to £900 million a year by 2003–04. In addition, we shall be targeting additional resources, rising to £360 million a year by 2003–04, to tackle the anomalies and inequities of the present funding system for long-term care. These include free nursing care in nursing homes for current self-funders which was introduced from October 2001. This will benefit around 42,000 people by around £5,000 p.a. A system of deferred payments has been introduced to avoid people having to sell their homes when they first enter residential care. Since April last year, the value of a property has been disregarded for 12 weeks when undertaking the residential care means test. In addition, the Government have established a new independent national body, the National Care Standards Commission, which will regulate social care services, and private and voluntary healthcare from April 2002.

The Government do not accept the royal commission's recommendation that all personal care should be provided free of charge. It would cost more than £1 billion a year to make all forms of personal care free. Spending money in this way would not help improve the quality and range of services for users of long-term care nor would it help achieve stability for providers, which are our priorities.

Care Standards

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by what means he will monitor and support the application of the national minimum standards and regulations as set out in the Care Standards Act 2000. [38637]

Jacqui Smith: The application of the national minimum standards and regulations by registered care providers will be monitored by the National Care Standards Commission. The commission will also have a general duty to encourage improvements in the quality of registered services and will be able to suggest ways in which services can be improved. If any regulations or standards are not complied with on inspection, the commission will agree an action plan and timescale with the provider to achieve compliance. Generally, the commission will work with providers over time to meet the standards.

The commission is accountable to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and its own performance as an executive non-departmental public body will be monitored by the Department in accordance with the management statement and financial memorandum, which has been placed in the Library.

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will issue guidance to registered care services on the operation of the national minimum standards and regulations and the National Care Standards Commission. [38636]

Jacqui Smith: Guidance for registered care providers about the National Care Standards Commission and containing information about the registration process will be issued shortly.

Autism

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his Department's most recent assessment of the causes of autism. [38419]

Jacqui Smith: The Medical Research Council (MRC) published the report of its detailed review of the epidemiology and causes of autism on 13 December 2001. The report, commissioned by the Department in March 2001, provides a clear, authoritative picture of what scientific research has revealed about the occurrence and causes of autism spectrum disorders (ASDs). The report accepts that autism is not as rare as previously thought but notes that the apparent increase in prevalence of ASDs is likely to have resulted from better diagnosis and clearer definition as well as increased awareness and makes recommendations on the future research strategy for the United Kingdom.

The MRC report identifies a strong genetic component in the causation of autism, while acknowledging that most researchers believe autism has a variety of causes, including possible interactions with environmental factors.

We announced on 14 February that the Government have allocated a further £2.5 million for research into autism. The funds are being given to the MRC to help them to take forward recommendations on research contained in their report on the epidemiology and causes of autism referred to above.

Coronary Heart Disease

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of the implementation of the recommendations on physical activity contained in the National Service Framework for coronary heart disease; and if he will make a statement. [39609]

Yvette Cooper: The Health Development Agency has recently completed a review of the progress on local programmes of effective policies on increasing physical activity, as required by standard one of the National Service Framework (NSF) for coronary heart disease. The report found programmes at varying levels of development. In light of these findings, the Department has commissioned the agency to develop guidance that will help primary care teams to design effective policies and strategies on physical activity, healthy eating, obesity and tobacco control. It will support the NSF for coronary heart disease, older people and diabetes, and the NHS Plan and Cancer Plan. The guidance will be published later this year.

Hearing Aids

Valerie Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to ensure that NHS trusts are fully implementing NICE guidance on hearing aid technology published in July 2000. [39608]

Jacqui Smith: The Commission for Health Improvement incorporates the monitoring of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidance in its clinical governance reviews. This is to ensure that national health service trusts have mechanisms in place to implement and comply with all NICE guidance.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which NHS trusts will receive new funding for digital hearing aids. [38420]

Jacqui Smith: We invited expressions of interest by 1 March 2002 from all health communities not yet involved in the modernising hearing aid services project. We will make decisions shortly about which sites will be included.

Waiting Lists

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 25 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1121W, on waiting lists, when the results of the regional office reviews of the listed trusts will be *(a)* completed and *(b)* published. [38676]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Evaluation of all 13 trusts named in the NAO report "Inappropriate adjustments to NHS waiting lists" is still to be completed by regional offices. We expect these evaluations to be completed soon.

Correspondence

David Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a reply to his letter of 21 January regarding midwives, ref P0003279. [38455]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* A reply was sent out on 5 March 2002.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will provide a substantive reply to the letter of 7 January from the hon. Member for Totnes, enclosing one from Ms Janet Cross of Kingsbridge, Devon on the Royal Commission report on Long Term Care, which was acknowledged by his Ministerial Correspondence Unit on 11 January. [39335]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* A reply was sent on 6 March.

Surgery

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what percentage of operations were cancelled for non-clinical reasons as a proportion of admissions in Hull and the East Riding in each year since 1997. [40050]

Jacqui Smith: The number of operations cancelled for non-clinical reasons and the and percentage of operations cancelled for non-clinical reasons as a proportion of admissions in the Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust in each year since 1997 is shown in the table.

Year	Cancelled operations	Total admissions	Percentage
1998–99	327	110,114	0.29
1999–2000	382	111,039	0.34
2000–01	323	109,739	0.29

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients died within 30 days of surgery in Hull and the East Riding in each year since 1997. [40045]

Jacqui Smith: The number of patients who died within 30 days of surgery in Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust in each year since 1997 is shown in the table.

Total deaths within 30 days of surgery

	Number
1998–99	407
1999–2000	390
2000–01	325

Hospital Readmissions

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were readmitted to hospital as emergency cases soon after being discharged in Hull and the East Riding between 1997 and 2001. [40047]

Jacqui Smith: The number of patients re-admitted to hospital as emergency cases soon after being discharged by the Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust between 1997 and 2001 is shown in the table.

Emergency readmissions

	Number
1998–99	7,022
1999–2000	7,137
2000–01	7,215

Funeral Arrangements

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 969W, on funeral arrangements, what measures have been taken since 27 October 1997 to *(a)* ensure and *(b)* monitor compliance with the guidelines on burial in unmarked graves issued to NHS trusts on that date. [40075]

Ms Blears: Since October 1997 NHS Trusts have had explicit guidance that where patients die in NHS hospitals and have a burial arranged by the Trust, the burial plot should be marked by a permanent memorial or marker. Trusts were further reminded of this requirement in April 2001 subsequent to the publication of the report into the Alder Hey Inquiry.

Compliance with the guidance is not monitored centrally, but if concerns were brought to the attention of the Department of Health they would be investigated.

Mixed-sex Wards

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what criteria he will decide when he has met his pledge to end the existence of mixed-sex wards. [40197]

Ms Blears: Guidance on maintaining privacy and dignity was first issued to the service in 1997 and since then trusts have been working towards clear targets to eliminate mixed sex accommodation in 95 per cent. of NHS trusts by December 2002.

There are three targets that trusts are working towards. These are:

> Ensuring that appropriate organisational arrangements are in place to secure good standards of privacy and dignity for hospital patients;
>
> Achieving fully the Patient's Charter standard for segregated washing and toilet facilities across the NHS;
>
> Providing safe facilities for patients in hospital who are mentally ill which safeguard their privacy and dignity.

NHS Activity Levels

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the activity levels were in the quarter to *(a)* December 2000 and *(b)* December 2001 for (i) new attendances at accident and emergency departments, (ii) first out-patient attendances, (iii) general and acute elective hospital spells and (iv) general and acute non-elective spells. [39958]

Mr. Hutton: The activity levels for quarter to *(a)* December 2000 and *(b)* December 2001 for (i) new attendances at accident and emergency departments, (ii) first out-patient attendances, (iii) general and acute elective hospital spells and (iv) general and acute non-elective spells are provided in the table.

Attendance and hospital spells in England

Thousand

	October to December	
	2000	*2001*
Accident and emergency first attendances	3,181	3,229
General and acute out-patient first attendances	2,844	2,902
Hospital spells		
General and acute:		
Total	2,342	2,346
Elective	1,341	1,338
Non elective	1,000	1,007

All estimates are derived from the Department quarterly management information system. Figures for 2000–01 have been adjusted to take account of definitional changes between 2000–01 and 2001–02 to allow direct comparison with 2001–02 figures.

The estimates relate to activity commissioned using national health service funds by health authorities in England. This includes activity in private hospitals and NHS hospitals outside England, but excludes private patients and patients from outside England treated in English NHS Hospitals. Some activity for the latter may be included through host commissioner services (eg accident and emergency and genito urinary medicine).

Management data have been used rather than Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) data because HES data are not yet available for December 2001–02.

Children Act

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps have been taken to review the regulations and guidance associated with the Children Act 1989 following the Utting report. [39957]

Jacqui Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, at column 973W.

NHS Mortuaries

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the combined capacity of designated, permanent mortuaries in the national health service was in each of the past five years. [39956]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not available centrally.

Health Inequalities

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received from organisations in east London on her Department's cross-cutting review on health inequalities. [39965]

Yvette Cooper: Representations on a range of issues were received from both local and national organisations based in east London in response to the Department's document "Tackling Health Inequalities: Consultation on a Plan for Delivery", including Barts and London NHS Trust, East London and City HA, and Cancer Black Care. These representations along with feedback from regional workshops, including one in London, are informing the cross-cutting Spending Review on health inequalities.

Bioterrorism

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to update advice to NHS personnel on how to identify the effects of *(a)* anthrax, *(b)* smallpox and *(c)* sarin: and if he will make a statement. [40278]

Yvette Cooper: The Department issued guidance on 17 October 2001 to all health authorities and regional directors of public health on the procedures to be followed in the event of a deliberate release of chemicals such as sarin and of biological agents such as anthrax and smallpox. At the same time, guidance for medical and laboratory staff was issued by the public health laboratory service on 17 October 2001 and is subject to continuous updating e.g. clinical evaluation and management of persons with possible inhalation anthrax was last updated on 2 January 2002.

NHS Security

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent steps he has taken to improve security in *(a)* hospitals, *(b)* clinics and *(c)* GP surgeries; and if he will make a statement. [40276]

Mr. Hutton: Security is the responsibility of the individual national health service trust.

All hospital, clinic and GP premises have different site and building constraints depending on location. The problems for inner city trusts are significantly different from those in rural areas.

Security is an important issue in the health service as it contributes to a safe working environment for staff, patients and visitors.

Guidance on security is provided for designers and users through Health Building Notes, the NHS Security Manual and individual specialist documents including Effective Management of Security in A&E Departments, and Safe and Sound (for maternity units). The revised NHS Security Manual will be published in May 2002.

Security is achieved through the use of security staff (either in-house or private contractors) and supported by various electronic security systems, including CCTV, personal attack alarm systems and door entry control.

Care Homes

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many private sector residential care homes for the elderly there were in 2000; and what forecast he has made of the number from April 2002. [39949]

Jacqui Smith: The table shows the number of private residential care homes in 2000 and 2001, at 31 March of each year. Forecasts of the future number of homes are not available.

Number[1] of private residential care homes for older people[2] in England as at 31 March

Year	*Number*
2000	12,050
2001	11,480

[1] Rounded numbers

[2] Includes homes for older people who are mentally infirm.

Source:

Department of Health's annual returns.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many residential care homes closed in *(a)* Eastbourne and *(b)* East Sussex in each of the last five years. [40361]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not centrally available.

GP Appointments

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many GP practices have achieved the NHS Plan target for patients to see their GP within 24 hours in *(a)* Leeds LS28, *(b)* Pudsey constituency, *(c)* each of the Leeds primary care groups, *(d)* West Yorkshire and *(e)* the UK. [39964]

Mr. Hutton: Patient surveys identify ready access to primary care as a key issue and the NHS Plan sets a target that by 2004 all patients will be able to see a primary care professional within 24 hours or a GP within 48 hours if they choose to do so. From September 2001 we have been using quarterly telephone surveys of GP practices to monitor progress towards delivery of this target. The results of these surveys indicate that on a national basis the interim milestone for March 2002 of 60 per cent. compliance will be achieved. Detailed and reliable data are not available in all the formats requested, but surveys to date do also suggest that the milestone will be achieved within the Leeds health area.

Further progress towards the target will be supported in 2002–03 by an earmarked increase of £83.5 million in the PCT Primary Care Access Fund to £168 million and by expanding the capacity of the National Primary Care Development Team.

Vulnerable Adults (Guidance)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many local authorities *(a)* have fully compliant policies and procedures, *(b)* have draft policies and procedures and *(c)* are not compliant with the protection of vulnerable adults guidance, "No Secrets", LAC(2000)7; [39304]

(2) if he will set out for each relevant year and each local authority the level of financial support *(a)* specific and special grants and *(b)* SSA provided by his Department to implement the "No Secrets" guidance LAC(2000)7; [39308]

(3) what plans his Department has to review the implementation of the "No Secrets" guidance; [39307]

(4) how many local authorities met the deadline set out in SSI circular CI(2001) 9 June 2001; [39313]

(5) how much each local authority responsible for implementing the "No Secrets" guidance LAC(2000)7 budgeted to spend in 2001–02; and what the actual and budgeted spend was in each of the last three years; [39306]

(6) what arrangements *(a)* his Department and *(b)* local authorities have made to publicise (i) the "No Secrets" guidance and (b) the reporting and referral system established in line with the guidance LAC(2000)7. [39305]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* The guidance "No Secrets" reinforces existing good practice with respect to adult protection. Information on the local costs of implementation is not held centrally.

72 local councils submitted their local multi-agency codes of practice to the Department of Health by the 31 October 2001 deadline. A further 48 codes of practice have been received since, and the remainder are being actively pursued. These codes of practice are being analysed for their content and compliance with "No Secrets". The analysis will also determine the number of codes of practice that were fully implemented by 31 October 2001.

The Department has no immediate plans for a formal review of the implementation of the "No Secrets" guidance but the matter will be considered when the findings of the analysis of local codes of practice are available.

The Department publicised the "No Secrets" guidance through a series of six, one-day workshops in Leeds and London, from November 2000 through to March 2001. The workshops encouraged representatives from all statutory agencies to discuss issues such as reporting and referral systems for inter-agency working. A number of local councils have publicised the launch of their multi-agency codes of practice. "No Secrets" requires local councils to develop local reporting and referral systems for inter-agency working in their codes of practice.

Food Safety

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the funding of research into food safety. [38008]

Yvette Cooper: Many factors affect the safety of food including chemical, radiological and microbiological contamination. Nutrition and other issues may also affect whether an individual is following a safe diet. Research on food safety is therefore correspondingly diverse both in the nature of the research and its funding. Direct Government funding of the research is through the research councils and the Food Standards Agency while other funds are also available through the academic funding system. In addition, the food industry itself funds food safety research either directly or through industrial levies or in LINK schemes with, for example, DEFRA.

Private Treatment

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients at Weston General Hospital have been treated by the private sector over the past five years; what the nature of the treatment was; and what the total cost of these treatments was. [40490]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not held centrally.

Health Expenditure

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for *(a)* England and *(b)* the Avon health authority the expenditure on health per head of the population, expressed in real terms, for each year since 1999. [40491]

Mr. Hutton: The expenditure on health by weighted head of population in real terms for Avon health authority area and England for each year since 1999 is shown in the table.

Expenditure by health authorities and primary care trusts

£

	1999–2000	*2000–01*
Avon health authority	747.51	810.53
England	734.19	770.91

Notes:

1. Expenditure is taken from health authority and primary care trust summarisation forms which are prepared on a resource basis and therefore differ from cash allocations in the year.

2. Allocations per weighted head of population provide a much more reliable measure to identify differences between funding of health authorities.

3. The expenditure is the total spent on commissioning healthcare by the health authority and by the primary care trusts within each health authority area. The majority of General Dental Services expenditure is not included in the health authority or primary care trust accounts and is separately accounted for by the Dental Practice Board. An element of drugs expenditure in 1999–2000 and 2000–01 is accounted for by the Prescription Pricing Authority and not by health authorities.

4. Health authorities and primary care trusts should account for their expenditure on a gross basis. This results in an element of double counting in 2000–01 where one body acts as the main commissioner and is then reimbursed by other bodies. The effect of this double counting within the answer cannot be identified.

5. Some health authorities act as lead commissioners for particular specialties which inflates their figures when compared with others and also causes differences between years. Other factors may also distort the figures so the results are therefore not all directly comparable with each other and with answers to similar questions for previous years.

Source:

Health authority audited summarisation forms 1999–2000 and 2000–01

Primary care trust audited summarisation schedules 2000–01

Weighted population estimates for 1999–2000 and 2000–01

GDP deflator at market prices with 2000–01 as the base year

Day Surgery Patients

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government have to increase the proportion of day surgery patients being treated in *(a)* cottage hospitals and *(b)* GP surgeries. [40856]

Mr. Hutton: Professor Ara Darzi has been asked to advise on how day surgery rates can be increased across the national health service as part of his appointment to advise the Department of Health on surgical issues.

The recent Audit Commission report on day surgery showed that in some trusts minor procedures are often treated in day surgery units while they could be carried out in treatment rooms or out-patient departments. This leads to surgery patients having to wait longer for their operations or having them as in-patients. As part of the day surgery strategy, Professor Darzi will be looking to ensure that day case procedures are undertaken in day surgery units.

General practitioners already carry out minor procedures in their surgeries, but there is the potential for more to be undertaken. Providing these services in the community gives patients better access to treatment, and reduces the time they would have to wait for the procedure. For these reasons the NHS plan provides that by 2004 there will be up to 1,000 specialist GPs taking referrals from fellow GPs for conditions in certain specialties, such as ophthalmology and dermatology. The Department is working with the Royal College of General Practitioners in developing this initiative.

Asbestos

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what he estimates the cost to the NHS will be of the proposed new Health and Safety Executive regulations on asbestos. [39288]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

Total costs for the removal of asbestos from NHS hospitals and among all other health care facilities excluding hospitals are shown in the table. These figures have been revised upwards since publication of the consultative document, and include costs arising from the provisions implementing the chemical agents directive.

Costs in NHS hospitals and all other health care establishments

£ million

Sector	*Costs over 50 years (not discounted)*	*Yearly costs averaged over the first 5 years*
Hospitals (NHS)	36	4
Other health care (all)	31	4
Total	67	8

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence he has evaluated that white asbestos is more dangerous than asbestos substitutes. [39290]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

The Institute for Environment and Health undertook a study for the Health and Safety Executive in 1998. Copies of the report "Chrysotile and its substitutes: a critical evaluation" is available in the Libraries of both Houses.

The report stated that white asbestos at high enough exposures could cause asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma. It also confirmed that this type was often contaminated with other higher risk types such as blue brown asbestos. It judged three substitutes to be less harmful, polyvinyl alcohol, aramid and cellulose. The report recognised that exposure to white asbestos will arise from asbestos-containing materials in buildings. While it indicated that exposure would be lower than in manufacturing, it was a persistent problem that would remain for many years to come. It therefore recommended wherever practicable the safer substitutes should be used.

Comparative Health Outcomes

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of the differences in *(a)* health outcomes and *(b)* the effectiveness of health services between England and other developed countries; and if he will make a statement. [10742]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2000, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Making comparisons between health services in different countries on a like-for-like basis is not straightforward and truly comparable data are often unavailable. However, "The NHS Plan", published last year, contains some assessment of the differences between the United Kingdom and health services in other developed countries.

This assessment contributed to the programme as set out in "The NHS Plan". The national health service will continue to improve in effectiveness and efficiency as the plan is implemented.

We have promised the following extra resources to help improve NHS services:

7,000 extra beds in hospitals and intermediate care

over 100 new hospitals by 2010 and 500 new one-stop primary care centres

- over 3,000 general practitioner premises modernised and 250 new scanners
- clean wards—overseen by "modern matrons"—and better hospital food
- modern information technology systems in every hospital and GP surgery and investment in staff:
  - 7,500 more consultants and 2,000 more GPs
  - 20,000 extra nurses and 6,500 extra therapists
  - 1,000 more medical school places
  - Child care support for NHS staff with 100 on-site nurseries.

In addition to extra resources it is essential that investment is accompanied by reform.

The Department is setting national standards, matched by regular inspection of all local health bodies by the Commission for Health Improvement.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence will ensure that cost effective drugs like those for cancer are not dependent on where you live. The NHS Modernisation Agency has been set up to spread best practice.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Mayoral Referendums

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the Government's response is to the Electoral Commission's report on its review of mayoral referendums; and if he will make a statement. [41861]

Mr. Raynsford: We welcome the report "Reinvigorating Democracy? Mayoral Referendums in 2001" which the Electoral Commission published on 1 February 2002. We said in the recent Local Government White Paper, "Strong Local Leadership—Quality Public Services" that we would learn from the lessons of the first round of mayoral referendums, in order to refine and improve the process. The Electoral Commission's report is an important contribution to that work.

The Government share the Commission's view of the importance of electors understanding fully what they are voting on and having unbiased, factual information on the issues surrounding the introduction of executive arrangements involving a directly-elected mayor.

It was following the recommendations of the Fifth Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life that we made provision in the Local Authorities (Conduct of Referendums) (England) Regulations 2001, which were approved by Parliament, to prohibit councils from undertaking proactive information campaigns within 28 days of a referendum. We note the Commission's conclusion that this may be preventing full information reaching electors on the issues, in the circumstances of mayoral referendums where often there are no well-defined "yes" or "no" campaign groups.

Accordingly we will be reviewing with the Electoral Commission and others, whether this prohibition should be relaxed. Any relaxation would need to include safeguards to maintain strict impartiality. The Electoral Commission has suggested that the text of such material be cleared with them in advance. We welcome that the Electoral Commission are considering how they might provide electors in authorities holding mayoral referendums with factual and impartial material, pending the outcome of the review of the 28-day prohibition.

We believe that the involvement by the Electoral Commission will meet the concerns of some, which were noted in the Commission's report, that the current wording of the referendum question, that Parliament had approved, could not be relied upon to guarantee a result which fairly and accurately reflected local electors' views. Accordingly we see no grounds for Government intervention to seek to postpone any referendum that local authorities are, or will be, planning to hold, including those as a result of a petition by electors.

We believe that the current question specified in regulations, developed following extensive consultation, is fair and clear. Nevertheless, we are pleased to accept the Electoral Commission's invitation to work with them to see if the text of the referendum question itself can be improved so that all will be satisfied that it is clear and free from any potential bias. We recognise that while we are actively working with the Commission on possible changes to the question and the rules on the provision of information, it may be perceived as wrong for Government to take any decision on whether or not to direct the holding of a referendum. We do not therefore intend to take any more decisions until after we have completed this work. We expect to complete the work by summer 2002.

We had indicated that the Secretary of State was minded to direct mayoral referendums in Bradford and Birmingham on the grounds that councils in these areas have not had due regard to the outcome of the consultation they have been required to carry out. The Secretary of State remains so minded but has decided to await the outcome of our further work with the Commission before coming to final decisions on whether or not to use his powers of direction in these cases. My Department is writing to these councils setting out in full our position on directing them to hold a referendum, in the light of the representation we have received.

We also welcome the other suggestions the Electoral Commission makes for councils to improve how referendums are run. My Department will help promulgate these suggestions to councils through the regular contacts it holds with authorities holding mayoral ballots.

In short, the Commission's report is an important contribution to our refining and improving the process of mayoral elections which are at the heart of our policy that people should be able to choose how they are governed locally.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many affordable housing units in *(a)* rural districts and *(b)* extreme rural districts in England have (i) been sold under right to buy and (ii) been newly built, showing for each district the net change, in each year since 1991 to 2001. [35161]

Ms Keeble: The information requested is presented in a summary table which has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Correspondence

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the average response time was for responding to departmental correspondence; what percentage of letters took longer than one month for a response; and what percentage took longer than three months for a response in each of the last five years. [37439]

Dr. Whitehead: The available information, relating to DTLR and its predecessor, is as follows:

Ministerial correspondence (including MPs' correspondence, invitations and inter-departmental correspondence)

	Number of letters received	*Replies within 15-day target (%)*	*Replies within 20-day target (%)*	*Replies that took longer than one month after the 15-day target (%)*	*Replies that took longer than three months after the 15-day target (%)*
1997 (DETR)	38,059	51	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
1998 (DETR)	31,798	58	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
1999 (DETR)[2]	26,115	46	64	13	4
2000 (DETR)	31,445	69	81	7	2
2001 (DETR/DTLR)[3]	25,613	82	90	4	1

[1] Not available.

[2] This relates only to the period from April to December 1999 as the information for the first quarter is not available due to technical difficulties.

[3] For 2001 the figures include correspondence addressed to DETR up until the general election and thereafter to DTLR.

Non-ministerial correspondence (from previous "Six Service Standards" reports)

Period	*Total volume received*	*Percentage replied to within 15 working days*
1 April 1997—31 March 1998	672,980	96
1 April 1998—31 March 1999	546,385	94
1 April 1999—31 March 2000	804,404	95
1 April 2000—31 March 2001	1,161,736	97
1 April 2001—31 December 2001	472,083	99

Catering Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the cost was of *(a)* in-house canteen and *(b)* other catering services provided by his Department in each of the last four years. [38918]

Dr. Whitehead: The figures are for DTLR(C) HQ buildings.

1998–99—in-house canteen and other catering figures are not available.

1999–2000—in-house canteen £116,613 and other catering services £355,015.

2000–01—in-house canteen £88,547 and other catering services £396,488.

2001–02—in-house canteen £49,021 and other catering services £549,842.

London Underground

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on which date the contracts tendered by bidders Metronet and Tube Lines wishing to enter into a public private partnership with London Underground Ltd. were first received by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the Treasury, *(c)* Ernst and Young, *(d)* London Underground Ltd., *(e)* the Mayor of London and Transport for London and *(f)* the Health and Safety Executive. [38969]

Mr. Jamieson: London Underground is responsible for the development of PPP contracts for the modernisation of the Underground's infrastructure. Draft contracts were issued with invitations to tender in October 1999 and have since been revised and updated to reflect changes to London Underground's requirements, negotiations with bidders and consultation with the Mayor and Transport for London.

Throughout the process, revisions of the draft PPP contracts have been shared with DTLR, HM Treasury, the Health and Safety Executive and, since they were established, the Mayor and Transport for London. Ernst and Young were contracted to provide independent advice to the Secretary of State in October 2001. They received the draft contract the same month and were updated as it developed.

Humber Bridge

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 789W on the Humber Bridge, what the total cost is of the essential maintenance work; what the nature of the work is; and when it will be completed. [38694]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The essential maintenance work referred to in my answer of 25 February is resurfacing of the carriageway at the Humber Bridge, estimated total cost of £7.36 million. The work is due to be completed in October 2002.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 789W on the Humber Bridge, under what authority capital repayments between 2000 and 2002 were waived. [38692]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Section 75 of the Humber Bridge Act 1959 as amended by Section 8 of the Humber Bridge Act 1971 states that the Humber Bridge Board shall apply revenues of the Board in the following manner:

> "first in payment of the working and establishment expenses and cost of maintenance of the undertaking;
>
> secondly in payment of the interest on moneys advanced by the Secretary of State by way of loan under the provisions of the Humber Bridge Act 1971 and moneys borrowed by the Board

> under any statutory borrowing power in proportion to the respective amounts borrowed by the Board from the Secretary of State and other than from the Secretary of State as aforesaid;
>
> thirdly, subject to all interest as aforesaid having been paid in any year in making provision for repayment of moneys borrowed by the Board under any statutory borrowing in proportion to the respective amounts borrowed by the Board from the Secretary of State and other than from the Secretary of State as aforesaid."

It is our view that the above clearly gives authority to the Humber Bridge Board to defer interest and capital repayments to concentrate revenue for essential maintenance work.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 789W, ref 34782, on the Humber Bridge, when the decision was taken to waive capital repayments between 2000 and 2002; and if he will make a statement. [38693]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The Humber Bridge Board took the decision (in accordance with Section 75 of the Humber Bridge Act 1959 as amended by the Humber Bridge Act 1971) to concentrate revenue for essential maintenance work and not to make capital repayments in 2000–01 and 2001–02.

This decision to not make capital repayments for the years mentioned was recognised by paragraph 4 of the Schedule to the Humber Bridge (Debts) Order 1998, whereby interest not exceeding £1.4 million in 2000–01 and not exceeding £200,000 (being in each case interest that cannot be paid by applying the revenues of the Humber Bridge Board in accordance with Section 75 of the Humber Bridge Act 1959) ceased to be payable.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the total public investment support is to *(a)* Phase 1 and *(b)* Phase 2 of CTRL; and in what years it (i) has been and (ii) will be allocated. [39417]

Mr. Jamieson: The level of Government investment in the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL) remains the same as set out in the Development Agreement with London and Continental in 1996.

The Government are providing grants totalling £778.1 million towards construction costs for section 1 of the CTRL and £1,774.2 million towards construction costs for section 2. These values are in January 1997 prices and are corrected to current values using the Retail Prices Index.

In both cases the grant will only be paid when expenditure has exceeded 68 per cent. of the target cost for the relevant section. The grants are then made in eight consecutive three-monthly payments provided that a specified construction milestone has been achieved.

Expenditure on section 1 exceeded the 68 per cent. point in September 2001 and the relevant milestone had by then been achieved. Therefore the first payment was made on 15 November 2001. The second and third milestones have also been achieved and the second payment was made on 15 February 2002.

Assuming that these conditions continue to be met according to the project plan, the grants will be paid as follows:

	In current values (£)	
	Section 1	*Section 2*
2001–02	221.91	—
2002–03	458.61	—
2003–04	234.44	—
2004–05	—	280.43
2005–06	—	1,142.68
2006–07	—	879.45

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions with the Scottish Executive have taken place concerning the restrictions of rail freight through the Channel tunnel that began on 7 November 2001 and its impact on Scotland; when such discussions took place; who took part; what the outcome was; and if he will place a copy of the minutes in the Library. [38675]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and I have regular discussions with the Scottish Executive concerning a variety of issues. The content of these discussions is confidential.

The Government are aware of, and have passed on, the particular concerns over the impact of restrictions on international rail freight services from Scotland. The Government are pressing the French Government at the highest levels to provide adequate policing resources at Fréthun to support the anti-intrusion measures already being installed by SNCF in order to address the disruption to Channel tunnel services caused by would-be illegal immigrants.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has written twice to the French Prime Minister, and also spoke to him at a recent summit in Stockholm. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions have followed up the Prime Minister's letters with the French Interior Minister and Transport Minister respectively.

Rail Engineering

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent discussions he has had with colleagues at DfES to encourage a higher academic status for rail engineering and rail engineers. [39439]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* The Minister for adult skills and I jointly hosted a transport skills seminar on 14 February as part of the continuing commitment of Government to promote better training and skills development to support delivery of the 10-Year Transport Plan.

Severn Bridge

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will make a statement about the reasons for the closure of the Severn Bridge on *(a)* 12 February and *(b)* 27 February; and what the recorded wind speeds were on each occasion; [39960]

(2) if he will list the dates on which the Severn Bridge has been closed in the past four weeks; and the reasons for the closure in each case. [39961]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Mr. Tim Matthews, to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Mr. Huw Edwards, dated 7 March 2002:

I have been asked by the Transport Minister, David Jamieson, to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about recent closures of the Severn Bridge.

In the last 4 weeks, the Severn Bridge was closed on the following dates:

Closed	*Re-opened*	*Reason for closure*
February 1 (10.00 hrs)	February 2 (13.45 hrs)	High winds
February 4 (12.00 hrs)	February 6 (01.00 hrs)	High winds
February 11 (15.30 hrs)	February 12 (10.45 hrs)	High winds
February 19 (20.00 hrs)	February 20 (19.30 hrs)	High winds
February 26 (01.00 hrs)	February 27 (12.15 hrs)	High winds

Severn Bridge is closed by the Police when they are concerned about high winds affecting vehicles. You will see that the closures on 12 and 27 February had been imposed, in each case, the day before because of high wind speeds. The maximum recorded wind speed on 12 February was 41 knots and, on 27 February, 49 knots.

Strategic Rail Plan

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the publication of the final directions and guidance to the Strategic Rail Authority will affect *(a)* the timetable and *(b)* progress towards implementation of the Strategic Plan published on 14 January; and if he will make a statement. [40268]

Mr. Jamieson: No, the timetable and implementation will not be affected.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of the uncommitted public sector investment in transport under the 10-Year Plan is intended to enable the leveraging in of private sector investment. [40230]

Mr. Jamieson: Of the original £8.9 billion of unallocated public sector investment in our 10-Year Plan for Transport, £2.3 billion has been allocated to the railways, *Official Report,* 29 January 2002, column 175W. This £2.3 billion will be used to help deliver our 10-Year Plan objectives for rail in partnership with the private sector.

Of the remaining unallocated public sector investment, we will consider to what uses this investment will be put in our forthcoming Review of the Plan and the extent to which this may leverage in private sector investment.

Rail Passengers

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 12 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 220W, on rail passengers, for what reason growth in Eurostar passenger and revenues is expected to continue. [40270]

Mr. Jamieson: Economic growth is the main cause of long term growth in Eurostar passenger demand and revenues. Eurostar will also benefit from the completion of Sections 1 and 2 of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, which will allow Eurostar to reduce journey times, improve reliability and increase the frequency of services.

Rail Network

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if the Strategic Rail Authority has provided *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Treasury with an estimate of the total renewal cost of the UK rail network; [40222]

(2) if his Department has made an assessment of the total renewal cost of the UK rail network; and if he will make a statement; [40221]

(3) what estimate he has made of how much is required fully to renew the United Kingdom rail network; [40224]

(4) if his Department has provided information to the Treasury to enable it to carry out an estimation of the total renewal cost of the UK rail network; [40223]

(5) what estimate he has made of the ratio between the total renewal cost of the UK rail network and the average annual amount allocated for renewals under the 10-Year Plan. [40202]

Mr. Jamieson: The appropriate level of renewals is a matter for the Rail Regulator and for bidders for Railtrack Plc. Bidders are expected to demonstrate an understanding of the investment needs of the rail network, to develop plans to improve the knowledge of the state of the rail network and to propose their renewal investment plans.

Local Government

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what level of population growth in each of the Government's regions is being used to plan local government functions in the next *(a)* five years, *(b)* 10 years and *(c)* 20 years. [39550]

Dr. Whitehead: Estimates of the population change by Government Office region are available, but the Department does not hold centrally information on the extent to which these estimates are used by Government Departments. The estimates are given in the report by the Office for National Statistics entitled "1996-based Subnational Population Projections—England" (series pp3 no. 10). The table provides the overall summary.

Table 1.1 Population of England by Government Office region for selected years

	Area population (thousand)						Percentage change				
	1996[1]	*2001*	*2006*	*2011*	*2016*	*2021*	*1996–2001*	*1996–2006*	*1996–2011*	*1996–2016*	*1996–2021*
England	49,089.1	49,871.1	50,526.3	51,161.2	51.831.9	52,483.9	1.6	2.9	4.2	5.6	6.9
North-east	2,600.5	2,579.3	2,555.1	2,535.9	2,521.4	2,509.1	–0.8	–1.7	–2.5	–3.0	–3.5
North-west	5,470.8	5,485.0	5,490.1	5,497.3	5,513.7	5,529.7	0.3	0.4	0.5	0.8	1.1
Merseyside	1,420.4	1,385.5	1,352.5	1,323.1	1,298.9	1,277.9	–2.5	–4.8	–6.9	–8.6	–10.0
Yorkshire and Humber	5,035.5	5,071.1	5,098.2	5,129.6	5,164.7	5,199.6	0.7	1.2	1.9	2.6	3.3
East Midlands	4,141.5	4,234.1	4,311.7	4,383.7	4,455.4	4,523.0	2.2	4.1	5.8	7.6	9.2
West Midlands	5,316.6	5,342.8	5,358.4	5,372.3	5,391.4	5,410.8	0.5	0.8	1.0	1.4	1.8
East	5,292.6	5,448.0	5,581.8	5,702.2	5,823.2	5,940.9	2.9	5.5	7.7	10.0	12.2
London	7,074.3	7.214.8	7,337.3	7,470.0	7,608.5	7,736.2	2.0	3.7	5.6	7.6	9.4
South-east	7,895.3	8,133.8	8,343.7	8,534.0	8,721.9	8,905.0	3.0	5.7	8.1	10.5	12.8
South-west	4,841.5	4,976.6	5,097.5	5,213.0	5,332.8	5,451.7	2.8	5.3	7.7	10.1	12.6

[1] Base

Road Safety

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secreatry of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much his Department has spent on road-safety related matters in each of the last three years. [40225]

Mr. Jamieson: In the financial years 1998–99, 1999–2000, 2000–01, my Department spent £68 million, £84 million and £97 million respectively on road safety. These figures exclude the Department's internal administration costs. While they include Highways Agency expenditure on specific safety schemes, it is not possible to estimate the cost of the safety benefits inherent in larger projects.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the ratio between total road safety spending in the United Kingdom and the number of vehicle journeys each year. [40227]

Mr. Jamieson: Expenditure on road safety by my Department and by local authorities in England in 1999–2000 totalled £318 million. It is estimated that motor vehicles travelled 398 billion kilometres in England in 1999. This suggests that annual expenditure on road safety is of the order of £8 per 10,000 vehicle kilometres travelled.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what regulations apply to speed limit indicators painted on the road surface in restricted areas. [40292]

Mr. Jamieson: Departmental policy is to authorise carriageway roundels only when used in conjunction with upright repeated signs. Research has shown when used alone roundels have little effect on vehicle speeds and adverse weather conditions can render them invisible.

Direction 10 of Traffic Signs Regulation and General Directions 1994 states that repeater signs are prohibited on restricted roads. Consequently carriageway roundels are only authorised when used in conjunction with an upright sign at the gateway/terminal of a restricted road.

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent assessment he made of the extent of reporting of road crashes that involve children. [40548]

Mr. Jamieson: After a study for my Department in 1996, the Transport Research Laboratory reported that "around half of casualties aged 0–4 and 15–19 and a third of those aged 5–14 were reported but the reporting rate increased to around two-thirds or more for older casualties". The reporting rate also varied with road user group: 56 per cent. for children aged 0–14 who were car occupants but only 12 per cent. for pedal cyclists.

The main reasons given by casualties interviewed in hospital accident and emergency departments for not reporting an accident were that the accident was too trivial or that no one else was involved.

Light Aircraft Noise

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he plans to limit light aircraft noise. [39691]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* All light aircraft issued with a UK Certificate of Airworthiness are required to comply with ICAO Annex 16 international noise certification requirements, which are currently implemented through the Aeroplane Noise Regulations Order 1999. These certification requirements place a maximum decibel limit on the noise level that an aircraft may produce.

The air transport White Paper, which we plan to publish this year, will cover aircraft noise policy generally including such legislative changes as we conclude may be appropriate in respect of the operational noise controls (including on light aircraft) available to aerodromes and to the Secretary of State.

Writing Paper

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reason the Minister for Housing, Planning and Regeneration's official writing paper does not include his correct style and title; and if he will amend it. [39904]

Ms Keeble: The Minister's writing paper is headed with his name. He has no plans to amend it.

Rail Journeys (Staff)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make it his policy that rail journeys undertaken by staff in his Department should ordinarily be on standard class tickets. [40446]

Dr. Whitehead: Rail travel is ordinarily undertaken on standard class tickets. However staff in my Department at Band 5 (Senior Executive Officer) and above may choose to travel first class where there is a business need and the extra expense is justified, for example, better to facilitate working during the journey.

With the exception of a few staff at Band 4 (Higher Executive Officer) who may choose to travel first class, staff below Band 5 may not choose to travel first class except where:

(a) they are travelling with someone who is travelling first class;

(b) the facilities provided in standard class do not meet their needs, for example if they are pregnant or suffer from a disability;

(c) there are no seats available in standard class, or in circumstances when it is necessary to buy a meal on the train and this is not possible when travelling in standard class;

(d) there is a need to travel overnight and use a sleeping berth.

Health and Safety At Work

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list for each year since 1997 the incidence rate of *(a)* fatal and *(b)* major injury accidents at work. [40427]

Dr. Whitehead: The incidence rate of fatal and of major injuries, reported to HSE and local authorities, 1997–98 to 2000–01[1] is shown in the table:

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
(a) Fatal injury rate				
Employees	0.9	0.8	0.7	0.9
Self-employed people	1.8	1.9	1.7	2.4
Workers	1.0	0.9	0.8	1.0
(b) Major injury rate				
Employees	127.6	121.7	116.6	107.3
Self-employed people	23.3	20.3	19.7	19.0
Workers	113.8	108.8	104.9	96.9

[1] The figures relate to the planning year 1 April to 31 March and those for 2000–01 are provisional.

Notes:

1. The incidence rates per 100,000 employees, self-employed and workers have been provided. "Workers" are employees and self-employed combined.
2. Injuries reported under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) 1995.
3. Non-fatal injuries are under reported. The Labour Force Survey suggest that, in 1999–2000, employers report about 44 per cent. of injuries that they should report and self-employed people report less than 5 per cent.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list for each year since 1997 the incidence rate of cases of work-related ill health. [40425]

Dr. Whitehead: No single source of information is available on the nature and full extent of work-related ill health in Great Britain. The most inclusive and broadly based estimates come from self-reporting surveys of the national population where individuals are asked to report any work related ill health they have suffered in the last 12 months. The latest available estimate of the incidence of new cases of work-related ill health from such a survey is for 1995; some 400,000 cases per year, or an incidence rate of 1,400 per 100,000 workers. An updated estimate, for 2001–02, will be published later this year.

More recent figures for particular types of work-related ill health are available from alternative are published in Health and Safety Statistics 2000–01, a copy of which is in the Library (and on the internet at http://www.house.gov.uk/statistics/2001/hsspt2.pdf).

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many working days were lost per 100,000 workers from *(a)* work-related injury and *(b)* ill health in each year since 1997. [40426]

Dr. Whitehead: The overall number of working days lost, as a result of work-related injury, is obtained every three years through a national survey. The latest figure, covering the financial year 2000–01, is estimated to be 27,900 working days lost per 100,000 workers, while in 1997–98 the figure was 25,800.

For work-related ill health, the latest available figure is based on a survey of self-reported work-related illness in 1995. The survey estimated that 71,000 working days were lost per 100,000 workers in Great Britain. A more up-to-date estimate, covering 2001–02, will be available later this year.

National Air Traffic Services

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what arrangements were put in place at the time of the NATS PPP to ensure that the income generated by the online services was kept separate from the other services. [40607]

Mr. Jamieson: The ring-fencing of NATS' en route services is effected through the air traffic services licence granted under the Transport Act 2000. The Government placed copies of this licence in the Libraries of the House in April 2001.

Capita Group

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the contracts that have been awarded to the Capita Group by the Department. [39344]

Dr. Whitehead: The following contracts have been awarded by DTLR to the Capita Group, since 1997:

Description of contract	*Date*	
Assessment Centre Recruitment for Traffic Examiners	September 2001	Vehicle Inspectorate
Training courses	2000–02	Maritime and Coastguard Agency
Provision and Maintenance of IT Infrastructure	September 1997-August 2004	Driving Standards Agency
Supply of Finance Director on an agency basis	March 1998-November 2000	Fire Service College
Direct Marketing Services	August 1998-July 1999	Fire Service College
Recruitment Service for DTLR	November 2001	DTLR(C)
National Road Traffic Census for 2002–04	January 2002	DTLR(C)
Recruitment Service for DETR(C)	October 1998 (contract now completed)	DTLR(C)
General Recruitment Services	February 1997 (contract now completed)	DTLR(C)

Description of contract	*Date*	
Project Management/Consultancy General	July 2001	Highways Agency
Engineering Support to Safety Standards and Research Structures and Technical Approvals	February 2002–04	Highways Agency
Traffic Monitoring East 2000	August 2001	Highways Agency
HRS Consultancy Services framework	February 2001	Highways Agency
A66 Stainburn to Great Clifton Bypass	February 2002	Highways Agency

Notes:

Four contracts were awarded to Cumbrian Contract Services (now part of the Capita Group) by Highways Agency between November and September 2000.

20 contracts were awarded to Cumbrian Industrials Ltd. (now part of the Capita Group) by Highways Agency between December 1997 a August 2001.

The Department's evaluation mechanism for successful delivery of contract is based on value for money, taking into consideration cost, quality and delivery for each individual tender.

The Department does not as a general rule have clauses in contracts relating to penalty clauses unless there are clear grounds for inclusion, as in the delivery of a construction project where damages could be assessed. No record is kept centrally of instances where these clauses have been invoked.Individual contract values are not quoted to protect commercial confidentiality.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the contracts awarded by his Department to Capita since 1997, stating *(a)* start and finish date of contract, *(b)* value of contract, *(c)* description of work to be carried out, *(d)* evaluation mechanism for successful delivery of contract, *(e)* penalty charges for failure to deliver and *(f)* if any penalty charges have been incurred; and if he will make a statement. [39981]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* The following contracts have been awarded by DTLR to the Capita Group, since 1997:

Description of contract	*Date*	*Department/agency*
Assessment centre recruitment for traffic examiners	September 2001	Vehicle Inspectorate
Training courses	2000–02	Maritime and Coastguard Agency
Provision and maintenance of IT infrastructure	September 1997 to August 2004	Driving Standards Agency
Supply of Finance Director on an agency basis	March 1998 to November 2000	Fire Service College
Direct marketing services	August 1998 to July 1999	Fire Service College
Recruitment service for DTLR	November 2001	DTLR (C)
National road traffic census for 2002–04	January 2002	DTLR (C)
Recruitment service for DETR (C)	[1]October 1998	DTLR (C)
General recruitment services	[1]February 1997	DTLR (C)
Project management/consultancy general	July 2001	Highways Agency
Engineering support to safety standards and research structures and technical approvals	February 2002–04	Highways Agency
Traffic monitoring east 2000	August 2001	Highways Agency
HRS consultancy services framework	February 2001	Highways Agency
A66 Stainburn to Gt. Clifton bypass	February 2002	Highways Agency

[1] Contract now completed

Notes:

1. 4 contracts were awarded to Cumbrian Contract Services (now part of the Capita Group) by Highways Agency between November 1999 and September 2000.
2. 20 contracts were awarded to Cumbrian Industrials Ltd. (now part of the Capita Group) by Highways Agency between December 1997 and August 2001.

The Department's evaluation mechanism for successful delivery of a contract is based on value for money, taking into consideration cost, quality and delivery for each individual tender.The Department does not as a general rule have clauses in contracts relating to penalty clauses unless there are clear grounds for inclusion, as in the delivery of a contraction project where damages could be assessed. No record is kept centrally of instances where these clauses have been invoked.

Individual contract values are not quoted to protect commercial confidentiality.

Air Travel (Deep Vein Thrombosis)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what research is being undertaken by the Government into links between deep vein thrombosis and air travel. [40677]

Mr. Jamieson: Rather than undertaking its own research into possible links between deep vein thrombosis and air travel, the Government will support the international research project being planned by the World Health Organisation.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the reasons why the research into links between deep vein thrombosis and air travel announced by the World Health Organisation in August 2001 has not yet begun; and what representations the Government made to the World Health Organisation as to beginning the research. [40678]

Mr. Jamieson: Members of the Aviation Health Working Group, which includes this Department, met representatives of the Scientific Committee responsible for the proposed WHO project on 26 February to discuss the timing of the study. Details of the various research protocols have now been agreed and it is planned to begin the work on 1 April 2002, subject to sufficient funding being in place.

Local Government Finance

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of local government expenditure has been met by *(a)* Government grant, *(b)* business rates and *(c)* council tax in each of the last five years. [40775]

Dr. Whitehead: English local authorities have reported the following funding of revenue expenditure:

	Revenue expenditure[1]	*Government grant*[2]		*Non-domestic rates*[3]		*Council tax*[4]	
	£ billion	*£ billion*	*Per cent.*	*£ billion*	*Per cent.*	*£ billion*	*Per cent.*
1997–98	47.256	23.840	50	12.034	25	11.241	24
1998–99	50.189	25.291	50	12.531	25	12.332	24
1999–2000	53.651	26.421	49	13.619	25	13.278	25
2000–01	57.324	27.784	48	15.406	27	14.200	25
2001–02[5]	61.270	30.341	50	15.144	25	15.245	25

[1] "Revenue expenditure to compare with TSS" i.e. expenditure financed from Revenue Support Grant, specific and special grants within AEF, non-domestic rates, council taxes and balances. Also includes spending met by SSA Reduction Grant, Police Grant, Central Support Protection Grant (1999–2000 onwards) and General Greater London Authority Grant (2000–01 onwards). This column is not the total of the others. The difference is due to funding by balances and other adjustments.

[2] Includes Revenue Support Grant, specific and special grants within AEF, SSA Reduction Grant, Police Grant, Central Support Protection Grant (1999–2000 onwards) and General GLA Grant (2000–01 onwards).

[3] Distributable amount from non-domestic rate pool. This is not exactly equal to the payments from businesses in any year, but adjustments are made to the distributable amount in future years to ensure that, over time, all rates received are redistributed to receiving authorities. Includes City Offset.

[4] Gross of council tax benefit and council tax transitional reduction scheme.

[5] Budgets.

Right to Buy

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his estimate is of the impact on the numbers of local authority tenants in London applying for the right to buy of *(a)* reducing the maximum discount to £25,000, *(b)* extending the discount clawback period to five years and *(c)* extending the cost floor liability period to 15 years. [40774]

Ms Keeble: No such estimates have been made. As explained in our December 2000 Housing Policy Statement "Quality and choice: a decent home for all", the Government have no proposals for further significant changes to the Right to Buy scheme.

South West Regional Assembly

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what expenses and allowances are available to members of the shadow South West Regional Assembly. [41139]

Dr. Whitehead: Expenses and allowances are a matter for the Assembly. Its accounts are published annually.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will set out the division of functions between the shadow South West Regional Assembly and *(a)* the South West Regional Development Agency, *(b)* the Government Office of the South West, *(c)* county councils, *(d)* district councils and *(e)* unitary authorities; and if he will make a statement. [41135]

Dr. Whitehead: The South West Regional Assembly is a voluntary body. It has not statutory duties and determines its own functions. However, I understand that its top priorities for the next two years are to:

> further develop its role as the voice of the South West;
>
> continue to identify present and future needs of the region; and
>
> encourage and promote integrated policy-making for the delivery of regional objectives.

The Secretary of State in approving the Regional Planning Guidance (RPG10) recognised the Regional Assembly as the Regional Planning Body for the South West. The Regional Assembly is therefore responsible for implementation, monitoring and reviews of RPG. I understand that the Regional Assembly is also taking forward the Regional Sustainable Development Framework, which it signed up to in December 2000.

The purposes of Regional Development Agencies are set out in s.4 of the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998:

> to further the economic development and regeneration of their area;
>
> to promote business efficiency, investment and competitiveness in their area;
>
> to promote employment in their area;
>
> to enhance the development and application of skills relevant to employment in their area; and
>
> to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in the United Kingdom, where it is relevant to their area to do so.

The Government Office for the South West manages spending programmes in the region on behalf of a range of Government Departments, carries out certain regulatory functions, sponsors the Regional Development Agency and provides a regional perspective which helps inform the development of Government policy.

The functions of local authorities are set out in many different pieces of legislation and are summarised, for example, on the website of the Local Government Information Unit www.lgiu.gov.uk. In summary:

> counties provide the following services: education, libraries, social services, trading standards, waste disposal, highways and transport, strategic land use planning.
>
> districts provide the following services: housing, parks, sports, arts and entertainment, land use planning permission, environmental health, waste collection and recycling, street cleaning, council tax collection, council tax and housing benefits, electoral registration and administration.
>
> unitary authorities are responsible for all the functions carried out by a county and district where there are two tiers of local government.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) when he will hold a referendum to determine whether to proceed to an elected South West Regional Assembly; and if he will make a statement; [41130]

(2) if he will list the policy areas for which the proposed South West Regional Assembly will have executive authority. [41137]

Dr. Whitehead: The forthcoming Regional Government White Paper will set out our proposals for elected assemblies for the English regions.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the budget *(a)* this year and *(b)* next year is of the shadow South West Regional Assembly. [41132]

Dr. Whitehead: The Assembly receives funds from a number of sources and is responsible for its own budget. Its accounts are published annually. The Department has made available £0.5 million for the Assembly in this financial year and proposes to make available £0.6 million in 2002–03.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what powers, deriving from which statutes, can be exercised by the shadow South West Regional Assembly. [41131]

Dr. Whitehead: The Assembly is a voluntary, non-statutory body. As such, it does not exercise any statutory powers or duties, and does not need specific statutory authority to carry out the activities determined by its members. However, the Assembly could not take an effective role in scrutinising the activities of the regional development agency for the South West unless the agency was required to play its part. Accordingly, provisions in the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998 allow the Secretary of State to designate a chamber for the region (which is the Assembly), and to direct the agency to have regard to the chamber's views and to consult it about the exercise of specified functions.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the terms of reference are of the shadow South West Regional Assembly. [41134]

Dr. Whitehead: The Assembly has no "terms of reference" set by Government. However, I understand that the Assembly has set as its top priorities for the next two years:

> to further develop its role as the voice of the South West;
>
> to continue to identify present and future needs of the region; and
>
> to encourage and promote integrated policy-making for the delivery of regional objectives.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the members of the shadow South West Regional Assembly, indicating in each case the reason for their membership. [41138]

Dr. Whitehead: Membership is a matter for the Regional Assembly.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many staff are employed by the shadow South West Regional Assembly; and how many staff will be employed next year. [41133]

Dr. Whitehead: "South West Regional Assembly" is the name used by the regional chamber designated by the Secretary of State under s.8 of the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998. It is not a "shadow" body of possible future elected regional assembly for the South West, but a voluntary body which has been recognised by Ministers for the purposes of scrutiny of the South West Regional Development Agency.

Staffing levels are a matter for the Assembly.

Voting

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will calculate the proportion of *(a)* United Kingdom residents and *(b)* council tax payers who do not have the right to vote in local authority elections; if he will calculate the total amount of council tax revenue received from residents who do not have the right to vote in local authority elections; and if he will list the 20 local authorities in receipt of the highest proportion of revenue from residents not entitled to vote. [41143]

Dr. Whitehead: The information necessary to make the calculations is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to make voting from overseas easier for UK diplomatic staff, with specific reference to voting by post; and if he will make a statement. [41167]

Dr. Whitehead: Regulations, approved by Parliament, were introduced in February 2001 to allow all overseas voters, including those serving in British diplomatic posts, to vote by post if they so wish.

Firefighters (Recruitment)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to amend departmental guidance in relation to the recruitment and retention of people with diabetes as firefighters to take account of EU Council Directive 2000/78/EC. [40641]

Dr. Whitehead: My Department is reviewing the existing guidance to the fire service on the employment of people with diabetes as firefighters. Key interest groups will be consulted, and the review will take account of all relevant legislation.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions by how much his Department underspent its expenditure limits in the financial year 2000–01. [40830]

Dr. Whitehead: Provisional outturn against departmental expenditure limits for 2000–01 is published in the Public Expenditure 2000–01 Provisional Outturn White Paper (Cm 5243), which is available in the Library. Final outturn against departmental expenditure limits for 2000–01, adjusted to take account of machinery of government changes in 2001–02, will be published in May 2002 in the Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 2002–03.

Rail Safety

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1169w, on safety training for railway employees, what information is collated by the *(a)* Health and Safety Executive and *(b)* individual railway companies on the number of railway employees who hold certificates of competence to work on railway tracks; what information about this was collected by British Rail prior to privatisation; and if he will make a statement. [40547]

Mr. Jamieson: Regulation 3(1) of the Railways (Safety Critical Work) Regulations 1994 requires employers to keep adequate records of any assessments undergone by safety critical employees. The Health and Safety Executive does not collate such information itself.

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the non-professional railway occupations for which employees are required to hold a certificate of competence or to show that they have completed appropriate training before being allowed to perform their job; and if he will state the type of certificate or qualification which is required in each case. [40525]

Mr. Jamieson: The Railways (Safety Critical Work) Regulations 1994 require employers to ensure that all employees carrying out work vital to the safe operation of the railways are competent and fit to carry out that work. The types of activities considered safety critical are described in the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) guidance to these regulations. This is available on the HSE website at www.house.gov.uk. Specific requirements for demonstrating competence are not set down in the regulations.

Special Advisers

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on how many occasions since 1 May 1997 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; and if he will list the total cost, including (i) travel, (ii) accommodation and (iii) subsistence allowance, for each occasion. [37983]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* Between 1 April 2000 and 31 March 2001, special advisers in the former Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions travelled abroad on six occasions, at an average cost of £4,000 per trip. The countries visited were Japan, USA, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, China and the Netherlands. Information for the period 2 May 1997 to 31 March 2000 is already in the public domain. All travel by special advisers is undertaken in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and the Civil Service Management Code.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 8 March 2002

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Golden Jubilee Medal

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent representations she has received concerning eligibility for the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal; what criteria will be used for allocating them; to which categories they will be awarded; and if she will make a statement. [37633]

Tessa Jowell: The medal is being issued to serving members of the Armed Forces and Royal Fleet Auxiliary and to the "999" emergency services. Eligibility is restricted to those who completed a minimum of five years' reckonable service on 6 February 2002—the 50th anniversary of the Queen's Accession. The detailed criteria for distribution are being worked out. I have recently received a number of representations from hon. and right hon. Members on behalf of the Prison Officers' Association who believe that their members should also receive the medal. Members of the Prison Service are not eligible because they are not a "999" emergency service.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the statutory instruments issued by her Department in the last 12 months, indicating *(a)* the purpose of each and *(b)* the cost of each to (i) public funds, (ii) businesses and (iii) individuals. [36226]

Mr. Caborn: The Statutory Instruments issued by my Department during 2001 and their respective purposes over the last 12 months are detailed in the table. Also included are Instruments which have been originated in this Department but eventually made by the Privy Council. The information sought under *(b)*(i), (ii) and (iii) is not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Serial Number	*Formal Title*	*Purpose of Order*
S.I./2001/223	The Broadcasting (Limit on the Holding of Licences to Provide Television Multiplex Services) Order 2001	Order changed the limit on the number of licences to provide television multiplex services that a person could hold so as to remove the existing restrictions. The purpose was to remove an unnecessary impediment to developments in the digital terrestrial television industry.
S.I./2001/411	The European Convention on Cinematographic Co-Production (Amendment) Order 2001*	Order added more European countries to the list of countries from which film producers would be eligible to co-produce cinema films with British film producers under the Council of Europe's European Convention on Cinematographic Co-production in order to obtain the fiscal benefits available in the UK for British films.
S.I./2001/772	The Wireless Telegraphy (Television Licences Fees) (Amendment) Regulations 2001	Regulations brought into effect certain increases in television licence fees and made amendments to the various easy payment schemes, and also made amendments relating to free television licences for people aged 75 or over.
S.I.2001/1404	The New Opportunities Fund (Specification of Initiatives) Order 2001	Order specified new initiatives for the New Opportunities Fund, a Lottery distributor, to support in areas concerned or connected with health, education and the environment.
S.I./2001/2378	The Broadcasting (Subtitling) Order 2001	Order amended Section 20(3)(a) of the Broadcasting Act 1996 to increase from 50 to 80 the specified percentage in relation to subtitling for the deaf on digital programme services. This means that the relevant code published by the Independent Television Commission must require that, as of the tenth anniversary of the date of commencement of the provision of any digital programme service, at least 80 per cent. of that service's non-excluded programmes in each week must be accompanied by such subtitling.
S.I./2001/2372	The Safety of Sports Grounds (Designation) Order 2001	Under the Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975 the Secretary of State may designate sports grounds with accommodation for more than 10,000 spectators, and football grounds occupied by Football League or FA Premier League clubs with accommodation for more than 5,000 spectators, as requiring a safety certificate from a local authority. Safety certificates contain such terms and conditions as local authorities consider necessary or expedient to secure reasonable safety at the ground. This Order designates the new City of Manchester Stadium, three football grounds occupied by new members of the Football League and one ground newly occupied by a Premier League club for these purposes.
S.I./2001/2373	The Football Spectators (Seating) Order 2001	Under the Football Spectators Act 1989, the Football Licensing Authority grants licences to allow spectators to be admitted to premises at which designated football matches are held, which include football matches played at the home ground of Football League and FA Premier League clubs. The Secretary of State may direct the FLA to include seating requirements in any licence. The Secretary of State's policy is that all football clubs in the top two divisions are required to have all-seater

Serial Number	*Formal Title*	*Purpose of Order*
		grounds. This Order therefore requires the FLA to include a condition in the licences in respect of the Southampton FC and Stockport County FC football grounds requiring that only seated accommodation shall be provided at designated matches at these grounds. This follows a grace period of three years since these clubs were promoted to the top two divisions for them to implement the all-seater policy.
S.I./2001/2403	The Protection of Wrecks (Designation) Order 2001	Order designates as a restricted area the site where part of the wreck of HMS Colossus lies, under section 1(1) of the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973. Designation protects wreck sites of historic, archaeological or artistic importance by making it a criminal offence, in particular, for a person to tamper with, damage or remove part of the wreck or any objects formerly contained in the wreck or carrying out diving or salvage operations on the wreck unless a licence is obtained to do so from the Secretary of State.
S.I./2001/2506	The National Lottery (Licence Fees) Order 2001	Licence fees must be paid on the granting of the main National Lottery operating licence (known as the section 5 licence) and also licences for individual Lottery games (known as section 6 licences). For the first seven year licence period, the fees were £70,000 for the section 5 licence, and £20,000 for section 6 licences and covered the costs specifically incurred by the National Lottery Commission in granting the licences. Camelot was awarded an interim licence between 1 October 2001 and 26 January 2002 and the Order therefore reduced the licence fees for that period to £11,000 and £1,000 respectively to reflect the actual costs incurred.
S.I./2001/3931	The European Convention on Cinematographic Co-Production (Amendment) (No.2) Order 2001*	Order added more European countries to the list of countries from which film producers would be eligible to co-produce cinema films with British film producers under the Council of Europe's European Convention on Cinematographic Co-production in order to obtain the fiscal benefits available in the UK for British films.
S.I./2001/3937	The Regulatory Reform (Special Occasions Licensing) Order 2001	Order relaxed alcohol licensing hours throughout the night on New Year's Eve 2001. It removed the need for businesses to apply for permission from the magistrates to extend the permitted licensing hours, which would have ended at 11pm on that night.
S.I./2001/3970	The Gaming Machines (Maximum Prizes) Regulations 2001	Order increased the maximum prize from a gaming machine in a casino from £1,000 to £2,000.
S.I./2001/3971	The Gaming Act (Variations of Monetary Limits) Order 2001	Order increased the maximum prize from an 'all-cash amusements-with-prizes' gaming machine from £15 to £25.
S.I./2001/3972	The Return of Cultural Objects (Amendment) Regulations 2001	Regulations implemented into UK law Directive 2001/38/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, which made some technical amendments to the threshold values set out in the Annex to Council Directive 93/7/EEC on the return of cultural objects unlawfully removed from the territory of a Member State.
S.I./2001/3984	The Public Lending Right Scheme 1982 (Commencement of Variations) Order 2001	Order amended the Public Lending Right(PLR) Scheme to increase the rate per loan paid to registered authors when their books are borrowed from public libraries from 2.49p to 2.67p.
S.I./2001/4034	The Amusements with Prizes (Variation of Monetary Limits) Order 2001	Order increased the maximum ticket sales and money prizes in games of prize bingo in an arcade (respectively, from £60 to £90 and from £15 to £25).
S.I./2001/4035	The Gaming Act (Variations of Monetary Limits) (No.2) Order 2001	Order increased the maximum cash prize in a prize bingo game played in a licensed bingo club from £15 to £25.

* DCMS Orders in Council

Golden Jubilee

Mr. Plaskitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make available to hon. Members, peers and the Library the Golden Jubilee Celebrations Toolkit sent to all councils and a wide range of organisations in England, Scotland and Wales in November 2001. [42604]

Tessa Jowell: Yes. I have arranged for all Members of both Houses to receive a copy of the Golden Jubilee Celebrations Toolkit together with an information leaflet and map giving the date and location of The Queen's United Kingdom Jubilee visits taking place from 29 April to 7 August 2002.

Copies of the Celebrations Toolkit are already in the Libraries of Both Houses and I have also arranged for copies of the information leaflet and map to be placed there.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many people were employed in a press or public relations function in her Department on 1 January in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000, *(e)* 2001 and *(f)* 2002. [39935]

Dr. Howells *[pursuant to his reply, 5 March 2002, column 264]:* Due to a typographical error the table contained in my original answer was incorrect. The following table gives the correct information.

The number of press officers and publicity officers in my Department at 1 January in each of the last six years was as follows:

Date	*Press Officers*	*Publicity Officers*
1997	8	4
1998	[1]9	[1]4
1999	8	4
2000	9	[2]5
2001	8	[2]4
2002	8	[2]5

[1] Includes two officers working part-time.

[2] Includes one officer working part-time.

DEFENCE

PRISM System

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress of the development of the prototype remote illness and symptom monitor (PRISM). [39198]

Dr. Moonie: The prototype remote illness and symptom monitor (PRISM) is a system designed to be a simple and practical tool for collecting medical signs and symptoms relating to individuals by identifying unusual health trends. The concept has been developed into a handheld device consisting of a computer and Global Positioning System. Bespoke Software records time and location data, and analyses the output of the handheld devices to record unusual levels of signs and symptoms. Prototype devices have been built and tested in laboratory and field-based trials. Most recently, PRISM has been successfully tested during exercise Saif Sareea in Oman. PRISM has therefore been a successful research programme resulting in the demonstration of a concept. We are currently considering the extent to which further research and development work is desirable.

QinetiQ

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department has spent on consultants and other fees relating to the privatisation of QinetiQ. [40082]

Dr. Moonie: Since the DERA PPP was announced in July 1998 as part of the Strategic Defence Review, the Ministry of Defence has spent some £7.2 million on advice from consultants and other fees. This figure covers the cost of advice and fees relating to all stages of the DERA PPP including the detailed options study in 1998–99, vesting of QinetiQ as a company in July 2001 and recent work preparing the company for a transaction. These costs have been subject to scrutiny to ensure that they offer value for money.

Job Sharing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the extent of job sharing in his Department. [41043]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 688W, to the hon. Member for Twickenham, (Dr. Cable).

Defence Fire Service (Golden Jubilee Medal)

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence of he will make it his policy that the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal should be awarded to serving members of the Ministry of Defence Fire Service. [41456]

Dr. Moonie: The criteria for eligibility of members of the emergency services working within Government departments to receive the medal are still being drawn up by the Cabinet Office, but I expect members of the Defence Fire Service to be among those who are eligible.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he intends to answer the question of 13 February from the hon. Member for Buckingham regarding staff involvement in union duties. [41811]

Dr. Moonie: I replied to the hon. Member on 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 316W.

Skynet 5 Project

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) on what criteria Paradigm was selected as the preferred bidder for the Skynet 5 project; [41769]

(2) pursuant to the answer of 26 February 2002 to the hon. Member for Bedford (Mr. Hall) *Official Report*, column 1135W, on the Skynet 5 programme, if he will give the location by parliamentary constituency of the jobs that will be *(a)* created and *(b)* sustained. [41771]

Dr. Moonie: The decision to select the preferred bidder for the Skynet 5 programme was taken on value for money grounds.

On current plans we expect the majority of the jobs created or sustained by Skynet 5 to be located in the parliamentary constituencies of Stevenage, Portsmouth North, North Wiltshire, Macclesfield and Newport (South Wales).

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Job Advertisements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the job advertisements placed by his Department in the last 12 months specifying where the advertisements were placed and the cost in each case. [39060]

Ms Rosie Winterton: In the last 12 months my Department has advertised over 400 posts externally to recruit staff. The total cost is over £400,000. The details requested have been placed in the libraries of both Houses.

Candidates for judicial offices are invited to apply through advertisements placed in the national press and legal journals. But judicial appointments do not constitute employment by the Lord Chancellor's Department and are therefore not included in the table.

Press Releases

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many press releases were issued by the Lord Chancellor's Department in the periods *(a)* between 1 May and 31 December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive. [40028]

Mr. Wills: The number of press releases that were issued by the Lord Chancellor's Department on behalf of LCDHQ, the Court Service, the Official Solicitor and members of the judiciary are:

		Number
(a)	1 May–31 December 1997	219
(b)	1998	386
	1999	387
	2000	452
	2002	463
Public Record Office (excluding releases of official documents):		
(a)	1 May–31 December 1997	3
(b)	1998	5
	2000	5
	2000	11
	2001	17
Land Registry:		
(a)	1 May–December 1997	13
(b)	1998	26
	2002	28
	2003	28
	2004	36
Northern Ireland Court Service:		
(a)	1 May–31 December 1997	11
(b)	1998	21
	2002	25
	2003	14
	2004	27
Public Guardianship Office:		
	With effect from 1 April 2001	1

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many people were employed in a press or public relations function in the Lord Chancellor's Department on 1 January in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000, (e) 2001 and *(f)* 2002. [39924]

Mr. Wills: The number of people who were employed in press or publicity work (excluding internal communications, web site developers and administrative support) was as follows:

	Number
(a) 1997	
LCD Headquarters	5
Public Record Office	2
Land Registry	1
Law Commission	1
Northern Ireland Court Service	2
(b) 1998	
LCD Headquarters	5
Public Record Office	2
Land Registry	2
Law Commission	1
Northern Ireland Court Service	2
(c) 1999	
LCD Headquarters	5
Public Record Office	2
Land Registry	2
Law Commission	1
Northern Ireland Court Service	2
(d) 2000	
LCD Headquarters	9
Public Record Office	3
Land Registry	2
Law Commission	1
Northern Ireland Court Service	2
(e) 2001	
LCD Headquarters	9
Public Record Office	3
Land Registry	2
Law Commission	1
Northern Ireland Court Service	2
(f) 2002	
LCD Headquarters	12
Public Record Office	4
Land Registry	2
Law Commission	1
Northern Ireland Court Service:	2
Public Guardianship Office	3

The Public Guardianship Office came into effect on 1 April 2001. Press and publicity work for the Court Service is handled by LCDHQ.

The increase in press and publicity staff in 2000 reflects new work connected with the Community Legal Service and the Court Service. The increase in 2002 reflects new responsibilities transferred to LCDHQ from the Home Office.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Hospitality

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the occasions on which he has received hospitality in his ministerial capacity from *(a)* Balfour Beatty plc, *(b)* Bombardier Transportation (formerly Adtranz), *(c)* WS Atkins plc, *(d)* Amey/Amec, *(e)* Bechtel-Halcrow, *(f)* Jarvis, *(g)* SEEBOARD Group plc, *(h)* Thames Water plc and *(i)* AEA Technology. [38987]

Mr. Byers: None.

Air Traffic Control

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what financial arrangements are in place for NATs to collect income generated from aircraft overflying the UK *(a)* from flights originating with the European Union, *(b)* from North America and *(c)* from the rest of the world to be collected from the CAA or the Government; whether all the income accrues to NATs; and if these arrangements can be changed by the UK unilaterally. [40608]

Mr. Jamieson: The UK is a member of the European Organisation for the Safety of Air Navigation ("Eurocontrol"). The Central Route Charges Office of Eurocontrol provides a centralised system for billing and collecting air traffic control charges. All aircraft flying in UK airspace, whatever their place of origin, pay their charges to the Central Route Charges Office, which reimburses direct to NATs En route Ltd the moneys owing to it.

The Central Route Charges Office also collects moneys on behalf of my Department and the Civil Aviation Authority.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the total costs were of the New En Route Centre at Swanwick, Hampshire, up until the operational start date of the centre in January; and if he will make a statement. [40410]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of Tuesday 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 177W, given to the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr Clifton-Brown).

Vacant Dwellings (Tyne and Wear)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many vacant residential dwellings there were in each year since 1997 in each local authority in Tyne and Wear, distinguishing between *(a)* local authority, *(b)* RSL, *(c)* public and *(d)* private sectors; and how many such vacancies were of more than six months duration. [40571]

Ms Keeble: The number of residential dwellings reported as being vacant in each year since 1997 in the five local authorities in Tyne and Wear by tenure is as follows:

Vacant Residential Dwellings on 1 April

	1997		*1998*		*1999*		*2000*		*2001*	
	Total	*of which vacant for more than 6 months*	*Total*	*of which vacant for more than 6 months*	*Total*	*of which vacant for more than 6 months*	*Total*	*of which vacant for more than 6 months*	*Total*	*of which vacant for more than 6 months*
Gateshead										
Local Authority	600	198	363	72	447	48	601	100	463	76
RSL	83	n/a	112	n/a	111	n/a	151	n/a	117	n/a
Other public service	5	n/a	7	n/a	9	n/a	5	n/a	7	n/a
Other private sector	2,626	n/a	2,827	n/a	2,041	n/a	2,627	1,940	2,611	1,975
Total Residential stock	3,314	n/a	3,309	n/a	2,608	n/a	3,384	n/a	3,198	n/a
Newcastle upon Tyne										
Local Authority	1,674	768	1,565	580	1,633	649	1,542	590	1,778	761
RSL	494	n/a	653	n/a	480	n/a	522	n/a	470	n/a
Other public sector	287	n/a	333	n/a	390	n/a	487	n/a	184	n/a
Private sector	4,385	n/a	4,455	n/a	5,402	n/a	5,471	n/a	1,323	921
Total	6,840	n/a	7,006	n/a	7,905	n/a	8,022	n/a	3,755	n/a
North Tyneside										
Local Authority	1,437	820	1,604	1,009	1,170	683	1,119	561	1,057	607
RSL	116	n/a	197	n/a	114	n/a	147	n/a	116	n/a
Other public sector	0	n/a	1	n/a	0	n/a	3	n/a	0	n/a
Other private sector	2,619	n/a	2791	n/a	3,724	n/a	2,675	1,211	2,657	1,113
Total Residential stock	4,172	n/a	4,593	n/a	5,008	n/a	3,944	n/a	3,830	n/a
South Tyneside										
Local Authority	371	44	426	49	368	30	495	68	518	119
RSL	46	n/a	120	n/a	132	n/a	32	n/a	86	n/a
Other public sector	0	n/a	0	n/a	0	n/a	0	n/a	0	n/a
Other private sector	766	n/a	1,223	n/a	1,841	n/a	870	450	1,973	661
Total Residential stock	1,183	n/a	1,769	n/a	2,341	n/a	1,397	n/a	2,577	n/a
Sunderland										
Local Authority	663	207	968	381	1,085	644	1,102	686	0	0
RSL	100	n/a	72	n/a	94	n/a	85	n/a	1,009	n/a
Other public sector	2	n/a	0	n/a	0	n/a	0	n/a	0	n/a
Other private sector	1,933	n/a	2,360	n/a	3,119	n/a	2,562	1,062	3,925	3,000
Total Residential stock	2,698	n/a	3,400	n/a	4,298	n/a	3,749	n/a	4,934	n/a

Notes:

RSL—Registered Social Landlord

Other public sector—includes Government Departments and public sector agencies (eg Health Authorities)

A level of vacancy is a usual feature of housing management, reflecting turnover and movement within the stock. There is likely to be some variation in the proportion of dwellings vacant in a local authority from one date to another during the year.

Source:

Housing Investment Programme (HIP) returns

Rail Safety

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what instructions his Department has issued to Railtrack since 1 September 2001 in relation to the work priorities of signalling engineers, with particular reference to the priority given to work on train protection and warning systems over other work. [40424]

Mr. Jamieson: This is a matter for Railtrack. TPWS is to be completed by the end of 2003. Railtrack are on schedule to meet this deadline.

Transport 10-Year Plan

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 26 February 2002 ref. 37227, on 10 year plan funding, to which years the future controls periods refer. [40523]

Mr. Jamieson: To all future five-year regulatory control periods from 1 April 2006 onwards.

South West Regional Assembly

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the trunk road schemes in which the shadow South West Regional Assembly has intervened. [41136]

Mr. Jamieson: The shadow South West Regional Assembly has not intervened in any "trunk road schemes".

Road Safety (Cannabis)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent research his Department has carried out into the effect of cannabis smoking on the competence of road vehicle drivers. [40842]

Mr. Jamieson: Research undertaken by TRL Ltd on behalf of the Department, and published in December 2000, concluded that the effects of cannabis on driver performance were different from those of alcohol, but they were unpredictable and as such could be a hazard. The complete TRL Report 477 "The Influence of cannabis on driving" is available directly from TRL Ltd or is free via the Department's website at "www.roads.dtlr.gov.uk/roadsafety/index.htm" under "DTLR Reports published by TRL". Alternatively, the summary of the report is available at "www.roads.dtlr.gov.uk/roadsafety/research16/index.htm".

Road Detrunking Programme

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what additional funding he will make available to county councils to accommodate their additional responsibilities under the detrunking programme. [41192]

Mr. Jamieson: We are committed to supporting the detrunking programme with a fair transfer of resources, discussed and agreed with the Local Government Association. Until the new system of local government finance comes into effect, resources for routine maintenance will be provided by special grant. In the year of detrunking and the following year if detrunking takes place on or after 1 July, resources for capital maintenance will be provided through 2-year supplementary credit approvals. Amounts will be determined with the new highway authority on the basis of an engineering assessment. After this capital resources will be provided via the local transport settlement.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what additional funding he plans to make available to the county councils as highway authorities to accommodate those additional responsibilities under the de-trunking programme. [41674]

Mr. Jamieson: We are committed to supporting the detrunking programme with a fair transfer of resources, discussed and agreed with the Local Government Association. Until the new system of local government finance comes into effect, resources for routine maintenance will be provided by special grant. In the year of detrunking and the following year if detrunking takes place on or after 1 July, resources for capital maintenance will be provided through 2-year supplementary credit approvals. Amounts will be determined with the new highway authority on the basis of an engineering assessment. After this capital resources will be provided via the local transport settlement.

Air Conditioning

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, (1) pursuant to the letter sent by (Mr. Chope) Under-Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Christchurch on 23 October 2001 whether *(a)* the technological elements of the refurbishment of the air conditioning chillers at the QE2 Centre have been finalised and *(b)* whether these are to contain not-in-kind or HFC refrigerants; [41158]

(2) whether an installer capable of installing not-in-kind air conditioning is being invited to quote for the refurbishment contract for the QE2 building; and if he will make a statement; [41162]

(3) which consultant is being used to advise on the installation of replacement air conditioning at the QE2 building. [41184]

(4) what measures are being taken by his Department to ensure that the consultant advising on the installation of replacement air conditioning at the QE2 building is aware of the Government's policy on the use of hydrofluorocarbon refrigerants in air-conditioning; and if he will make a statement on the measures taken by the consultant to source practical and safe alternatives to hydrofluorocarbon-based air-conditioning. [41157]

Dr. Whitehead: We have been working on this project with a team which includes project managers Project Management International, engineers Cundall Johnson Partnership, architects Gollins Melvin Ward Partnership and cost consultants Dearle and Henderson. This team has experience of various, including not-in-kind, air-conditioning projects. We have engaged experts from AEA Technology to provide health and safety risk assessment. We also have engaged as client advisers a specialist team of refrigeration experts headed by BRE.

Our project team has been evaluating the whole life costs and benefits of all options including not-in-kind air-conditioning. The project team and our advisers are fully aware of Government and Departmental policy on refrigerants and their work reflects this.

We expect to make a decision in the spring on a choice of replacement air-conditioning which fully reflects this policy. We will have a project team, including installers, with expertise appropriate to the option selected.

Road Noise

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what budgetary provision has been made for the introduction of low noise road surfaces during the period of the 10-year plan. [41654]

Mr. Jamieson: The amount is not identified separately. On local roads the choice is a matter for local authorities. On the strategic road network, operated by the Highways Agency, the 10-year plan allows for:

the resurfacing of 60 per cent of the network with lower noise surfaces during the normal maintenance cycle including the resurfacing of all concrete roads, and for all new construction to use lower noise surfaces as a matter of course.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Refurbishment

Ms Walley: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee who provided or is providing the *(a)* windows and *(b)* doors for the refurbishment of the Norman Shaw South building. [41344]

Derek Conway: *[holding answer 8 March 2002]:* Wallis Joinery, Broadmead Works, Maidstone, Kent is providing the new timber windows, doors and joinery used in the refurbishment of Norman Shaw South.

Ms Walley: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what organisation provided the certification for the doors and windows for the refurbishment of the Norman Shaw South building to show that they were produced from sustainably managed sources; and if he will place a copy of these certificates in the Library. [41343]

Derek Conway: *[holding answer 8 March 2002]:* Wallis Joinery, the manufacturer of the new timber windows, doors and joinery for the Norman Shaw South refurbishment project, operates a Quality Assurance system. This requires its timber suppliers to provide evidence (in the form of import licences and certificates) to show that timber supplied has been legally obtained and is from sustainably managed sources. The contractor is required to provide these licences and certificates to the House. When they are received I will ensure that copies are sent to the hon. Member.

WALES

Volunteers

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many members of his staff in each of the past two years have been granted a day's paid leave to work as a volunteer; and if he will make a statement. [39739]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The figure requested is not readily available.

Staff in my department are subject to the terms and conditions of service of the National Assembly for Wales. These allow individuals to apply for paid special leave, of up to three days per year, to participate in voluntary work.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

End of Life Vehicles Directive

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make arrangements under the End of Life Vehicles Directive to enable owners of classic cars who dismantle them in order to re-use their parts in other vehicles to obtain a certificate of destruction and have the vehicle removed from the register. [39717]

Mr. Wilson: *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* The Directive requires the setting up of a system under which the issue of a Certificate of Destruction is a necessary condition of the deregistration of an end of life vehicle. We are exploring arrangements which will accommodate classic and other cars whose owners dismantle them in order to re-use their parts.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the proportion of UK vehicle dismantlers who are likely to obtain registration as approved treatment centres under the End of Life Vehicles Directive. [39718]

Mr. Wilson: *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* Our intention is to ensure that an adequate collection and treatment network is maintained, operating to the improved environmental standards required by the Directive, and capable of dealing properly with all end of life vehicles. Having consulted industry, we believe that there will be a sufficient number of approved facilities to achieve this. The interpretation of the minimum technical standards which will apply to treatment facilities is still being discussed by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Environment Agency and industry, and we cannot at this stage assess precisely the proportion which will be approved.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the likely costs to vehicle-owners of dismantling of vehicles under the End of Life Vehicles Directive. [39719]

Mr. Wilson: *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* Depollution and dismantling costs will be variable, and will depend on a number of factors, including the marque, model, age and condition of the vehicle being treated. Having consulted widely with industry, we estimate that the additional treatment costs required by the Directive might average around £50 per vehicle.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact on low income car owners of the costs of disposal under the End of Life Vehicles Directive. [39720]

Mr. Wilson: *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* The impact upon all car owners is being taken into account as we consider the best means of implementing the Directive.

Equipment Leasing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the equipment leasing arrangements entered into by her Department in each of the last four years; and what the cost to public funds in each case is. [38939]

Ms Hewitt: Information on the hire of DTI's IT equipment and office machinery is not centrally available for the first two years and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. For the two most recent years, central records indicate nearly 500 transactions with the following suppliers, by total value:

Supplier	*Jan–Dec 2000*	*Jan–Dec 2001*
Hire of IT Equipment[1]		
Bull Finanservices PLC (BT)		£5,980
Cable & Wireless Communications		£416
International Computers Ltd (ICL)	£25,272	£56,571
Pipex Internet Ltd		£700
PNE Consulting		£201
Sierra Nova Consulting		£10,179
Thomas Telford Ltd		£2,500
Hire of Office Machinery		
Action Computer Supplies	£668	
AFS		£849
Anglo Financial Services	£3,164	£4,629
Aqua Cool	£426	
Astron		£280
Astron Document Services Ltd		£227
Banner Business Supplies Ltd		£670
British Telecommunications plc (BT)		£2,003
BT Business Accounts	£156	
BT UK Business Accounts		£539
Business Plus	£2,031	£618
Cable & Wireless Communications	£108	
Canford Audio plc		£106
Canon (UK) Ltd	£5,517	£15,982
Danka UK plc	£121,956	£67,303
Danwood Finance Ltd	£10,292	£15,781
Danwood Financial Services Ltd	£36,294	£17,958
GBC UK	£649	
GE Capital Equipment Finance Ltd	£3,219	£19,042
Hugo International Ltd		£1,444
Ikon Capital plc		£2,880
Ikon Office Solutions plc		£2,994
International Computers Ltd (ICL)	£2,100	£10,000
Ionics (UK) Ltd		£2,000
LMS Professions Ltd		£2,145
Minolta Rentals Ltd	£718	£859
Minolta UK Ltd	£3,650	£113
Muirhead Systems Ltd	£552	
Newcourt Credit		£3,006
Repro Link	£644	
Servus Facilities Management Ltd	£100	
Sharp Electronics (UK) Ltd		£743
Sharp Rentals Ltd	£40,021	£16,841
SMS Imaging		£480
The Danwood Group Ltd	£28,152	£13,766
Vodaphone Corporate Limited	£125	
Xerox (UK) Ltd	£228,653	£275,818
Xerox Finance Ltd	£12,748	£19,431

[1] The bulk of the Department's IT equipment is not hired directly but is supplied as part of a service contract.

Press Office

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many staff in her Department's press office have received *(a)* termination and *(b)* redundancy payments in each of the last four years. [41085]

Ms Hewitt: None.

Export Licences (Dual-use Goods)

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the UK exporters who have registered with the Applicant Services and Compliance Unit (DTI) to export dual use goods under the authority of the Community General Export Authorisation. [32275]

Nigel Griffiths: UK exporters provide registration details for the CGEA in confidence. Information given in confidence is exempt from disclosure under Exemption 13 the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Nuclear Installations Decommissioning (Former Soviet Union)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what expenditure, and in which states, her Department has incurred on the decommissioning of nuclear installations and equipment, both defence or civil-related, in the former Soviet Union in each year since 1996; and how much she plans to spend in 2001–02. [40573]

Mr. Wilson: In July 2000, the Government announced an inter-Departmental £84 million Former Soviet Union Programme of expenditure in the period 2000 to 2004 on nuclear problems in the Former Soviet Union. This Programme is being managed by the Department. Its budget bought together both existing commitments and proposed new areas of work. We are in the early stages of establishing a comprehensive project portfolio, which includes defence-related spend in relation to plutonium disposition, submarine spent-nuclear fuel in NW Russia and the physical protection of proliferation on sensitive nuclear materials. Forecast outturn for the Programme in 2001–02 is estimated at £16,000,000.

The following programme funds have assisted the decommissioning of nuclear power plants in the Former Soviet Union. These form part of the bilateral Nuclear Safety Programme—one of the Former Soviet Union programmes:

Year	*Expenditure under the Nuclear Safety Programme (£)*
1996–97	—
1997–98	111,000
1998–99	—
1999–2000	53,000
2000–01	209,000

Planned expenditure in this area during 2001–02 is £313,000 for the Nuclear Safety Programme in Lithuania and Ukraine, and 1,500,000 Euro for the International Decommissioning Support fund for Ignalina.

Small Business

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the Government accepted the recommendation put forward by the Small Business Council to use litmus tests. [36975]

Nigel Griffiths: The Small Business Council recommended that the Government use focus groups of small businesses as well as throughout the Regulatory Impact Assessment process in considering regulations. The SBS now uses litmus tests through focus groups.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the restrictions are on the number of loans to one company that can be guaranteed under the Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme; and if she will make a statement. [39812]

Ms Hewitt: Under the Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme a business can borrow up to an overall limit of £100,000 if it has been trading for less than two years, rising to £250,000 if it has been trading for two years or more. Loans to other businesses where the same individual is involved will count towards the overall limit. There is no restriction on the number of loans provided the total borrowed is within these limits.

Correspondence

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average response time was for responding to departmental correspondence; what percentage of letters took longer than one month for a response; and what percentage took longer than three months for a response in each of the last five years. [37446]

Ms Hewitt: Figures broken down in percentages of replies within each of the specified timescales are unavailable. However my department monitors its performance annually by sample for all correspondence (excluding Ministerial) against the Whitehall standard

"to answer all correspondence within 15 working days".

The latest figure available is for 2000–01 when the department answered 95 per cent. of correspondence within this target. The volume of correspondence was estimated to be 81,726.

Figures for previous years were:

Year	*Per cent.*
1997–98	95
1998–99	92
1999–2000	96

My department has a target of answering Ministerial correspondence within 10 days. Information broken down as requested is not available. Figures on departmental performance against targets in responding to Ministerial correspondence are published annually by the Cabinet Office.

The figures published for the last two years for my department's performance against the target of responding to Ministerial correspondence within 10 days are as follows.

Year	*Per cent.*
1998–99	50
1999–2000	60

The figure for this year will be published by the Cabinet Office in due course.

Military Exports (Israel)

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the categories were of the standard individual export licences issued for military exports to Israel between May and October 2001; and if she will make a statement. [40381]

Nigel Griffiths: Between 1 May and 31 October 2001 the following categories of items on the Military List were licensed for export to Israel:

ML1
ML2
ML3
ML4
ML5
ML6
ML8
ML9
ML10
ML11
ML13
ML14
ML15
ML16
ML21
PL5017
PL5031

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many of the standard individual export licences were issued for military exports to Israel from October 2001; and in what categories they were; and if she will make a statement. [40383]

Nigel Griffiths: Between 1 October 2001 and 18 February 2002 61 Standard Individual Export Licences (SIELs) were issued covering items on the Military List. Individual export licences might cover a range of items with various ratings. Where this is so, the licence is included in the totals for all of the relevant ratings. Details are set out in the table:

Rating	*No. of Licences*
ML2	2
ML4	5
ML5	20
ML9	8
ML10	10
ML11	9
ML13	2
ML14	1
ML15	2
ML21	2
ML22	2
PL5017	2
PL5031	1

All export licence applications to Israel continue to be assessed against the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria in light of the circumstances prevailing at the time of the application. This means that we will not issue licences where to do so would be in contravention of the Consolidated Criteria, including where there is a clear risk that the items might be used in internal repression, international aggression, adversely effect regional stability or prolong internal conflict.

Business Link Call Centre

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her estimate is of the total cost of the Business Link national call centre between its inception in 2001 and its planned closure in 2002. [38773]

Nigel Griffiths: The DTI's programme of information and advice services for small businesses, known as the Gateway is delivered under a managed service contract with one contractor and consists of four components:

a web site

a contract centre service 0845 600 9006

a national client database; and

a range of support systems for 43 local Business Link Operators.

The Gateway cost £2.65 million pounds to set up and currently costs £3.75 million pounds in fixed annual service charges to run.

The cost of the Business Link National Contact Centre cannot be disaggregated.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the quality of service provided to users of the Business Link national call centre. [38774]

Nigel Griffiths: The Small Business Service (SBS) has continually monitored the performance of the inquiry handling service since April 2001 (when the Business Link National Contact Centre started operating). In particular the SBS has:

commissioned an independent performance survey;

received and reacted to feed back, compliments and complaints from SME customers and from the Small Business Council (SBC) and the Business Links;

listened to and quality reviewed sample calls received by the Business Link National Contact Centre; and

worked with its contractor to review and improve the quality of service delivery.

In the light of these assessments, the SBS has considered a number of options to improve the enquiry handling service. The SBS has now concluded that instead of being handled by a centre service point, calls will be routed straight to local Business Link Operators. This will improve responsiveness and service to customers.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to ensure that advice will continue to be available free of charge and without pressure to purchase services via local business links following the closure of the Business Link national call centre. [38775]

Nigel Griffiths: We have no plans for changing the basis of Business Link charges or to pressurise any users into purchasing services from Business Link Operators.

Joint Strike Fighter

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the shortfall in the number of engineers working in UK aerospace needed to fulfil future major defence contracts, with particular reference to the JSF. [40508]

Mr. Wilson: The Department is not aware of any particular problems in relation to the number of engineers available for the Joint Strike Fighter programme. UK companies including BAE SYSTEMS, Rolls-Royce, Smiths and others won their place on Lockheed Martin's JSF team on their own merits in the face of tough international competition. Part of the reason for their success was the availability of highly-skilled aerospace engineers and capabilities in the UK.

Advertising

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the cost was of media advertising in each of the past five parliamentary sessions including the current session, for her Department in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Northern Ireland; and for the last two Parliamentary sessions and the current Parliamentary session, what the media advertising expenditure was per month in (i) England, (ii) Wales and (iii) Northern Ireland. [37410]

Ms Hewitt: I provided information on expenditure on DTI advertising through the COI for previous financial years in the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) on 20 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 162W. Information in the format requested is not available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the expenditure was per campaign for the five most expensive media advertising campaigns her Department undertook in the past five Parliamentary sessions including the current Parliamentary session in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland; and for the last two Parliamentary sessions and the current session, when each advertising campaign (i) began and (ii) ended in (A) Scotland, (B) England, (C) Wales and *(D)* Northern Ireland. [37398]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested is not available centrally and could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Non-governmental Organisations

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list non-Governmental organisations operating in the South West Region that receive public funds from her Department; and what amount of annual funding they received in the most recent year for which figures are available. [39180]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested is not readily available in the form requested and could only be assembled at disproportionate cost.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the annual budget for communications activities, including press, public relations, marketing and internal communications, was for her Department for each financial year from 1997–98 to 2001–02. [39910]

Ms Hewitt: There is no separately identified budget for communications activities. Expenditure is authorised by the relevant programme budget holders along with other items of expenditure in those policy areas. Information on expenditure of this kind is not held centrally and could only be produced at disproportionate cost.

Beer and Cider

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many representations she has received in the last 12 months from individuals concerning short beer and cider measures. [41337]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Since 1 March 2001 the Department has received 9,000 representations, either direct to the Department or through Members' correspondence.

Metrication

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the implications of the decision in Dove *v.* Cornwall County Council. [40360]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The decision by the High Court confirms that the metrication legislation made in 1994 and 1995 is lawful and valid.

Sub-sea Surveys

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what consideration is given to the interests of local fishermen in determining applications for licences to carry out sub-sea surveys. [40965]

Ms Hewitt: All applications and notifications by applicants wishing to carrying out oil and gas surveys are subject to a review process, which includes mechanisms to take account of the interests of fishing organisations.

In Scotland, the Scottish Fishermen's Federation is informed of proposed surveys and details are published in the Kingfisher Fortnightly Bulletin for the benefit of fishermen. If a survey is proposed in an area where fishing activity is intense, our statutory consultees, the Scottish Executive's Fisheries Research Services, will provide comments that draw the fishermen's interests to my Department.

In England, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) are our statutory consultees representing fisheries interests. DEFRA seek the views of local Sea Fisheries Committees and take account of these in advice to my Department. Where comments arise, my Department communicates them to the applicant, and the applicant will often arrange for details to be published in the Kingfisher Fortnightly Bulletin.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make it a requirement for applicants for licences to carry out sub-sea surveys to consult first with representatives of local fishermen. [40966]

Ms Hewitt: The current process includes mechanisms to take account of the interests of fishing organisations. My Department would welcome comments from fishing representatives on our forthcoming consultation on draft Guidance Notes relating to oil and gas surveys. Their views will be given due consideration in the preparation of the final Guidance Notes.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Money Laundering

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many actions by the police *(a)* have been undertaken and *(b)* are pending against UK financial institutions alleged to have been involved in money laundering activities; and if he will make a statement. [39006]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Statistics are kept of prosecutions undertaken and convictions secured for a variety of money laundering offences under United Kingdom legislation, and are given in the tables. However, there are no details available as to whether these proceedings were against individuals or corporate bodies.

Ongoing or pending investigations into money laundering offences are a matter for the police and other enforcement agencies with responsibilities in this area.

Number of Offenders convicted for Money Laundering offences, by type of offence, England and Wales, 1989–2000[p]

Code	*Offence*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
	Drug Money Laundering Offences												
93/49	S49 Drug Trafficking Act 1994 (previously S14 Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Act 1990—Concealing or transferring the proceeds of drug trafficking	*	*	—	—	—	1	—	—	4	—	12	5
93/50	S50 Drug Trafficking Act 1994 (previously S24 Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986)—[1]Assisting another person to retain the benefit of drug trafficking	—	—	—	—	4	4	3	2	11	9	9	9
93/51	S51 Drug Trafficking Act 1994 (previously S23A Drug Trafficking Offences At 1986 as inserted by S18 Criminal Justice Act 1993)—Acquisition, possession of use of other proceeds of drug trafficking	*	*	*	*	*	—	—	3	13	7	9	2
93/52	S52 Drug Trafficking Act 1994—Failure to disclose knowledge or suspicion of money laundering	*	*	*	*	*	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
93/53	S53 Drug Trafficking Act 1994—Disclosure of information likely to prejudice an investigation ("Tipping off")	*	*	*	*	*	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Number of Offenders convicted for Money Laundering offences, by type of offence, England and Wales, 1989–2000[p]

Code	Offence	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
	Offence of Laundering Proceeds of Other Crime												
53/26	S93A Criminal Justice Act 1988[2] as inserted by S29 Criminal Justice Act 1993—Assisting another to retain the benefit of criminal conduct	*	*	*	*	*	—	—	2	10	4	4	8
53/27	S93B Criminal Justice Act 1988[2] as inserted by S30 Criminal Justice Act 1993—Acquisition, possession or use of proceeds of criminal conduct	*	*	*	*	*	—	—	6	4	2	5	6
52/28	S93C Criminal Justice Act 1988[2] as inserted by S31 Criminal Justice Act 1993—Concealing or transferring proceeds of criminal conduct	*	*	*	*	*	—	—	—	1	4	—	9
53/29	S93D Criminal Justice Act 1988[2] as inserted by S32 Criminal Justice Act 1993—Disclose of information likely to prejudice an investigaiton ("Tipping off")	*	*	*	*	*	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

[p] 2000 data are provisional.
— Nil Return.
* Not applicable.

[1] Court Proceedings data prior to 1993 cannot separately identify offences under S24 Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986 (since consolidated and replaced by S50 Drug Trafficking Act 1994) from other drug offences. For the years 1993, 1994, and 1995, a special exercise was undertaken to identify this specific offence. However as a 100 per cent. response from courts was not achieved "estimates" for these three years were made.

[2] Sections 93A to 93D Criminal Justice Act 1988 came into force in February 1994.

Source:
Crime and Criminal Justice Unit (RDS), Home Office.

Number of Defendants prosecuted for Money Laundering offences, by type of offence, England and Wales, 1989–2000[p]

Code	Legislation and Offence Description	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
	Drug Money Laundering Offences												
93/49	S49 Drug Trafficking Act 1994 (previously S14 Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Act 1990—Concealing or transferring the proceeds of drug trafficking	*	*	—	—	—	1	—	7	20	9	22	46
93/50	S50 Drug Trafficking Act 1994 (previously S24 Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986)—[1]Assisting another person to retain the benefit of drug trafficking	—	—	—	—	8	14	17	5	15	17	50	20
93/51	S51 Drug Trafficking Act 1994 (previously S23A Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986 as inserted by S16 Criminal Justice Act 1993)—Acquisition, possession or use of other proceeds of drug trafficking	*	*	*	*	*	—	7	9	13	9	13	6
93/52	S52 Drug Trafficking Act 1994—Failure to disclose knowledge or suspicion of money laundering	*	*	*	*	*	—	1	—	—	—	1	1
93/53	S53 Drug Trafficking Act 1994—Disclosure of information likely to prejudice an investigation ("Tipping off")	*	*	*	*	*	—	1	—	—	—	1	—
	Offence of Laundering Proceeds of Other Crime												
53/26	S93A Criminal Justice Act 1988[2] as inserted by S29 Criminal Justice Act 1993—Assisting another to retain the benefit of criminal conduct	*	*	*	*	*	—	1	6	10	9	10	7
53/27	S93B Criminal Justice Act 1988[2] as inserted by S30 Criminal Justice Act 1993—Acquisition, possession or use of proceeds of criminal conduct	*	*	*	*	*	—	1	5	6	5	10	11
52/28	S93C Criminal Justice Act 1988[2] as inserted by S31 Criminal Justice Act 1993—Concealing or transferring proceeds of criminal conduct	*	*	*	*	*	—	1	—	12	3	19	27
53/29	S93D Criminal Justice Act 1988[2] as inserted by S32 Criminal Justice Act 1993—Disclose of information likely to prejudice an investigation ("Tipping off")	*	*	*	*	*	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

[p] 2000 data are provisional.
— Nil Return.
* Not applicable.

[1] Court Proceedings data prior to 1993 cannot separately identify offences under S24 Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986 (since consolidated and replaced by S50 Drug Trafficking Act 1994) from other drug offences. For the years 1993, 1994, and 1995, a special exercise was undertaken to identify this specific offence. However as a 100 per cent. response from courts was not achieved "estimates" for these three years were made.

[2] Sections 93A to 93D Criminal Justice Act 1988 came into force in February 1994.

Source:
Crime and Criminal Justice Unit (RDS), Home Office.

Asylum Accommodation Centres

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what assessment he has made of the likely availability of staff for the proposed asylum accommodation centre at Throckmorton; [36768]

(2) what his estimate is of the *(a)* cost of construction and *(b)* running costs of each asylum accommodation centre. [36710]

Angela Eagle: The Home Office recently launched a procurement competition, under the European Commission Directives, in respect of the proposed

Accommodation Centres. The information requested cannot be provided as it would prejudice the Home Office's ability to obtain best value for money from the competition as prospective bidders would become aware of our commercial expectations.

Work has been undertaken on behalf of the Home Office to assess economic sustainability in respect of all the sites identified as having the potential for development as an Accommodation Centre. Those assessments will be made available to local authorities as part of the planning process.

Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons have been detained under section 23 of the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 specifying *(a)* the duration of each detainee's detention, *(b)* in how many cases the detention under section 23 has come to an end and *(c)* the reasons why such detention has come to an end. [38501]

Mr. Blunkett: Nine foreign nationals have so far been detained using powers in Part IV of the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act. Of those detained one has left the United Kingdom voluntarily; the other eight remain in detention.

Police Station (Newark)

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for a new police station in Newark. [39203]

Mr. Denham: Decisions on the provision of police stations are matters for the Police Authority and Chief Officer.

Convention Derogations

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for how long he expects *(a)* the derogation from Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights and *(b)* the derogation from Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to last; and if he will make a statement. [37680]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: For as long as the United Kingdom faces a public emergency threatening the life of the nation, the limited derogation from Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) will continue to be necessary.

Prison Service

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 5 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 877W, on the Prison Service, what the additional cost will be each year of the pay review award; what proportion of the additional cost will be met from maintenance of the prison estate being re-scheduled; if he will list the maintenance projects which will be re-scheduled and the new dates; what proportion of the additional cost will be met from efficiency savings from the wider Home Office budget; if he will list the areas where efficiency savings will be made; and if he will make a statement. [37740]

Beverley Hughes: The additional cost of the pay review award for the present Spending Review period is:

2001–02: £4.6 million

2002–03: £21.1 million

2003–04: £37.2 million

Although the plan remains to re-schedule some maintenance projects, this has not been worked up in detail yet. Similarly, how best to meet the cost of the award between the Prison Service budget and that of the wider Home Office is still under consideration.

Airguns

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what licensing requirements are in place for air *(a)* rifles and *(b)* pistols held in the UK; and how many licences have been awarded each year since 1996; [38253]

(2) what restrictions there are on air *(a)* rifle and *(b)* pistol ownership in the UK; [38252]

(3) if he will make a statement on *(a)* the legislation and *(b)* the restrictions on the use and ownership of airguns. [38245]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The law relating to the use and possession of air guns varies according to the muzzle energy of the gun concerned.

Air guns with muzzle energies below about three quarters of a foot pound are not regarded as firearms because they are not capable of inflicting a potentially lethal injury. These are generally referred to as airsoft or BB guns and do not come under the control of the Firearms Acts excepting where it is an offence to threaten other people with an imitation firearm in such a way as to cause them to believe that unlawful violence might be used against them.

Air rifles with muzzle energies between three quarters of a foot pound and 12 foot pounds and air pistols with muzzle energies between three quarters of a foot pound and six foot pounds are classed as firearms and, although they do not have to be kept on a firearm certificate, do come under the control of the Acts.

It is an offence to make a gift of an air weapon to a person under 14 years of age or to sell one to a person under 17. It is also an offence for a person under 17 to have an uncovered air weapon in a public place or for anyone, of whatever age, to have a loaded air weapon in a public place. Trespass with an air weapon is also an offence whether in a building or on open land, as is having an air weapon with intent to damage property. Having an air weapon with intent to endanger life or to resist arrest both carry a maximum penalty of life imprisonment.

Air rifles with muzzle energies greater than 12 foot pounds fall under the control of section 1 of the Firearms Act 1968 and must be kept on a police issued firearm certificate. No central record is kept of the number of air rifles kept on a firearms certificate. Air pistols with muzzle energies of greater than six foot pounds are prohibited weapons under the terms of section 5(1)(aba) of the Act and may not be possessed without the express authority of the Secretary of State for the Home Department. No authorities have been specifically issued for air pistols.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many incidents involving the use and misuse of an airgun have been recorded each year since 1996. [38244]

Mr. John Denham: General use of air weapons is not recorded. The number of recorded crimes in England and Wales involving air weapons in each year since 1996 is as follows:

Year	*Number of recorded crimes involving air weapons*
1996	7,813
1997	7,506
1998–99[1]	8,665
1999–2000	10,103
2000–01	10,227

[1] Year ending March. There was a change in counting rules for recorded crime on 1 April 1998, which expanded the offences covered, and placed a greater emphasis on counting crimes in terms of numbers of victims. Numbers of recorded crimes after this date are therefore not directly comparable with previous years.

Prison Statistics

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of prisoners in each prison establishment in England and Wales are from minority ethnic groups. [38101]

Beverley Hughes: The population breakdown for each prison establishment in England and Wales for 31 January 2002 is given in the table.

Prison Name	*Total Number of Prisoners*	*White %*	*Black %*	*Asian %*	*Chinese and Other %*
Acklington	767	97	1	1	1
Albany	443	93	5	1	1
Altcourse	894	94	4	1	1
Ashfield	376	88	9	1	2
Ashwell	417	81	11	5	4
Askham Grange	119	78	16	2	4
Aylesbury	345	57	34	5	5
Bedford	436	75	14	8	3
Belmarsh	857	58	30	3	9
Birmingham	849	65	22	4	9
Blakenhurst	847	79	14	4	3
Blantyre House	117	75	17	4	3
Blundestone	417	55	39	2	4
Brinsford	439	71	21	5	3
Bristol	612	85	13	1	2
Brixton	742	48	41	2	8
Brockhill	154	77	17	1	5
Buckley Hall	135	83	10	4	3
Bullingdon	889	71	20	5	4
Bullwood Hall	152	68	24	0	8
Camp Hill	526	63	31	3	3
Canterbury	304	83	8	2	7
Cardiff	668	94	5	0	1
Castington	240	94	2	1	3
Channings Wood	581	93	5	1	1
Chelmsford	479	79	12	3	5
Coldingley	353	54	38	1	7
Cookham Wood	143	43	48	0	9
Dartmoor	604	90	7	1	1
Deerbolt	423	95	2	1	1
Doncaster	1,091	89	6	1	4
Dorchester	257	94	4	1	1
Dovegate	658	71	23	3	3
Dover	178	63	29	3	5
Downview	163	40	53	1	7
Drake Hall	256	86	11	2	1
Durham	710	95	3	1	1
East Sutton Park	96	49	36	3	11
Eastwood Park	322	77	20	0	2
Elmley	930	81	13	2	4
Erlestoke	317	91	8	2	0
Everthorpe	364	89	6	2	2
Exeter	482	97	2	0	0
Featherstone	589	75	15	4	6
Feltham	651	41	43	4	11
Ford	394	75	14	4	7
Forest Bank	917	89	6	3	2
Foston Hall	213	84	13	1	2
Frankland	639	87	8	2	3
Full Sutton	595	81	12	2	4

Prison Name	*Total Number of Prisoners*	*White %*	*Black %*	*Asian %*	*Chinese and Other %*
Garth	633	83	10	5	2
Gartree	281	86	6	6	1
Glen Parva	747	82	12	4	1
Gloucester	318	92	5	2	1
Grendon/Spring Hill	430	81	12	4	3
Guys Marsh	520	87	10	2	1
Haslar	143	28	26	19	27
Hatfield	170	88	2	7	3
Haverigg	529	97	2	1	1
Hewell Grange	181	71	14	8	7
Highdown	674	65	27	2	6
Highpoint	840	66	28	2	5
Hindley	406	79	14	5	3
Hollesley Bay	323	78	16	3	3
Holloway	498	53	36	1	10
Holme House	963	96	1	0	2
Hull	632	94	3	2	1
Huntercombe	323	58	31	4	8
Kingston (Portsmouth)	179	85	10	2	2
Kirkham	447	89	3	5	3
Kirklevington	150	90	2	7	1
Lancaster	215	95	2	2	1
Lancaster Farms	512	90	4	6	0
Latchmere House	172	58	28	6	8
Leeds	1,277	85	6	8	1
Leicester	361	77	10	12	1
Lewes	464	86	11	1	1
Leyhill	379	89	5	4	1
Lincoln	549	95	4	1	1
Lindholme	621	74	12	7	7
Littlehey	620	81	13	3	3
Liverpool	1,449	91	6	1	2
Long Lartin	400	74	16	4	6
Low Newton	291	96	2	0	1
Lowdham Grange	494	71	19	3	7
Maidstone	372	76	14	2	7
Manchester	1,231	83	10	3	4
Moorland	769	83	10	4	3
Morton Hall	184	42	47	1	10
New Hall	369	83	12	1	4
North Sea Camp	196	91	4	4	1
Northallerton	183	92	3	3	2
Norwich	753	88	7	1	3
Nottingham	506	81	14	3	2
Onley	490	76	15	5	4
Parc	882	95	3	1	1
Parkhurst	451	62	29	3	6
Pentonville	1,198	48	36	5	10
Portland	436	64	26	3	6
Preston	563	92	2	3	2
Ranby	737	87	8	4	1
Reading	240	85	8	3	3
Risley	799	88	9	2	1
Rochester	64	55	13	5	28
Rye Hill	587	70	16	5	10
Send	214	46	47	1	6
Shepton Mallet	157	86	11	1	2
Shrewsbury	334	90	4	4	2
Stafford	621	79	15	3	3
Standford Hill	347	69	18	7	6
Stocken	566	79	11	7	2
Stoke Heath	492	89	8	1	2
Styal	449	85	12	1	2
Sudbury	492	79	9	8	4
Swaleside	749	62	26	3	9
Swansea	320	97	1	0	2
Swinfen Hall	307	72	19	7	2
The Mount	742	47	40	4	8
The Verne	564	50	39	1	10
The Weare	387	73	19	1	6
The Wolds	405	95	4	1	1
Thorn Cross	192	79	9	7	5
Usk/Prescoed	324	96	2	0	1
Wakefield	558	87	10	2	2

Prison Name	*Total Number of Prisoners*	*White %*	*Black %*	*Asian %*	*Chinese and Other %*
Wandsworth	1,362	55	31	2	11
Wayland	626	70	23	3	4
Wealstun	607	84	6	9	2
Wellingborough	499	81	13	2	4
Werrington	118	90	6	3	1
Wetherby	336	85	5	7	3
Whatton	271	94	3	1	1
Whitemoor	418	72	18	3	7
Winchester	581	82	13	1	3
Woodhill	705	79	12	5	3
Wormwood Scrubs	982	41	44	6	9
Wymott	794	93	3	2	2
Total Population	67,870	78	15	3	4

Crime Statistics (St Helens, South)

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the level of recorded *(a)* burglary, *(b)* robbery and *(c)* crimes of violence was in St Helens, South in each of the last three years. [38270]

Mr. John Denham: Information on recorded crime is not collected by parliamentary constituency level. Data for St Helens Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership are available for 1999–2000 onwards, and have been provided in the table.

St Helens	*April 1999 to March 2000*	*April 2000 to March 2001*
Burglary in a dwelling	1,550	1,669
Robberty	171	178
Violence against the person	1,693	1,795

Laeken Conclusions

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will identify the specialist services referred to in paragraph 17 of the Laeken conclusions. [39632]

Mr. Blunkett: The specialist services referred to at paragraph 17 of the Laeken conclusions of 14 and 15 December 2001 are the different services with responsibility for combating terrorism within each of the European Union member states.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many applicants for disability living allowance have sought review of decisions in the last 12 months for which figures are available but have not then proceeded to appeal. [41768]

Maria Eagle: Information is not available in the form requested.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many appeals against decisions against the withdrawal of disability living allowance were lodged in the last 12 months for which figures are available; how many appeals were decided during that period; and how many such appeals were successful *(a)* in whole and *(b)* in part. [41767]

Ms Maria Eagle: The available information is in the table.

DLA Appeals in the period 1 December 2000 to 30 November 2001

	Number
Caseload (000)[1]	2,271.1
Appeals lodged[2]	85,085
Appeals cleared at hearing[2]	88,555
Appeals found in favour of appellant[2]	46,075

Notes:

All figures are provisional and subject to change.

Figures rounded to the nearest 5.

Source:[1]

DLA caseload figures are current at 31 August 2001, from 5 per cent samples of data. Caseload figures are expressed in thousands and have been rounded to the nearest hundred.

Source:[2]

100 per cent download of the Generic Appeals Processing System.

Child Support

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 27 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 1320W, on child support, what the basis was for the assumption that the introduction of the new child support scheme would result in a rise in the level of compliance. [41695]

Mr. Wicks: The new child support scheme is far less complex than the current scheme and hence the need for recalculation following changes in circumstances will be less. The result will be that more resources are available for the agency to use on tracing non-resident parents, on collection of arrears and on enforcement of unpaid debt.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Job Sharing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council if he will make a statement on the extent of job sharing in his Department. [41014]

Mr. Robin Cook: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) on Thursday 14 February 2002, *Official Report,* columns 631–32W.

Non-Governmental organisations

Mr. Sanders: To ask the President of the Council if he will list non-Governmental organisations operating in the South West Region that receive public funds from his Department; and what amount of annual funding they received in the most recent year for which figures are available. [39181]

Mr. Robin Cook: My Department has never funded non-governmental organisations, and it would not be appropriate for it to do so.

Catering services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council what the cost was of *(a)* in-house canteen and *(b)* other catering services provided by his Department in each of the last four years. [38921]

Mr. Robin Cook: My Department has only 43 staff. It does not provide its own in-house canteen or other catering services, and has not done so during the period mentioned. Staff from my Department may use some facilities provided by the Cabinet Office, and those who support me in my role as Leader of the House use certain facilities in the Palace of Westminster.

Advertising

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council if he will list the publicity and advertising campaigns run by his Department in each of the last four years, specifying the *(a)* purpose, *(b)* cost to public funds, *(c)* number of staff involved and *(d)* method of evaluation in each case. [39103]

Mr. Robin Cook: My Department has never run an advertising or publicity campaign.

Volunteers

Bob Russell: To ask the President of the Council how many members of his staff in each of the past two years have been granted a day's paid leave to work as a volunteer; and if he will make a statement. [39733]

Mr. Robin Cook: One member of staff from my Department (out of a total staff of 43) has been granted paid leave to work as a volunteer during the past two years. My Department's policy is to support special paid leave for volunteering, subject to operational needs. A list is maintained of volunteer bureaux agencies if staff wish to volunteer but do not know what is available. My Department's policy statement on volunteering will once more be drawn to the attention of all Privy Council Office staff.

Press Office

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council how many staff in his Department's press office have received *(a)* termination and *(b)* redundancy payments in each of the last four years. [41076]

Mr. Robin Cook: None. Press office facilities are supported by the Cabinet Office Communication Group.

Rail Journeys (Staff)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council if he will make it his policy that rail journeys undertaken by staff in his Department should ordinarily be on standard class tickets. [40448]

Mr. Robin Cook: That is already my policy. Staff in my Department travel by rail on standard class tickets unless accompanying a Minister or someone else entitled to first class travel.

Job Advertisements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council if he will list the job advertisements placed by his Department in the last 12 months specifying where the advertisements were placed and the cost in each case. [39067]

Mr. Robin Cook: The information requested is as follows:

Post Advertised	*Placing of advertisement*	*Cost*
Judicial Committee messenger	Local Jobcentre	Nil
Administrative support for my private office	Employment agency [Brook Street]	£3,187

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Fair Trade

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 16 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 927W, on fair trade goods, if he will review and increase the amount of fairly traded goods purchased by her Department during Fair Trade Fortnight. [35920]

Mr. MacShane: Yes.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether fair trade products are sold in his Department. [39835]

Mr. MacShane: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir) today, UIN 35920.

Civil servants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the *(a)* percentage and number of rail journeys undertaken on first class tickets, *(b)* average cost of a first class journey by rail and *(c)* total cost of rail travel in each of the past four years broken down by grade of civil servant. [37508]

Mr. MacShane: The information required could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many overseas visits have been undertaken by parliamentary private secretaries in his Department at departmental expense in each of the last four years; and at what cost to public funds. [36814]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* Seven overseas visits by FCO parliamentary private secretaries travelling specifically on Government business took place in the period concerned. The total cost of these visits was approximately £15,600.

Details of other visits by parliamentary private secretaries made in their capacity as MPs, are normally recorded in the Register of Members' interests as appropriate.

Capita

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many contracts the Department has with Capita; and how much they are worth. [38379]

Mr. MacShane: The FCO has three contracts with Capita. Two cover staff recruitment services and the other relates to flexible working policies. Over their lifetime the total value of these contracts will be in the region of £1.96 million.

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the contracts that have been awarded to the Capita Group by the Department. [39349]

Mr. MacShane: The FCO has three contracts with Capita. Two cover staff recruitment services and the other relates to flexible working policies. Over their lifetime the total value of these contracts will be in the region of £1.96 million.

Colombia

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions the Government have had with the Government of Colombia during 2002 about the peace process there. [38491]

Mr. MacShane: We have continuing dialogue with the Colombian Government about the peace process. I have written to the Colombian Ambassador about President Pastrana's recent decision to terminate the demilitarised zone in Colombia and spoken to Vice President Gustavo Bell expressing HMG's support for action taken to combat violence against civilians by guerillas and paramilitary groups.

We have invited Colombian presidential candidates to the UK to exchange views on the situation in Colombia. Dr. Horacio Serpa has already visited.

Accommodation Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the cost was of hotel accommodation for departmental staff working away from home in each of the last four years. [41066]

Mr. MacShane: Information is not held in the format required and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Special urgency provisions

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how often the Department has applied the special urgency provisions in paragraph 22 of Circular 18/84 (Development by Government Departments) to a development by the Department; and if he will make a statement. [38709]

Mr. MacShane: In the last three years during which the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has had the direct responsibility for the management of its properties there has been no application of the special urgency provisions.

Information beyond this period is not available without incurring disproportionate cost.

HEALTH

Asbestos (Welsh Hospitals)

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which north Wales hospital faces a bill of £40 million for the replacement of asbestos under the proposed new Health and Safety Executive regulations. [39296]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* I have been asked to reply. This is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales, though I am assured that no hospital in Wales faces a bill of this size for asbestos removal.

Cancer and Heart Disease Spending

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the NHS budget was spent on *(a)* cancer and *(b)* heart disease in (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99, (iii) 1999–2000, (v) 2000–01 and (v) in the current year to date. [16461]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 20 November 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 202, *Official Report,* column 192W.

The Department of Health does not collect figures on the cost of NHS services in a way that enables an accurate figure to be calculated for the total cost of a particular disease.

Correspondence

John Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to answer the letters of 19 and 28 December from the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead regarding smoking, medical research and the Guildford Depository. [26299]

Yvette Cooper: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 192W.

A reply was sent on 8 March.

Care Homes

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the impact on the care of elderly people in Lancashire of the proposed closure of care homes by Lancashire County Council. [35013]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply which I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Gordon Prentice) on 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, at column 121W.

Alzheimer's Disease

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding has been made available by his Department for research into Alzheimer's disease for each year since 1997; how many people were diagnosed as suffering from Alzheimer's for each of those years; and if he will make a statement. [37906]

Jacqui Smith: The main Government agency for research into the causes of and treatment for diseases is the Medical Research Council (MRC), which receives its funding via the Department of Trade and Industry.

The Department of Health (DH) is supporting research into Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia, but does not separately identify expenditure for Alzheimer's disease only. Management of much of the research supported by the NHS is devolved and expenditure at project level is not held centrally by the Department.

The available figures for DH and MRC expenditure on research on dementia are as follows:

£000s

	DH	*MRC**
1996–97	149	4,780
1997–98	198	5,549
1998–99	287	6,050
1999–2000	245	7,200
2000–01	220	8,200

*These figures include Alzheimer's disease, general dementia, AIDS related dementia, Pick's disease and Huntington's disease.

The Department of Health does not routinely collect data on the numbers of people diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease.

Social Work Training

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the last five years have *(a)* applied for and *(b)* completed their social work training; and what the attrition rate was for social work courses. [37695]

Jacqui Smith: Information on the number of applicants for social work training is not held centrally as not all students apply through the Social Work Admissions Service.

Cancer Research Treatment

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what *(a)* Government and *(b)* private funds are available in this financial year for research into cancer (i) care and (ii) treatment, broken down by types of cancer; [38240]

(2) what assessment he has made of the percentage of *(a)* Government and *(b)* private research funding available for cancer (i) research and (ii) treatment in the last year for which figures are available; [38236]

(3) how many *(a)* organisations and *(b)* facilities receive Government funding for cancer research; and how they are distributed (i) in the UK and (ii) by region; [38238]

(4) what criteria are used to determine the percentage of research funding allocated to different types of cancer by Government; [38234]

(5) how much was spent in the last year for which figures are available by *(a)* Government and *(b)* private organisations on cancer (i) treatment and (ii) research. [38237]

Yvette Cooper: The Government support health-related research, including for cancer, through three main routes. The Medical Research Council (MRC, which is funded via the Department of Trade and Industry) is the main agency through which the Government supports research on the causes and treatment of disease including cancer. Other research councils also contribute e.g. the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC).

The Department of Health meets the National Health Service (NHS) costs of MRC charity funded research. The Department of Health also directly funds research to support policy development in health and social care, and to support effective practice in the NHS.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE, funded via the Department of Education and Skills) funds the university academic base. In addition, the health and education departments of the devolved administrations make corresponding contributions.

The Department has estimated that the total Government expenditure on cancer research in 2000–01 was in the region of £190 million. The Department has estimated that expenditure on cancer research by charities in 2000–01 was approximately £180 million. Thus the amounts that the Government and the charities spent on cancer research were roughly equal. Some £500 million a year is spent by industry in the pharmaceutical and other sectors.

The Department's funding for cancer research is not provided by specific allocations. The amount that is eventually spent on cancer research in any one year is influenced by a number of factors including the scientific quality of proposals received and the relevance to NHS priorities and needs. It is therefore not possible to give a figure for Department of Health spend on cancer research in the current financial year. But in 2000–01, the Department's expenditure on cancer research was £83.8 million.

The Department, its equivalents in the devolved administrations, and the MRC are members of the new National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI), which is a partnership between government, charities and industry. The purpose of the NCRI is to streamline and accelerate the advancement of cancer research in the UK. The NCRI aims to do this by developing an overall strategy for cancer research in the UK and co-ordinating activities between member organisations.

Many hundreds of organisations and facilities, including NHS Trusts and universities receive Government funding for cancer research. Details of all research funded by the Department are available on the National Research Register (www.doh.gov.uk/research).

The NHS Cancer Plan also said that we will be investing an additional £20 million each year in the infrastructure for cancer research and an extra £4 million on prostate cancer research.

In 2000–01, resources for treatment included in general allocations to the NHS. The Department does not collect information that enables a figure to be calculated on the cost of services relating to the treatment of a particular disease.

Nursing care

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answers of 13 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 472W, what estimate he has made of the *(a)* total final cost of the financial support for nursing care based on these assessments and *(b)* average level of weekly support per patient assessed. [39132]

Jacqui Smith: A total of £100 million was made available to the NHS for the remaining 6 months of the current financial year for NHS funded nursing care for self funders, including funding for continence needs. This was based on an average figure of £90 per person per week.

Speech Therapy (Children)

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the availability of speech and language therapy for children in each health authority. [38439]

Jacqui Smith: It is for health authorities in partnership with Primary Care Groups/Trusts and other local stakeholders, to determine how best to meet national and local priorities for improving health, tackling health inequalities and modernising services.

There has been an increase from September 2000 of 5,427 to 30 September 2001 of 5,683 (256 increase) speech and language therapists employed in England.

Therapists

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to improve recruitment of *(a)* physiotherapists, *(b)* occupational therapists and *(c)* speech therapists (i) in London and (ii) in general. [39030]

Jacqui Smith: We are implementing a range of measures to improve recruitment and retention of all staff, including physiotherapists, occupational therapists and speech therapists. These include an increase in pay, encouraging the National Health Service to become a better employer through the *Improving Working Lives and Positively Diverse* programmes, increasing training commissions, reducing student attrition, running national and local recruitment and return to practice campaigns, and supporting international recruitment where appropriate. Further information on Improving Working Lives is available at www.doh.gov.uk/iwl. These measures are being implemented in London, and nationally.

Road traffic accidents

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give the estimated cost to the NHS of treatment of those *(a)* injured and *(b)* killed in road traffic accidents each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [38838]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* National Health Service costs in Scotland are not known. Information for England is not recorded in the form requested.

Social Services (Lancashire)

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients are in hospitals in the north-west of England awaiting transfer to residential or nursing care home by social services in Lancashire. [40303]

Jacqui Smith: The information is not collected centrally in the form requested.

Surgery (Deaths)

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average number of patient deaths occurring within 30 days of surgery was in the last 12 months. [40048]

Mr. Hutton: The latest information available on the number of deaths occurring within 30 days of surgery, in England, for the year ending 31 March 2001 was published in February 2002. This information has been placed in the Library and can be found on www.doh.gov.uk/nhsperformanceindicators/index.htm.

Hospital Readmissions

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average number of patients re-admitted to hospital as emergency cases after being discharged was in the last 12 months. [40046]

Jacqui Smith: The information is not collected centrally in the form requested.

Aspirin and Paracetamol

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what consideration has been given to allowing elderly and infirm people to buy aspirin in larger quantities than currently allowed; and if he will make a statement; [39868]

(2) what assessment he has made of the health implications of variations in costs of the new aspirin and paracetamol pack sizes; and if he will make a statement; [39867]

(3) if he will review the impact of the regulations on aspirin and paracetamol pack sizes on the elderly and infirm; and if he will make a statement. [39866]

Jacqui Smith: We introduced pack size restrictions for paracetamol and aspirin in September 1998, because of concerns about the number of deaths and serious morbidity connected with overdosing and the evidence that many patients who intentionally overdose, use products already available in the home.

The Medicine Controls Agency is monitoring the impact of the pack size measures, by examining a range of data, including hospital admissions, liver transplants and deaths from self-poisoning and will review their effectiveness once sufficient data have been collected. A study by the Centre for Suicide Research at Warneford Hospital in Oxford (reported in the *British Medical Journal* on 18 May 2001) has reported a fall in the number of deaths from poisoning with paracetamol alone (21 per cent. and a reduction in liver transplants (66 per cent.).

The elderly and infirm, as all other people with recurrent or long-term needs, can get up to 100 aspirin or paracetamol tablets (in packs of 32) from their pharmacist without a prescription. The restrictions governing "over the counter" sales do not apply to aspirin and paracetamol dispensed against a prescription so larger quantities can be prescribed.

Rheumatoid arthritis

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the side effects of anti-TNF therapies for the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis. [26022]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 192W.

The anti-TNF therapies are selective immunosuppressants which inhibit tumour necrosis factor. Two anti-TNF therapies, Enbrel (etanercept) and Remicade (infliximab) have been authorised by the European Commission, and are used to treat highly active rheumatoid arthritis in adults, who have failed to respond to at least two standard disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs.

As with all new medicines, the manufacturers of anti-TNF therapies were required to conduct extensive clinical trials, the results of which were carefully assessed by European Union regulatory authorities including the Medicine Controls Agency (MCA) before the marketing authorisations were granted. The MCA and its independent body, the CMS, evaluated any adverse effects seen during the clinical trials.

Since these medicines have been marketed, the MCA has continuously monitored them to detect previously identified adverse effects. Any potential issues are reviewed by the Committee for Proprietary Medicinal Products (CPMP), the European advisory body on medicines safety to ensure that the potential benefits of the medicine outweigh the possible risks. Information regarding adverse effects associated with Remicade was issued to health professionals in February 2001 in the bulletin, *Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance.*

The known side-effects of anti-TNF medicines are included in the product information provided to doctors and patients. Based on such information and according to clinical need, these medicines are prescribed under the supervision of specialist clinicians experienced in the diagnosis and treatment of rheumatoid arthritis. Like all medicines, anti-TNF therapies will continue to be monitored by the UK MCA to ensure the risk:benefit balance continues to be favourable.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment has been made by NICE on the provision of anti-TNF therapy for people with severe rheumatoid arthritis. [40428]

Jacqui Smith: As announced on 16 November 2000, as part of its work programme the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE), has been asked to appraise the use of infliximab (Remicade) and etanercept (Enbrel) in the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis for adults and etanercept only for juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA). Unless there are appeals, NICE expects to issue its guidance in March 2002 for etanercept for JIA and guidance on the etanercept and infliximab for adults in April.

Midwife Training

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many midwives are in training in NHS hospitals in the Greater London area. [40515]

Yvette Cooper: Information on the number of midwives in training in National Health Service hospitals in the Greater London area is not collected centrally.

In 2000–01, 187 pre-registration midwifery training places were commissioned by workforce development confederations in the London regional office area. This is an increase of 33 training places since 1999–2000.

The total number of pre-registration midwifery training places commissioned for England in 2000–01 was 1,098.

NHS Trusts

Helen Southworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial arrangements are being made in respect of *(a)* the NHS trusts dissolved and *(b)* the new NHS trusts and primary care trusts established in 2001–02. [42603]

Mr. Milburn: Pursuant to the dissolution of 64 National Health Service trusts on 1 April 2001 and their reconfiguration through the establishment of 29 new NHS trusts, I propose to create originating capital for the new NHS trusts equal to the net assets transferred to them and therefore to remit the outstanding debt of the dissolved trusts.

A number of primary care trusts were also established during the year. Public Dividend Capital is not required for the establishment of new Primary Care trusts as they are subject to a different financial regime. Net assets transferred from dissolving NHS trusts to Primary Care trusts are reflected in the General Fund of the Primary Care trust.

These operations involved no overall loss to the Exchequer. Her Majesty's Treasury has today presented a minute to the House giving particulars and circumstances of the proposed remission which it has approved in principle.

Malnutrition

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 974W, on malnutrition, what plans she has to instigate a single assessment process for malnutrition. [40806]

Yvette Cooper: We have no plans to instigate a single assessment process for malnutrition.

Thrombolysis

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to allow pre-hospital thrombolysis in Herefordshire. [41493]

Yvette Cooper: The NHS Plan contained a commitment to improve "call-to-needle" times for administering thrombolytic drugs for treating heart attack victims.

I am advised that the Hereford and Worcester Ambulance Service National Health Service trust are already meeting targets set for ambulance response times.

The trust, in collaboration with Herefordshire and Worcestershire health authorities, Hereford Hospitals NHS Trust and Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust, have initiated procedures to train and equip ambulance paramedics to provide thrombolysis safely for appropriate patients.

I understand that in May 2002 the trust will begin to roll out their 18 month programme to safely administer thrombolytic drugs to heart attack patients to the 14 ambulance stations covered by their ambulances.

Care Homes

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on changes in bed numbers in the care home sector in Herefordshire since 1997. [41495]

Jacqui Smith: The table shows the number of places in residential care homes and the number of registered nursing beds in the Hereford and Worcester[1] area between 19[illegible]d 2001.

At 31 March — *Number*

Year	*Number of places in residential care homes*	*Number of registered beds in nursing homes*[2]
1997[3]	5,552	3,383
1998	5,413	3,654
1999	5,543	3,980
2000	5,392	3,526
2001	5,080	3,365

[1] Information is presented for the former Local Authority district of Hereford and Worcester to ensure details of residential places given in the table are on consistent boundaries. (At 1 April, 1998 the Unitary authority of Herefordshire and the shire county area of Worcestershire were created).

[2] Registered beds in general and mental nursing homes, hospitals and clinics. Information is presented on nursing beds for the two Health Authorities of Herefordshire and Worcestershire (equating to the former local authority district of Hereford and Worcester).

[3] Information for registered nursing beds for 1997 relates to the period 1 October 1996 to 31 March 1997.

Source: Department of Health annual returns.

Home Helps

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many local authority home helps there were in each *(a)* constituency and *(b)* health authority in England in each year since 1992; and what the most recent 12 month figures are. [38340]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Information on the number of home helps by parliamentary constituency and by health authority area is not held centrally.

Psychiatric Nurses

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many child and adolescent community psychiatric nurses were employed *(a)* in May 1997 and *(b)* at the latest date for which figures are available. [39686]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* Data collected by the Department do not differentiate between different types of community psychiatric nurses. Workforce information is collected annually on 30 September.

There has been a 31 per cent. increase in the number of community psychiatric nurses employed in England between 1996 and 2001.

Mental Health (Children)

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children under four years of age have been diagnosed as suffering from depression in the last 12 months. [39684]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* The information requested is not collected centrally.

Convalescent Care

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if a scheme to promote the provision of convalescent and recuperative care in rural bed and breakfast accommodation requires Government approval; and if he will make a statement. [37729]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* Currently any establishment intending to provide either nursing or personal care to its resident would have to register under the Registered Homes Act 1984. From April 2002 onwards, all establishments providing personal or nursing care will have to be registered under the Care Standards Act 2000 and will be subject to the relevant national minimum standards. Establishments will be inspected by the National Care Standards Commission.

Mental Illness

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what proportion of people, broken down by age, were *(a)* admitted and *(b)* discharged from hospital in each of the last five years where the main diagnosis was mental illness, but the patients also suffered other illness; and if he will make a statement as to the physical health of those being treated for mental illness. [40580]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* The figures show the number of discharges (table 1) and admissions (table 2) to National Health Service hospitals in England, where the main diagnosis was mental illness and a secondary diagnosis was present which was not a mental illness.

Between 0.0 per cent. and 0.08 per cent. of all discharges and admissions had a main diagnosis of mental illness where a secondary (non mental illness) diagnosis was present.

NB. Mental Illness = ICD-10: F00-F99.

Table 1: Number of discharges from NHS Hospitals in England, where the main diagnosis was mental illness and a secondary diagnosis was present, finished episodes, by age and year

1996–97 to 2000–01

Age	*2000–01*	*1999–2000*	*1998–99*	*1997–98*	*1996–97*	*All five years*
0–16	0	0	0	0	0	0
17–24	0	0	0	0	0	0
25–44	0	0	0	0	0	0
45–64	3	12	30	51	31	82
65–74	85	31	129	319	170	489
75–84	130	56	236	643	333	976
85+	51	34	128	306	197	503
Total	269	133	523	1,319	731	2,050

Table 2: Number of admissions to NHS Hospitals in England, where the main diagnosis was mental illness and a secondary diagnosis was present, finished episodes, by age and year

1996–97 to 2000–01

Age	*2000–01*	*1999–2000*	*1998–99*	*1997–98*	*1996–97*	*All five years*
0–16	0	0	0	0	0	0
17–24	0	0	0	0	0	0
25–44	0	0	0	0	0	0
45–64	3	14	35	50	26	76
65–74	93	54	154	348	129	477
75–84	165	127	334	813	319	1,132
85+	88	79	194	433	225	658
Total	349	274	717	1,644	699	2,343

Notes:

Admissions are defined as the *first* period of in-patient care under one consultant within one healthcare provider. Please note that admissions do not represent the number of in-patients, as a person may have more than one admission within the year.

Discharge episodes are defined as the last period of in-patient care and ends with death, discharge or transferred to another hospital.

The main diagnosis is the first seven diagnosis fields in the Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) data set, and provides the main reason why the patient was in hospital.

Figures are grossed for both coverage and missing/invalid clinical data, except for 2000–01 which is not yet adjusted for shortfalls.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health.

The National Service Framework (NSF) for mental health draws attention to the evidence in the national psychiatric morbidity survey of high levels of physical ill health and higher rates of death amongst those with mental health problems compared to the rest of the population. This is confirmed in the more recent Office of National Statistics (ONS) survey of psychiatric morbidity among adults living in private households. Our policy as set out in the NSF is that assessment of people with severe mental illness should include assessment of physical health needs, and the care plan should identify the health and social care required to be provided under the care programme approach.

Teenage Pregnancies

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* conceptions, *(b)* maternities and *(c)* abortions were recorded among girls of each year of age under 16 in each health region in each year since 1989. [28209]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Karen Dunnell to Mr. Andrew Turner, dated 8 March 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question asking how many *(a)* conceptions, *(b)* maternities and *(c)* abortions were recorded among girls of each year of age under 16 in each health region in each year since 1989. I am replying in his absence. (28209)

The available figures based on health regions using boundaries as at 1 April 2001 are for the years 1992–2000. These are shown in the attached table. Figures for years before 1992 are only available for the old regional health authority areas prevailing at the time and would not be comparable with 2001 health regions. For consistency, the figures are all presented using age at conception for girls conceiving under age 16.

Conceptions under 16 by outcome and age for health regions 1992–2000

	Number of conceptions			*Number of conceptions leading to maternity*			*Number at conceptions leading to abortion*		
	Age at conception			*Age at conception*			*Age at conception*		
	Under 14	*14*	*15*	*Under 14*	*14*	*15*	*Under 14*	*14*	*15*
Year of conception and health region*									
1992									
Northern & Yorkshire	53	236	796	25	113	472	28	123	324
Trent	46	187	659	14	86	364	32	101	295
West Midlands	51	199	674	19	93	356	32	106	318
North West	41	248	765	22	120	465	19	128	300
Eastern	26	139	406	10	52	182	16	87	224
London	48	225	594	19	104	291	29	121	303
South East	45	186	647	19	64	334	26	122	313
South West	32	115	329	11	50	169	21	65	160
Wales	21	97	352	8	48	197	13	49	155
1993									
Northern & Yorkshire	57	275	780	20	103	442	37	172	338
Trent	42	225	606	18	95	328	24	130	278
West Midlands	45	228	644	24	119	369	21	109	275
North West	55	261	786	23	128	447	32	133	339
Eastern	25	161	377	10	64	180	15	97	197
London	54	200	613	26	89	293	28	111	320
South East	41	191	634	19	69	281	22	122	353
South West	28	128	346	15	44	170	13	84	176
Wales	21	105	339	10	50	207	11	55	132
1994									
Northern & Yorkshire	69	303	837	27	150	485	42	153	352
Trent	48	235	624	23	97	345	25	138	279
West Midlands	50	247	733	25	100	405	25	147	328
North West	62	264	800	24	118	462	38	146	338
Eastern	21	146	409	8	56	197	13	90	212
London	66	243	656	28	90	299	38	153	357
South East	35	243	647	16	84	324	19	159	323
South West	23	133	396	8	51	177	15	82	219
Wales	23	124	358	8	58	210	15	66	148
1995									
Northern & Yorkshire	53	271	923	19	135	559	34	136	364
Trent	35	214	673	10	113	413	25	101	260
West Midlands	48	239	711	25	125	413	23	114	298
North West	47	235	821	17	114	463	30	121	358
Eastern	36	130	442	10	52	214	26	78	228
London	74	232	713	30	101	338	44	131	375
South East	39	238	729	16	102	351	23	136	378
South West	25	133	423	10	56	202	15	77	221
Wales	25	142	400	13	80	237	12	62	163
1996									
Northern & Yorkshire	60	317	887	32	152	503	28	165	384
Trent	58	210	790	19	88	463	39	122	327
West Midlands	57	225	821	22	99	427	35	126	394
North West	54	256	921	21	123	525	33	133	396
Eastern	25	137	485	11	51	258	14	86	227
London	71	278	823	35	105	369	36	173	454
South East	57	225	810	25	75	417	32	150	393
South West	39	160	447	13	68	237	26	92	210
Wales	30	153	461	14	77	269	16	76	192
1997									
Northern & Yorkshire	57	309	907	28	137	535	29	172	372
Trent	34	217	647	15	117	343	19	100	304
West Midlands	52	239	721	22	96	360	30	143	361
North West	45	245	781	19	111	424	26	134	357
Eastern	25	149	457	9	57	238	16	92	219
London	57	285	799	20	115	366	37	170	433
South East	47	262	774	19	111	407	28	151	367
South West	34	142	422	15	64	218	19	78	204
Wales	14	116	434	2	58	258	12	58	176

Conceptions under 16 by outcome and age for health regions 1992–2000

	Number of conceptions			Number of conceptions leading to maternity			Number at conceptions leading to abortion		
	Age at conception			Age at conception			Age at conception		
	Under 14	14	15	Under 14	14	15	Under 14	14	15
1998									
Northern & Yorkshire	63	301	856	26	134	461	37	167	395
Trent	56	241	672	26	108	358	30	133	314
West Midlands	56	227	752	18	87	368	38	140	384
North West	39	263	826	21	108	439	18	155	387
Eastern	28	156	451	13	57	223	15	99	228
London	64	280	808	25	110	351	39	170	457
South East	54	236	773	17	98	362	37	138	411
South West	35	144	474	10	53	228	25	91	246
Wales	28	140	429	14	66	242	14	74	187
1999									
Northern & Yorkshire	53	260	806	23	132	403	30	128	403
Trent	39	204	623	14	89	311	25	115	312
West Midlands	49	206	635	22	86	339	27	120	296
North West	50	258	826	21	106	437	29	152	389
Eastern	27	145	455	11	58	209	16	87	246
London	71	257	730	31	99	325	40	158	405
South East	63	256	737	28	98	337	35	158	400
South West	28	161	469	10	59	232	18	102	237
Wales	26	119	392	14	58	210	12	61	182
2000									
Northern & Yorkshire	43	250	805	18	119	408	25	131	397
Trent	40	181	590	18	75	310	22	106	280
West Midlands	49	234	709	21	104	342	28	130	367
North West	38	229	840	21	98	430	17	131	410
Eastern	30	153	430	11	63	185	19	90	245
London	87	303	856	24	105	340	63	198	516
South East	47	268	792	22	113	348	25	155	444
South West	40	153	450	16	59	215	24	94	235
Wales	21	119	354	10	54	200	11	65	154

* Boundaries as at 1 April 2001

Source: Office for National Statistics

Background note:

1. Boundaries are for health regions as defined at 1 April 2001. This is a consequence of the absence of postcode on the electronic records for abortions prior to 1992.
2. The wording of the question is ambiguous in that year of age could relate either to the age at which events occurred or to conceptions at each age leading to an abortion or a maternity. For consistency, we have chosen the latter interpretation since it provides the two components of conceptions at each age.
3. To prevent disclosure and preserve the confidentiality of individuals figures for under 14 have not been disaggregated.
4. This question was originally asked of the Secretary of State for Health on 15 January 2002 The Department of Health transferred it to ONS on 1 March 2002.
5. Numbers of conceptions are estimated from registrations of births and notifications of abortions. Miscarriages before the 24th week of gestation are not included.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Standard Spending Assessment

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will give the total standard spending assessment per pupil, and the total over or under spend per pupil, broken down by local education authority for England and Wales for each year from 1990–91 to 2000–01, for 2001–02 to date, and projected for the financial year 2002–03, adjusted for inflation at current values. [37196]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is not collected in the form requested. Because of the long time series involved, it is only possible to provide an analysis for education overall. A table containing information showing Local Education Authorities' Standard spending Assessments (SSA) and Outturn at 2001 prices for England has been placed in the Library. My right hon. Friend is not responsible for expenditure in Wales. We do not yet have information on spending in 2001–02, or projected for 2002–03.

Individual Learning Account

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) whether the database held by Capita of individual learning account holders has been made available to her Department to assist in investigations into fraud and abuse of the individual learning account scheme; and if she will make a statement; [36945]

(2) whether Capita has been able to comply with all her Department's requests for information concerning individual learning account holders since 23 November; and if she will make a statement. [36944]

John Healey: Capita have complied with all of the Department's requests for information about Individual Learning Account holders and have been working closely with the Department to assist investigations into potential fraud and abuse of the Individual Learning Account programme.

Capita provided four copies of the ILA Centre database; one has been passed to the police and three copies have been retained by my Department.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what information concerning individual learning account holders is stored by Capita; and in what form. [36947]

Mr. Healey: The Individual Learning Account Centre, which is managed by Capita, stores information provided by Individual Learning account holders on the Individual Leaning Account Application Form. This information is stored both electronically and as a hard copy. The information held is as follows:

name and address;

details on previous learning accounts;

a declaration on personal eligibility (British citizen or UK National, EU or EAA national, employed or self employed and paying UK taxes, not in employment);

date of birth;

**other personal information (gender, employment status, occupation code, registered disabled, ethnic origin, telephone number, e-mail address);

**if in forces Service Number and if member of ELC Scheme;

**additional information (attending full time education; if so where, other funding for learning, previous highest qualification, target groups—member of school support staff or returning to work, how applicant heard about ILAs).

Providing information for items marked ** was not compulsory and therefore is not held for all ILA holders.

In addition information is held electronically on learning episodes undertaken by ILA holders. This covers: registered learning provider number, course identifier, course name, course start date, course cost and payment claimed.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the non-fraudulent abuses of the Individual Learning Account scheme have been; and if she will issue guidance on methods of selling in any successor scheme. [40403]

John Healey *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* Recorded complaints received in respect of non-compliance with the rules of the programme included aggressive marketing, poor value for money, unsolicited learning materials sent to learners, improper use of the ILA and DfES logos and offers of free training to which individuals were not required to contribute.

There will be a replacement ILA-style scheme building on the strengths of the ILA and taking into account lessons learned from the ILA investigations, and the findings of the current stakeholder consultation exercise due in early April. We will announce our plans for the successor scheme in due course.

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what the Government are doing to help those students who started individual learning account courses and could not complete the course because of the decision to suspend ILAs; [40629]

(2) how many students could not complete their courses because of the Government's decision to suspend the individual learning account in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* the north-east, *(c)* south Tyneside and *(d)* the Jarrow constituency. [40628]

John Healey: The Individual Learning Account programme was closed down completely on 23 November 2001. The Department has taken steps to ensure all bookings of eligible learning are honoured. The Department has put in place validation arrangements to process payments for claims already in the system when it was closed down and for submitting claims for learning booked, but unconfirmed on the system at its closure on 23 November. All learners who started ILA supported learning will, subject to validation checks, benefit from a discount.

It was not mandatory for a learner to complete their ILA supported course to b able to benefit from a discount. Therefore, the ILA Centre was not required to hold information on course completion.

Matriculation Diploma

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the implications for social inclusion of the introduction of a matriculation diploma. [41204]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* The Green Paper, 14–19: *extending opportunities, raising standards* sets out the proposal for an overarching award—the Matriculation Diploma. A key aim for the Diploma is that it should provide a clear goal for all young people. It should motivate a greater proportion to remain in education and training until 19 and so contribute to social inclusion. Our proposal for an Intermediate Diploma should be within the reach of the majority of young people, and we suggest too that we should recognise the progress of those who make a sustained effort but do not reach the threshold for the Intermediate Diploma by awarding them with a record of progress setting out their achievements. Our proposals for guidance and support for young people during the 14–19 phase should make an important contribution to the inclusion of those most at risk.

Standards (Key Stage 3)

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of OFSTED's recent report on the first year of the key stage 3 pilot programme to improve educational standards for 11 to 14-year-olds. [40821]

Mr. Timms: OFSTED's report on the pilot strongly supported our decision to introduce the strategy to raise standards for all 11–14-year-olds. The report confirmed that the pilot had begun well, and that there was still much more to be done. The roll out of the national strategy has benefited from the OFSTED conclusions. It has started well in secondary schools throughout the country.

School Governors

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to give school governors the power to remove a fellow governor for *(a)* unruly behaviour and *(b)* behaviour likely to bring the school into disrepute. [41120]

Mr. Timms: Existing regulations allow for the removal of appointed governors by their appointing authority, but there is no provision for the removal of elected governors as they hold a mandate from their electorate. We have no immediate plans to extend the current removal powers, but we will be consulting on new regulations later in the year, and inviting representations on how current provisions can be improved.

Science/Engineering Students

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the impact on the number and standard of students entering further education to study science and engineering of *(a)* GCSE combined science courses, *(b)* GCSE and A level design and technology, *(c)* modular science A levels and *(d)* GNVQs, since their inception. [39700]

John Healey: *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* The information requested is not available.

Data on student numbers in FE are collected via the Individualised Student Record (ISR).The information collected on the ISR is not readily available by specific course subjects required in the PQ. Further, because there are a significant number of students categorised as "other" we cannot accurately detect changes from one year to the next.

However, we can provide the number of enrolments in science and engineering courses in FE sector colleges, as follows:

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
Science	890,713	1,035,441	1,207,863
Engineering	369,998	342,785	309,327

The Science breakdown above includes mathematics and computing courses. The increase in Science courses is mainly due to IT related courses.

The ISR does not collect detailed information about prior attainment.

Citizenship Studies

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will issue guidance to schools to include the Queen's golden jubilee in studies of citizenship during the *(a)* current and *(b)* next academic year. [39556]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* Understanding the institutions that underpin our system of government is an important part of citizenship which becomes part of the statutory National Curriculum for 11–16 year olds in September 2002. Pupils will learn about the Monarchy and the role of the Queen as the head of State. Detailed guidance has been sent to all schools to support citizenship. Citizenship is flexible to allow teachers to decide the content of lessons, which can include discussions of the Queen's Golden Jubilee.

The DfES supports the Spirit of Friendship festival which is a series of events aimed at celebrating, and increasing understanding of, the Commonwealth Games and the Queen's Golden Jubilee. The festival will take place in June and July.

Classroom Assistants

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps she *(a)* has taken and *(b)* intends to take to encourage local authorities to pay classroom assistants all year round. [39461]

Mr. Timms: Terms and conditions of employment of school support staff including teaching assistants are matters for local authorities and schools to determine. The National Joint Council for Local Government Services has established a working group to look at matters relating to the pay structure of school support staff and intends to issue further guidance.

Circulars

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the circular documents that have been sent by her Department to *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools since 7 June 2001; and how many pages each document contained. [38803]

Mr. Timms: We have sent 85 documents to all primary schools in this period. The full list of titles and page numbers is contained in the following table.

Mailings to primary schools, 7 June 2001 to end February 2002

Date		*No.*
Jun 01	Letter from Estelle Morris	2
	SEN Update 7	6
	Spectrum 43	8
Jul 01	Factual leaflet for all teachers on pay	8
	Final decisions on changes schools will make on performance tables returns in 2001	3
	New deal for schools. NDS devolved formula capital	6
	School Teachers Pay and Conditions of Employment 2001	36
	Teachers magazine—Spectrum 44	10
	Letter about delay in SEN Code	2

Mailings to primary schools, 7 June 2001 to end February 2002

Date		*No.*
Sep 01	Data collection timetable for schools	2
	Guidance on Continuing Professional Development to CPD co-ordinators in schools	15
	ICT in the Literacy hour (leaflet and CD ROM)	6
	Preparation for the Annual School Census 2002	2
	Revised guidance on school teachers pay and conditions 2001	36
	School Performance tables: contextual, background and KS2 data for checking (outside batch—average page nos.)	19
	School Teachers Pay and Conditions Document 2001	115
	Schools Achieving Success	74
	Schools Achieving Success—summary white paper	24
	September 2001 class size count (infant)	3
	Special Grant claim forms (via LEA)	10
	Spectrum	19
	The National Literacy Strategy—Teaching writing: Fiction and non-fiction	41
	The way forward—A modernised framework for School governance	32
	Threshold + Performance Management planner	4
Oct 01	After the events of 11 September	1
	ELS Book—Early Literacy Support Programme: materials for teachers working in partnership with teaching assistants	158
	Golden Jubilee Poetry Competition 2002	9
	Key Stage 1—The Autumn Package 2001—Pupil Performance Information and Interactive Autumn Package 2001, Version 2.0	35
	Key Stage 2—The Autumn Package 2001—Pupil Performance Information and Interactive Autumn Package 2001, Version 2.0	36
	School Achievement Award Scheme	4
	Schools achieving success—Discussion Pack	1
	Spectrum 46	12
	Teachers magazine	20
	Welcome back bonuses for returners to teaching—Guidance for schools and LEAs NEW	41
	2001 School and College Performance Tables—how to get tables	1
Nov 01	Admission Appeals for Maintained Primary and Secondary Schools in England 1999–2000	3
	Advanced Skills Teachers—Poster one	1
	Fast track flyer—how to get more information about the fast track NEW	1
	Information about a consultation on the overarching strategy for young people NEW	1
	Introducing Consistent Financial reporting	30
	School Finance Pack—Advance notification	1
	SEN Update	6
	Spectrum	8
	Threshold certificates data checking NEW	5
Dec 01	Annual School Census 2002	21
	Early Years Headcount	3
	Inclusive schooling for pupils with Special Educational Needs NEW	32
	SEN Code of Practice	210
	The SEN Toolkit	224
	Internet safety	1
	Health and Safety: Responsibilities and powers	5
	National Numeracy Strategy: Springboard 6 Lessons for use in booster classes	64
	Education Bill 2001	10
	Spectrum	6
	Teacher certificates for threshold awards	1
Jan 02	Helping children achieve throughout Year 6—English and mathematics	
	Key Stage 1 and 2—schemes of work for citizenship	200
	New Year letter from Secretary of State	2
	Spectrum	8
	Teacher magazine	20
Feb 02	Commonwealth Day message from the Queen—Celebrating Diversity	3
	Spectrum	8
	Springboard 6: Lessons for use in booster classes (second part)	72
	Teachers Pay 2002–03	8
Total		1,755

Mailings to secondary schools, 7 June 2001 to end February 2002

Date		*No.*
Jun 01	Letter from Estelle Morris	2
	Order form for Which Way Now? 2001, Teacher's Notes for It's Your Choice (for Year 10 and/or 11 cohort), Teacher's Notes for It's Your Choice, Which Way Now?	2
	SEN Update 7	6
	Spectrum 43	8

Mailings to secondary schools, 7 June 2001 to end February 2002

Date		*No.*
Jul 01	Factual leaflet for all teachers on pay	8
	Final decisions on changes schools will make on performance tables returns in 2001 NEW	3
	New deal for schools. NDS devolved formula capital	6
	School Teachers' Pay and Conditions of Employment 2001	36
	Spectrum 44	10
	Letter about delay in SEN Code	2
Sep 01	Data collection timetable for schools	2
	Guidance on Continuing Professional Development to CPD co-ordinators in schools NEW	15
	Introduction to the Student Apprenticeship scheme	20
	Preparation for the Annual School Census 2002 NEW	4
	Revised guidance on school teachers' pay and conditions 2001	36
	School and College Performance tables: Examination results data checking collection (outside batch—average page nos.)	25
	School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document 2001	115
	Schools Achieving Success NEW	74
	Schools Achieving Success—summary white paper	24
	September Pupil Count 2001 (via LEA)	5
	Special Grant claim forms (via LEA)	10
	Spectrum	19
	Target Setting at Key Stage 4 (KS4) NEW	3
	The way forward—A modernised framework for School governance NEW	32
	Threshold + Performance Management planner	4
Oct 01	After the events of 11 September	1
	Key Stage 3—The Autumn Package 2001—Pupil Performance Information and Interactive Autumn Package 2001, Version 2.0	36
	School Achievement Award Scheme	4
	Schools: achieving success—Discussion Pack NEW	1
	Golden Jubilee Poetry Competition 2002 NEW	9
	Spectrum 46	6
	Welcome back bonuses for returners to teaching—Guidance for schools and LEAs NEW	41
Nov 01	Advanced Skills Teachers—Poster one	1
	Aim Higher. Information to encourage disadvantaged young people into HE	1
	Fast tracker flyer—Headteachers are you interested in recruiting a teacher who . . .	1
	Information about Building a Strategy for Children and Young People	1
	Introducing Consistent Financial reporting NEW	30
	Key Stage 4—The Autumn Package 2001—Pupil Performance Information and Interactive Autumn Package 2001, Version 2.0	65
	New GCSEs in vocational subjects	2
	School and College Performance tables—Letter about PIN to access pre-publication performance tables	1
	Consistent Financial Reporting—Advance notification	5
	Special Educational Needs Update	6
	Spectrum	
	Threshold certificates data checking	5
Dec 01	Annual School Census 2002	18
	Autumn Exclusions data collection 2002	1
	SEN Code of Practice NEW	210
	Inclusive schooling for pupils with Special Educational Needs NEW	32
	The SEN Toolkit NEW	224
	Internet safety NEW	1
	Health and Safety: Responsibilities and powers NEW	5
	Education Bill 2001 NEW	10
	Spectrum	8
	Teacher certificates for threshold awards NEW	1
Jan 02	Spectrum	8
	Working with Connexions NEW	8
	New Year letter from Secretary of State	2
Feb 02	Consultation paper—14–19: Extending opportunities, raising standards NEW	87
	Poster—14–19: Extending opportunities, raising standards	
	Response form—14–19: Extending opportunities, raising standards	20
	Summary—14–19: Extending opportunities, raising standards	18
	Commonwealth Day message from the Queen—Celebrating Diversity	3
	Spectrum	8
	Student support 2002–03	4
Total		1,355

Training and Enterprise Councils

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the cases of *(a)* suspected fraud and *(b)* misuse of public funds notified to her Department involving training and enterprise councils, and in each case the sums involved, for each financial year up to 31 March 2001; which ones have been the subject of investigation by her Department; how many cases have been referred by her Department to the police; how many of the investigations (i) have been terminated, and for each of those cases the grounds on which that decision was taken, (ii) have resulted in a criminal prosecution and (iii) continue, and what sums have been recovered as a result; what controls were put in place for training and enterprise councils to minimise the possibility of fraud and misuse of public funds; what lessons her Department drew from the cases; and how these were applied in relation to individual learning accounts. [33785]

John Healey: Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) were required to notify Government Offices (GOs) of instances of suspected fraud or financial irregularity in accordance with their contracts with the Department. Details of cases notified to the Department are as follows:

	Number of Cases Notified	*Number of Cases Investigated by DfES*	*Number of Cases Referred to the Police*	*Number of Cases Terminated*	*Number of Cases Still Ongoing*
1994–95	3	3	1	1	—
1995–96	41	41	10	40	1
1996–97	24	24	9	24	—
1997–98	44	44	14	44	—
1998–99	35	35	10	35	—
1999–2000	20	20	9	18	2
2000–01	15	15	2	9	6
Total	182	182	55	173	9

The reasons for terminating cases are shown in the following table:

		Reason For Closure			
	Number of Cases Terminated	*Criminal Prosecution*	*Malpractice*	*No Evidence to Substantiate*	*Poor Administration*
1994–95	3	1	—	2	—
1995–96	40	—	13	19	8
1996–97	24	1	11	4	8
1997–98	44	1	25	8	10
1998–99	35	—	22	2	11
1999–2000	18	1	12	1	4
2000–01	9	—	4	5	—
Total	173	4	87	41	41

In total, the amount involved and identified as recoverable was £18,167,000. The amounts identified as recoverable from TECs were notified to GOs in order to initiate recovery action. Details of actual recoveries are not held centrally.

The Department's financial control mechanisms applied to TECs developed and improved, drawing on the experience gained from managing the contracts with TECs and lessons learned from investigating cases of fraud and misuse of public funds. Key elements of the controls were:

(a) A detailed legal contract for the provision of the public funds, legally binding. The contract and supporting material reflected input from specialist professional financial control staff, spelling out the specifics of what was being paid for, evidence requirements and other specific conditions on the provider. It was a requirement on TECs to notify the Secretary of State immediately if it had reason to suspect that a fraud had or was occurring;

(b) Legal contractual remedies that could be followed quickly if any of the contractual conditions were not met;

(c) Visits from Government Office Financial Assurance and Management Teams to TECs and providers to ensure that public sector standards of regularity and propriety were maintained and that public funds were properly spent, well managed and safeguarded;

(d) A specialist national Financial Assurance Unit consisting of a mix of professional field audit, accounting and software database staff, working with Government Office financial control field teams, performing regular contract audit monitoring visits to the 72–75 TECs and their 5,000+ providers and supporting NAO visits as required;

(e) A Special Investigations Unit (SIU) based in the Department with a national remit to investigate serious cases of fraud; and

(f) Quarterly reports to the Departmental Audit Committee on emerging or serious issues so that timely decisions could be taken on financial control risk management and on early preventative action.

The Department drew a range of lessons from the TEC experiences applicable in relation to Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs) and other Departmental business, including for example: retaining expertise in the DfES Special Investigations Unit. The SIU was involved in investigations of alleged ILA fraud and abuse at the earliest opportunity working closely with ILA policy team. They are currently involved in investigations into the activities of 97 ILA learning providers.

Computers

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) if she will make it her policy to turn the Computers Within Reach pilot scheme into a permanent scheme; [39110]

(2) how many people were provided with recycled computers under the pilot Computers Within Reach Scheme; and how many people applied unsuccessfully. [39111]

John Healey: The Computers Within Reach pilot scheme closed on 31 October 2001, having delivered over 24,000 computers into 22 pilot areas. We are currently evaluating the scheme and considering options for the bet way of using the remaining funding available.

Information on the number of unsuccessful applications could only be supplied at disproportionate cost.

Pupil:Teacher Ratios

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the ratio of teachers to pupils was in *(a)* all schools, *(b)* primary schools and *(c)* secondary schools for each year since 1996 in (i) East Sussex Local Education Authority, (ii) the South-East region and (iii) England. [37911]

Mr. Timms: The available information is shown in the table:

Pupil:teacher ratios in schools

Position in January each year

	East Sussex Local Education Authority[1]			*Brighton and Hove Local Education Authority*		
	Primary schools	*Secondary schools*	*All schools*	*Primary schools*	*Secondary schools*	*All schools*
2001	22.7	17.1	16.6	21.6	16.5	15.4
2000	22.4	17.1	16.5	22.6	16.5	16.1
1999	23.8	16.9	17.0	23.4	16.4	16.5
1998	23.3	16.6	16.8	23.3	16.3	16.5
1997	22.8	16.2	16.5	—	—	—
1996	22.7	16.0	16.3	—	—	—

Source: Annual Schools' Census

— Not applicable.

[1] Data for 1996 and 1997 include Brighton and Hove LEA.

In April 1997 East Sussex Local Education Authority was subject to Local Government Re-organisation and was split into Brighton and Hove Local Education Authority and East Sussex Local Education Authority.

	South East Region			*England*		
	Primary schools	*Secondary schools*	*All schools*	*Primary schools*	*Secondary schools*	*All schools*
2001	22.9	17.4	17.2	22.9	17.1	18.1
2000	23.2	17.3	17.3	23.3	17.2	18.3
1999	23.6	17.1	17.5	23.5	17.0	18.4
1998	23.6	16.9	17.4	23.7	16.9	18.5
1997	23.2	16.7	17.3	23.4	16.7	18.3
1996	—	—	—	23.2	16.6	18.2

Source: Annual Schools' Census

— Not applicable

In 1997 Government Office Region definitions altered and data for previous years are therefore not comparable.

Class Sizes (Lincolnshire)

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* five, *(b)* six and *(c)* seven-year-olds in North East Lincolnshire and North Lincolnshire were in class sizes over 30 in each year from 1990 to 2001. [37752]

Mr. Timms: The available information is shown in the table.

Number of classes with 31 or more Key Stage 1 pupils and the number of pupils in such classes in Maintained Primary Schools in North East Lincolnshire and North Lincolnshire Local Education Authorities

Position in January each year

	North East Lincolnshire		*North Lincolnshire*	
	Classes	*Pupils*	*Classes*	*Pupils*
1997	71	2,393	53	1,738
1998	73	2,467	66	2,229
1999	53	1,767	0	0
2000	20	633	0	0
2001	3	98	0	0

Source: Annual Schools' Census

Prior to 1997 North East Lincolnshire and North Lincolnshire were part of Humberside Local Education Authority which was subject to Local Government Reorganisation in April 1996.

Information on Key Stage 1 classes and pupils was not collected prior to 1996.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Crown Prosecution Service

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General if the recommendation advanced in the review of the Crown Prosecution Service, Cm 3960, concerning the agreement of statistics, has been achieved. [35952]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 14 February 2002]:* As an interim measure, the Research, Development and Statistics Directorate of the Home Office undertook the publication of the Criminal Justice Business Quarterly Report, bringing together the best available data from existing sources and presenting figures in a revised format agreed by representatives of the Home Office, Lord Chancellor's Department, and Crown Prosecution Service.

The Criminal Justice Joint Planning Unit is taking the lead in developing and testing joint or shared performance measures. This involves examining the current matrix of agency performance measures and targets and making recommendations as to which need amendment and where new inter-agency measures are required. The aim is to develop a cohesive set of indicators on criminal justice system priorities while meeting the needs of individual agencies and services.

Linked to this, the Unit is also developing, with local practitioners, the business requirement for a shared management information system for the criminal justice system. A number of areas, including Merseyside, Northumbria and West Yorkshire, already have access to a web-based management information system that contains performance information from each of the main agencies. The system will be further developed over the coming months both in terms of its technical specification and, more importantly, its content.

None of the above resolves the long-standing problem of incompatibility in agency definitions and counting protocols. However, this issue is being addressed by an independent consultant, guided by a small inter-departmental steering group. This project—The Review of Statistics on Administration of Criminal Justice—is due to report later this year, and is expected to result in recommendations about both short and long-term improvements in the integrity and availability of our information, including common definitions. Whatever recommendations emerge, further progress will involve agreement between the various agencies to ensure that individual business needs continue to be served.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what actions have been taken in response to the observations in Cm 3960, Summary of the report, paragraph 24, concerning performance indicators for timeliness, the magistrates' courts and the CPS. [35964]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 14 February 2002]:* The Government have accepted the need for whole systems targets. Reducing unnecessary delay in the criminal justice system has always been a priority for the Government. The importance of this, and a key achievement to date, is illustrated by cases involving persistent young offenders, in respect of which the Government set a target to halve the time that it took to process persistent young offenders from arrest to sentence from 142 days in 1996 to 71 days, a target systematically met over the summer of last year.

The criminal justice departments have continued to work together to identify and agree further timeliness targets. An announcement will be made once the new timeliness targets have been agreed.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Correspondence

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter of the hon. Member for West Derbyshire dated 4 July concerning Mr. and Mrs. Don Holland of Chelmorton, Derbyshire. [7352]

Mr. Morley: A reply was sent on 10 December to the hon. Member.

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letters from the hon. Member for West Derbyshire of 3 September and 4 October concerning milk containers and recycling. [15116]

Mr. Morley: A reply was sent on 6 February to the hon. Member.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the hon. Member for Huntingdon's letter of 5 July on behalf of his constituent, Mrs. June Allen. [17482]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 26 November 2001]:* A reply was sent on 13 February to the hon. Member.

Mr. Alan Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute to the Chancellor of the Exchequer on sheep annual premiums, dated 29 October 2001, which was transferred to her Department. [30802]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* A reply was sent on 6 February to the hon. Member.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter of 23 October from the hon. Member for Christchurch to the Under-Secretary of State on the use of refrigerants in Government departments. [33637]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* A reply was sent on 24 February to the hon. Member.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State or Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will answer the letter to her of 26 November 2001, from the hon. Member for the Vale of York, on the statement in the House on 12 November on the number of farmers who opposed the contiguous culls in Thirsk during the foot and mouth epidemic. [33897]

Mr. Morley: A reply was sent on 21 January to the hon. Member.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letters dated 10 December 2001 and 11 January from the hon. Member for Leominster on the Agricultural Land Tribunal. [34667]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* A reply was sent on 26 February to the hon. Member.

Domestic Game Industry

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the environmental impact of the domestic game industry; and if she will make a statement. [30444]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* The White Paper "Our countryside: the future" published in November 2000 set out the Government's view that activities related to game shooting have a far-reaching influence on landscapes, habitats and wildlife. This statement acknowledged that these activities can have a positive impact on the environment, for example by encouraging biodiversity through the conservation of particular habitats. The Government recognise at the same time the need to ensure that any relevant controls, for example prohibiting illegal methods of gamekeeping, are properly enforced.

This was one of the considerations which led to the setting-up of a working group, in 1995, to review the conflict issues surrounding raptors, their final report was published in March 2000. Illegal persecution was examined. Investigations showed that from 1990 to 1997, there were 720 confirmed incidents of illegal killing of raptors reported to the Agriculture Departments or RSPB, involving a minimum of 834 birds.

Many of the report recommendations involve measures to mitigate against the persecution of raptors such as:

promotion of legal methods of pest control;

monitoring of vulnerable species to assess levels of persecution;

acceptable alternative moorland management practices.

There is also research currently underway by BASC to assess; the level of predation by raptors at pheasant poult release sites; and, habitat manipulation measures. The results are due shortly.

We also strongly encourage the application of good environmental and husbandry practice, for example by observance of the Codes of Good Agricultural Practice, for operations such as game farming whether or not in particular cases they fall within the legal definition of agriculture. This will be beneficial for example in maintaining ground cover and shelter areas which encourage wildlife and reduce risks of crop damage and soil erosion.

We are aware of suggestions that this subject could form part of the Department's future programme of Horizon Scanning research, information on which is available at www.defra.gov.uk/horizonscanning. This will be considered together with other suggestions made in the current consultations on the programme.

Water Meters

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many water meters were installed in domestic properties in the London borough of Hillingdon in each of the last five years. [34101]

Mr. Meacher: Each water company reports to the Office of Water Services the number of meters that it fits, but there is no requirement for a more detailed breakdown of where they are fitted within the company's area. Water company areas do not correspond to local authority boundaries. The Hillingdon local authority areas is only a small part within the area of Three Valleys Water. The number of households with meters in the entire area of Three Valleys Water in 2001–02 is about 205,000.

Departmental Policies (Bristol, East)

Jean Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Bristol East constituency, the effects on Bristol of her Department's policies and actions *(a)* from 5 May 1994 to 2 May 1997, *(b)* from 2 May 1997 to 7 May 1998, and *(c)* since 7 May 1998. [35599]

Mr. Morley: I refer to my hon. Friend to the reply given to her by the Minister of State, Cabinet Office on 4 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 80W. As this Department was created in June 2001, the historical information requested is not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Working Conditions and Practices

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment has been made of the effect of the Working Time Directive on her Department's employees; how many employees are working in excess of 48 hours per week; what steps she is taking to reduce this number; and if she will make a statement. [35897]

Mr. Morley: The European Working Time Directive was incorporated into UK law by the Working Time Regulations 1998.

This Department takes the work/life balance seriously and is taking a number of steps to raise awareness. As a general rule staff in core-DEFRA will not be asked to work more than 48 hours per week. Agreements to disapply the 48 hour limit are entered into only very exceptionally and after thorough examination of the working arrangements of the staff involved. Prior to an expected increase during the Foot and Mouth crisis only about 30 staff had agreed to disapply the 48 hour limit and a number of these related to junior staff with second jobs.

The Pesticides Safety Directorate, the Rural Payments Agency and the Veterinary Medicines Directorate are covered by the Departmental response. RPA currently has two members of staff who work in excess of 48 hours though this number was greater during the BSE and Foot and Mouth crises. Managers continually review the position of those staff who regularly work more than 48 hours per week. PSD has no staff who work in excess of 48 hours.

Responsibility for the Working Time Regulations within the Central Science Laboratory, the Veterinary Laboratories Agency and the Centre for Environmental Fisheries and Aquaculture Agency has been delegated to Agency Chief Executives and I have asked them to reply direct.

Letter from Victor Bye to Dr. Vincent Cable, dated January 2002:

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has asked Agency Chief Executives to reply to your question concerning the Working Time Directive. I am replying on behalf of Chief Executive for The Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Agency (CEFAS).

The Working Time Regulations were first introduced in the UK in 1998. As a general rule, members of staff are not asked to work more than 48 hours per week. Any paid hours worked in excess of conditioned hours, have to be approved by line managers. Officers have also been asked to notify their managers if they have a second job or employment outside CEFAS.

Annual medical assessments have been introduced for Nightpatrol staff as prescribed by the regulations. However, there have been no agreements to disapply the 48-hour weekly limit within CEFAS.

Letter from Steve Edwards to Dr. Vincent Cable, dated February 2002:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question on what assessment has been made of the effect of the Working Time Directive on her Department's employees, how many employees are working in excess of 48 hours per week and what steps she is taking to reduce this number.

The European Working Time Directive was incorporated into UK law by the Working Time Regulations 1998.

As a general rule staff will not be asked to work more than 48 hours per week. Although there is the opportunity for staff to enter into an agreement to disapply the 48 hour limit there are no such agreements within VLA.

Letter from Michael Roberts to Dr. Vincent Cable, dated 13 February 2002:

CSL operates a policy of ensuring staff do not work in excess of 48 hours on a regular basis. No member of CSL staff has signed a "waiver" excluding themselves from the provisions of the Working Time Directive.

During the recent FMD outbreak, a small number of CSL staff, seconded to FMD duties, did work in excess of 48 hours per week. This has now ceased.

British Trust Conservation Volunteers

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the grants made to the British Trust Conservation Volunteers for the last five years for which figures are available. [35675]

Mr. Meacher: DEFRA—and DETR before it—contributes directly to the funding of BTCV's activities with the main grant each year going towards the organisation's core costs. The Countryside Agency, which we fund, also provides some financial support.

Details of DEFRA/DETR core funding and additional grant funding for the last five years are as follows:

	£
1997–8	
Core grant	398,775
Project grants: Small woods	12,000
Tree wardens	16,767
Trees and Woods	11,516
Local Project fund grants:	
Drayton Wood Nature Reserve	3,500
Takely Environment Centre	6,000
Dog Kennel Wood Tree Nursery	4,988
Vicarage Orchard	994
Woodside Community Landscape	600
1998–99	
Core grant	386,812
Project grants: Small Woods	12,240
Flying Slug	11,000
1999–2000	
Core grant	297,000
Regional grant: Flying Slug	11,350
2000–01	
Core grant:	297,000
Regional grant: Local Trees and Healthy Living	13,269
Green Gym Regional Development	21,057
Flying Slug	11,610
2001–02	
Core grant:	306,000
Regional: Developing Sustainable Tourism	10,340
Pond Warden Scheme	21,324
Green Gym Regional Development	18,557

Energy Efficiency

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 4 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 751W, on central heating, if she will make it her policy to include assistance to upgrade inadequate central heating systems in the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme. [38304]

Mr. Meacher: We have no plans at the present time to replace working or aged central heating systems under HEES. Our priority remains to seek to end fuel poverty in vulnerable households by 2010 through the installation of insulation and heating measures for those over 60 in receipt of an income related benefit where there is currently no working central heating system.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the use of information technology in energy efficiency; and what good practice exists in the United Kingdom. [39378]

Mr. Meacher: Information technology is frequently used to control and monitor energy use in buildings, industry and commerce as an integral part of intelligent energy management technologies which can provide potential energy savings of up to around 40 per cent. The Department's Energy Efficiency Best Practice Programme provides information and guidance on the use of information technology to save energy. Under the programme, further investigation is also underway to identify ways of achieving wider market acceptance of such technologies.

Recycling

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the recycling rates are for local authorities in England and Wales. [37130]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 26 February 2002]:* Household recycling rates for individual local authorities for England are published in the consultation paper on "Distribution of the £140 million Waste Minimisation and Recycling Fund" at Annex B. A copy of the paper is available in the Library of the House and also on the Department's website at: www.defra.gov.uk/environment/consult/wastefund/index.

Recycling rates for local authorities in Wales are a matter for my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Wales.

Pollution Inspection

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many inspections per annum per polluting process by local authorities are *(a)* expected by her Department and *(b)* covered by existing legislation; and what plans she has to change (i) the expected level of inspections and (ii) legislation covering the requirements placed upon local authorities. [38644]

Mr. Meacher: Guidance issued by the Department of Environment in 1995 and re-issued by the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions in 1998 specified a normal inspection rate of twice a year (with certain qualifications) for processes regulated under the Local Air Pollution Control system.

As regards inspection in future, DETR commissioned consultants in 2000 to investigate the scope for establishing a risk-based regulatory approach, whereby inspections and regulatory effort would be determined according to the potential environmental impacts of a process and operator performance. The consultants reported last year and we consulted on their report. We have since commissioned the consultants to trial the recommended methodology, involving local authorities, process operators, and trade associations. Their report is expected shortly and we again plan to issue it for comment. The introduction of such a system would not require legislation.

Right to Roam

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received from the freedom to roam to be introduced on a region-by-region basis. [39384]

Alun Michael: There have been a number of such representations, mainly in favour of bringing the right of access under Part I of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 into force within each region as soon as the conclusive map of open country and registered common land for that region is issued. I undertook to decide our approach in the light of the experience in the first two areas to be mapped and I hope to make an announcement shortly.

Car Dumping

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with local councils on the impact charges for taking cars at scrapyards have had on the numbers of cars being dumped; and if she will make a statement. [39272]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* We have not had discussions with local councils on this issue. However, it is widely believed that the fall in prices for scrap metal has contributed to the increase in the number of vehicles abandoned.

Fair trade

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether fair trade products are sold in her Department. [39826]

Mr. Morley: Support for Fair Trade initiatives both in developing countries and the UK has been given by the Department for International Development. This support forms part of a wider dialogue with the private sector to encourage them to adopt more socially responsible and ethical business practises.

Products are not generally sold within DEFRA other than food through catering contracts. We have no central information on the extent to which such food is fair trade.

Flooding

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if the issue of responsibility for ground water flooding where there is no owner or recent records of a water source will be included in the review of flooding. [40343]

Mr. Morley: The Steering Group Report and associated consultation document recently issued by this Department relate specifically to a review of the future arrangements for funding flood and coastal defence work and related institutional and administrative arrangements. The review did not cover ground water flooding matters.

Sustainable Development

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proposals she has to promote sustainable development. [40354]

Mr. Meacher: The Department has lead responsibility for the Government's Sustainable Development Strategy. We will shortly be publishing the second annual report on progress towards sustainable development by the country as a whole. In DEFRA itself, we intend to put in place a Departmental sustainable development strategy—by Spring 2002; the new Department's aim and objectives have sustainable development at their heart.

Later this year Johannesburg will host the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), marking the tenth anniversary of the Rio Earth Summit. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was the first head of government to confirm that he would attend. DEFRA has a central role to play in the UK preparations for the Summit, both as the champion of sustainable development policy in the UK Government, and as the lead Department on relevant negotiations in environmental fora, including policy lead for WSSD. We hope the publicity it generates will stimulate further interest not just in the international aspects of sustainable development, but the action we need to take at home.

We are committed to taking forward sustainable development—as we have already demonstrated, for instance, at the climate change talks in Marrakech and the WTO talks in Doha; and by calling a Waste Summit, publishing a Fuel Poverty Strategy and setting up the Policy Commission on Food and Farming. We shall continue to work actively with other countries, business, local authorities and NGO's to promote sustainable development.

Combined heat and power

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action she plans to take to double UK use of combined heat and power following the PIU review of energy policy. [39978]

Mr. Meacher: Government will consider the Review's recommendations and will hold a public consultation leading to a White Paper in the Autumn. My Department is developing a CHP Strategy in close collaboration with other Government Departments and this will set out the measures needed to achieve the target to double Good Quality CHP capacity to at least 10,000 megawatts by 2010. We will issue the Strategy as a draft document for consultation shortly.

Refrigerators

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on what basis the money allocated to local authorities to assist in meeting the costs involved in storing *(a)* refrigerators and *(b)* freezers, will be divided between different local authorities; and how much she expects each local authority to receive. [40084]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* In early December 2001, I announced a payment of £6 million to cover local authority costs from January to March 2002. This payment will be made through the Revenue Support Grant for 2002–03 and will be distributed to waste disposal authorities according to the Standard Spending Assessment Formula. We are monitoring the impact of the Regulation to assess what further action is required.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement indicating what her understanding is of whether sections in Article 5, Paragraph (d) of EC Regulation 2037/2000 (29 June 2000) apply to insulating materials used in refrigerators and freezers. [39994]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* The UK Government's interpretation of Article 5(1)(d)(iv) of EC Regulation 2037/2000 is that it prohibits the use of hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs) for the production of polyurethane foams for appliances, including refrigerators and freezers, from 1 January 2003.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement indicating her understanding of the way in which Article 16 of EU Regulation 2037/2000, paragraph 3 affects the implementation of paragraph 2. [39996]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* In June 2001, the European Commission gave EU Member States a definitive clarification of Article 16(2) of EC Regulation 2037/2000. It required ozone-depleting substances (ODS) in domestic fridges and freezers, either used as the refrigerant or to blow the insulating foam, to be recovered and dealt with as provided for in Article 16(1) after 31 December 2001. Article 16(3) of EC Regulation 2037/2000 applies to the recovery, if practicable, and recycling, reclamation or destruction of any ODS contained in equipment, systems and appliances not specified in either Article 16(1) or 16(2). Therefore Article 16(3) does not affect the implementation of Article 16(2).

Livestock Movements

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what information she collects on the *(a)* duration and *(b)* distance of farm livestock's journeys to slaughter. [40973]

Mr. Morley: This information is not collected. Farmers and transporters are not required to provide information about journeys within Great Britain. All export consignments of farm livestock are accompanied by a Route Plan showing the intended route and duration of the journey.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received on the 21-day standstill rule. [40376]

Mr. Morley: I have received a number of representations from organisations representing farmers and auctioneers on the 20-day movement standstill, which forms a key part of the Interim Animal Movement Regime which was introduced on 11 February. The 20 day standstill rule has been waived for some types of movement, subject to conditions and we will continue to keep these arrangements under review.

TREASURY

Temporary Employees

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what guidance has been issued in respect of the recruitment and appointment of non-permanent employees in *(a)* his Department and *(b)* all executive agencies supervised by his Department; and if he will publish the full terms of employment as specified to employees in his Department and the executive agencies for which he is responsible who are employed on a temporary contract of (i) 51 weeks' and (ii) less than 51 weeks' duration. [25514]

Ruth Kelly: The information has been placed in the Library.

Money Laundering (General Abacha)

Harry Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what reports he has received indicating the involvement of UK banks in the money laundering activities of the late General Abacha; whether he is *(a)* budgeting for the return of such money to Nigeria and *(b)* arranging for its repayment; and if he will make a statement. [39003]

Ruth Kelly: The Financial Services Authority published a report in March 2001 following a three month investigation into the handling by banks in the UK of accounts linked to the late General Abacha. The investigation established that 23 banks had accounts linked either to General Abacha, family members or close associates and that in 15 of the banks significant control weaknesses were identified. Eight of the banks had corrected these weaknesses after the accounts were opened but seven banks were ordered to take action to rectify control weaknesses.

The return to Nigeria of any money held in accounts owned by the Abacha family or close associates is dependent on the Nigerian authorities prosecuting individuals for their offences and subsequently, if these individuals are found to be guilty, obtaining a confiscation order against them. If in its assessment of the benefits obtained by these individuals from the crimes they are convicted of, it is considered that assets are held in the UK, an application for enforcement of that order in the UK courts would then be required. I understand that no such confiscation orders have, as yet, been made in Nigeria. Although the proceeds of overseas confiscation orders revert to the Exchequer the government has powers to return such proceeds to overseas jurisdictions. The UK government would consider returning any money confiscated form the Abacha accounts to the Nigerian authorities.

Euro

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money has been spent by the Treasury on the promotion of the euro in the past year. [40800]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* Details of the expenditure on business euro preparations were set out in the Treasury's Fifth Report on Euro Preparations, published on 4 November 2001, copies of which were deposited in the Library of the House.

Smaller Quoted Companies

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what initiatives there are to give smaller quoted companies more flexibility to seek approval from shareholders for non pre-emptive issues. [40253]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

Smaller quoted companies already have flexibility to allot shares on a non-pre-emptive basis where this is approved by a special resolution of their members. The Company Law Review recommended no change in this arrangement. I am considering this along with the Review's other recommendations.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Child Exploitation

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action her Department is taking to stop child trafficking. [40239]

Clare Short: Our response focuses on eliminating the poverty that causes child trafficking, and supporting and encouraging the work of governments, business, voluntary agencies and international organisations, such as the International Labour Organisation and UNICEF, which addresses this issue. It includes £3 million of support for specific ILO operations in Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia and China.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment her Department has made of the levels of exploitation of children by aid workers in Africa. [40243]

Clare Short: My Department has not undertaken any direct assessment of the level of exploitation of children by aid workers. No level of exploitation is acceptable in any circumstance. We welcome the attention the recent report of UNHCR and SCF-UK on exploitation amongst refugee children in West Africa has brought to this issue.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action her Department is taking to educate people living in Africa about the dangers of child trafficking. [40238]

Clare Short: DFID is supporting the work of agencies such as Anti-Slavery International and Save the Children that collaborate with local civil society organisations to raise awareness of the issues of child labour and trafficking.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action she is taking to help developing countries implement the International Labour Organisation conventions on child trafficking. [40237]

Clare Short: DFID is supporting the work of the International Labour Organisation to help developing countries implement Convention 182, on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour, which includes trafficking, both through our four-year Partnership agreement, and through support to specific ILO operations such as the regional programme in Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia and China.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what conclusions she has drawn form the UNHCR report into the sexual exploitation of children by aid workers in Africa. [40242]

Clare Short: The initial findings of the UNHCR and Save the Children-UK Assessment Mission are very disturbing. We welcome their openness in bringing this issue to public attention and strongly endorse the Framework for Action adopted. The agencies implicated by the allegations in the report must take urgent action to stamp out any exploitation uncovered of the people that they are there to protect.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the levels of child trafficking in each of the last five years. [40240]

Clare Short: The covert and illicit nature of child trafficking makes it very difficult to establish accurate statistics, but there is wide agreement and growing concern that evidence of the practice is growing in all regions of the world.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance her Department is providing to UK charities working in Africa to prevent the sexual exploitation of children by their overseas staff. [40244]

Clare Short: UK charities and other aid agencies clearly have to take responsibility for the conduct of their staff, both those from the UK and those who are recruited locally. They need to ensure that they have policies and procedures in place to prevent the recruitment of unsuitable individuals, to monitor their programme operations, and to take action against staff who abuse children or misuse their authority in any other way.

HIV/AIDS

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) how much money to address HIV/AIDS was given by her Department to each international agency in each year since 1995–96 in *(a)* cash terms and *(b)* constant prices; [40415]

(2) how much money to address HIV/AIDS was given by her Department to *(a)* state agencies, *(b)* NGOs and *(c)* other bodies in each recipient country in each year since 1995–96 in (i) cash terms and (ii) constant prices. [40414]

Clare Short: My Department has made the following contributions to UNAIDS:

1995–96—£1 million.
1996–97—£3.5 million
1997–98—£2.3 million.
1998–99—£2.75 million.
1999–2000—£3 million.
2000–01—£3 million.

We have also in this period provided funding to other international agencies with significant HIV/AIDS programmes, including the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Development Programme, UNICEF, the EC, and the World Bank. However, it is not possible to determine the portion of our contributions used for HIV/AIDS work as opposed to other work of these agencies.

The details requested about aid given to state agencies, NGOs and other bodies is not held centrally and to provide it in the form requested would be at disproportionate cost to my Department.

Sri Lanka

Mr Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what requests for financial assistance, and for what projects, have been made by the Sri Lanken Government to her Department in the last two years. [40518]

Clare Short: We have agreed with the Government of Sri Lanka that DFID's programme will focus on inter-communal reconciliation, livelihood security for the poor in conflict areas and basic education. Details of our work in Sri Lanka are outlined in our Country Strategy Paper, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Full details of DFID's programme in Sri Lanka were also provided in my answer to a previous question from my hon. Friend on 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, 18 December 2001, column 190W.

My officials have also been approached by the Government of Sri Lanka for new programmes to support social harmony through basic education and for confidence building measures in support of the peace process. Design of these programmes is underway.

In 2001 DFID declined a proposal for support to the textile industry because it fell outside the agreed focal areas.

Tanzania

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she was informed of the application for an export licence for the sale of an air defence system to Tanzania. [39830]

Clare Short: The applications were first drawn to my attention in October 2001.

Afghanistan

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the level of funding for the Ministry of Women in Afghanistan. [39474]

Clare Short: I discussed the funding of the Afghan Ministry of Women's Affairs when I met Jim Wolfensohn, in Tokyo in January 2002. Since then, the US government has agreed to provide support to the Ministry of Women's Affairs in partnership with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

My Department are also in the process of finalising support to help establish the office of the Afghan Ministry for Women's Affairs in partnership with IOM.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 11 March 2002

DEFENCE

Challenger 2 Tank

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans the MOD has for improvements to the Challenger 2 tank following the training exercise in Oman; what they will be; and if he will make a statement. [38279]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. Friend the Minister for the armed forces gave on 22 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 733W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones).

Iraq

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions *(a)* coalition aircraft and *(b)* UK aircraft patrolling the southern no-fly zone in Iraq have (i) detected violations of the no-fly zones, (ii) detected a direct threat to a coalition aircraft and (iii) released ordnance in (1) January and (2) February, stating for each month the tonnage of ordnance released; what has been (A) the nature of the violation detected, (B) the nature of the threat detected and (C) the category of target attacked in percentage terms; and if he will make a statement. [38414]

Mr. Ingram: The information is:

(i) No-fly-zone (NFZ) violations are detected in several ways, though rarely (if ever) by tactical aircraft. For reasons of operational security we do not release details of detection methods. No violations of the southern NFZ were detected in January or February.

(ii) In January and February, coalition aircraft recorded threats on a total of 11 occasions, as follows:

January—8

February—3.

10 of the recorded threats were attacks by anti-aircraft artillery. The remaining one was an attack by other weapons.

(iii) Coalition aircraft in the southern NFZ released 9 tons of ordnance in January, and none in February.

100 per cent. of ordnance released was in self-defence responses by coalition aircraft against military targets in the Iraqi Integrated Air Defence System.

Type 45 Destroyers

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on the delays in the contract to build six type 45 destroyers; [39201]

(2) if he will make a statement on the additional costs expected due to delays in signing a contract for the building of six type 45 destroyers. [39200]

Dr. Moonie: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced to the House on 10 July 2001, *Official Report*, columns 676–85, the timing of the contract was dependent upon the completion of satisfactory negotiations between the Ministry of Defence and the prime contractor, BAE Systems Electronics, and between the prime contractor, BAE Systems Marine and Vosper Thornycroft.

While it was originally planned that by September 2001 the parties would enter into a legally binding agreement, intensive work on the programme has clarified the timescales in which the shipbuilders had to make their investment decisions to maintain the T45 programme. The commitment, as announced by the Minister for Defence Procurement on 18 February 2002, has been made in time to allow the shipbuilders to make their investment decisions and participate in the programme as planned.

It should be emphasised that both shipbuilders have been working hard in the Type 45 programme under the prime contractor for around two years. The ship design, which is rapidly maturing, has been unaffected by the negotiations between the prime contractor and shipbuilders over the build contracts.

There are no additional costs due to the later than anticipated contract signing and we remain fully committed to achieving our scheduled in service date for the First-of-Class of 2007.

Army Personnel

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* Lieutenant-Colonels, *(b)* Majors, *(c)* Captains, *(d)* Sergeant-Majors (Warrant Officer Class II), *(e)* Sergeants and *(f)* Corporals there are meant to be in the Army; and how many there are at the latest date for which figures are available. [39195]

Mr. Ingram: The following table shows the strengths, by rank, against the 2001 Manpower Planning Target.

	Target figure	*Strength as at 1 February 2002*
Lieutenant-Colonel	1,481	1,625
Major	4,673	4,555
Captain	4,893	4,181
Sergeant-Major (WO II)	4,435	4,962
Sergeant	11,190	10,212
Corporal	17,627	15,922

These figures do not include Lieutenant Colonels on the Special List (Lt Col (SL)), Warrant Officer Class I, Staff Sergeant or Lance Corporal.

The target figures for each rank are currently undergoing routine review; this will take into account the establishment changes made by individual budget holders since the 2001 targets were set. These establishment changes have, in particular, led to a marked increase in the requirement for staff officers at the rank of Major and Lieutenant Colonel.

Nuclear Tests (Nevada)

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the joint UK/US Los Alamos National Laboratory underground sub-critical nuclear test which took place at Nevada on 14 February; and if he will give an undertaking that the information gathered from the test will not be used to design a replacement for existing Trident warheads. [40649]

Dr. Moonie: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 12 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 165–66W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac). The purpose of this experiment was to help us to ensure that UK nuclear weapons remain safe and reliable. No new warhead system is being designed by the UK and the experiment was entirely consistent with our obligations under the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

Court Martial

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people were sentenced to a period of imprisonment by court martial in the last year; and for what offences. [41362]

Mr. Ingram: During the year 2000, which is the most recent year for which complete figures are available at this time, the number of service personnel sentenced to imprisonment and military detention by courts-martial was as follows:

Royal Navy

- Military detention—nine, consisting of:
  - Three for assault
  - Two for actual bodily harm
  - Two for theft
  - One for dishonesty
  - One for possession of drugs

Army

- Imprisonment—31 consisting of:
  - 15 for offences concerned with violence
  - Nine for sexual offences
  - Four for theft
  - Three for drug related offences
- Military detention—257, consisting of:
  - 100 for crimes of violence:
  - 82 for absence without leave
  - 35 for theft
  - Nine for sexual offences
  - Six for drug related offences
  - Five for desertion
  - Four for driving under the influence
  - One for criminal damage
  - 15 for other offences

Royal Air Force

- Imprisonment—four, consisting of:
  - Two for furnishing false information
  - One for theft
  - One for indecent and common assault
- Military detention—19, consisting of:
  - Five for false accounting
  - Five for actual bodily harm—one with battery, one with drunkenness
  - Two for theft—one with obtaining by deception, one with prejudice to good order and wilful damage
  - One for unlawful wounding
  - One for failure to attend for duty
  - One for drug possession
  - One for battery
  - One for disgraceful conduct, drunkenness and disobeying lawful command
  - One for indecent assault
  - One for obtaining property by deception and theft.

Notes:

1. The figures listed do not include suspended detentions.

2. Five members of the Army received other forms of custodial sentences (eg Young Offenders Institution, three for crimes of violence and two for AWOL).

Sierra Leone

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his plans for British troop deployments in Sierra Leone after the elections in that country. [40855]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* As I explained to the House on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 15–16, we are maintaining our current military presence in Sierra Leone of some 360 shore-based personnel over the period of the elections in May. Thereafter, our intention is that the International Military Advisory and Training Team will continue the task of developing the capacity of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces.

Departmental Expenditure Limits

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer of 26 February 2002 to the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster), *Official Report*, column 1133W, on departmental expenditure limits, for what capital projects the sum of £261,594,000 transferred from the capital element to the resource element of the departmental expenditure limit had been earmarked. [41773]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 8 March 2002]:* The circumstances that give rise to transfers between the Department's capital and resource expenditure limits were described in the answer given to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) on 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 325W. There are typically in excess of 1,000 capital projects and sub-projects under way in the Ministry of Defence at any given moment. It is not possible to attribute the sum transferred to individual projects, the spend profiles of almost all of which will have changed since the expenditure limits were set for the current year.

Service Pensions

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the armed forces pension scheme retired in *(a)* 1975, *(b)* 1976 and *(c)* 1977. [33620]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* This information is not available for Army retirements and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The figures for the Royal Navy and RAF are as follows.

Retirements

1975—21,663

1976—20,328

1977—12,690.

Retired has been taken to mean exited the armed forces.

Aerospace Industry (Assistance)

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received, since 11 September 2001, on helping the aerospace industry by advancing military orders; and if he will make a statement. [38200]

Dr. Moonie: We have received several representations from hon. Members and industry. The Government have a close interest in the success of the aerospace industry, with whom we maintain regular dialogue. We have examined ways in which it may be possible to bring orders forward, and we are always happy to discuss any specific proposals. At this time we have not identified any orders which could be brought forward within our available resources and industrial capacity but the UK aerospace industry already benefits from a large programme of work on Ministry of Defence projects including JSF, Eurofighter, A400M, Nimrod, and Apache.

Rail Journeys (Staff)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy that rail journeys undertaken by staff in his Department should ordinarily be on standard class tickets. [40450]

Dr. Moonie: No. Where Ministry of Defence civil servants are required to travel on official business they are expected to do so in the most effective and economic way. When journeys are made by rail then the class is determined by reference to the individual's grade. There are no plans to change the current entitlements, which form part of the terms of employment and cannot unilaterally be altered.

Tomahawk Missiles

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what factors were considered in awarding Raytheon the contract to remanufacture Tomahawk missiles for the armed forces; if he plans to publish the results of the tests performed; and if he will make a statement. [40614]

Dr. Moonie: The contract to remanufacture Tomahawk missiles is between the United States Department of Defense and Raytheon, which is the only manufacturer of this equipment. The Ministry of Defence requirement has been added to the US purchase under a Foreign Military Sales agreement with the US DoD. The performance of the remanufactured missiles will match that of the Tomahawk Block IIIC missiles already in service with the Royal Navy.

Apache Helicopter

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are for the new Apache helicopters to use the combined laser designator rangefinder; what safety assessment has been conducted; and if he will make a statement. [40609]

Dr. Moonie: The WAH64 Apache helicopter is fitted with a combined laser rangefinder and designator supplied by Lockheed Martin. A full safety assessment is being undertaken, and will be subject to clearance by the appropriate Ministry of Defence Safety Committee.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Apache attack helicopters are in service; and how many are due to become operational. [41379]

Mr. Ingram: 14 Apache attack helicopters have been accepted into service by the Army. A further three aircraft are engaged in trial work. The balance of 50 aircraft have yet to be delivered. We expect a maximum of 58 to be in use at any one time: 48 will be allocated to operational squadrons and 10 to the School of Army Aviation.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in which operations the Apache helicopter has been used. [41381]

Mr. Ingram: There have not been any United Kingdom Apache attack helicopters used in operations to date.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the armaments of the Apache helicopter and on how much each helicopter is worth. [41380]

Mr. Ingram: The UK Apache helicopter will be armed with a combination of Hellfire Missiles, CRV7 rockets and a 30mm gun. The aircraft is being acquired through a combined development and production contract for the aircraft, support equipment and spares. As such, the contract does not specify a unit price. However, for internal resources accounting purposes, we have estimated the attribution of the contract price and this gives a value of some £27.5 million per aircraft. This estimate is based on necessarily subjective assessments and should not be regarded as an accurate replacement cost for the aircraft.

Accommodation Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost was of hotel accommodation for departmental staff working away from home in each of the last four years. [41070]

Dr. Moonie: The cost of hotel accommodation used by Ministry of Defence civil servants working away from home in each of the last four years is as follows:

Year	*£ million*
1998–99	14.3
1999–2000	16.0
2000–01	16.1
2001–02	13.9

These figures are based upon annual statistics covering the period May to April. The final year's total is based on actual figures for May 2001 to January 2002 and projected to give a 12-month total.

Relocation Expenses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his policy is on the payment of relocation expenses to staff in his Department. [41024]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence's policies on the payment to its civil servants of relocation expenses follow the general principles set out in the Civil Service Management Code and are detailed in the MOD Civilian Transfer Manual.

Staff who are transferred in the public interest are entitled to a range of financial assistance to enable them to take up their new duties. Depending upon the circumstances, the individual may be entitled to support for a move of home or, where a move of home is not justified, assistance with additional commuting costs. In order to qualify for reimbursement, expenses must be reasonable, necessarily incurred and result in no overall "betterment" in the standard of housing. In order to facilitate house moves, the Department operates a contractor-run Relocation Company Scheme, which offers Guaranteed Sale Prices to vendors as well as estate agency, survey, removals and legal services.

Snagge Report

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 28 February 2002, ref. 38529, on the Snagge report, for what reason he will not publish Colonel Snagge's report "The Command Structure in the United Kingdom"; and if he will discuss this with the Open Government Task Force. [40971]

Mr. Ingram: The "Snagge Report" was an unsolicited piece of work by the Chief of Staff of the Division then based in York. It argued for keeping the headquarters of 2 Division in York and, as such, provided a very one-sided opinion. It did not represent a balanced Army view, and its publication would be highly misleading. For these reasons, I decided not to release it.

The Code of Practice on Access to Government Information makes no requirement to consult before making a decision to withhold information under an exemption.

Future Strategic Tanker Aircraft

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will announce the preferred bidder for the Future Strategic Tanker Aircraft; and when he expects final contracts to be signed. [40885]

Dr. Moonie: Our current aim is to decide later this year whether PFI will provide the best value money procurement solution for the Future Strategic Tanker Aircraft project and, if so, which consortium is our preferred bidder. Contract signature is currently scheduled for 2003. However, the precise timing will depend on a range of factors, including the satisfactory conclusion of complex contract negotiations.

Surinder Nath Saggar

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 14W, on sovereign bases, when he will give a substantive reply concerning Surinder Nath Saggar of Brompton on Swale; and what plans he has to revise the *(a)* Race Relations Act 1976 and *(b)* Sex Discrimination Act 1975 to make them applicable to service personnel working on sovereign bases outside the European Union. [41140]

Mr. Ingram: Lieutenant Colonel Saggar has been granted leave to appeal the decision of the Employment Tribunal to the Employment Appeal Tribunal. A preliminary hearing has been listed for 1 July 2002. It would therefore be inappropriate for me to comment further on matters relating to this case in view of the on-going proceedings.

Sovereign Bases

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the British Medical Association concerning the application of *(a)* the Race Relations Act 1976 and *(b)* the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 to service personnel serving on sovereign bases outside the European Union. [41267]

Mr. Ingram: There have been no such discussions between the Ministry of Defence and the British Medical Association.

Explosives

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if the new explosive factory in the US run by BAE Systems will meet all the UK's requirements for military explosives; [40962]

(2) what his long-term policy is on the manufacture of explosives in the UK. [40963]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence places contracts for the supply of whole munitions. The sourcing of components for those munitions, including high explosives, is a matter for the prime contractor. The MOD aim is to achieve value for the taxpayer, as well as the security of supply of safe and reliable munitions for the armed forces. The Framework Partnering Agreement between the MOD and Royal Ordnance Defence which was signed in 1999, has been established to help ensure these aims, and world benchmark prices for munitions supplied to the MOD, are achieved.

Shackleton Barracks

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what disciplinary action has been taken against soldiers stationed at Shackleton Barracks following the manufacture, transport and display on the anniversary of Bloody Sunday of a banner; and what measures he has taken in respect of the effect on the relatives of those killed. [40854]

Mr. Ingram: None. No evidence has been presented which suggests that soldiers from Shackleton Barracks, Ballykelly were involved in this incident.

Air Conditioning

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures were taken to ensure that the consultant advising on the installation of air conditioning during the recent refurbishment of *(a)* his Department's main building and *(b)* RAF High Wycombe was aware of the

Government's policy on the use of hydrofluorocarbon refrigerants in air-conditioning; and if he will make a statement on the measures taken by the consultant to source practical and safe alternatives to hydrofluorocarbon-based air-conditioning. [41173]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether an installer capable of installing not-in-kind air conditioning was invited to quote for the recent refurbishment contract for *(a)* his Department's main building and *(b)* RAF High Wycombe; and if he will make a statement. [41172]

Dr. Moonie: It is assumed that the term not-in-kind refers to an air-conditioning/refrigeration system that is not based upon a vapour compression refrigeration cycle using halocarbon refrigerants.

No installer capable of installing not-in-kind air conditioning was invited to quote for the recent refurbishment of main building or the chiller replacement unit in the Strike Command Operations Centre at RAF High Wycombe.

RMSE Brompton Barracks

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he plans to make a statement on the public-private partnership for RMSE Brompton Barracks. [40847]

Mr. Ingram: Bids for the public-private partnership project for the Royal School of Military Engineering at Chatham and Minley (which encompass Brompton Barracks) are currently subject to rigorous examination by the project team. I envisage an announcement on the selection of the preferred bidder towards the end of this year.

Refurbishment

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) who provided or is providing the *(a)* windows and *(b)* doors for the refurbishment of the MOD building; [41352]

(2) what organisation or company provided the certification for the doors and windows for the refurbishment of the Ministry of Defence building to show that they were produced from sustainably managed sources; and if he will place a copy of these certificates in the Library. [41351]

Dr. Moonie: The existing aluminium framed windows are not being replaced except for those beyond economic repair or damaged during the construction process. These will be replaced with windows of similar construction.

The developed Ministry of Defence Main Building will be open plan in design. Existing doors taken from the building will be re-used in certain circumstances, e.g. fire doors. No contracts have yet been placed in respect of either windows or doors for the redevelopment.

Logistics

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on proposals to review defence logistics following the action in Afghanistan. [41422]

Mr. Ingram: It is our normal practice to undertake a full audit of all operations and exercises with the aim of identifying lessons to be learned, including those that are relevant to defence logistics matters. Work is in hand on the lessons to be learned from all aspects of operational deployments to Afghanistan.

Fast Jet Pilots

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many fast jet pilots have left the RAF in each of the past five years; how many of those left at the end of their commission; and how many sought premature voluntary retirement. [41610]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 8 March 2002]:* The numbers of fast jet pilots who left the RAF in each of the past five years are set out in the table.

	Exits at end of commission[2]	*PVR*	*Other reasons*[3]	*Total*
1997–98	56	23	3	82
1998–99	64	23	7	94
1999–2000	53	23	4	80
2000–01	37	22	0	59
2001–02[1]	46	21	4	71

[1] Figures to 31 January 2002

[2] Includes those leaving at option points

[3] Includes compulsory retirement, medical discharges and death-in-service

A400M

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what discussions he has had with the manufacturer of the A400M about the aircraft's engines; what assessment he has made of the power to size ratio of the A400M engines; what steps he has taken to promote Rolls Royce engines for the A400M; when the first A400M will come into service; and when the first A400M will come into service in the UK; [41936]

(2) how many years it will take to bring the A400M into service; whether the retendering process for the A400M's engines will delay its introduction into service; what discussions he has had with his German counterpart about the Bundestag Finance Committee's discussions on the A400M; how many United Kingdom jobs are dependent on the A400M; and if he will make a statement. [41922]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Centrifuge (RAF Henlow)

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the centrifuge at RAF Henlow begins operations; how overdue is the start of operations; and what measures he will take with regard to the contractor responsible. [42338]

Mr. Ingram: The contract for the human centrifuge at RAF Henlow has been terminated. Negotiations with the original contractor are presently on-going and therefore it would not be appropriate to comment at the present time.

Headley Court

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many patients are waiting for treatment at the joint services rehabilitation centre at Headley Court. [42337]

Dr. Moonie: As at 7 March this year, some 880 patients have been referred for treatment and are currently awaiting admission to the Defence Services Medical Rehabilitation Centre, Headley Court.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Departmental Events

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will list the *(a)* conferences, *(b)* seminars, *(c)* workshops, *(d)* exhibitions and *(e)* press conferences which have been sponsored by her Department and which took place on non-Departmental premises in each of the last four years giving the title, purpose, date and cost of each. [34296]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* My own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Offices, was the joint sponsor, with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, of a conference of Presidents of the Supreme Courts and Attorneys General of the member states of the European Union in financial year 2000–01. The cost to LSLO was £34,534.25. There is no record of any other qualifying event occurring over the period in question.

The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Research

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General how many people were working in a research capacity in the office of the *(a)* CPS, *(b)* Attorney-General and *(c)* Solicitor-General in each year since the inception of the CPS, as a percentage of (i) staff turnover and (ii) the number of people employed. [37777]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* The Policy Directorate in CPS Headquarters, based in London and York, presently employs around 60 staff, of which 30 are qualified lawyers. This constitutes 0.05 per cent. of the number of people presently employed by the CPS. Unfortunately, figures to show the number of Policy Directorate staff in each year since the inception of the CPS cannot be disaggregated from recorded data either as a percentage of staff turnover or the number of staff employed.

The Directorate has responsibility for development of prosecution policy, setting standards and giving guidance to CPS staff on the criminal law generally. It also contributes to the development of criminal law by liaising with other agencies on new legislative proposals and initiatives. This often involves research based work for both the legally qualified staff and for a smaller number of administrative staff.

The office of the Attorney-General and Solicitor-General also does not employ persons in a specific research capacity, but is staffed predominantly by lawyers whose role is to brief the Law Officers on a wide range of issues.

Accountancy Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what the total cost to her Department was for accountancy services in each of the last four years. [34174]

The Solicitor-General: The total cost to my own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, of accountancy services in each of the last four year has been nil. In relation to the other Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible, the details are as follows:

Crown Prosecution Service

The total cost to the Crown Prosecution Service of accountancy services, in each of the last four years has been as follows:

£29,000 in 1997–98

£21,000 in 1998–99

£23,000 in 1999–2000

£108,000 in 2000–01.

"Accountancy services" is taken to denote services provided by an external firm of accountants or their management consultancy arms if the assignment if connected with financial matters.

The CPS also uses accountants as expert witnesses in criminal prosecutions. Expenditure over the last four years in this respect has been as follows:

£46,000 in 1997–98

£75,000 in 1998–99

£52,000 in 1999–2000

£101,000 in 2000–01.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

The Treasury Solicitor's Department has an in-house Finance Team which has responsibility for the expenditure, billing activity and accounting for the Treasury Solicitor's Department Agency, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, residual matters from the closure in September 1999 of the Government Property Lawyer's Agency and, since 1 April 2001, HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate. The team has required additional accounting resources during the last few years to deal with the introduction of Resource Accounting and Budgeting; the associated replacement of the accounting computer system; and a substantial increase in the business of the Treasury Solicitor's Department Agency.

The total costs of the Treasury Solicitor's Department's Finance Team for the last four years are as follows:

£546,000 in 1997–98

£645,000 in 1998–99

£877,000 in 1999–2000

£1,262,000 in 2000–01

£726,000 in 2001–02 (up to 31 December 2001).

These figures include direct staff, agency temporary staff and independent consultants' costs, a new computer system and other direct costs incurred by the Treasury Solicitor's Department Agency.

Serious Fraud Office

The Serious Fraud Office has only incurred accounting costs over the last four years by the use of specific accountancy expertise to support case investigation. There have been no administrative accountancy services other than external/internal audit by the National Audit Office and Inland Revenue respectively.

The total costs incurred for accountancy work to support cases have been as follows:

£1,445,472.14 in 1997–98

£1,477,816.95 in 1998–99

£872,523.95 in 1999–2000

£1,207.917.93 in 2000–01

£1,482,945.64 in 2001–02 (to date).

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will list for 1997–98 and for each subsequent financial year, including the current year to date, the amount spent by *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies on (i) food and (ii) alcohol, indicating how much was spent on guests, and how much in respect of (A) Ministers and (B) staff, broken down to show how much was provided directly by her Department and how much reclaimed. [34460]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* My own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, spent the following sums in providing hospitality and meeting refreshments in 1997–98 and subsequent financial years:

Hospitality

£3,259.79 in 1997–98

£3,120.70 in 1998–99

£3,726.64 in 1999–2000

£4,296.13 in 2000–01

£2,693.89 in 2001–02

Meeting Refreshments

£931.36 in 1997–98

£317.56 in 1998–99

£799.59 in 1999–2000

£1,769.85 in 2000–01

£377.75 in 2001–02.

Due to the accounting system used by the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, the cost information provided could not be divided to show the amount spent on food and alcohol, and the amounts spent on guests, Ministers and staff without incurring disproportionate cost. For the same reason information cannot be provided regarding how much of the money spent by the Department was provided directly by the Department and how much was reclaimed.

Crown Prosecution Service

In 1997–98 and subsequent financial years the Crown Prosecution Service spent the following sums in providing hospitality:

£7,819 in 1997–98

£4,466 in 1998–99

£4,084 in 1999–2000

£10,533 in 2000–01

£18,710 in 2001–02.

It would not be possible, without incurring disproportionate costs, to identify how much money was spent on food and drink, how much on guests, Ministers and staff, how much money was provided directly by the Department and how much was reclaimed.

The Department's policy on the provision of hospitality requires that the number of staff at any event must not exceed the number of guests. The thrust of the policy is that CPS representation must be kept to an absolute minimum.

Expenditure on hospitality is restricted to a maximum of £25 per head for lunch and £35 per head for dinner. These sums are to cover all food and drink.

The increase in expenditure in the last two years is a consequence of the CPS policy to raise its profile in the community and in the media. Recent initiatives such as Direct Communication to Victims and the Equality and Diversity Action Plan on Race have been publicly launched to the press and invited members of the public and relevant organisations.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

In 1997–98 and subsequent financial years the Treasury Solicitor's Department spent the following sums in providing hospitality:

£4,591.56 in 1997–98

£4,702.97 in 1998–99

£5,872.31 in 1999–2000

£5,965.65 in 2000–01

£4,598.78 in 2001–02.

The contract management and financial analysis systems currently in place within the Treasury Solicitor's Department mean that it is not possible to distinguish between money spent on food and alcohol and between guests and others, without incurring disproportionate cost. These systems are being upgraded as part of improvements which commenced some months ago. Most of the improvements should be in place during the course of the financial year 2002–03.

In relation to agencies and non-departmental public bodies, the Government Property Lawyers spent the following sums in providing hospitality in 1997–98 and subsequent financial years:

£1,438.35 in 1997–98

£684.92 in 1998–99

£7.62 in 1999–2000

£0 in 2000–01

£0 in 2001–02.

The Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate has not incurred any hospitality costs since they became part of the Treasury Solicitor's Department.

Serious Fraud Office

In 1997–98 and subsequent financial years the Serious Fraud Office spent the following sums in providing hospitality and meeting refreshments:

Hospitality

£7,881.36 in 1997–98

£6,260.46 in 1998–99

£6,702.39 in 1999–2000

£6,035.78 in 2000–01

£8,555.03 in 2001–02 (to date)

Meeting Refreshments

£8,444.81 in 1997–98

£8,389.30 in 1998–99

£7,166.21 in 1999–2000

£6,089.75 in 2001–01

£7,025.40 in 2001–02 (to date).

This information could not be divided to show the amount spent on food and alcohol, and the amounts spent on guests, Ministers and staff without incurring disproportionate cost. For the same reason information cannot be provided regarding how much of the money spent was provided directly by the Department and how much was reclaimed.

The Serious Fraud Office has neither agencies nor non-departmental bodies.

Lost/Stolen Property

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will list those items valued at less than £50 each which have been stolen or lost from her Department in each of the last four years. [34210]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* I am not aware of any items valued at less than £50 being stolen from or lost by the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers during the years 1998–2002.

The details of the other Departments for which the Attorney General is responsible are as follows:

Crown Prosecution Service

No items valued at less than £50 have been recorded as lost or stolen by the Crown Prosecution Service in any of the last four years.

CPS systems focus on more expensive items and it is not considered cost effective to maintain detailed records of items valued at less than £50. It is possible that such items have been stolen or lost but not reported.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

No items valued at less than £50 have been recorded as lost or stolen by the Treasury Solicitors Department in any of the last four years.

Serious Fraud Office

The records regarding losses and thefts of official items from February 1998 to February 2002 have been examined. Up to the end of December 1999 there were no recorded losses or thefts of official items valued at £50 or under. From January 2000 policy was changed so that no records are made of any official items lost or stolen if their value is under £50.

Crown Prosecution Service

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General how many staff, broken down by type, the CPS budget provided for in each CPS region; and how many vacancies there were per type of staff in each year since the inception of the CPS. [35942]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 14 February 2002]:* A budget to meet basic running costs needs—excluding fixed accommodation costs—is allocated to each CPS area. Its use is not prescribed. Areas are empowered to apportion it between staffing and any other costs in accordance with their judgment of local circumstances. Thus staffing mix can vary from area to area, depending on the local judgments made in each area.

In their business plans for the 2001–02 financial year completed in March 2001, CPS areas profiled their estimated staffing numbers on a monthly basis. The results for each of the existing staffing groups—Chief Crown Prosecutors, lawyers and administration—are set out in the tables.

The CPS does not keep historical data on the number of vacancies within the Department. Areas decide the numbers and mix of staff against the budget available to them, rather than against an overall complement figure.

Area	*April 2001*	*May 2001*	*June 2001*	*July 2001*	*August 2001*	*September 2001*	*October 2001*	*November 2001*	*December 2001*	*January 2002*	*February 2002*	*March 2002*
Estimated lawyer staff in post												
P01 Avon and Somerset	44.0	44.0	53.0	53.0	53.0	53.0	53.0	53.0	53.0	53.0	53.0	53.0
P02 Bedfordshire	18.0	18.0	20.0	20.0	20.0	20.0	20.0	20.0	20.0	20.0	20.0	20.0
P03 Cambridgeshire	19.0	20.0	21.0	23.0	23.0	23.0	23.0	23.0	23.0	23.0	23.0	23.0
P04 Cheshire	33.8	37.8	37.8	37.8	37.8	37.8	37.8	37.8	37.8	37.8	37.8	37.8
P06 Cleveland	24.8	26.8	26.8	28.8	30.8	30.8	30.8	30.8	30.8	30.8	30.8	30.8
P07 Cumbria	23.0	23.0	23.0	23.0	23.0	23.0	23.0	23.0	23.0	23.0	23.0	23.0
P08 Derbyshire	29.9	29.9	30.9	30.9	30.9	30.9	30.9	30.9	30.9	30.9	30.9	30.9
P09 Devon and Cornwall	37.0	38.0	38.0	38.0	38.0	38.0	38.0	38.0	38.0	38.0	38.0	38.0
P10 Dorset	16.8	18.8	18.8	18.8	18.8	18.8	18.8	18.8	18.8	18.8	18.8	18.8
P11 Durham	23.1	25.1	25.1	25.1	25.1	25.1	25.1	25.1	25.1	25.1	25.1	25.1
P12 Dyfed/Powys	21.4	21.4	21.4	21.4	21.4	21.4	21.4	21.4	21.4	21.4	21.4	21.4
P13 Essex	39.8	39.8	39.8	39.8	39.8	39.8	39.8	39.8	39.8	39.8	39.8	39.8
P14 Gloucestershire	16.4	15.4	15.4	15.4	15.4	16.4	16.4	16.4	16.4	16.4	16.4	16.4
P15 Greater Manchester	114.1	118.1	126.1	130.7	130.7	130.7	130.7	130.7	130.7	130.7	130.7	130.7
P16 Gwent	23.5	29.5	29.5	29.5	29.5	29.5	29.5	29.5	29.5	29.5	29.5	29.5
P17 Hampshire and Isle of Wight	50.0	55.0	55.0	55.0	55.0	60.0	60.0	60.0	60.0	65.0	65.0	65.0
P18 Hertfordshire	26.6	26.6	26.6	25.8	25.8	26.6	26.6	26.6	26.6	27.4	27.4	27.4
P19 Humberside	28.6	30.6	30.6	30.6	30.6	30.6	30.6	30.6	30.6	30.6	30.6	30.6
P20 Kent	44.7	44.7	46.7	46.7	48.7	48.7	50.7	50.7	50.7	50.7	50.7	50.7
70.4P21 Lancashire	70.4	70.4	70.4	70.4	70.4	70.4	70.4	70.4	70.4	70.4	70.4	70.4
P22 Leicestershire	28.1	28.1	29.1	34.1	34.1	34.1	34.1	34.1	34.1	34.1	34.1	34.1
P23 Lincolnshire	16.2	18.2	18.2	18.2	18.2	18.2	18.2	18.2	18.2	18.2	18.2	18.2
P24 Merseyside	67.7	68.3	70.3	70.3	71.3	73.3	73.3	73.3	75.3	76.3	76.3	76.3
P25 Metropolitan and City	270.0	270.0	270.0	315.0	315.0	315.0	315.0	315.0	315.0	315.0	315.0	315.0
P26 Norfolk	26.4	26.4	27.4	27.4	27.4	27.4	27.4	27.4	27.4	27.4	27.4	27.4
P27 Northamptonshire	19.8	19.8	19.8	21.8	21.8	21.8	23.8	23.8	23.8	23.8	23.8	23.8
P28 Northumbria	66.9	69.9	71.9	71.9	71.9	71.9	71.9	71.9	71.9	71.9	71.9	71.9
P29 North Wales	22.9	22.4	22.4	22.4	22.4	22.4	22.4	22.4	22.4	22.4	22.4	22.4
P30 North Yorkshire	17.4	17.4	17.4	17.4	17.4	17.4	17.4	17.4	17.4	17.4	17.4	17.4

Area	April 2001	May 2001	June 2001	July 2001	August 2001	September 2001	October 2001	November 2001	December 2001	January 2002	February 2002	March 2002
P31 Nottinghamshire	49.0	49.0	52.0	52.	052.0	52.0	52.0	52.0	52.0	52.0	52.0	52.0
P32 South Wales	60.9	66.9	66.9	66.9	66.9	66.9	66.9	66.9	70.9	70.9	70.9	70.9
P33 South Yorkshire	44.0	49.0	49.0	49.0	51.0	51.0	51.0	51.0	51.0	51.0	51.0	51.0
P34 Staffordshire	36.0	36.0	36.0	38.0	38.0	40.0	40.0	40.0	40.0	40.0	40.0	40.0
P35 Suffolk	18.6	19.6	19.6	19.6	19.6	19.6	19.6	19.6	19.6	19.6	19.6	19.6
P36 Surrey	19.1	19.1	22.1	22.1	22.1	22.1	22.1	22.1	22.1	22.1	22.1	22.1
P37 Sussex	40.0	40.0	42.0	42.0	44.0	44.0	44.0	45.0	45.0	45.0	45.0	45.0
P38 Thames Valley	50.0	51.0	51.0	52.0	53.0	53.0	53.0	53.0	53.0	53.0	53.0	53.0
P39 Warwickshire	11.0	11.0	11.0	11.0	11.0	11.0	11.0	11.0	11.0	11.0	11.0	11.0
P40 West Mercia	31.2	33.2	33.2	33.2	33.2	33.2	33.6	33.6	33.6	33.6	33.6	33.6
P41 West Midlands	112.3	112.3	122.3	124.3	128.3	135.3	140.3	140.3	140.3	140.3	140.3	140.3
P42 West Yorkshire	91.0	91.0	101.0	104.0	104.0	110.0	110.0	110.0	110.0	110.0	110.0	110.0
P43 Wiltshire	18.4	18.4	18.4	18.4	18.4	18.4	18.4	18.4	18.4	18.4	18.4	18.4
Total	1,822	1,870	1,927	1,995	2,009	2,033	2,042	2,043	2,049	2,056	2,056	2,056
Estimated Total Administration and SCS Staff in Post												
P01 Avon and Somerset	65.0	65.0	71.0	71.0	71.0	71.0	71.0	71.0	71.0	71.0	71.0	71.0
P02 Bedfordshire	30.0	33.0	33.0	35.0	35.0	35.0	33.0	33.0	33.0	33.0	33.0	33.0
P03 Cambridgeshire	30.4	38.0	38.0	38.0	38.0	38.0	38.0	38.0	38.0	38.0	38.0	38.0
P04 Cheshire	60.4	70.4	70.4	70.4	70.4	70.4	70.4	70.4	70.4	70.4	70.4	70.4
P06 Cleveland	48.2	49.2	49.2	53.2	59.2	62.2	62.2	62.2	62.2	62.2	62.2	62.2
P07 Cumbria	33.2	33.2	33.2	33.2	33.2	33.2	33.2	33.2	33.2	33.2	33.2	33.2
P08 Derbyshire	58.1	58.1	59.1	59.1	59.1	59.1	59.1	59.1	59.1	59.1	59.1	59.1
P09 Devon and Cornwall	63.4	68.4	68.4	68.4	68.4	68.4	69.4	69.4	69.4	69.4	69.4	69.4
P10 Dorset	27.6	30.0	30.2	30.2	30.2	30.2	30.2	30.2	30.2	30.2	30.2	30.2
P11 Durham	34.8	37.8	37.8	37.8	37.8	37.8	37.8	37.8	37.8	37.8	37.8	37.8
P12 Dyfed/Powys	30.3	31.3	31.3	34.3	34.3	34.3	33.3	33.3	33.3	33.3	33.3	33.3
P13 Essex	68.5	68.5	68.5	68.5	68.5	68.5	67.5	67.5	67.5	67.5	67.5	67.5
P14 Gloucestershire	30.7	30.7	30.7	30.7	30.7	30.7	30.7	30.7	30.7	30.7	30.7	30.7
P15 Greater Manchester	182.7	205.7	229.0	229.0	229.0	229.0	229.0	229.0	229.0	229.0	229.0	229.0
P16 Gwent	46.4	46.4	48.4	47.4	47.4	47.4	47.4	47.4	47.4	47.4	47.4	47.4
P17 Hampshire and Isle of Wight	108.0	113.0	116.0	116.0	121.0	126.0	126.0	126.0	136.0	136.0	136.0	136.0
P18 Hertforeshire	42.9	45.9	45.9	45.9	45.9	45.9	45.9	45.9	46.9	46.9	46.9	46.9
P19 Humberside	51.1	51.1	51.1	51.1	51.1	51.1	51.1	51.1	51.1	51.1	51.1	51.1
P20 Kent	77.1	77.1	81.1	81.1	86.1	86.1	87.1	87.1	87.1	87.1	87.1	87.1
P21 Lancashire	124.0	124.0	124.0	124.0	124.0	124.0	124.0	124.0	124.0	124.0	124.0	124.0
P22 Leicestershire	57.7	63.7	66.7	66.7	70.7	70.7	70.7	70.7	70.7	70.7	70.7	70.7
P23 Lincolnshire	24.3	27.3	27.3	27.3	29.3	29.3	29.3	29.3	29.3	29.3	29.3	29.3
P24 Merseyside	126.0	130.0	131.0	132.0	136.0	138.0	138.0	138.0	138.0	138.0	138.0	138.0
P25 Metropolitan and City	635.0	694.0	694.0	759.0	772.0	772.0	772.0	772.0	772.0	772.0	772.0	772.0
P26 Norfolk	39.1	43.1	43.1	43.1	43.1	43.1	44.1	44.1	44.1	44.1	44.1	44.1
P27 Northamptonshire	33.6	33.6	33.6	33.6	33.6	33.6	33.6	33.6	33.6	33.6	33.6	33.6
P28 Northumbria	122.7	128.7	141.7	141.7	141.7	141.7	141.7	141.7	141.7	141.7	141.7	141.7
P29 North Wales	40.6	40.6	40.6	40.6	40.6	40.6	40.6	40.6	40.6	40.6	40.6	40.6
P30 North Yorkshire	26.6	26.6	26.6	26.6	26.6	26.6	26.6	26.6	26.6	26.6	26.6	26.6
P31 Nottinghamshire	92.6	92.6	92.6	96.4	96.4	96.4	96.4	96.4	96.4	96.4	96.4	96.4
P32 South Wales	136.6	142.6	142.6	142.6	142.6	142.6	136.6	136.6	132.6	132.6	132.6	132.6
P33 South Yorkshire	93.0	93.6	95.6	95.6	95.6	95.6	95.6	95.6	95.6	95.6	95.6	95.6
P34 Staffordshire	63.0	65.0	68.0	68.0	68.0	68.0	68.0	69.0	69.0	69.0	69.0	69.0
P35 Suffolk	35.8	41.8	41.8	41.8	41.8	41.8	41.8	41.8	41.8	41.8	41.8	41.8
P36 Surrey	35.0	35.0	40.0	42.0	42.0	42.0	40.0	40.0	40.0	40.0	40.0	40.0
P37 Sussex	59.6	61.6	61.6	63.6	63.6	63.6	65.6	65.6	65.6	65.6	65.6	65.6
P38 Thames Valley	74.4	77.4	78.4	77.4,	76.4	77.6	78.6	78.6	78.6	78.6	78.6	78.6
P39 Warwickshire	19.7	19.7	19.7	19.7	19.7	19.7	19.7	19.7	19.7	19.7	19.7	19.7
P40 West Mercia	60.2	60.2	60.2	60.2	60.2	60.2	60.2	60.2	60.2	60.2	60.2	60.2
P41 West Midlands	202.6	202.6	209.5	230.5	240.5	240.5	240.5	240.5	240.5	240.5	240.5	240.5
P42 West Yorkshire	169.7	169.7	183.7	191.7	191.7	191.7	191.7	191.7	191.7	191.7	191.7	191.7
P43 Wiltshire	25.4	25.4	25.4	25.4	25.4	25.4	25.4	25.4	25.4	24.4	24.4	24.4
Total	3,386	3,552	3,640	3,750	3,795	3,809	3,803	3,804	3,811	3,810	3,810	3,810
Estimated Total Chief Crown Prosecutors in post												
P01 Avon and Somerset	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P02 Bedfordshire	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P03 Cambridgeshire	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P04 Cheshire	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P06 Cleveland	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P07 Cumbria	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P08 Derbyshire	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P09 Devon and Cornwall	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P10 Dorset	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P11 Durham	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P12 Dyfed/Powys	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P13 Essex	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P14 Gloucestershire	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P15 Greater Manchester	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P16 Gwent	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P17 Hampshire and Isle of Wight	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P18 Hertforeshire	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P19 Humberside	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P20 Kent	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0

Area	April 2001	May 2001	June 2001	July 2001	August 2001	September 2001	October 2001	November 2001	December 2001	January 2002	February 2002	March 2002
P21 Lancashire	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P22 Leicestershire	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P23 Lincolnshire	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P24 Merseyside	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	10	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P25 Metropolitan and City	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0
P26 Norfolk	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P27 Northamptonshire	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P28 Northumbria	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P29 North Wales	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P30 North Yorkshire	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P31 Nottinghamshire	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P32 South Wales	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P33 South Yorkshire	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P34 Staffordshire	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P35 Suffolk	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P36 Surrey	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P37 Sussex	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P38 Thames Valley	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P39 Warwickshire	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P40 West Mercia	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P41 West Midlands	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P42 West Yorkshire	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
P43 Wiltshire	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Total	45.0	45.0	45.0	45.0	45.0	45.0	45.0	45.0	45.0	45.0	45.0	45.0

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Relocation Companies

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which relocation companies her Department has used when relocating civil servants since May 1997; which relocation companies hold contracts with her Department for the relocation of civil servants; when the contracts were last renewed; where the contracts were advertised; and what the length and value of each contract is. [42365]

Ms Hewitt: Since May 1997 the Department has used only one company and has a contract with only one company for relocating civil servants, Cendant Relocation Services (previously known as Bradford and Bingley Relocation Services and Black Horse Relocation Services). The contract was let in November 1999. The contract was not advertised; six companies were invited to tender. The contract runs until 31 October 2002 (with provision to extend if necessary). Its value at award was £950,000 a year.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many civil servants in her Ministry have used the services of Cendant or its subsidiaries *(a)* to relocate in London and *(b)* to be housed in London since May 1997; what the name was of the company employed in each case; and what were the dates on each occasion. [42366]

Ms Hewitt: From April 2000 to March 2002 11 DTI civil servants have used the services of Cendant Relocation Services to relocate to and to be housed in London or within a reasonable travelling distance of London. The relocations were initiated on: 23 May 2000, 2 June 2000, 17 August 2000, 27 July 2000, 19 January 2001, 30 January 2001, 22 May 2001, 4 September 2001, 19 October 2001, 2 January 2002 and 7 March 2002.

Prior to April 2000 DTI did not record data on relocation by location from other data on staff relocations. To provide the information requested from May 1997 to March 2000 would entail disproportionate cost.

Catering Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the cost was of *(a)* in-house canteen and *(b)* other catering services provided by her Department in each of the last four years. [38934]

Ms Hewitt: The information is as follows:

	£000
1997–98	247
1998–99	236
1999–2000	246
2000–01	101

For 2001–02 and subsequent years no costs will be incurred.

Gender Pay Gap

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the extent of the gender pay gap among staff in her Department. [41004]

Ms Hewitt: My Department is in the process of undertaking an audit of our pay system. In line with the commitment on all Government Departments and agencies, we will put in place by April 2003 an action plan to close any equal pay gaps that emerge.

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average gap was between men's and women's pay in *(a)* Glasgow, Pollok constituency and *(b)* Glasgow in 2001. [40819]

Alan Johnson: Estimates for the Parliamentary Constituency of Glasgow, Pollok are not available. According to the 2001 New Earnings Survey, conducted by the Office for National Statistics, average hourly pay for full-time employees, excluding overtime, in the Glasgow City Unitary Authority, was £11.27 for men and £9.06 for women, a pay gap of £2.21.

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average gap was between men's and women's pay in Finchley and Golders Green constituency in 2001. [40815]

Alan Johnson: Estimates for the Parliamentary Constituency of Finchley and Golders Green are not available. According to the 2001 New Earnings Survey, conducted by the Office for National Statistics, average hourly pay for full-time employees, excluding overtime, in the London Government Office Region, was £16.83 for men and £13.00 for women, a pay gap of £3.83.

Job Sharing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the extent of job sharing in her Department. [41047]

Ms Hewitt: My Department promotes flexible working, including job sharing, in its personnel systems. Unless there are fully justifiable business requirements to prevent it, which is rare, all jobs are advertised as being available on a part-time, job share/split and full-time basis.

Relocation Expenses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her policy is on the payment of relocation expenses to staff in her Department. [41028]

Ms Hewitt: The Department acts as a responsible employer when requiring a member of staff to relocate. Assistance is offered if either the mobility obligation is enforced or if permanent and compulsory terms are offered and relocation is cost-effective compared with alternatives. The principle underlying the Department's policy is that reasonable additional costs necessarily incurred in relocation will be reimbursed, though this should not result in the betterment of an individual's circumstances.

Accommodation Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the cost was of hotel accommodation for departmental staff working away from home in each of the last four years. [41055]

Ms Hewitt: The cost of UK hotel accommodation, booked by staff through the departmental hotel booking agents during each of the last four financial years are:

	£
April 1998 to March 1999	826,662
April 1999 to March 2000	779,384
April 2000 to March 2001	928,242
April 2001 to January 2002	853,200

Small Business Service

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made in finding a replacement for the Chief Executive of the Small Business Service. [41460]

Nigel Griffiths: On 6 February my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announced a new Chief Executive for the Small Business Service, Martin Wyn Griffith.

Post Office

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the cost of the Horizon project was broken down by *(a)* cancellation payments and *(b)* others costs; and from which accounts of the Government and their agencies those costs were met. [40551]

Mr. Alexander: The total cost to Consignia of the Horizon project to automate the whole of the Post Office network was £1 billion. No cancellation payments have been made. £480 million of the project costs were funded from cash investments held by Consignia and previously earmarked for surrender to the Treasury. Wider background to the Horizon project is provided in the reports of the Committee of Public Accounts and of the Comptroller and Auditor General on the cancellation of the Benefit Payment Card project.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) when she expects the review of the future of the Crown office at Barras Bridge, Newcastle to be completed; [40552]

(2) how many sorting offices are located in *(a)* Northumberland, *(b)* Tyne and Wear, *(c)* Durham and *(d)* Cleveland which are open at weekends; and what proposals there are for changes in *(a)* the number of sorting offices and *(b)* weekend opening. [40553]

Mr. Alexander: This is a matter that falls within the day to day responsibility of Consignia and I have therefore asked the chief executive to reply direct to my hon. Friend.

Trailblazing Sector

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the meetings she has had with representatives from the trailblazing sector skills council. [40246]

Ms Hewitt: I have had no such meetings.

BAE, Filton

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will investigate the situation at BAE, Filton with particular reference to *(a)* the operation of the Rapid Response Fund and other training grants and *(b)* the role of the South West Regional Development Agency in their delivery. [41240]

Alan Johnson: There is no Rapid Response Fund awarded to BAE Systems at Filton as no large scale redundancy has taken place at this location. The RDA does not provide training grants.

Polyurethane

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations have been made to the European Commission in respect of dumping of polyurethane film products. [41419]

Ms Hewitt: My Department has not received any representations about the dumping of polyurethane products. Any representations to the European Commission in respect of anti-dumping complaints are confidential until an investigation is opened.

Miners' Compensation

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many claims have been lodged by former miners for *(a)* Vibration White Finger and *(b)* respiratory diseases in Galloway and Upper Nithsdale constituency. [41930]

Mr. Wilson: Claims for Vibration White Finger (VWF), and respiratory disease have been registered in Galloway and Upper Nithsdale as follows:

	Number of claims in Galloway and Upper Nithsdale constituency
VWF	129
Respiratory disease	191

These statistics are available on the Department's website at www.dti.gov.uk/coalhealth.

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 1 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 615W, on miners' compensation, what progress has been made on deciding how to progress former mineworkers' claims for compensation for respiratory disease from those in *(a)* safety, *(b)* salvage, *(c)* mine rescue, *(d)* under managers and *(e)* Group 3 employment. [41755]

Mr. Wilson: The Department and the claimants' solicitors representatives have recently agreed the terms on which safety officers and under managers—who were not originally incorporated within the claims handling agreement—may be compensated for respiratory disease. They have also agreed that claims from mines rescue workers and assistant area salvage reclamations managers may be referred to the Dust Reference Panel on a case by case basis, for a decision on the terms on which they may be compensated. Group 3 employment relates to claims for Vibration White Finger, not for respiratory disease.

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of reports prepared by Healthcall in 2001 on former mineworkers' compensation claims for respiratory disease were *(a)* returned by the claim handlers and *(b)* returned by solicitors representing claimants, identifying errors. [41752]

Mr. Wilson: Medical reports are returned by IRISC, the Department's claims handlers, or the claimant's solicitor either to seek further clarification or to identify clerical errors. In 2001, Healthcall, the company contracted to undertake the delivery of the Medical Assessment Process, MAP, completed and passed 44,341 MAP reports to IRISC. Of this number, 5,011 reports (11 per cent.) were returned by IRISC and 2,701 reports (6 per cent.) were returned by solicitors. In both cases, the issues raised related mainly to clarification of points.

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 1 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 615W, on miners' compensation, what policy has been agreed for handling claims for compensation for respiratory disease by or on behalf of the families of former mineworkers who have received payments for pneumoconiosis previously. [41753]

Mr. Wilson: If a claimant has received payments through the Coal Workers Pneumoconiosis Scheme (CWPS) set up in 1974 and is claiming for simple pneumoconiosis in conjunction with COPD, the claim can be processed in accordance with the handling agreement.

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 1 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 615W, on miners' compensation, what policy has been agreed for handling industrial injury compensation claims on behalf of the families of former mineworkers who died before 1983. [41754]

Mr. Wilson: A separate method of assessment is required for those deceased claimants who died prior to 1 January 1983 to reflect the law prior to that date. Under the previous law, a miner's claim for the years that he lost due to respiratory disease and his loss of expectation of life passed on to the estate as part of the claim under the Law Reform Act (LRA) 1934. The compensation paid to the beneficiary of that claim would be deducted from any entitlement that the beneficiary has to a dependency claim under the Fatal Accidents Act (FAA) 1976.

It has been agreed with the claimants' solicitors that these claims will be dealt with in the following manner:

1. Where there is a surviving widow, she will receive the higher sum of either the LRA or FAA claim;
2. Where the miner leaves a widow who subsequently dies, her estate will receive her dependency entitlement in the period up to her death without any offset for the LRA claim;
3. Where a miner leaves a surviving dependent other than a widow, as classified by the FAA, there will be an individual assessment of the claim in accordance with common law principles for pre-1983 deceased cases.

Natural Gas

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the projected balance of trade in natural gas is for *(a)* this year and *(b)* each of the next five years. [41987]

Mr. Wilson: The latest official data available are for the year 2001. Provisional data published recently on the DTI Energy Statistics website show that the UK was a net exporter of gas to the order of 107,771 Gigawatt hours, equivalent to 8.7 per cent. of gross UK production of 1,233,754 Gigawatt hours.

Whether and to what extent there will be net exports of gas from the UK over the next five years will depend on the balance between UK supply and demand. Demand is subject to a number of factors, including weather conditions and the relative price of gas and other sources of energy, none of which is easy to forecast. Gas production from the UK continental shelf is currently projected to peak in the next few years, but it is not possible to predict precisely when UK supply will fall short of UK demand. However, on present evidence, on an annual basis the UK is likely to become a net importer of gas in or soon after 2005.

BNFL

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 523W, on BNFL, when she estimates that the chief executive of BNFL will send the letter promised. [40823]

Mr. Wilson: I understand the chief executive has now written.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on what date work began in her Department on the proposals relating to the liabilities of BNFL announced on 28 November; and on what date they were first considered by Ministers. [40810]

Mr. Wilson: Since the announcement of a possible PPP on 13 July 1999, the Department has been working closely with BNFL on all aspects of its business, including liabilities management. This work, and that carried out under the auspices of the UKAEA Quinquennial Review between April 2000 and August 2001, resulted in the proposals outlined on 28 November. Ministers were given regular reports on the work as it progressed.

Local Loops

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the number of BT local loops that will have been unbundled by 31 July. [41908]

Mr. Alexander: The regulatory framework for local loop unbundling is now in place. It is not possible to estimate how many loops will be unbundled by 31 July as this is dependent on operators' own commercial rollout plans.

Public Bodies

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people from Warrington, North she has appointed to non-departmental public bodies since 1997. [39449]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* Information on the town in which individuals appointed to public bodies live is not recorded centrally and it is therefore not possible to give the details requested.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to upgrade the capacity of the National Grid to enable further development of renewable energy in the Scottish Highlands; and if he will make a statement. [41587]

Ms Hewitt: I published on 13 February a preliminary feasibility study, undertaken for my Department by PB Power Ltd., of the concept of a subsea electricity interconnector along the western seaboard of the United Kingdom. This initial study sustains the validity of the concept while being realistic about the costs and difficulties.

In partnership with the Scottish companies, the National Grid Company and the regulator, the Government intend to move forward to a more detailed and comprehensive study on options for the development of the transmission system within Scotland and from Scotland to the rest of the United Kingdom. I expect conclusions and firm recommendations on the way forward to be available within six months. Whatever we do will extend to the north and west of Scotland, including the islands.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she intends to provide an answer to the question from the hon. Member for Isle of Wight of 9 January 2002, Ref 25387. [35523]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 13 February 2002]:* I replied to the hon. Member on 13 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 440W.

Export Contracts

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the proportion of companies exporting goods and services which have lost export contracts owing to language difficulties in each of the last five years for which the Government hold data; and if she will list the lost contracts. [38318]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* The DTI has been closely involved with a series of studies, both on its own behalf and in collaboration with other agencies, such as the Languages National Training Organisation, with a view to measuring the impact of language skills on export companies. These studies took place in 1997, 1999 and with the LNTO in 2001 and 2002. Details of lost contracts are not held on an individual company basis, though the number of exporting companies explicitly stating they had lost business due to language barriers varies from 5 per cent. to 21.6 per cent. The results in respect of lost business for each report are as follow:

National Languages for Export Campaign (Language Studies) -

1997 = 5 per cent.

1997 = 7 per cent.

Sample size—500 UK companies

Languages National Training Organisation (Regional Language Skills Capacity Audits)

North East 2000 = 19 per cent.

West Mi[illegible]s 2001 = 21.6 per cent.

Yorkshire and Humberside 2001 = 20 per cent.

Note:

Executive Summaries of the LNTO studies are published on the LNTO website: www.languagesnto.org.uk/index.php

Rental Cost Indices

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the rental cost indices were for each nation and region of the UK where the GB level is used as the base figure in each of the last five years. [37571]

Ms Hewitt: It is not clear to what the hon. Member refers. If he would like to write to me in detail I will consider the points he raises.

LNM Holdings

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions her Department has held with LNM Holdings on the possible imposition of tariffs on overseas steel imports by the US Government. [38849]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The Department has not had any discussions with LNM Holdings regarding this issue.

Space Satellites

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what space satellites that the UK is involved in operating and funding are used for *(a)* weather, *(b)* astronomy, *(c)* spying and *(d)* other purposes; [41330]

(2) how many space satellites the UK *(a)* owns and *(b)* jointly runs and funds; and with whom the joint agreements are. [41329]

Ms Hewitt: The Government's civil space activities are co-ordinated through the British National Space Centre, an interdepartmental body which is situated in my Department. Details of the civil operational satellites, which the Government have contributed to, are listed in the following table.

List of operational satellites which the UK Government were involved in funding and/or are involved in operating in whole or in part

Satellite	*Launch year*	*Category*	*Operator(s)*	*Funding*	*Ownership*
ECS-4	1987	Communications	ESA	Through ESA subscription	ESA
Meteosat-5	1991	Meteorological	EUMETSAT	Jointly funded with the other member states of EUMETSAT	EUMETSAT
Meteosat-6	1993	Meteorological	EUMETSAT	Jointly funded with the other member states of EUMETSAT	EUMETSAT
Hubble space telescope	1990	Astronomy	NASA	Through ESA subscription and NASA	NASA
Ulysses	1990	Solar system science	ESA/NASA	Through ESA subscription and NASA	NASA
ERS-1	1991	Earth observation/remote sensing	ESA	Jointly funded with ESA and its member states	ESA
ERS-2	1995	Earth observation/remote sensing	ESA	Jointly funded with ESA and its member states	ESA
SOHO	1995	Solar system science	NASA	Through ESA subscription	ESA
Meteosa[illegible]	1997	Meteorological	EUMETSAT	Jointly funded with the other member states of EUMETSAT	EUMETSAT
Huygens	1997	Solar system science	ESA	Through ESA subscription	ESA
XMM-Newton	1999	Astronomy	ESA	Through ESA subscription	ESA
Cluster	2000	Solar system science	ESA	Through ESA subscription	ESA
Artemis	2001	Communications	ESA	Jointly funded with ESA (and its member states) and Japan	ESA
Envisat	2002	Earth observation/remote sensing	ESA	Jointly funded with ESA and its member states	ESA

List of future satellites which the UK Government have made a commitment to fund or operate in whole or in part

Satellite	*Launch year*	*Category*	*Operator(s)*	*Funding*	*Ownership*
Integral	2002	Astronomy	ESA	Through ESA funding	ESA
MSG-1[1]	2002	Meteorological	EUMETSAT	Shared funding with ESA (and its member states) and EUMETSAT	EUMETSAT
SMART-1	2002	Technology demonstrator/solar system science	ESA	Shared funding with ESA and its member states	ESA
Rosetta	2003	Solar system science	ESA	Through ESA subscription	ESA
EGNOS	2003	Navigation	ESA	Shared funding with ESA and its member states	ESA
Mars Express[2]	2003	Solar system science	ESA	Through ESA subscription	ESA
Cryosat	2004	Earth observation/remote sensing	ESA	Shared funding with ESA and its member states	ESA
METOP-1[1]	2005	Meteorological	EUMETSAT	Shared funding with ESA (and its member states) and EUMETSAT	EUMETSAT
UK disaster monitoring satellite	2003	Earth observation/remote sensing	Surrey Satellite Technology Ltd. Joint operation with Algeria's Centre National Des Techniques Spatiales, Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Science and Technology, and other potential overseas collaborating partners	Shared funding with Surrey Satellite Technology Ltd., ESYS, Algeria's Centre National Des Techniques Spatiales, Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Science and Technology, and other potential overseas collaborating partners	Surrey Satellite Technology Ltd.
Gemini	2004	Geostationary satellite communications demonstrator	Surrey Satellite Technology Ltd. Operating agreement with Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Science and Technology	Shared funding with SSTL and Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Science and Technology	Surrey Satellite Technology Ltd.
TopSat	2004	Earth observation/remote sensing (high resolution imagery demonstrator)	QinetiQ Ltd./Surrey Satellite Technology Ltd.	UK Government funding	ESA
GOCE	2004	Earth observation/remote sensing	ESA	Shared funding with ESA and its member states	ESA
SMOS	2006	Earth observation/remote sensing	ESA	Shared funding with ESA and its member states	ESA

List of future satellites which the UK Government have made a commitment to fund or operate in whole or in part

Satellite	*Launch year*	*Category*	*Operator(s)*	*Funding*	*Ownership*
ADM	2006	Earth observation/remote sensing	ESA	Shared funding with ESA and its member states	ESA
SMOS	2005	Earth observation/remote sensing	ESA	Shared funding with ESA and its member states	ESA
Herschel	2007	Astronomy	ESA	Through ESA subscription	ESA
Plank	2007	Astronomy	ESA	Through ESA subscription	ESA

[1] Series of 3

[2] Including UK-led lander

The Government also fund instruments to be flown on satellites owned by others—for example the NASA swift and stereo missions. The procurement and operation of satellites for military communications is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence.In addition, licences have been granted to UK companies—for example, Inmarsat, ICO, Surrey Satellite Technology and Europe*Star—to operate particular satellites. Details of these satellites can be found on the regulatory affairs section of the British National Space Centre's website http://www.bnsc.gov.uk/.

Wind Farms

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many wind farms there are in the UK; and how many are *(a)* offshore and *(b)* on land. [41327]

Mr. Wilson: My reply is based on the best available information, but this may not be wholly accurate, up-to-date or comprehensive. Excluding very small projects (below 50 Kw installed capacity), the Department is aware of 113 wind farms currently operational in the UK, only one of which is based offshore.

Details of most of these projects were given in my reply of 26 November 2001 to the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Duncan), *Official Report*, columns 671–74W.

In addition, the following wind farms have been added to our records since my earlier reply:

England

Out Newton, Southfield Farm, Hull, Humberside

Hedley Hope, Bishop Auckland, County Durham

Tow Law, Crook, County Durham

Wales

Cemmaes B. Windfarm, Cemmaes, Machynlleth, Powys

Scotland

Beinn-An-Tuirc, Near Carradale, Mull of Kintyre

Cnoc Donn Amicle, Near Carradale, Mull of Kintyre

Deucheran Hill, Kintyre, Argyll

Bu Farm, Rothiesholm, Stronsay, Orkney

Myres Hill, South of Eaglesham, Galloway

Sainsbury's Distribution Depot, Langlands Park, East Kilbride.

The wind farm off the coast at Blyth, Northumberland is the only UK wind farm currently based offshore. Between now and 2004, the Government are making available up to £74 million for capital grants for the emerging UK offshore wind industry, in addition to the substantial support for renewable energy generally provided through the Renewables Obligation.

Correspondence

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer of 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 518W, how many letters her Department received in November 2001; and of these how many are still awaiting a reply. [40022]

Ms Hewitt: My Department received 1,720 letters in November 2001 of which 21 replies are still outstanding.

Computer Ownership

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what information she has collated on figures for the ratio of computer ownership per household in *(a)* the USA, *(b)* France, *(c)* Germany, *(d)* Japan and *(e)* the UK; [33433]

(2) if she will publish figures for the ratio of computer ownership per household. [33339]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Karen Dunnell to Mr. David Drew, dated 11 March 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent questions regarding information on computer ownership per household. I am replying in his absence. (33433, 33339)

Our latest estimate for 2001 is that 49 per cent. of households in the UK had a home computer. This is an increase from 44 per cent. in 2000 when the comparable figures for other countries were: USA and Japan 51 per cent., France 27 per cent. and Germany 32 per cent.

Engineering Industry

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what response she has made to the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council document measuring the mathematics problem, with specific reference to levels of skills in basic mathematics and preparation for mathematics based degree courses. [39702]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

The Secretary of State has not been formally presented with this report. However, Ministers are currently considering the issues set out in the report.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Television Licence Fee

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when regulations will be laid to bring into effect the television licence fee increases due to come into force on 1 April. [42701]

Tessa Jowell: On 23 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 531W, the Government announced that, from 1 April 2002, the fee for a colour television licence would rise to £112 and the black and white licence fee to £37.50. I have today laid before the House the regulations necessary to bring these new fees into force.

Gaming and Lotteries (Fees)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she is taking to amend the fees for gaming and lotteries. [42700]

Mr. Caborn: I have today laid before the House two Orders under the Gaming Act 1968 and one under each of the Lotteries and Amusements Act 1976, and the Gaming (Bingo) Act 1985.

The Gaming Board and the Government review gaming fees and the fees for society and local authority lotteries every year. The amended fees in the four Orders are based upon estimates by the Gaming Board of the cost of each service and demand for it during the financial year 2002–03.

We have set the fees at these levels in order to ensure that they recoup the estimated costs of ensuring the proper regulation of the commercial gaming industry and society lotteries during the year. The four Orders will bring revised fees into effect from 1 April 2002. The following table sets out the current and the new levels of all the fees.

£

Fee	Level of fee in 2001–02	Level of fee in 2002–03
Employee's certificate[1]	145	160
Gaming machine supplier licence[2]		
New	5,623	5,800
Renewal	3,753	3,970
Casino licences		
Grant	26,349	28,915
Renewal	7,325	7,950
Transfer	5,898	7,665
Consent application	6,810	8,000
Consent transfer	3,405	5,000
Bingo licences		
Grant	2,940	3,800
Renewal	1,357	1,450
Transfer	1,030	1,545
Consent application	3,260	7,500
Consent transfer	2,630	5,000
National Bingo Game		
New	150,168	167,000
Renewal	144,576	160,000
Lotteries		
Gaming Board fee per lottery raising:		
£200,000 or more	404	435
£50,000 to £199,999	263	290
£20,000 to £49,999	86	100
£10,000 to £19,999	86	100
Less than £10,000	82	100
Registration fee[3]	3,840	4,600
Registration renewal fee	142	180
Lottery manager	5,470	14,220
Inspection of lottery returns	5	10
Registered club fees		
Part II registration:		
New	235	235
Renewal	118	120
Part III registration:		
New	115	115
Renewal	69	70

[1] Section 19, Gaming Act 1968

[2] s.27, Gaming Act 1968

[3] For society and local authority lotteries

Gambling Controls

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment her Department has made of the effect of the independent review of the gambling controls in Great Britain on *(a)* jobs, *(b)* businesses and *(c)* Government revenue. [41497]

Mr. Caborn: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to him on 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 345W.

PRIME MINISTER

Rail Journeys (Staff)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy that rail journeys undertaken by staff in his Office should ordinarily be on standard class tickets. [40444]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 421W.

Accommodation Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister what the cost was of hotel accommodation for his Office's staff working away from home in each of the last four years. [40943]

The Prime Minister: Information on the total travel and accommodation costs is included in the detailed list of Cabinet Ministers' visits overseas and information on expenditure by all Ministers on travel overseas. Lists of overseas visits undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing more than £500 during the period 2 May 1997 to 31 March 2001 were placed in the Library of the House and published in the *Official Report* on 17 June 1999, columns 196–97W; on 28 July 2000, column 969W; and on 20 July 2001, column 467W. The list for the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the current financial year.

Information on the cost of other hotel accommodation s not held centrally.

Golden Jubilee

Bob Russell: To ask the Prime Minister what epresentations he has received for the award of the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal from those who are to be excluded; and if he will make a statement. [41455]

The Prime Minister: I have received representations on this matter.

The medal will be issued to members of the armed forces and Royal Fleet Auxiliary and the '999' emergency services who completed a minimum of five years' reckonable service on 6 February 2002—the 50th anniversary of the Queens Accession.

Waste

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Prime Minister when the Performance and Innovation Unit will *(a)* complete and *(b)* publish its report on waste policy. [41827]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Foster) on 21 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 337W.

Steel Industry

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions took place on the subject of the proposed steel works in Romania between Mr. Jonathan Powell and HM Ambassador to Romania prior to the ambassador's advice to the Government to write a letter in support of Mr. Mittal's bid. [41865]

The Prime Minister: None.

Gibraltar

Bob Spink: To ask the Prime Minister if he will visit Gibraltar to gauge the opinions of the people of Gibraltar on the question of British sovereignty. [42384]

The Prime Minister: The Government stand by the commitment set out in the preamble to the 1969 Gibraltar Constitution that we will not enter into arrangements under which the people of Gibraltar will pass under the sovereignty of another state against their freely and democratically expressed wishes. Any proposals emerging from the Brussels process would be implemented only in the event of an affirmative vote by the people of Gibraltar in a referendum.

BP Signing Ceremony

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister who *(a)* organised and *(b)* proposed the signing ceremony at 10 Downing street involving BP on [illegible] November 1997. [41975]

The Prime Minister: As was stated in the Lobby briefing on 18 November 1997, I witnessed the BP signing ceremony between the Chief Executive John Browne and the Chief Executive of Omexim Bank, Vladmir Potanin and Victor Ott the Russian First Deputy Minister of Fuel and Energy at Downing street.

Parliamentary Debates

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister on how many occasions he has spoken in the House, other than in statements or questions, and for how long, in each year since May 1997. [42137]

The Prime Minister: It is long-standing convention that the Prime Minister answers weekly questions in the House. Since 1997 I have spent 75 hours in the House answering questions. I have also made 42 statements.

In addition, I have made speeches on the elections of the Speaker in 1997 and 2000, *Official Report*, 7 May 1997 and 23 October 2000; Debates on the Address, *Official Report*, 14 May 1997, 24 November 1998, 17 November 1999, 6 December 2000 and 20 June 2001; the Humble Address: Hundredth Birthday of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother, *Official Report*, 11 July 2000; the Opposition Day on Parliament and the Executive, *Official Report*, 13 July 2000; and the Retirement of Madam Speaker, *Official Report*, 26 July 2000.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Brady: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral statement on the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting of 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 291, if he will make a statement on the outcome of his discussions regarding the exclusion of Zimbabwe from the 2002 Commonwealth Games. [41919]

The Prime Minister: Arrangements for the Games, including participation, are the responsibility of the Commonwealth Games Federation. We are not aware of any discussions having taken place regarding the exclusion of Zimbabwe from the 2002 Commonwealth Games but will keep the situation under review.

As I made clear in my statement last week, the Presidents of South Africa and Nigeria, and the Prime Minister of Australia, will be considering what action to take on Zimbabwe in the light of the findings of the Commonwealth observer team currently monitoring Zimbabwe's Presidential election. Should the Commonwealth, on the basis of these findings, decide Zimbabwe should be suspended from the organisation, Zimbabwe would become ineligible to compete in the Games.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the annual budget for communications activities, including press, public relations, marketing and internal communications, was for her Department for each financial year from 1997–98 to 2001–02. [39914]

Clare Short: Our budget for press office costs over the last three years has been as follows.

	£000
1999–2000	149
2000–01	117
2001–02	[1]132

[1] to date

Figures for the previous two years are not readily accessible. We do not hold separate budgets for public relations or marketing. We have an overall programme of public information work, which forms part of our effort to raise awareness and understanding of international development issues in the UK. Spending under this programme in the last five years has been as follows:

	£000
1997–98	407
1998–99	683
1999–2000	880
2000–01	1,487
2001–02	[1]1,264

[1] to date

Internal communications work is also, by its nature, spread across a wide range of activities and functions. However our core central system in this regard is our intranet. The annual budget for this, as well as for our wider knowledge sharing work, is expected to be around £150,000.

Child Labour

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions she has had with representatives of the International Labour Organisation on child labour; and which issues were discussed. [40517]

Clare Short: Officials from my Department are in regular contact with the ILO as part of our Partnership Framework arrangement. Child labour is an important element of our partnership. Issues discussed recently have included our support to the ILO's International Programme for the elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) and its activities in south-east Asia, India and Bangladesh.

Education

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on international educational developments since the Dakar Conference, with particular reference to the completion of national educational development programmes and progress towards universal primary education. [40892]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) on 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 334W.

Israel

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which DFID-funded projects in the West Bank and Gaza Strip have been damaged by Israeli retaliatory attacks; what the damage incurred was; and what was the value of the damage sustained. [40624]

Clare Short: The conflict and closures have had a major impact on all development projects. The only direct damage to a DFID funded project of which we are aware from Israeli military activity has been to a community centre in Rafah, part of a water and sanitation project funded through Save the Children Fund. The final cost has not yet been confirmed. 60 houses have also been damaged in Rafah, affecting 100 potential project beneficiaries.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what success the DFID-funded water and sanitation projects in *(a)* Rafah, *(b)* Tabalra, *(c)* Dura and *(d)* Arabia have had in improving water supplies to the Palestinians of the Occupied Territories. [40622]

Clare Short: The project in Rafah has led to improvements in both the quality and quantity of water. Sanitary standards have also increased as the majority of households are now connected to a new sewage network. But Rafah is a target for the Israeli military. This has disrupted project implementation.

The establishment of a water network and communal cisterns, and the rehabilitation of springs have increased the quality and volume of water in Dura. At least 75 per cent. of households are connected to the new sewage network. Access and mobility are easier in Dura, but the Israeli port authorities have embargoed important water meters.

Significant progress in both water and sanitation has also been made in Anabta and Jabalia, the two other towns covered by the project. We do not have any activities in Arabia or Tabalra.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with the EU with a view to calling for reparations from Israel for the destruction of and damage to the European-financed development projects in Gaza and the West Bank at *(a)* the Gaza International Airport, *(b)* the Office of the Palestinian Statistical System and *(c)* the Voice of Palestine Radio Station in Ramallah. [40625]

Clare Short: The Presidency, with full UK support, has conveyed the EU's grave concern to the Israeli Government. It has been made clear that we view the damage and destruction of all EU-financed development projects in the Palestinian Territories to be out of proportion to any military, security, or political needs. Financial compensation may be sought. A provisional assessment has been made of the affected projects. It has been emphasised that this is not simply an accounting exercise to form the basis of a financial claim; such actions are counter-productive and perpetuate the cycle of violence.

Sexual and Reproductive Health

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what account is taken of the religious and cultural values of people in developing countries before her Department funds organisations providing sexual and reproductive health assistance. [41968]

Clare Short: My Department recognises that sexual and reproductive health programmes must honour the principles of freedom of choice agreed at the UN conference in Cairo and will only be successful if full account is taken of the religious and cultural values of those the programmes are intended to help. We only work with organisations that also recognise this approach.

Rail Journeys (Staff)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make it her policy that rail journeys undertaken by staff in her Department should ordinarily be on standard class tickets. [40433]

Clare Short: Our policy on rail travel has been in place for many years and is derived from guidance which applied across the civil service. It has served us well but we propose to review it to define more clearly that the class of travel should be determined by business need not the grade of the traveller.

Tanzania

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the impact on the development of Tanzania of the terms of the loan provided by Barclays bank to fund the purchase of the air traffic control system for Tanzania; and if she will make a statement. [41450]

Clare Short: The IMF and the World Bank have conducted assessments of the impact on the development of Tanzania of the air traffic control purchase. This has included examining both the terms of the loan from Barclays bank and the value for money of the proposed purchase.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether she has made an assessment of the bidding process conducted by the Tanzanian Government to select a supplier of an air traffic control system; and if she will make a statement. [41449]

Clare Short: DFID has not made an assessment of the bidding process conducted by the Tanzanian Government to select a supplier of an air traffic control system.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether she has had discussions with representatives of Barclays bank concerning the provision of a loan to the Tanzanian Government for the purchase of an air traffic control system from BAE; and if she will make a statement. [41451]

Clare Short: Neither I nor officials from my Department have had discussions with representatives of Barclays bank concerning a loan to the Government of Tanzania to buy an air traffic control system from BAE.

India

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which projects are funded in India by her Department; and what the cost is of each project. [40522]

Clare Short: My Department is funding around 100 development projects in India with a total commitment of about £1.2 billion. We expect our bilateral assistance to India in the current financial year to total £170 million. Our programme of development assistance in India is aimed at the elimination of poverty principally through partnership with government at both national and state levels.

A copy of our Country Strategy Paper for India is available in the Library of the House, further information is also available in Statistics on International Development which is also in the Library.

Zimbabwe

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans her Department has made for supporting the reconstruction of Zimbabwe in the immediate aftermath of the presidential elections in the event of President Mugabe losing the election. [40658]

Clare Short: The UK is working closely with key stakeholders and the international community to ensure support of any Government committed to reform and the pursuit of sound economic policies and the reduction of poverty in Zimbabwe.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent meetings officials in her Department have had with representatives of Southern African Development Community regarding the reconstruction of Zimbabwe. [40659]

Clare Short: Our contacts with SADC member states over Zimbabwe have included discussions on the need for future external support for reform, sound economic policies and poverty reduction.

Afghanistan

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to achieve an expansion of the mine action programme in Afghanistan. [40657]

Clare Short: We have been supporting mine clearance in Afghanistan for many years. We have allocated £3 million through the United Nations Afghanistan Emergency Trust Fund for future humanitarian mine action interventions. This will cover mine clearance operations in Afghanistan, such as training, clearance of cluster bombs and other unexploded ordnance (UXO) and mines awareness activities. In addition we have provided £150,000 for the cost of two dedicated airlifts of demining equipment for the HALO Trust to begin demining operations.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list for 1997–98 and each subsequent financial year the amount spent by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies in respect of hotel and other similar privately provided accommodation (i) in the UK and (ii) abroad for (A) Ministers, (B) staff and (C) other persons; if he will list the proportion of this cost incurred in respect of (x) food and (y) alcohol in each case; and if he will list the average cost per hotel room or similar unit of accommodation provided in each case. [34375]

Mr. MacShane: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 559–60W.

Working Conditions and Practices

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people are employed in his Department on a job-share contract; and what percentage of vacant positions was advertised on this basis in the last 12 months. [35360]

Mr. Bradshaw: 44 people are currently employed on job-share contracts. 45 per cent. of positions were advertised externally as potential job-shares in 2001. Job-sharing is only one of a number of alternative and flexible working patterns in use at present. We currently have 92 part-time workers and 13 employees working compressed hours. Other arrangements include staggered hours, flexi-time, home working, school working hours, term time working and time off in lieu.

Lord Levy

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how the access of Lord Levy to departmental papers differs from that of Ministers. [39047]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Lord Levy sees papers and official documents required for his role as Prime Minister's envoy. Ministers see papers and official documents required for their role as Ministers.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the role of Lord Levy in his Department. [39049]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Lord Levy acts and travels as the Prime Minister's envoy as required. He reports to the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will name the countries visited by Lord Levy in his capacity as a special envoy of the British Government. [39048]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* As the Prime Minister's envoy, Lord Levy has visited Mexico, Venezuela, Uruguay, Bolivia, Ecuador, Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Oman, Bahrain, Tunisia, Qatar, Egypt and Morocco. He has also had discussions about the middle east peace process in France, Germany and the USA.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will name the overseas Governments with which Lord Levy has undertaken business on behalf of the Government. [39044]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* As the Prime Minister's envoy, Lord Levy has had discussions with the Governments of Mexico, Venezuela, Uruguay, Bolivia, Ecuador, Israel, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Bahrain, Tunisia, Qatar, Egypt, Morocco and the Palestinian Authority as well of course with our other close allies.

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the accommodation and staff assigned to Lord Levy within his Department. [39045]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Lord Levy has an office in the FCO main building in London. He receives assistance from FCO officials as required in support of his role as the Prime Minister's envoy.

Indonesia

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will use the forthcoming session of the UNHCR to call for Indonesia's Law on Human Rights Courts to be amended so that it is consistent with international standards; [40540]

(2) if he will raise at the forthcoming session of the UN Commission on Human Rights the issue of the human rights situation in Indonesia with particular reference to *(a)* extra judicial killings, *(b)* disappearances, *(c)* torture and *(d)* unlawful detention in Aceh and Papua. [40539]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are discussing with EU partners what, if any, action to take on Indonesia at the forthcoming session of the UN Commission on Human Rights. Indonesia is likely to be included in the EU Omnibus Country Statement on Human Rights in any part of the world. And, as in recent years, the EU is planning to table a Chairman's Statement on the situation in East Timor.

Meanwhile, we continue to apply pressure on the Government of Indonesia bilaterally and through the European Union for Indonesia to comply fully with its international human rights obligation.

Our Ambassador in Jakarta last raised the issue of human rights in Indonesia when he met with Bambang Yudhoyono the Co-ordinating Minister for Political and Security Affairs on 1 March.

Rail Journeys (Staff)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy that rail journeys undertaken by staff in his Department should ordinarily be on standard class tickets. [40445]

Mr. MacShane: In practice, many staff already travel at standard class unless, for example, they need extra space to work during travel. Staff are encouraged to use standard class on short journeys, especially when they are made at off-peak times.

Israel

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his assessment is of the number of Israelis killed by Palestinian terrorists *(a)* since 7 March 2001 and *(b)* during the 12 months prior to that date. [40964]

Mr. Bradshaw: As I said to my right hon. Friend in my previous answer on the same subject on 6 December 2001, casualty figures can be unreliable. Israeli Government figures show that about 65 Israelis were killed in the twelve months before 7 March 2001, and 255 since then to 6 March. From the start of the intifada in September 2000 to the end of February 2002, 1,087 Palestinians have been killed, according to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of whether British-made components are in use on *(a)* Israeli Apache helicopters, *(b)* Merkave tanks, *(c)* F16 jets and *(d)* armoured personnel carriers; and if he will make a statement. [40796]

Mr. Bradshaw: In answer to *(a)*, *(b)* and *(c)*, we have no evidence that equipment or components manufactured in the UK and licensed for export by this Government have been used by Israeli forces against civilians in the Occupied Territories during the recent and continued violence. We would plainly be most concerned if such evidence came to light.

New information has, however, come to light that UK supplied equipment licensed for export under a previous Administration and a different export control regime is being used by the Israelis in the Occupied Territories. The Israelis have modified a number of Centurion tanks, exported to Israel between 1958 and 1970, into armoured personnel carriers.

This contradicts a written assurance that the Israeli Government gave us on 29 November 2000 that

> "no UK originated equipment nor any UK originated systems/sub-systems/components are used as part of the Israel Defence Force's activities in the Territories"

We shall be seeking an explanation from the Israeli Government. I shall inform my hon. Friend and the House of the outcome.

We consider all export licence applications to Israel on a case by case basis against the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria, taking careful account on a case by case basis of the nature of the equipment and the proposed end-use and end-user.

Overseas Representatives (Business Promotion)

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether a British ambassador or high commissioner has, since the beginning of this Parliament, submitted a draft letter for the Prime Minister in support of the commercial activities of a British company other than that submitted by the British ambassador to Romania in connection with the acquisition of Sidex by Mr. Lakshmi Mittal's company. [39715]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 14 February 2002, *Official Report,* columns 610–11W.

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what instructions and guidance his Department has given to British ambassadors and high commissioners overseas as to the circumstances in which they should seek a letter from the Prime Minister in support of the commercial activities of a British company; and if he will place a copy of such instructions and guidance in the Library. [39721]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* Ministers write frequently in support of UK commercial interests in overseas markets with each case considered on its merits.

Drug Trafficking (Central Asia)

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what recent discussions his Department has had with the Government of Turkey concerning the cultivation and trafficking of poppies originating in Afghanistan; [41627]

(2) what recent discussions his Department has had with the Government of Pakistan concerning the measures it is taking to prevent the trafficking of poppies and heroin between Afghanistan and other countries in Central Asia; [41625]

(3) what recent discussions his Department has had with the Government of Kazakhstan concerning the measures it is taking to prevent the trafficking of poppies and heroin between Afghanistan and those countries in Central Asia; [41641]

(4) what recent discussions his Department has had with the Government of Iran concerning the measures it is taking to prevent the trafficking of poppies and heroin between Afghanistan and those countries in Central Asia; [41636]

(5) what recent discussions his Department has had with the Government of Kyrgyzstan concerning the measures it is taking to prevent the trafficking of poppies and heroin between Afghanistan and other countries in Central Asia; [41634]

(6) what recent discussions his Department has had with the Government of Kyrgyzstan concerning the cultivation and trafficking of poppies originating in Kyrgyzstan; [41635]

(7) what recent discussions his Department has had with the Government of Tajikistan concerning the measures it is taking to prevent the trafficking of poppies and heroin between Afghanistan and other countries in Central Asia; [41633]

(8) what recent discussions his Department has had with the United States Government concerning the cultivation and trafficking of poppies originating in Afghanistan; [41628]

(9) what reports his Department has received on changes in the level of cultivation and trafficking of poppies in *(a)* Afghanistan and *(b)* other Central Asian countries since the establishment of Afghanistan's interim Government; [41626]

(10) what recent discussions his Department has had with the Government of Afghanistan concerning the measures it is taking to prevent the trafficking of poppies and heroin between Afghanistan and other countries in Central Asia; [41631]

(11) what recent discussions he has had with his European Union counterparts concerning the cultivation and trafficking of poppies originating in Afghanistan; [41629]

(12) what recent discussions his Department has had with the Government of Pakistan concerning the cultivation and trafficking of poppies originating in Pakistan; [41624]

(13) what recent discussions his Department has had with the Government of Uzbekistan concerning the cultivation and trafficking of poppies originating in Uzbekistan; [41640]

(14) what recent discussions his Department has had with the Government of Kazakhstan concerning the cultivation and trafficking of poppies originating in Kazakhstan; [41642]

(15) what recent discussions his Department has had with the Government of Uzbekistan concerning the measures it is taking to prevent the trafficking of poppies and heroin between Afghanistan and other countries in Central Asia; [41623]

(16) what recent discussion his Department has had with the Government of Turkmenistan concerning the measures it is taking to prevent the trafficking of poppies and heroin between Afghanistan and other countries in Central Asia; [41639]

(17) what recent discussion his Department has had with the Government of Iran concerning the cultivation and trafficking of poppies originating in Iran; [41637]

(18) what recent discussions his Department has had with the Government of Tajikistan concerning the cultivation and trafficking of poppies originating in Tajikistan; [41632]

(19) what recent discussions his Department has had with the interim Government of Afghanistan concerning the cultivation and trafficking of poppies originating in Afghanistan. [41630]

Mr. Straw: The cultivation and trafficking of opiates is of serious concern to the UK. The UK maintains a dialogue, and co-operates closely, with the EU and G8 countries as well as all countries in south-west and Central Asia. The Bonn Agreement concluded in December 2001 urged the international community to assist the Afghan Interim Authority to combat the cultivation and trafficking of illicit drugs. When I met Hamid Karzai, the Chairman of the Interim Administration, during my visit to India at the end of last month I stressed the importance of progress on tackling drugs. Mr. Karzai has already signalled his intent by announcing in January a ban on drugs production, processing and trafficking. The international community, including the UK, has expressed its determination to help the Afghan authorities to implement this ban as soon as possible.

It was decided at the Tokyo Reconstruction conference in January that drugs should be treated as a cross-cutting issue and that drugs-related objectives should therefore be reflected in all assistance programmes. The UK pledged £200 million at Tokyo which, among other things, will be aimed at projects designed to reduce the dependence of the Afghan economy on drugs.

In financial year 2002–03 the FCO will provide around £4.5 million for practical anti-drugs assistance in the form of training and equipment to countries in south-west and Central Asia.

A UNDCP report published at the end of February 2002 stated that between 1,900 and 2,700 tones of opium would be produced in Afghanistan this year. Opium production in other south-west and Central Asian countries is negligible by comparison.

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions his Department has had with the Government of Turkmenistan concerning the cultivation and trafficking of poppies originating in Turkmenistan. [41638]

Mr. MacShane: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram).

Death Penalty

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken to ensure that there will be a resolution condemning the use of the death penalty at the forthcoming session of the Commission on Human Rights. [41284]

Mr. MacShane: Since the death penalty was removed from the statute book in 1998, the UK has gained a reputation as a leading advocate for the abolition of the death penalty worldwide. As in recent years, the EU will table a resolution on the death penalty at the forthcoming session of the UN Commission on Human Rights (CHR). The UK will be contributing fully to this resolution and will be working hard to ensure that it receives maximum support in the CHR.

World Conference Against Racism

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he has taken to encourage the 2002 Commission on Human Rights to adopt a resolution calling on all Governments to implement the Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Conference against Racism. [40015]

Mr. MacShane: The UK reaffirmed its commitment to combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance in the UN General Assembly Third Committee when it co-sponsored a Resolution that endorsed the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action which was passed on 26 February. The UK will be working closely with other nations to ensure that the Resolution at the CHR promotes the follow-up agreed in the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action.

Torture Convention

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken to encourage the adoption of the Draft Protocol to the Torture Convention at the 2002 Commission on Human Rights. [40016]

Mr. MacShane: The UK supports the Draft Optional Protocol to the UN Convention Against Torture (OP/CAT) and believes it would make an important contribution to preventing and eradicating torture. We are continuing to work closely with EU partners and others to make the protocol a reality; the EU is in contact with the Chairperson-Rapporteur of the Optional Protocol Working Group to discuss next steps, including promoting the Optional Protocol at the Commission on Human Rights.

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to whom the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development is accountable; and when he last met *(a)* the president and *(b)* the UK director of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. [40374]

Clare Short: I have been asked to reply.

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) is accountable to the 62 Governments and institutions that hold shares in it. The UK Government are one of these shareholders.

The EBRD is governed by 62 governors appointed by the shareholders. The board of governors meets once a year and holds full power over the bank. Governors have delegated responsibility for most general operations of the bank to a board of 23 directors. The powers and responsibilities of the governors and directors are set out in full in the agreement establishing the EBRD (available at www.ebrd.com).

In the case of the UK, the Chancellor of the Exchequer is the UK governor and I am the UK alternate governor. My Department takes lead policy responsibility for EBRD on most issues. The UK director is a DFID official on secondment.

I have met the President of the EBRD on a number of occasions.

Parliamentary Debates

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish the information which underlay the statement of the hon. Member for Exeter on 6 March in Westminster Hall that the Prime Minister has spent more time in the House answering questions and making statements than either of his two predecessors. [42187]

Mr. Bradshaw: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Prime Minister on 11 March (UIN 42137).

SCOTLAND

Electricity Act

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she has had with the Scottish Executive on the consequences for energy supply of section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989; and if she will make a statement. [41984]

Mrs. Liddell: I have regular discussions with the First Minister on a wide range of matters.

Asbestos-related Diseases

Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action she is taking to encourage insurance companies to reduce the delay in making payments to those with asbestos-related diseases in Scotland. [41434]

Mrs. Liddell: On Wednesday 6 March I chaired a meeting of parties involved in handling asbestos claims related to Chester Street Insurance Holding Ltd. Present at the meeting were PricewaterhouseCoopers (the Chester Street administrators); the Association of British Insurers; the Financial Services Compensation Scheme and Iron Trades Management Services (claims handlers).

At the meeting, I made it very clear that delays in dealing with agreed claims are not acceptable. All parties acknowledged that agreed claims should be paid as quickly and as efficiently as possible. The administrators, the ABI, the FSCS and ITMS made the point to me that the arrangements set up following the insolvency of Chester Street are unique. There had been complexities, particularly in relation to establishing liabilities. In some cases, solvent policyholders (i.e. the companies, or their successors, for whom the claimants had originally worked) have been traced and their liabilities have had to be established. However, this type of work has now largely been completed. As a result, it should be possible to process claims payments more quickly in the future.

In a number of cases, those present at the meeting indicated that settlement forms had been sent out to claimants' lawyers, for the claimant to sign. Clearly, it is important for these forms to be signed and returned as soon as possible, to speed the process along.

I am anxious to ensure that individual claimants are kept informed of the process. It was agreed that a newsletter will be produced within the next week, to be distributed to Members of Parliament with a constituency interest. We will also consider other ways of keeping individual claimants informed.

We also discussed whether it would be possible to establish a system so that once a claim against Chester Street is agreed, the claimant would know how long it should take for the claim to be processed. The administrators, the ABI, FSCS and ITMS agreed to consider this further and report back to me.

I will convene a further meeting in six weeks' time to discuss the claims handling process. I made it clear that, when this next meeting takes place, I want to see significant progress made in paying claims. We will invite other relevant parties to the meeting, such as claimants' solicitors. We will also have detailed statistical information available on the number of claims made; the number settled and the number still outstanding.

The Government are determined to make sure that the arrangements put in place following the insolvency of Chester Street last year work as efficiently and as quickly as possible.

TREASURY

Job Advertisements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the job advertisements placed by his Department in the last 12 months specifying where the advertisements were placed and the cost in each case. [39062]

Ruth Kelly: The details held centrally in respect of job advertisements placed by Departments and agencies of the Chancellor have been deposited in the Library of the House. In each case details for the latest 12 months available have been provided.

Customs and Excise and the Inland Revenue, including Valuation Office, delegate much of their recruitment to their various business elements. In consequence the amount of information held centrally is limited.

Premium Bonds

Tim Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the yield rates on premium bonds in each of the last five years. [42311]

Ruth Kelly: The rate of interest used to calculate the size of the monthly premium bond prize fund is a variable rate that can be changed on giving three months' notice. The rates that have applied over the last five years are as follows:

Rate per annum (percentage)	*Effective from*
4.75	1 May 1996
5.0	1 November 1997
4.5	1 March 1999
4.0	1 April 1999
3.25	1 June 1999
3.5	1 January 2000
3.75	1 March 2000
4.0	1 May 2000
4.25	1 June 2000
4.0	1 April 2001
3.75	1 August 2001
3.5	1 September 2001
3.25	1 December 2001
2.9	1 February 2002
2.4	1 March 2002

War Insurance Cover

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will extend war insurance cover for the airlines until the end of June. [R] [41191]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury announced on 21 January that the Troika insurance scheme that provides war insurance for the UK aviation industry would be extended for a final time until 20 March. I have nothing further to add to that announcement.

A minute setting out the details of the scheme and the date on which it would end was laid before Parliament on 5 February. A copy was sent to the Transport and Treasury Select Committees.

Care Homes

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate the Valuation Office has made of the likely annual receipts from charging care homes NNDR where they provide intermediate care. [41831]

Dawn Primarolo: The Valuation Office Agency has no information regarding the number of intermediate care homes which exist at present, or are likely to be constructed or adapted in the future. It is unable to provide information regarding individual liability since this will depend on the size and location of the property in question. Nor does it have knowledge of the council tax liability which might accrue in such cases if they were not subject to business rates.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will review the decision of the Valuation Office to make care homes providing intermediate care liable for NNDR. [41830]

Dawn Primarolo: The decision as to whether a property should be entered in the valuation list for council tax, or the rating list for business rates, is based on the definition of domestic property in section 66 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988. In short, if the accommodation is wholly or mainly provided for short periods to individuals whose sole or main residence is elsewhere then it will no longer be domestic and must be treated as non-domestic and, therefore, will be liable to business rates.

Personal Allowance

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the distribution of benefits for the personal allowance by income deciles in *(a)* pounds per annum and *(b)* percentage terms; and if he will make a statement. [41310]

Dawn Primarolo: The reductions in income tax labilities of taxpayers from personal allowances by income decile are in the table.

Tax reductions from personal allowances

Income decile of taxpayers in 2001–02	*£ billion per annum*	*As a percentage of income*
Top	5.0	3
Second	3.1	4
Third	2.7	4
Fourth	2.8	5
Fifth	2.8	6
Sixth	2.9	8
Seventh	2.9	9
Eighth	2.9	11
Ninth	2.9	14
Bottom	2.5	16

These estimates are based on the Survey of Personal Incomes.

Tax Credits

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for which benefits he proposes the proposed pension credit and the general employment credit to be a passport. [41595]

Dawn Primarolo: The benefits passported from tax credits or social security benefits are the responsibility of the Departments that administer them, and it is they who set the rules for entitlement.

The Treasury continues to discuss with the relevant Departments the effect of the new tax credits on the populations currently entitled to various passported benefits.

Accommodation Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the cost was of hotel accommodation for departmental staff working away from home in each of the last four years. [41057]

Ruth Kelly: The table shows the total cost of all hotel accommodation, subsistence allowances and associated expenditure for HM Treasury staff making official trips away from the office. No further disaggregation is available.

Expenditure

	£000
1997–98	141
1998–99	162
1999–2000	210
2000–01	166

Class 3 Contributions

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been raised in each of the last three years by Class 3 contributions sent in from those resident abroad, broken down by country where this amounts to more than 5 per cent. of total numbers, and for the remainder collectively. [40688]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* Reliable information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which of the promotional campaigns for the WFTC have been evaluated by *(a)* the Government and *(b)* independent bodies on behalf of the Government; and if he will place copies of the reviews in the Library. [40452]

Dawn Primarolo: All working families tax credit promotional campaigns have been evaluated by independent external agencies managed by COI Communications Research Unit on behalf of Inland Revenue Marketing and Communications.

Qualitative research has been undertaken to develop the creative proposals for the advertising campaigns and measure the effectiveness of the proposals to convey the campaign messages to the target audiences.

Quantitative tracking research has also been organised to evaluate the success of the campaign, by measuring the awareness levels among the target audiences and understanding of the message. The Inland Revenue also monitors the number of calls to helplines, the number of booklets ordered and the take up of WFTC.

The tracking research reports have not been placed in the House of Commons Library, but are held by Inland Revenue Marketing and Communications team and the COI Communications Research Unit. These reports are used to develop all following campaigns.

Quantitative tracking research has been carried out five times since the first WFTC advertising campaign in 1999. Wave 1 was 1999, wave 2 and 3 in 2000, wave 4 in 2001 and wave 5 in 2002 (currently under way).

Landfill Tax

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much of the landfill tax proceeds have passed to Entrust in *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000 and *(c)* 2000–01 for (i) the UK and (ii) Scotland separately. [41199]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 8 March 2002]:* Entrust, the regulator of the environmental bodies landfill tax credit scheme, receives none of the proceeds from landfill tax. Figures for contributions are collected by calendar year. Contributions made by landfill site operators under the scheme to environmental bodies are:

		£
	For the UK	*For Scotland*
1999	82,676,183	7,488,354
2000	96,221,885	7,992,538
2001	115,774,454	7,808,311

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been raised by the landfill tax in *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000 and *(c)* 2000–01 in (i) the UK and (ii) Scotland; and how much of this landfill tax has been used for tax credits in (A) 1998–99, (B) 1999–2000 and (c) 2000–01 for (1) the UK and (2) Scotland. [41198]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 8 March 2002]:* Figures related to landfill tax receipts and environmental tax credits for the UK can be found in the HM Customs and Excise "Landfill Tax Factsheet", which is available in the Library.

Separate figures for Scotland are not available. This is due to the method of calculation of the tax, where each landfill operator is registered according to the location of their head office.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the expenditure of Entrust has been in *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000 and *(c)* 2000–01 for (i) the UK and (ii) Scotland. [41200]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 8 March 2002]:* Figures for expenditure by environmental bodies under the environmental bodies landfill tax credit scheme are collected by calendar year. They are:

(i) For the UK:

	£
1999	46,835,182
2000	82,040,006
2001	117,659,082

(ii) For Scotland:

	£
1999	5,475,538
2000	9,904,464
2001	2,670,705

Pete Wishart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what landfill tax proceeds have passed to Entrust in *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000 and *(c)* 2000–01 for (i) the UK and (ii) Scotland. [36449]

Mr. Boateng *[pursuant to his reply, 25 February 2002, c. 1054W]:* The information relating to landfill site operators' contributions should have been presented by

calendar year, the basis on which Entrust calculates its figures, not by financial year. The table should have read:

(i) For the UK:

	£
1999	82,676,183
2000	96,221,885
2001	115,774,454

(ii) For Scotland:

	£
1999	7,488,354
2000	7,992,538
2001	7,808,311

Pete Wishart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what Entrust's expenditure was in *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000 and *(c)* 2000–01 for (i) the UK and (ii) Scotland. [36450]

Mr. Boateng *[pursuant to his reply, 26 February 2002, c. 1204W]:* The information relating to landfill site operators' contributions should have been presented by calendar year, the basis on which Entrust calculates its figures, not by financial year. The table should have read:

(i) For the UK:

	£
1999	46,835,182
2000	82,040,006
2001	117,659,082

(ii) For Scotland:

	£
1999	5,475,538
2000	9,904,464
2001	2,670,705

Arthur Andersen

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the names of the Arthur Andersen employees seconded to the Treasury between 1997 and 2001; and what their duties were. [33042]

Ruth Kelly: Four people were seconded to HM Treasury from Arthur Andersen during the period 1997 to 2001. Details of current secondees from all sectors outside central Government can be found on the Treasury website.

Private Sponsorship

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the events which have been sponsored by a private organisation in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the Office of Government Commerce, *(c)* the Inland Revenue and *(d)* Customs and Excise since May 1997 and the names of the sponsoring organisations; and if he will make a statement. [32512]

Ruth Kelly: Records are not maintained centrally. Information in the format required could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Parliamentary Questions

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will answer the question of 31 January 2002 from the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell concerning sponsorship. [38299]

Ruth Kelly: I have replied to the hon. Gentleman today.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham can expect an answer to his Question tabled on 28 January, ref 31887. [42310]

Ruth Kelly: I very much regret that the hon. Member's earlier question has not yet been answered. I hope to be in a position to reply to him very soon.

Teenage Pregnancies

Tim Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many teenage pregnancies there were in each of the last five years, broken down by *(a)* age and *(b)* region. [42329]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Tim Loughton, dated March 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking how many teenage pregnancies there were in each of the last five year, broken down by *(a)* age and *(b)* region. (42329)

Figures for the latest available five years, 1996–2000, are shown in the table.

Teenage conceptions: numbers by age and health region 1996–2000

	Age at conception						
Year of conception and health region[1]	*<14*	*14*	*15*	*16*	*17*	*18*	*19*
1996							
Northern and Yorkshire	60	317	887	2,052	2,840	3,228	3,569
Trent	58	210	790	1,535	2,051	2,440	2,597
Eastern	25	137	485	1,049	1,661	1,998	2,336
London	71	278	823	1,852	2,919	3,563	4,490
South East	57	225	810	1,907	2,685	3,306	3,618
South West	39	160	447	1,061	1,553	1,798	2,021
West Midlands	57	225	821	1,694	2,327	2,811	3,131
North West	54	256	921	2,168	2,991	3,438	3,867
Wales	30	153	461	966	1,322	1,568	1,604

Teenage conceptions: numbers by age and health region 1996–2000

	Age at conception						
Year of conception and health region[1]	*<14*	*14*	*15*	*16*	*17*	*18*	*19*
1997							
Northern and Yorkshire	57	309	907	1,996	2,924	3,459	3,595
Trent	34	217	647	1,460	2,134	2,605	2,598
Eastern	25	149	457	1,135	1,721	2,138	2,351
London	57	285	799	1,938	2,896	3,796	4,489
South East	47	262	774	1,823	2,898	3,436	3,553
South West	34	142	422	1,072	1,532	1,927	1,975
West Midlands	52	239	721	1,635	2,574	3,020	3,031
North West	45	245	781	2,059	2,959	3,666	3,818
Wales	14	116	434	940	1,391	1,570	1,621
1998							
Northern and Yorkshire	63	301	856	1,884	2,975	3,777	3,909
Trent	56	241	672	1,480	2,317	2,885	2,936
Eastern	28	156	451	1,108	1,849	2,298	2,519
London	64	280	808	1,852	3,038	4,157	4,762
South East	54	236	773	1,855	2,997	3,755	4,005
South West	35	144	474	1,065	1,642	2,130	2,213
West Midlands	56	227	752	1,567	2,483	3,116	3,380
North West	39	263	826	2,009	3,113	4,095	4,099
Wales	28	140	429	982	1,451	1,726	1,746
1999							
Northern and Yorkshire	53	260	806	1,908	2,787	3,515	4,011
Trent	39	204	623	1,428	2,078	2,748	3,055
Eastern	27	145	455	1,037	1,756	2,295	2,477
London	71	257	730	1,896	3,021	4,075	4,894
South East	63	256	737	1,754	2,768	3,570	4,019
South West	28	161	469	1,000	1,513	1,959	2,229
West Midlands	49	206	635	1,550	2,398	2,980	3,445
North West	50	258	826	1,904	3,041	3,746	4,182
Wales	26	119	392	857	1,387	1,739	1,820
2000[2]							
Northern and Yorkshire	43	250	805	1,785	2,667	3,537	3,794
Trent	40	181	590	1,366	2,042	2,573	3,024
Eastern	30	153	430	1,113	1,605	2,157	2,424
London	87	303	856	1,892	2,900	4,057	5,085
South East	47	268	792	1,766	2,736	3,363	4,043
South West	40	153	450	984	1,464	1,966	2,167
West Midlands	49	234	709	1,512	2,355	3,021	3,521
North West	38	229	840	1,903	2,983	3,826	4,192
Wales	21	119	354	828	1,327	1,666	1,851

[1] Boundaries as at 1 April 2001

[2] Provisional

Source:

Office for National Statistics

Insurance Premiums

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has evaluated the effect on the competitiveness of British businesses of increases in *(a)* employer liability insurance premiums and *(b)* other insurance premiums; and if he will make a statement. [39962]

Ruth Kelly: The Government do not intervene in the setting of insurance premiums. These are currently increasing worldwide, not just in the UK.

Export Licences

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer who in his Department is responsible for co-ordinating export licence applications between the Department of Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign Office. [40255]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Responsibility for co-ordinating export licence applications does not rest with the Treasury or any other department of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Relevant Treasury teams may provide advice on the countries in question or on issues relating to international financial institutions.

Pension Funds

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with the managers of pension funds about the impact of the new accounting standard FRS 17; and what assessment his Department has made of the effect of FRS 17 on pension funds. [40196]

Ruth Kelly: I meet representations of the pensions industry regularly and discuss a number of issues. However, the application of accounting standards, FRS 17 included, is a matter for the independent Accounting Standards Board.

Independent School Fees

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to extend the scope of VAT to include independent school fees. [40793]

Mr. Boateng: The Government have no such plans.

Office for National Statistics

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what information is provided by information on business turnover collected by the Office for National Statistics which is not available to the Government from information collected by Customs and Excise; [40834]

(2) for what reason the Office for National Statistics is required to collect turnover information from businesses. [40835]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mr. David Lidington, dated 11 March 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent questions on information collected on business turnover. (40834, 40835).

The ONS collects monthly turnover data directly from businesses in the production, retail and services industries. These statistics are key inputs to monthly short-term indicators of economic activity such as the Index of Production, the Retail Sales Index and the Experimental Index of Services. The same data are used to give timely measures of quarterly Gross Domestic Product. These economic indicators are used by government and the public to help monitor the performance of the UK economy, and by the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of England to help set interest rates. Other key users of the data are the Treasury, the Department of Trade and Industry and the European Union.

Turnover information is also collected on an annual basis via the Annual Business Inquiry. Here it is one of a set of data items needed on a coherent basis from the annual accounts of a business and cannot be taken in isolation. This set of data is used to compile the National Accounts (including estimation of Gross Domestic Product and Investment) and for other important statistics such as Productivity. Key users again include the Treasury, the Department of Trade and Industry and the European Union.

VAT returns made by businesses to Customs and Excise do include data on turnover. However VAT sources are far from ideal for the purposes of producing national statistics. The data are for the most part collected on a quarterly basis and they are less timely. Also, some businesses are exempt from VAT so that coverage is incomplete.

The possible use of these returns to replace or partially replace directly collected survey data is part of ONS' long term strategic development programme. In 2000 a feasibility study suggested that it might be possible to use VAT sources more directly. In 2001 ONS piloted and introduced a secure system for transmitting VAT turnover data from Customs and Excise to ONS and confirmed that there would be no legal barriers to such data transfer. We plan to further develop the methodology adopted in the 2000 feasibility study, to prepare inputs to the Index of Production and Index of Services in parallel with those based on business surveys and to quality assure the alternative sources with key users. If this is successful ONS will then move to the much greater use of VAT returns.

Cancer Deaths

Tim Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his latest assessment is of the number of deaths from cancer which could be avoided in the UK each year if cancer survival rates were raised to the average level of other EU countries. [42286]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Tim Loughton, dated March 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question on the number of deaths from cancer which could be avoided in the UK each year if cancer survival rates were raised to the average level of other EU countries. (42286)

The number requested is not readily available. Comparable survival rates do not exist for all EU countries or for the UK as a whole. The comparable figures that are available relate to the devolved administrations of the UK and those parts of EU countries that participated in the EUROCARE project.

Official Visits

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the official visits (1) to *(a)* Paris and *(b)* Brussels made by each Minister in his Department in 2001 and the mode of travel used; and what guidance is provided to Ministers in his Department on the choice of mode of travel for such visits; [38159]

(2) within the UK outside London made by each Minister in his Department in 2001, giving for each *(a)* the origin and destination and *(b)* the mode of travel used; and what guidance is provided to Ministers in his Department on choice of mode of travel for official visits. [38195]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given to him by the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 421W.

Smaller Quoted Companies

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what incentives are in place to aid investment in research for smaller quoted companies; and what steps the Government are taking to make competition for investment capital less biased towards larger quoted companies. [40248]

Dawn Primarolo: An R&D tax credit for small and medium sized companies was introduced in Budget 2000. The credit increases the tax deduction for current spending on qualifying R&D from 100 per cent. to 150 per cent., reducing the cash cost of R&D by 30 per cent. for a company paying tax at the small companies rate. The credit can also be paid to companies that are not yet in profit, at a rate of 24 per cent. An R&D tax credit for larger companies will be introduced in Budget 2002. There are also 100 per cent. allowances for R&D capital spending, which are available to all companies and allow immediate tax deductions for qualifying capital expenditure.

The Government commissioned the Myners Review in 2000 to look at factors that may be distorting the investment decision-making of institutions. The review reported in March 2001 and found weaknesses in the investment process that affect all quoted companies, including smaller quoted companies. The Government have accepted all the recommendations made in the review in principle and have published consultation documents on specific issues that were highlighted.

Equity

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Government intend to define initial costs incurred as a result of raising equity as a legitimate expense and allow them to be written off against tax. [40250]

Dawn Primarolo: The costs of raising equity finance are treated consistently between taxable profits and commercial accounts—they are not allowed as a deduction against profits because they relate to ownership of the company. The Government have not stated any intention to change this rule.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Escapees

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the escaped terrorist prisoners who were on the run and have been granted early release under the terms of the Northern Ireland Sentences Act 1998. [41618]

Dr. John Reid: 11 prisoners on the run have successfully applied to the Sentence Review Commissioners for early release under the terms of the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998. In addition eight prisoners on the run have met the principles of the early release scheme but a strict application of the Sentences Act has created an anomaly whereby the Sentence Review Commissioners are unable to grant an early release. In those circumstances the Secretary of State's powers under the Northern Ireland Prisons Act 1953 or the Royal Prerogative of Mercy have been used to provide early release. It has always been the Government's policy that they do not name individuals released under the early release scheme.

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the terrorists who are on the run from justice and who may benefit from future amnesty legislation. [41617]

Dr. John Reid: The Government have acknowledged that there is an issue concerning fugitives on the run who would stand to benefit from the early release scheme if they were convicted. As part of the package of measures proposed at Weston Park last July the Government made a commitment to take steps to resolve this issue. The Government are currently considering how to take this forward. An announcement will be made in due course.

Ballistic Protection Kits

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many reclaimed ballistic protection kits have been *(a)* taken out of service and *(b)* retained for future use in the event of increased security demands. [30417]

Jane Kennedy: The Chief Constable advises me that:

(a) No Land Rover protection kits have been taken out of service. 70 armoured saloon protection kits have been taken out of service and recycled.

(b) Reclaimed ballistic protection kits are always recycled and therefore not retained for future use.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Data Protection

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the President of the Council what representations he has received on the responsibilities of hon. Members under the Data Protection Act 1998; and if he will make a statement. [42121]

Mr. Robin Cook: I have received a number of representations from hon. Members about difficulties they are experiencing in dealing with constituency cases as a result of the Data Protection Act. At my instigation, officials are consulting their colleagues in the Lord Chancellor's Department about what changes might be needed to the present arrangements.

Government Bills

Norman Baker: To ask the President of the Council how many Government Bills were announced in the Queen's Speech and were not introduced in the same Session of Parliament in the *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000–01 Sessions of Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [42123]

Mr. Robin Cook: Subject to the exceptions set out, all legislation announced in Queen's Speeches from 1997–2000 was introduced during the same Session of Parliament.

Queen's Speech 1998 announced our intention to introduce legislation to promote electronic commerce; the Electronic Communications Act was introduced the following Session.

Queen's Speech 1999 announced our intention to introduce legislation to increase the effectiveness of the power to remove regulatory burdens and to improve the education of children with special educational needs; the Regulatory Reform Act and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act were introduced the following Session.

Queen's Speech 2000 announced our intention to re-introduce legislation on giving courts the power to decide whether certain defendants should be tried by jury or by magistrates; the Government have subsequently announced their intention to bring forward legislation to reform the criminal courts system in the light of the recommendations from the review by Lord Justice Auld.

Norman Baker: To ask the President of the Council if he will list the average number of days of consideration for Government Bills in *(a)* the House of Commons and *(b)* the House of Lords in each parliamentary Session since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [42125]

Mr. Robin Cook: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Records are not kept in precisely the form required. The table[1] provides information on the time taken to consider Government Bills.

---

[1] Supplied by the Journal Offices in the Lords and the Commons.

House of Commons

Session	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Government Bills considered—floor	53	31	40	26
Time taken debating	781 hours 53 minutes	396 hours 38 minutes	565 hours 5 minutes	243 hours 35 minutes
Average time per Bill	14 hours 45 minutes	12 hours 48 minutes	14 hours 8 minutes	9 hours 22 minutes
Government Bills considered[1]	31	26	37	17
Sittings[1]	228	207	341	121
Average sittings per Bill	7.35	7.96	9.22	7.12

[1] Standing Committee

House of Lords

Session	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Government Bills considered[1]	50	29	42	27
Time taken debating	806 hours 55 minutes	622 hours 45 minutes	791 hours 33 minutes	223 hours 38 minutes
Average time per Bill	16 hours 8 minutes	21 hours 28 minutes	18 hours 51 minutes	8 hours 17 minutes

[1] Floor or Grand Committee

Norman Baker: To ask the President of the Council (1) how many Government Bills were introduced in each Parliamentary Session since 1997; and if he will make a statement; [42122]

(2) if he will list each Bill introduced by the Government which failed to complete its passage through Parliament in each Parliamentary Session since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [42124]

Mr. Robin Cook: The information is in the table.

	Number of Government Bills	
Session/Bill	*Introduced*	*Which failed to complete their passage*
1997–98		
European Parliamentary Elections	53	1
1998–99		
Northern Ireland	13	4
Sexual Offences (Amendment)		
Financial Services and Markets[1]		
Railways		
1999–2000		
Criminal Justice No. 1[2]	42	3
Criminal Justice No. 2[2]		
European Parliamentary Elections		
2000–01		
Adoption and Children	28	7
Commonhold and Leasehold		
Culture and Recreation		
Homes		
Hunting		
International Development		
Tobacco Advertising and Promotion		
2001–02		
So far	31	—

[1] Carried over

[2] Mode of Trial

HOME DEPARTMENT

Home Detention Curfew Scheme

12. **Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has held with prison governors about the number of prisoners released under the home detention curfew scheme. [38884]

Beverley Hughes: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary addressed prison governors on 6 November 2001.

He and I saw representatives of the Prison Governors Association on 6 March. We have told governors that we want to see the fullest possible use made of Home Detention Curfew without compromising public safety. HDC has an important part to play in resettling prisoners on their release from custody and that is why the Government are looking at ways of extending HDC.

Substance Abuse Centres

15. **Mrs. Helen Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the support given by the Government to drug rehabilitation and substance abuse centres. [38888]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Government are making substantial investment to increase drug treatment services, particularly for Class A drug users. Through the Pooled Treatment Budget, we are increasing funding from £234 million in 2001–02 to £400 million by 2003–04 to improve services locally and reduce waiting times.

Everybody wants to see more treatment available—but we also want to ensure that it is better treatment, providing skilled staff and delivered in a way that is appropriate for the communities that they serve. Many treatment providers already offer excellent services. Where services need to be improved the National Treatment Agency is working with Drug Action Teams to raise standards and ensure that high quality treatment is available to everyone who needs it with a minimum of delay.

Police Officers

16. **Annabelle Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to meet representatives of the police forces to discuss proposed changes to police pay and conditions. [38889]

Mr. Denham: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary continues to have regular meetings with representatives of all police organisations. He had a meeting with leaders of the Police Federation on 6 March. His officials are involved in conciliation discussions in the Police Negotiating

Board (PNB) about proposed changes to police pay and conditions with the representatives of all the main police organisations.

23. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many additional police officers have allocated to *(a)* West Midlands police force and *(b)* Coventry under his recent initiative. [38896]

Mr. Denham: Under the Government's Crime Fighting Fund (CFF) recruitment initiative, the West Midlands police have been allocated funding for 523 recruits over the above their previous recruitment plans for the three years to March 2003.

I understand that so far, 62 of the recruits funded by the CFF have been allocated by the chief constable to Coventry. In addition to the CFF, Coventry has been allocated funding for four extra officers from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund.

Community Wardens

17. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the funding of community wardens in Lancashire. [38890]

Mr. Denham: Government funding for neighbourhood wardens schemes in Lancashire in the financial years 2000–01 to 2002–03 totals £740,070. Of this £197,500 will go to Skelmersdale in the West Lancashire district council, £343,274 to the Greater Lever, Hutton Lance and Deane areas Burnley and £199,296 to Wyre district council.

Government funding for Street Warden Schemes in Lancashire in the financial years 2001–02 to 2003–04 totals £441,785. Of this £189,000 will go to Morecambe, £206,500 to Hyndburn and £45,785 to Burnley.

Auld Review

18. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on Lord Justice Auld's review of the criminal courts. [38891]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Government welcome Sir Robin Auld's review of the criminal courts, the report of which was published last October, and are considering their response in the light of full public consultation.

Refugees

19. **Martin Linton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his proposals to develop a source country refugee resettlement programme. [38892]

Angela Eagle: As announced on 7 February in the White Paper "Secure Borders, Safe Haven", we intend to introduce a resettlement programme that will enable those refugees whose life, liberty, or security cannot be protected in their current place of refuge, to be brought in safety to the United Kingdom and provided with protection. This will provide a legal route for those seeking international protection and is further evidence of our practical support of the Refugee Convention.

Victims of Crime

20. **Mr. Caton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what support his Department is giving to victims of crime in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [38893]

Mr. Keith Bradley: I am fully committed to improve services and support to the victims of crime. That is why we have more than doubled the annual grant to Victim Support since May 1997 (from £11.7 million to £25 million), and delivered new services such as witness support in magistrates courts, a national telephone helpline and a victim personal statement scheme.

28. **Mrs. Betty Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he gives to police authorities on automatic referral of victims of crime to Victim Support. [38901]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Guidance about new arrangements for referring details of victims of crime to Victim Support by the police was issued in Home Office Circular 44/2001 of 3 October 2001.

Citizenship

21. **Ian Lucas:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to ensure that young offenders have instruction in the obligations of citizenship. [38894]

Beverley Hughes: Citizenship is an important part of the curriculum for juveniles in custody. It helps them to understand the consequences of their behaviour and prepares them for a useful life on release.

Young Offenders

22. **Mr. Lammy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the numbers of young people serving custodial sentences in young offenders' institutions who come from deprived areas. [38895]

Beverley Hughes: While information about prisoners' home addresses prior to custody is not collected centrally, we know that many young prisoners have a multiplicity of serious problems and social exclusion. For some, prison can be the first chance to address the problems that contribute to their offending.

In the spring, the Social Exclusion Unit are to publish a report into how the Prison Service, the National Probation Service and other agencies can better tackle the problems, including social deprivation, that contribute to prisoners' offending and reduce their likelihood of re-offending on release. A copy of the report will be placed in the Library.

27. **Mr. Best:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offenders in young offender institutions are fathers; and what the Prison Service is doing to ensure they maintain contact with their children. [38900]

Beverley Hughes: There are no centrally held statistics. However, recent research suggests that 25 per cent. of male young offenders and 39 per cent. of female young offenders are parents. The Prison Service recognises the importance of family ties to the rehabilitation of prisoners, and in particular the value of prisoners continuing their parental role while in custody. Young offender institutions have introduced programmes which support this process, including the appointment of family liaison officers, extended family visits and parenting skills courses. For low income families, the Assisted Prison Visits Unit provides financial support for the cost of visiting, or escorting children to visits.

37. **Ms Munn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he issues on the proportion of youth offending team budgets to be devoted to preventative work. [38910]

Beverley Hughes: The aim of all youth offending team (Yot) spending is to prevent offending. National standards issued by the Home Secretary in April 2000 state that a minimum of 2.5 per cent. of the Yot budget must be spent on preventive services for children and young people at high risk of offending. The remainder prevents offending by working with young people in the youth justice system who have admitted or been convicted of an offence.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what information he has on the *(a)* numbers and *(b)* categories of young offenders broken down into those living with (i) a single parent and (ii) two married parents; [38423]

(2) what recent research he has evaluated on a link between young offenders and the incidence of families living on some form of state welfare support; [38432]

(3) what research he has commissioned on the link between young offenders and their family structures, with special reference to living with *(a)* never married parent, *(b)* single parents, *(c)* two married parents, *(d)* family members other than parents and *(e)* being adopted, in (i) the UK and (ii) in other countries. [39320]

Beverley Hughes: In last year's youth offending survey commissioned by the Youth Justice Board, 24 per cent. of young secondary school people in two parent households and 30 per cent. of those in one parent households admitted to an offence in the previous years.

However there was not a clear difference in repeat offending.

The Home Office and the Home Office-sponsored Youth Justice Board have commissioned a number of research studies into the causes of youth offending, including family background. Most recently, 19 November 2001, Communities That Care reported on risk and protective factors associated with youth crime for the Youth Justice Board. It showed that youth offending risks were increased by among other things family conflict, family structure, poor quality parental supervision and discipline, a poor relationship between the child and one or both parents and low family income. I am arranging for copies to be placed in the Library.

We have not commissioned any specific research on the link between youth offending and families living on welfare support.

Police Administration

24. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his strategy for investment in technology designed to improve police administrative procedures. [38897]

Mr. Denham: The Police Reform White Paper includes major strategies for using information technology to reduce bureaucratic burdens on police officers.

Major projects which will benefit from central investment include the Airwave national police communications service; the National Strategy for Police Information Systems to improve the recording and delivery of information across the police service and wider criminal justice system; the National Automated Fingerprint Identification's System and the Police National Network Two which will add new services such as internet and extranet connectivity to the original Police National Network.

Criminal Records Bureau

25. **Ms Shipley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what access to the Criminal Records Bureau will be available in Northern Ireland. [38898]

Mr. Denham: Arrangements for implementing Part V of the Police Act 1997 in Northern Ireland are still under consideration. Until Part V is implemented, some organisations in Northern Ireland, in considering applicants with connections in England and Wales for relevant positions in Northern Ireland, will wish to access information on lists held by departments here of people who are unsuitable to work with children or vulnerable adults.

Rural Policing

26. **Mr. Liddell-Grainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of rural policing in Somerset. [38899]

Mr. Denham: The Avon and Somerset police authority has received extra funding of nearly £1 million in the past two years to improve policing in rural areas. This has predominantly been used to make it easier for rural communities to access police services and to increase the visibility and effectiveness of police patrol and operations.

The Somerset West Basic Command Unit area has been successful in attracting funding for the first national pilot Parish Warden Scheme. Four wardens were recruited in May 2001 and were operational from June 2001. They patrol on foot in local villages to reduce antisocial behaviour and the fear of crime.

Community Support

29. **Mr. Neil Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on community support officers' role in reducing the fear of crime. [38902]

Mr. Denham: Community Support Officers, who will be employed by the police authority and will be under the command and control of the chief officer of police, will be deployed in the community and will have a vital role to play in support of the police in increasing public safety, contributing to the regeneration of their areas, and reducing the fear of crime. They will provide a visible, reassuring presence to the public, and will have sufficient powers to deal with minor disorder and antisocial behaviour.

Police Reform

30. **Ms Ward:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had on police reform with Hertfordshire Constabulary. [38903]

Mr. Denham: As yet, we have not been in direct discussion with Hertfordshire Constabulary on the police reform programme. We did invite comments on the police reform White Paper but there were no representations from Hertfordshire. However, we did receive responses from organisations such as the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Association of Police Authorities, both of whom represent the interests of Hertfordshire Constabulary, and from the Police Federation and the Superintendents Association who represent other ranks.

Bail Hostels

31. **Dr. Starkey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on plans for private sector involvement in bail hostels. [38904]

Beverley Hughes: The National Probation Directorate is currently inviting tenders for a contract to provide facilities managements services, such as catering, cleaning and building maintenance for the approved probation hostels estate. The Invitation To Tender document has been issued and bids have been requested by the end of April. The contract is programmed to commence in September 2002.

Child Abuse

32. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce proposals for new laws to protect children from sexual abuse. [38905]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Protecting children from abuse is of the highest priority for this Government and we will continue to build upon and strengthen the measures already in place to safeguard children.

Protecting children from sexual abuse was one of the principal reasons why we set up the Sex Offences Review in January 1999. Its terms of reference specifically included

> "to provide clear and coherent sex offences which protect individuals, especially children and the more vulnerable, from abuse and exploitation".

The review made wide-ranging proposals both to introduce new offences and to clarify and amend existing ones. These proposals were published for public consultation in July 2000 and we are currently considering how to proceed in the light of the large number of responses. We intend to legislate as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Street Robbery

33. **Siobhain McDonagh:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he is taking to reduce street robbery. [38906]

Mr. Denham: We are determined to reduce street robbery. Five metropolitan forces have received an additional £20 million to assist their efforts in tackling this crime. We are working with those forces, as well as progressing an extensive robbery research programme, to enable us to identify good practice in tackling robbery which we will ensure is disseminated to all forces.

We are working with schools, communities and local authorities to reduce the opportunities for robbery and to prevent people from drifting into a life of street crime. We have been working closely with the police and the mobile phone industry to take practical steps to tackle the mobile phone theft problem. We intend to ensure that all mobile phones can be barred as soon as their theft is reported, and we welcome the recent announcements by major network providers on progress towards this target.

The new London Youth Crime Task Force will help tackle youth crime in London. It will pursue ways of improving the effectiveness of the youth justice system across the capital. We will ensure that the police and the criminal justice system give the highest priority to dealing with street robbers. We especially welcome the Metropolitan Police's Safer Streets initiative which was announced on 4 February and their Ultra Violet (UV) id initiative to mark mobile phones with ultraviolet pens.

We have also published a Robbery Toolkit which is available to all forces and those involved in crime reduction and community safety and will help them to work as effectively as possible in tackling robbery.

Drugs

34. **Jeff Ennis:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to focus the drugs strategy on class A drugs. [38907]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The main focus of the Government's drug strategy is on the drugs that cause the greatest harm, Class A drugs like heroin and cocaine. However, as my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary indicated in his evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee on 23 October 2001 we need to be even more effective at tackling the harm caused by Class A drugs. That is why he has sought advice from the Advisory Council on the misuse of Drugs on their assessment reclassifying cannabis from Class B to Class C; we launched an action plan to reduce drug-related deaths; we launched a campaign to raise the awareness of the risks of drugs and to encourage young people, their parents or carers to call the National Drugs Helpline on 0800 776 600; we set up an expert group to consider best practice guidance on the treatment of Crack Cocaine addiction; we are reviewing guidance on heroin prescribing; and also in conjunction with the Department of Health we are implementing a further series of measures to minimise the harm drugs cause.

We are also reviewing programmes against all Drugs Strategy Targets as part of the work for the Spending Review 2002, to ensure we still have the right balance and focus.

Police Pay

35. **Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the recent negotiations about reform of police pay. [38908]

Mr. Denham: The package of reforms were agreed in principle in the Police Negotiating Board (PNB) on 27 December 2001 is now the subject of conciliation, as required by the PNB Constitution.

38. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on police pay. [38911]

Mr. Denham: It is for my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to determine police pay in England and Wales, taking account of any recommendation by the Police Negotiating Board (PNB). The package of reforms agreed in principle in the PNB on 27 December 2001 is now the subject of conciliation, as required by the PNB Constitution.

Prison Service

36. **Jean Corston:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the role of the Prison Service in reducing re-offending. [38909]

Beverley Hughes: One of the principal aims of the prison service is to reduce re-offending. In order to provide regimes which are effective at reducing re-offending the Prison Service increasingly draws upon research about "What Works" to develop a more evidence based approach to tackling offending behaviour and the factors which contribute towards re-offending. The recently launched What Works Strategy provides a clear direction for the Prison Service for the further development of constructive regimes to reduce the risk of re-offending. The Prison Service and the Probation Service have been set a challenging but achievable target of reducing the level of predicted reconvictions by five per cent. by 2004.

The What Works in Prison Strategy encompasses accredited Offending Behaviour Programmes, drug treatment programmes, increased eduction provision with a target of delivering 23,400 accredited education or vocational qualifications in 2001–02 and an associated Custody to Work Strategy, which is investing £30 million between 2001 and 2004 to improve resettlement outcomes.

Travellers

39. **Richard Ottaway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review guidance to police forces and local authorities on the removal of unauthorised traveller encampments and the tackling of antisocial behaviour by travellers. [38912]

Mr. Denham: The Home Office and Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions are currently revising the good practice guidance on managing unauthorised camping to encourage local authorities and police to develop robust strategies to deal with unauthorised encampments and crime and disorder. We are also seeking legislative changes to enable Antisocial Behaviour orders to cover a wider area to help police deal with individual members of the travelling community who persistently engage in antisocial behaviour across the country.

Prison Education

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on education provision in adult prisons in England and Wales. [38881]

Beverley Hughes: We are increasing prison education funding by 15 per cent. in real terms over the next two years. We have set challenging basic skills targets for every prison. And we will raise standards and learner achievement by bringing developments in mainstream provision into prisons. For example, prisons are part of a national project to trail diagnostic assessments, curriculum materials and tests in basic skills, including English for Speakers of Other Languages. From April 2002 we will be ensuring that provision meets national standards by introducing the Common Inspection Framework into prisons along with a national strategy to support continuous improvement in prisons.

Crime Statistics

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many notifiable offences of *(a)* robbery and *(b)* burglary were recorded by the police on retail petrol stations in (i) 1999, (ii) 2000 and (iii) 2001; and if he will make a statement; [39855]

(2) how many police authorities record drive-offs as a discrete category of offence; and what plans he has to standardise recording procedure; [39856]

(3) how many offences of drive-offs from retail petrol stations were recorded by the police in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001; how many offenders were found guilty of the offence in each year; and if he will make a statement; [39858]

(4) how many offenders were found guilty, by sex and age, of *(a)* robbery and *(b)* burglary on retail petrol stations in (i) 1999, (ii) 2000 and (iii) 2001; and if he will make a statement. [39857]

Mr. Denham: Recorded crime and offender statistics collected centrally do not in general include the nature of offences so that offences of making off without payment (bilking), robbery and burglary from petrol stations cannot be distinguished from similar offences at other premises.

The number of robberies involving firearms in garages and the total number of robberies in business properties are given in the table.

Offences recorded, England and Wales

	Robberies involving firearms in a garage, service station	*Robbery of business property*
1998–99	198	10,481
1999–2000	213	12,148
2000–01	219	12,394

We are determined to reduce the number of robberies across the country as a whole. That is why we have given five metropolitan forces, including the Metropolitan police, an additional £20 million specifically to assist their efforts in tackling robbery, and have set them the challenging target of a 14 per cent. reduction of robbery in our principal cities by March 2005. The additional funds have enabled those forces to introduce a number of new initiatives and to reinforce good practice. We are working with those forces to enable us to identify good practice in tackling robbery which we will ensure is disseminated to all forces. We have also published a Robbery Toolkit which is available to all forces and those involved in crime reduction and community safety and will help them to work as effectively as possible in tackling robbery.

Public Appointments

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people from Warrington, North he has appointed to non-departmental public bodies since 1997. [39446]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* This information is not held centrally and could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

Violent Crime

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many violent crimes were recorded in East Sussex in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001. [33918]

Mr. Denham: Recorded crime data have historically been collected by police force area. Information on Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership areas has been collected centrally since 1 April 1999, and the figures for the two available years for the areas which comprise East Sussex are given in the table.

Recorded violent crimes in East Sussex, 1999–2000 and 2000–01

Crime and disorder reduction partnership (CDRP)	*Violence against the person*		*Sexual offences*		*Robbery*	
	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Eastbourne	1,301	1,232	80	112	87	95
Hastings	1,755	1,881	130	110	134	251
Lewes	690	726	45	40	28	39
Rother	578	552	46	42	26	50
Wealden	780	743	42	37	31	23
East Sussex total[1]	5,104	5,134	343	341	306	458

[1] Brighton and Hove is a unitary authority.

Information on violent crime recorded in the whole of the Sussex police force area for 1997 and the years ending March 2000 and 2001, the latest available, is as given.

Numbers of recorded violent crimes

Offence group	*1997*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Violence against the person	6,114	16,924	17,235
Sexual offences	766	1,003	1,029
Robbery	681	1,020	1,241

There was a change in counting rules for recorded crime on 1 April 1998, which expanded the offences covered, and placed a greater emphasis on counting crimes in terms of numbers of victims. Owing to the change, over England and Wales as a whole, the numbers of offences of violence against the person, sexual offences and robbery went up by 118 per cent., 4 per cent., and 1 per cent. respectively. Numbers of recorded crimes after this date are therefore not directly comparable with previous years.

It should be noted that recorded violent crime is subject to changes in reporting and recording. The 2001 British Crime Survey found that, over England and Wales as a whole, reporting to the police of violent offences in total rose from 37 per cent. in 1997 to 45 per cent. in the 2000 calendar year.

Also, the British Crime Survey has shown that, in England and Wales as a whole, the number of violent crimes recorded in the survey decreased by 23 per cent. between the 1997 and 2000 calendar years, whereas violent crime recorded by the police increased by an estimated 14 per cent. Violent crime recorded by the police may therefore not necessarily be a reflection of real changes in the level of violent crime.

Asylum Accommodation Centres

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who will design the proposed asylum accommodation centres; and if he will make a statement. [34481]

Angela Eagle: The Home Office intends to place contracts for the design, build and operation of the proposed accommodation centres which will place the responsibility for the design of accommodation centres with the contractor.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will announce his preferred sites for asylum accommodation centres. [41933]

Angela Eagle: We will announce the preferred sites later in the year, once bids to develop and operate accommodation centres have been evaluated.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many sites are under consideration for the proposed asylum accommodation centres; and for what reason the sites originally proposed are no longer being so considered. [41935]

Angela Eagle: Each of the eight sites referred to in my answer on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 57W, remains under consideration.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department where and when police marksmen were involved in culling animals during the foot and mouth outbreak. [41214]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* I regret these figures are not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The responsibility for culling animals lay with veterinary officers and licensed slaughterers under the control of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what reports have been compiled by police forces on police involvement in measures to tackle foot and mouth disease. [41215]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* Following a national police debrief of the foot and mouth crisis, Suffolk constabulary circulated a report to all forces concerning the difficulties faced by the service during the crisis and making recommendations for improvements. The chief constable of Suffolk has made the document available to me and I am placing a copy in the Library.

Asylum Centre (Edinburgh)

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to build an asylum seekers' centre near Edinburgh; what time scale he is working to; and when he advised *(a)* official bodies and *(b)* local residents of his plans. [39672]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* The Air West Edinburgh (formerly Royal Air Force (RAF) Turnhouse) site is one of eight potential sites presently under consideration for the building of trial accommodation centres for asylum seekers. My noble Friend Lord Rooker wrote to the Scottish First Minister, Jack McConnell, formally informing him of the site on 21 January 2002. My noble Friend has also met the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (John Barrett) who, together with the planning authority, was advised shortly afterwards. The Home Office interest in the site was then made public. A meeting between Home Office officials and the Edinburgh city council planning department took place on 6 February 2002.

Preferred locations will be decided upon in the next few months and the Home Office intends to consult widely within the constraints of the planning process, time and departmental resources. This will include public consultations.

Yarl's Wood

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers have (1) been admitted to Yarl's Wood Detention Centre since it opened; and of these how many at the time of entry *(a)* had removal directions set, *(b)* had removal directions pending, *(c)* had appeals pending and *(d)* were awaiting initial decisions; [38655]

(2) passed through Yarl's Wood Detention Centre broken down by those who were *(a)* removed, *(b)* granted bail, *(c)* granted temporary admission, *(d)* transferred to Oakington Detention Centre and *(e)* transferred to other detention centres. [38654]

Angela Eagle: Internal management information, which has not been quality-assured, records that there were 385 individuals held at Yarl's Wood on 14 February 2002. In addition, 764 individuals have passed through the centre since it opened last November. Of those who have passed through the centre, 416 were removed from the United Kingdom and 16 were granted bail. The remaining 332 were given temporary admission, moved to Oakington Reception Centre or transferred to other removal centres.

Information about the stage reached in the asylum process by each of the 1,149 detainees who had either passed through Yarl's Wood or who were at Yarl's Wood on 14 February 2002 is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost by an examination of individual case files.

Criminal Justice and Police Act

Mr. Fabian Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the monitoring systems he has put in place to evaluate the effectiveness of section 71 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001; [39807]

(2) what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of section 71 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001. [39808]

Mr. Denham: Section 71 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 came into force on 1 October 2001. Since 1 October, the police have been able to arrest suspected kerb crawlers and hit and run drivers and take them into custody for questioning rather than having to summons them to appear at a magistrates court.

I am informed by the Metropolitan Police Clubs and Vice Unit that the Metropolitan police have made 221 arrests for the offence of kerb crawling since the implementation of the new power on 1 October 2001.

As the new powers have only been in force for five months, we have not as yet set up any monitoring systems to assess their effectiveness. However, we intend to write to chief officers of police in the autumn to obtain a picture over a 12-month period of how many arrests there have been, how effective the new arrest powers are and whether any practical difficulties have been experienced.

Prison Population

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the projected change in the prison population is over the next *(a)* 12 months, *(b)* two years, and *(c)* five years; for what reasons the prison population is expected to change over these periods; and if he will make a statement. [37741]

Beverley Hughes: Prison population projections are produced every six months; information from the latest projection (November 2001) is provided.

	Central population projection	*Higher population projection*
12 months	69,264	71,785
2 years	72,615	76,068
5 years	77,922	84,501

The main determining factors in the size of the prison population are the numbers of offenders being sentenced at the courts, the proportions given custody, and the average lengths of sentences received. The projections make assumptions about future trends in court sentencing behaviour, based on observed trends in these three areas. The total number of persons sentenced for indictable offences has remained stable over the last eight quarters. Custody rates (the proportion of those sentenced at court who are given immediate custody) have increased for adult males and females, and have decreased for male young offenders. Average sentence lengths have remained stable for adult males, and have increased for young males, and also for females.

The projections take into account the average year on year changes over the last four quarters for which information is available. Three scenarios, based on different possible sentencing trends at the courts, are used to project forward the prison population. These scenarios apply to prisoners sentenced to four years or less. Prisoners with sentences of four years or greater are assumed to increase in line with the long-term trends. Males are expected to increase by 70 prisoners per month, and females by 20 per month.

As well as assumptions about court sentencing behaviour, the projections also take into account known changes in legislation and policy. That is, where the proposals are law, that relevant legislation has been enacted, and there is an agreed timetable for implementation. Various changes can act to increase or reduce the prison population. On 1 March 2002 the population had exceeded the higher projection for six weeks. The reasons for this are as yet unclear.

Airguns

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the number of airguns handed in during gun amnesties in the UK; [38250]

(2) how many air *(a)* rifles and *(b)* pistols are legally owned in the UK; [38251]

(3) how many *(a)* airguns and *(b)* pellets were legally sold in each of the last three years in the UK. [38242]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: This information is not collected centrally.

Wheel-clamping

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has to investigate the charges private wheel-clamping companies levy for unclamping cars; [38103]

(2) what assistance his Department offers *(a)* the police and *(b)* local authorities on controlling the activities of wheel-clampers; [38100]

(3) what plans he has to regulate companies in the wheel-clamping sector; [38098]

(4) if he will introduce regulations for stricter controls on unlawful wheel-clamping; [38104]

(5) what advice his Department gives to police authorities on the activities of wheel-clamping companies. [38099]

Mr. Denham: Currently there are no regulations relating to clamping on private roads. However, last year the Government introduced the Private Security Industry Act 2001, in part because of concerns about the unscrupulous behaviour of some clamping companies. The Act specifies the creation of a Security Industry Authority. The authority, which will regulate the industry through licensing, will begin operations in 2003; it will have wheel-clamping as one of its priority areas.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much his Department *(a)* budgeted to spend and *(b)* spent in each of the last six years on entertaining; and if he will break down these figures into categories. [32676]

Angela Eagle *[pursuant to her reply, 8 February 2002, c.1250] [holding answer 8 February 2002]:* I reported that the costs of entertaining official visitors and guests for the financial year 2000–01 was £143,269; it has since been found that a sum relating to costs of conferences had been incorrectly classified in the accounting system as hospitality costs.

Expenditure for the year on entertainment was actually £62,410.

WORK AND PENSIONS

SERPS

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) of 5 March 2002, Ref. 40938, if he will place in the Library a copy of the letter and the accompanying leaflet that will be sent to those within 10 years of state pension age, explaining how the changes to inherited SERPS may affect them. [42181]

Maria Eagle: The letter and accompanying leaflet have been placed in the Library.

Appeal Costs

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average cost was of an appeal to *(a)* a social security appeal tribunal ~~and~~ *(b)* a child support appeal tribunal, in the latest year for which figures are available. [37586]

Maria Eagle *[holding answer 26 February 2002]:* The average cost of an appeal heard by an appeal tribunal is £139 (excluding first tier agency costs). Separate figures are not available in respect of child support appeals.

The average first tier agency direct staffing costs of an appeal in respect of Benefits Agency administered benefits is £81.92 and in respect of child support appeals is £136.79.

Long-Stay Hospitals

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what payments are available to patients in long-stay hospitals. [36076]

Mr. McCartney: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 778W.

Jobcentre Plus

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to introduce additional security measures for benefits offices after screens have been removed; whether these plans include *(a)* CCTV cameras and *(b)* security guards; and if he will make a statement. [32762]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* There are no plans to remove protective screens from Benefits Agency offices until they are converted into fully integrated offices of the new Jobcentre Plus service.

In very Jobcentre Plus area there will continue to be screened provision for dealing with those customers and transactions known to give rise to particular risk. The precise type and location of this provision will depend on the recommendations of the risk assessments carried out in each individual Jobcentre Plus office. We have a zero tolerance policy under which determined action will be taken against anyone threatening or abusing Jobcentre Plus staff.

56 Jobcentre Plus pathfinder offices are already open and operating effectively—with positive feedback from staff and customers. For each of these offices a full health and safety risk assessment has been conducted and its recommendations implemented in full.

Examples of measures implemented to support the safety of staff and improved customer service as a result of the risk assessments include:

Close circuit television;

Floor managers to greet customers and guide them through their visit;

Security guards with clear instructions as to when to intervene;

Screened facilities to deal with situations likely to give rise to particular risk.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many prosecutions have been brought against perpetrators of physical assault on Benefits Agency and Employment Service staff in each year since 1997; and how many resulted in successful prosecutions. [32649]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* The majority of prosecutions in cases of physical assault on Benefits Agency and Employment Service staff are criminal prosecutions brought by the police. The Department does not keep statistics on such cases.

In addition, both the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service refer some cases to the Department's solicitor for consideration of proceedings where the police have decided not to prosecute. The Benefits Agency does not keep statistics on such cases. The Employment Service has referred 13 such cases since 1 April 1996, four of which have resulted in successful prosecution. A yearly breakdown of these cases is in the table.

Year[1]	*Submitted for prosecution*	*Successful prosecution*
1996–97	4	3
1997–98	4	—
1998–99	1	—
1999–2000	2	—
2000–01	1	1

[1] 1 April to 31 March

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many incidents of *(a)* verbal assault and *(b)* physical assault reported in Benefits Agency offices in the last 12 months took place in (i) a reception area, (ii) an unscreened office and (iii) a screened office. [32645]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* The information is in the table.

Benefits Agency incidents (2001)

	Physical assaults	*Verbal assaults*
Unscreened area	103	914
Screened area	31	1,422
Unknown location	1	43

Notes:

1. The figures are based on the number of cases reported so far. Other incidents could have taken place but have not yet been reported.

2. Of the assaults in known locations, 23 physical assaults and 1,100 verbal assaults occurred in reception. The reception in Benefits Agency offices is generally a screened area.

Visually Impaired People

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if all documentation and forms issued by his Department are available in formats suitable for the visually impaired. [41928]

Maria Eagle: The Department is committed to providing accessible information to all its customers and produces a wide range of information in a variety of formats. If a customer with a visual impairment requests a document or form in an alternative format (e.g. braille, large print or audio cassette) every effort is made, both locally and nationally, to provide it.

Pensions

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female pensioners who have retired in each of the past five years have deferred their state basic pension entitlements for sufficient time to claim a pension increment of (i) less than £5 per week, (ii) £5 to £10 a week and (iii) exceeding £10 a week at present rates of payment; and how many such pensioners retired without such an increment. [31304]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 31 January 2002]:* The information is not available in the format requested. The available information is in the table:

Number of pensioners in receipt of retirement pension on the dates shown, by amount of deferred retirement increment received and gender—Great Britain

Thousands

	Total with incs	*Less than £5*	*Between £5 and £10*	*More than £10*	*Total without incs*
March 1996					
All	1,155.2	653.3	270.4	231.5	8,551.2
Male	290.6	135.4	60.5	94.8	3,123.5
Female	864.6	517.9	209.9	136.8	5,427.8
March 1997					
All	1,100.8	607.4	260.7	232.7	8,738.0
Male	266.6	120.6	55.1	90.9	3,234.0
Female	834.2	486.8	205.6	141.8	5,504.0
March 1998					
All	1,056.0	576.5	250.5	229.1	8,914.5
Male	247.3	110.2	50.8	86.3	3,335.9
Female	808.7	466.3	199.7	142.7	5,578.8
September 1999					
All	980.4	517.6	229.5	233.2	9,150.8
Male	218.6	92.3	44.4	81.9	3,483.2
Female	761.8	425.3	185.1	151.3	5,667.6
March 2000					
All	965.3	[illegible]	227.3	227.9	9,185.5
Male	[illegible]	88.8	42.8	78.9	3,511.9
Female	754.8	421.3	184.5	149.0	5,673.6
March 2001					
All	934.3	490.7	222.7	220.9	9,266.5
Male	196.5	82.3	40.1	74.1	3,561.2
Female	737.8	408.3	182.6	146.8	5,705.2

Notes:

1. The figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.
2. Totals may not sum due to rounding.
3. Increments include basic retirement pension increments and additional pension increments payable.
4. Analysis has shown that increments data for March 1999 are not reliable therefore September has been used for that year.
5. Excludes overseas cases.

Source:

Five per cent. sample from the Pension Strategy Computer System at March in each year, 1996, 1997, 1998, 2000 and 2001. Data for 1999 are at September of that year.

Pensioner Incomes

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the *(a)* mean level of income of each decile of people of working age and *(b)* overall mean income was in the last 12 months for which figures are available; and what the (i) mean level of income of each decile of pensioners and (ii) overall mean income of pensioners was in the same period. [40110]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* Such information as is available is in the tables.

Equivalised money values of decile median income, and overall mean income, for working age adults and pensioners in December 2000 prices, including the self-employed.

£pw

	Working age adults	*Pensioners*
Income before housing costs		
Decile 1 Bottom 10%	116	123
Decile 2 10–20%	165	155
Decile 3 20–30%	199	179
Decile 4 30–40%	237	199
Decile 5 40–50%	278	221
Decile 6 50–60%	321	244
Decile 7 60–70%	372	277
Decile 8 70–80%	435	322
Decile 9 80–90%	524	391
Decile 10 90–100%	755	573
Total population (Mean)	363	284
Income after housing costs		
Decile 1 Bottom 10%	75	102
Decile 2 10–20%	119	130
Decile 3 20–30%	154	146
Decile 4 30–40%	194	166
Decile 5 40–50%	235	193
Decile 6 50–60%	276	222
Decile 7 60–70%	322	259
Decile 8 70–80%	380	301
Decile 9 80–90%	462	377
Decile 10 90–100%	678	562
Total population (Mean)	311	260

Notes:

1. All figures are estimates and are taken from the Households Below Average Income (HBAI) data set which is derived from the Family Resources Survey (FRS). The FRS does not include Northern Ireland and 1999–2000 is the latest year for which data are available.
2. The estimates are sample counts, which have been adjusted for non-response using multipurpose grossing factors that control for tenure, council tax band and a number of other variables. Estimates are subject to both sampling error and to variability in non-response and are presented on both a Before Housing Costs (BHC) and an After Housing Costs (AHC) basis in line with HBAI conventions.
3. The income measure used is weekly net (disposable) equivalised household income, that is to say income that is adjusted to reflect the composition of the household. This process reflects the common sense notion that a family of several people needs a higher income than a single person in order for both households to enjoy a comparable standard of living. Equivalence scales conventionally take a couple with no children as a reference point, with the cash incomes of larger households adjusted downwards, and smaller households upwards, relative to this benchmark. The income figures quoted therefore relate to the 'cash' income of a couple with no

children only, and the equivalisation process must be reversed in order for them to be converted into cash incomes for other family types.

Source:

Family Resources Survey

Hospital Patients (Benefits)

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many patients in long stay hospitals and nursing homes in Scotland are in receipt of benefits, broken down by benefits accessed. [37954]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested is not available. Such information as is available is set out in the tables:

Income support claimants in Scotland in residential care/nursing home or in hospital for more than 52 weeks, August 2001

Thousand

Circumstance type	*Number of claimants*
All	26.5
Residential care homes	3.1
Private nursing homes	1.2
Part III	1.3
Hospital personal allowance (over 52 weeks)	[1]0.4
Residential allowance	20.4

[1] Figure based on a very few sample cases and therefore subject to a high degree of sampling error and should be used as a guide to the current situation only.

Notes:

1. Figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample and are therefore subject to a degree of sampling variation.

2. Figure has been rounded to the nearest hundred and quoted in thousands.

Source:

Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, August 2001.

Incapacity benefit, severe disablement allowance and retirement pension recipients who have been in hospital for more than 52 weeks

Thousand

	Number of recipients
Incapacity benefit	[1]0.4
Severe disablement allowance	1.5
Retirement pension	3.2

[1] Figure based on a very few sample cases and therefore subject to a high degree of sampling error and should be used as a guide to the current situation only.

Notes:

1. All 5 per cent. samples are subject to sampling error.

2. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.

3. Figures exclude Channel Islands and overseas cases.

Sources:

1. IB and SDA figures are taken from a 5 per cent. sample of the benefit computer system and exclude a small number of cases held clerically. Figures are expressed as thousands and are rounded to the nearest hundred.

2. Pension Strategy Computer System at 30 September 2001 based on a 5 per cent. sample.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 43W, on hospital stays, when his Department will announce the result of its consideration of the rules governing the docking of benefits for hospital in-patients. [30132]

Mr. McCartney: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 778W.

Doctors' Handwriting

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to require doctors to produce evidence that is typed instead of handwritten in hearings of appeals of disability claims to the tribunal service. [38334]

Maria Eagle *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Medical Services are aware of problems with the legibility of some doctors' handwriting. They are currently developing a computer supported system for use in Personal Capability Assessments produced in examination centres which will generate typed reports, underpinned by the principles of an evidence-based medicine approach to the assessment.

Medical reports for disability living allowance and attendance allowance are undertaken in the claimant's home. Computer generated reports in these circumstances are not a feasible option at present. The Department is undertaking a review of the current report form and will ensure that the format of the new report assists in legible completion. Where a decision-maker is unable to read a report it is returned to Medical Services for clarification.

Linked Benefits

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list all linked benefits available automatically to those entitled to certain means-tested benefits, stating the qualifications for entitlement. [35219]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* People who receive either income support or income-based jobseeker's allowance are entitled to apply for the following additional benefits.

Free milk and vitamins are available to people who are pregnant or who have a child under 5 years. Where a person has dependant children in full-time education they are entitled to free school meals. People who have savings of less than £8,000, or £12,000 if aged 60 or over, are entitled to free national health service (NHS) prescriptions, dental treatment, wigs, fabric supports, sight tests, money-off vouchers for glasses and help with the cost of travel to hospital for NHS treatment.

For those people who have a close relative or partner in prison help with the cost of travel to visit them is available. Assistance can also be given to someone who is not a close relative or partner where they are the only adult visitor.

In addition, pensioners, disabled people and families with young children receiving income support or income-based jobseeker's allowance qualify for cold weather payments. These payments are made automatically if the average temperature at a specified meteorological weather station has been recorded, or is forecast to be, zero degrees celsius or below over seven consecutive days.

A variety of local government schemes and benefits are also available to people on low incomes. Details of these schemes are not collected centrally.

Housing Benefit

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of possession proceedings for rent arrears in local authority and RSL accommodation related to tenants who have had their benefit reduced as a result of one or more non-dependent deductions in the last 12 months for which figures are available; what the average age is of housing benefit claimants affected by non-dependent deductions; what percentage of housing benefit claimants affected by non-dependent deductions are *(a)* registered disabled, *(b)* over 60 years old, *(c)* in receipt of income support or JSA and *(d)* lone parents; and what estimate he has made of the percentage of housing benefit claimants affected by non-dependant deductions who are left with a disposable income below income support level, once the non-dependent deduction has been taken into account. [34550]

Malcolm Wicks: We believe it is right that adult members of a household who are not eligible for housing benefit should contribute towards the cost of rent where they are financially able to do so. Non-dependent deductions are designed to reduce housing benefit to take account of the contribution towards rent that other members of the household should make. We would therefore expect any shortfall in housing benefit resulting from a non-dependent deduction could be met by the non-dependant person.

The available information is in the table.

Percentage of housing benefit cases in which non-dependent deductions have been applied—May 2000

Client group—Great Britain	*Percentage*
(a) Receiving a disability premium	2
(b) Aged 60 and over	5
(c) Income support/income-based jobseeker's allowance	4
(d) Lone parents	3

Notes:

1. Housing benefit recipients may fall into more than one client group so there may be overlaps between each client group.
2. The figures are based on a 1 per cent. sample and are subject to a degree of sampling variation.
3. The data refer to housing benefit recipients which may be a single person, a couple or a family. More than one benefit recipient can live in one property, for example two or more adults in a flat or house share.
4. The percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.
5. The average age of housing benefit recipients affected by non-dependant deductions is 59 years.

Source:

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Management Information System, annual 1 per cent. sample, taken in May 2000

Benefit Appeals

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the proportion of rejected benefit claims where the appellant was represented was *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* in the west midlands in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [23556]

Maria Eagle: The available information is in the tables.

Appeals heard where the appellant was represented, for all benefits: 1 November 2000 to 31 October 2001

	Case Load	*All attendances*	*Representative attended*	*Percentage where appellant was represented*
Attendance allowance	1,294,300	7,135	5,455	76.4
Child benefit/one parent benefit	7,102,800	215	70	33.2
Council tax benefit	4,651,000	20	5	33.3
Disability living allowance	2,271,100	73,500	48,405	65.9
Disability working allowance/DPTC	28,900	100	45	44.9
Family credit/WFTC	1,224,800	560	165	29.5
Housing benefit	3,854,000	155	80	50.6
Housing/council tax benefit	n/a	105	45	41.1
Incapacity benefit (personal capability assessment)	n/a	22,175	11,385	51.3
Incapacity benefit (not personal capability assessment)	n/a	2,580	1,300	50.4
Personal capability assessment (not incapacity benefit)	n/a	515	225	44.2
Income support	3,914,500	10,310	5,280	51.2
Industrial death benefit	14,000	5	[1]—	[1]—
Industrial injuries disablement benefit	280,800	16,180	8,875	54.9
Invalid care allowance	379,800	515	275	53.5
Jobseekers allowance	966,500	3,495	945	27.0
Maternity allowance	16,300	25	[1]—	[1]—
Retirement pension	11,067,100	645	215	33.3
Severe disablement allowance	365,800	1,215	545	44.9
Widows benefit/bereavement benefit	255,500	305	120	39.9
Others (extinct/rare benefits)	n/a	115	65	56.4

[1] Nil or negligible

Notes:

1. All appeals figures are provisional and subject to change as more up to date data become available.
2. Case load figures are expressed in thousands and have been rounded to the nearest hundred.
3. Appeals figures are rounded to the nearest five.
4. All case load figures are for Great Britain, except DWA/DPTC/FC/WFTC, which are United Kingdom.

Sources:

1. AA, CHB, DLA IB, SDA, MA figures are current at 31 August 2001, from 5 per cent. sample of data.
2. IS quarterly statistical enquiries, November 2000 to August 2001.
3. JSA quarterly statistical enquiries, November 2000 to August 2001.
4. ICA current at 30 September 2001, 100 per cent. data.
5. IDB current at December 2000, 100 per cent. data.
6. IIDB assessments at 1 April 2000 from 10 per cent. sample data.

7. DWA/DPTC current at July 2001, supplied by Inland Revenue.
8. FC/WFTC current at 31 March 2001, supplied by Inland Revenue.
9. RP/WB current at 31 March 2001, from 5 per cent. sample data.
10. CTB/HB current at August 2001, 100 per cent. stock count. Approximately 80 per cent of housing benefit recipients also receive council tax benefit.
11. Appeals figures are from a 100 per cent. down load of the generic appeals processing system.

Appeals heard where the appellant was represented, for all benefits processed through the Birmingham regional centre: 1 November 2000 to 31 October 2001

	All attendances	*Representative attended*	*Percentage where appellant was represented*
Attendance allowance	635	420	66.2
Child benefit/one parent benefit	20	5	26.3
Council tax benefit	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Disability living allowance	5,935	3,570	60.2
Disability working allowance/DPTC	10	5	50.0
Family credit/WFTC	55	15	25.5
Housing benefit	15	10	53.3
Housing/council tax benefit	10	[1]—	[1]—
Incapacity benefit (personal capability assessment)	1,495	720	48.2
Incapacity benefit (not personal capability assessment)	175	75	43.8
Personal capability assessment (not incapacity benefit)	70	35	48.5
Income support	1,090	560	51.5
Industrial death benefit	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Industrial injuries disablement benefit	860	370	42.9
Invalid care allowance	40	15	39.5
Jobseeker's allowance	395	120	29.7
Maternity allowance	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Retirement pension	110	45	41.7
Severe disablement allowance	105	35	35.2
Widows benefit/bereavement benefit	45	20	44.2
Others (extinct/rare benefits)	10	[1]—	[1]—

[1] Nil or negligible

Notes:

1. All appeals figures are provisional and subject to change as more up to date data become available.
2. Appeals figures are rounded to the nearest five.
3. Representative figures may include cases where the appellant also attended.
4. Figures where the appellant was there alone have not been included.

Source:

100 per cent. down load of the generic appeals processing system.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the percentage success rate of appeals against rejected benefit claims was *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* in the west midlands in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [23557]

Maria Eagle: The available information is in the tables.

Appeals cleared and the number found in favour of the appellant during the period 1 November 2000 to 31 October 2001 expressed as a percentage of the case load

	Case Load[1]	*Appeals cleared at hearing*	*Appeals found in favour*	*Appeals found in favour of the appellant as a percentage of case load*
Attendance allowance	1,294,300	11,570	5,355	0.4
Child benefit/one parent benefit	7,102,800	605	75	0.0
Council tax benefit	4,651,000	50	10	0.0
Disability living allowance	2,271,100	90,505	46,815	2.1
Disability working allowance/DPTC	28,900	165	45	0.1
Family credit/WFTC	1,224,800	1,500	265	0.0
Housing benefit	3,854,000	205	65	0.0
Housing/council tax benefit combined	n/a	155	55	n/a
Incapacity benefit (personal capability assessment)	n/a	30,200	12,870	n/a
Incapacity benefit (not personal capability assessment)	n/a	4,010	1,430	n/a
Total incapacity benefit	2,337,800	34,215	14,305	0.6
Personal capability assessment (not incapacity benefit)	n/a	800	295	n/a
Income support	3,914,500	19,100	5,350	0.1
Industrial death benefit	14,000	5	5	0.0
Industrial injuries disablement benefit	280,000	18,455	7,490	2.7
Invalid care allowance	379,800	920	210	0.1
Jobseekers allowance	966,500	9,125	2,380	0.2

Appeals cleared and the number found in favour of the appellant during the period 1 November 2000 to 31 October 2001 expressed as a percentage of the case load

	Case Load[1]	*Appeals cleared at hearing*	*Appeals found in favour*	*Appeals found in favour of the appellant as a percentage of case load*
Maternity allowance	16,300	70	15	0.1
Retirement pension	11,067,100	1,285	150	0.0
Severe disablement allowance	365,800	1,825	755	0.2
Widows benefit/bereavement benefit	255,500	635	80	0.0
Others (extinct/rare benefits)	n/a	250	40	n/a

[1] AA, CHB, DLA, IB, SDA, MA figures are current at 31 August 2001, from 5 per cent. sample of data.

Notes:

1. All appeals figures are provisional and subject to change as more up to date data become available.
2. Case load figures are expressed in thousands and have been rounded to the nearest hundred.
3. All case load figures are for Great Britain, except DWA/DPTC/FC/WFTC, which are United Kingdom.
4. Appeals figures are rounded to the nearest five.

Sources:

1. IS quarterly statistical enquiries, November 2000 to August 2001.
2. JSA quarterly statistical enquiries, November 2000 to August 2001.
3. ICA current at 30 September 2001, from 100 per cent. data.
4. IDB current at December 2000, from 100 per cent. data.
5. IIDB assessments at 1 April 2000 from 10 per cent. sample data.
6. DWA/DPTC current at July 2001, supplied by Inland Revenue.
7. FC/WFTC current at August 2001, supplied by Inland Revenue.
8. RP/WB current at 31 March 2001, from 5 per cent. sample data.
9. CTB/HB current at August 2001, 100 per cent. stock count. Approximately 80 per cent. of housing benefit recipients also receive council tax benefit.
10. Appeals figures are from a 100 per cent. down load of the generic appeals processing system.

Appeals cleared and the number found in favour of the appellant for all benefit appeals processed through the Birmingham regional centre: 1 November 2000 to 31 October 2001

	Appeals cleared at hearing	*Appeals found in favour*
Attendance allowance	1,185	455
Child benefit/one parent benefit	65	10
Council tax benefit	10	0
Disability living allowance	8,370	3,640
Disability working allowance/DPTC	20	5
Family credit/WFTC	155	25
Housing benefit	20	5
Housing/council tax benefit	10	0
Incapacity benefit (personal capability assessment)	2,285	880
Incapacity benefit (not personal capability assessment)	355	95
Personal capability assessment (not incapacity benefit)	100	40
Income support	1,985	580
Industrial death benefit	0	0
Industrial injuries disablement benefit	1,125	530
Invalid care allowance	100	20
Jobseeker's allowance	1,125	280
Maternity allowance	10	0
Retirement pension	160	25
Severe disablement allowance	160	65
Widows benefit/bereavement benefit	80	10
Others (extinct/rare benefits)	20	0

Notes:

1. All figures are provisional and subject to change as more up to date data become available.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest five.
3. '0' indicates figures are nil or negligible.

Source:

100 per cent. down load of the generic appeals processing system.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has for infrastructure works on the channel tunnel route to *(a)* alleviate the effects of and *(b)* reduce the number of conflicting moves in the area between Charing Cross and Hither Green; and what is the (i) status of, (ii) start date of and (iii) expected completion date for such works. [32995]

Mr. Byers: Significant capacity on the existing network will be freed up in 2007, when the channel tunnel rail link (CTRL) is planned to open. A new franchise, independent of the Connex South Eastern franchise, will offer fast domestic services on the CTRL from Kent, with new trains, and will contribute to major reduction in overcrowding. A franchise proposal for such services will be published later this year.

Rail Industry Group

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 8 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1189W, on Railtrack, if he will list those circumstances on which the Rail Industry Group has been called to meet to date; what changes have been made to the possessions regime; and if he will list the groups set up to tackle skills shortages, broken down by skills shortages to be tackled. [37580]

Mr. Jamieson: The Rail Industry Group meets on an ad hoc basis.

A Possessions Working Group, reporting to the Rail Industry Group (RIG), recommended changes to the possessions planning process to improve efficiency and flexibility. These were accepted. Detailed implementation is an operational matter for Railtrack.

Under the auspices of RIG three work streams covering all the main skills areas in the industry are being taken forward. These are manpower planning, training and development, and attraction recruitment and retention.

Job Advertisements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the job advertisements placed by his Department in the last 12 months specifying where the advertisements were placed and the cost in each case. [39070]

Dr. Whitehead: This Department advertised 27 specialist and 190 generalist posts in the last 12 months. The advertisements were placed in a variety of national newspapers as well as in specialist journals and on a number of websites. The total cost of advertising was £175,000.

London Underground

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which contractual safety cases for each infrastructure company have *(a)* been conducted and *(b)* will be conducted by the Health and Safety Executive relating to the London Underground PPP; what timetable for assessment is being followed; and if he will place in the Library all related documentation. [38974]

Mr. Jamieson: The Health and Safety Executive has accepted three successive versions of London Underground's safety case during the development of the tube modernisation plans. HSE is now considering a revised safety case covering the involvement of the private sector. The contractual safety cases of the infrastructure companies are interdependent on London Underground's safety case, and under the relevant regulations are not subject to HSE acceptance. However, HSE's assessment of the London Underground's case includes consideration of the adequacy of arrangements to control the infrastructure companies through their contractual safety cases.

I understand that completion of HSE's assessment will depend on how quickly LUL is able to respond satisfactorily to the issues raised so far. HSE will release its assessment and acceptance reports when an acceptance decision is taken.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will *(a)* list the titles and *(b)* provide details of the length of the document supplied to his Department making up the contracts tendered by bidders Metronet and tube lines wishing to enter into a public-private partnership with London Underground. [38966]

Mr. Jamieson: London Underground is responsible for the development of PPP contracts for the modernisation of the underground's infrastructure.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what the anticipated *(a)* public resource, *(b)* public investment, *(c)* public resource supporting private investment and *(d)* private investment for the London Underground PPP is during (i) zero to seven and a half years, (ii) seven and a half years to the end of the 10-year Transport Plan period and (iii) the remainder of the contracts beyond the end of the 10-year Transport Plan period; [38983]

(2) what the total level of private investment *(a)* expected and *(b)* required under contract with the Infracos for the London Underground PPP is; and what restrictions are placed on the procurement of finance by Infracos (i) within the first seven and a half years of the contract and (ii) in the remainder of the contracts after seven and a half years. [38982]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the statement my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made to the House on 7 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1126–28.

London Underground is finalising contract terms with bidders on each of the three contracts. At the same time, the Government are discussing with Transport for London the greatly increased level of public grant with which it intends to support the tube modernisation programme. I understand that London Underground intends to make the contracts publicly available following completion of the competitions. Information on the expected level of investment and grant will also be made publicly available at that stage.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what responsibility his Department *(a)* has had and *(b)* will have relating to the development of the PPP contracts for the modernisation of London Underground's infrastructure. [42116]

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of State has powers under section 212 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 to designate contracts as PPP agreements.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what powers he has to *(a)* place into administration and *(b)* take over work from the London Underground PPP Infracos; and under what circumstances he envisages it may be necessary to carry out such action. [42114]

Mr. Jamieson: In relation to *(a)*, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 85W.

In relation to *(b)*, the Secretary of State has no such powers.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions against what *(a)* test and *(b)* definition he measured the London Underground PPP to ensure that the plans did not involve privatisation. [42115]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 88W.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 85W, on London Underground real estate and property, *(a)* by whom and *(b)* how the length of leases of infrastructure were measured as appropriate and necessary; what involvement is meant by the phrase, interest in the infrastructure; and by whom, and against what criteria, sufficient interest has been and will be measured. [42265]

Mr. Jamieson: Details of the leases required for the plans for the modernisation of the underground are a matter for London Underground.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 85W, on contracts with Infracos, what the safety changes and qualifying law changes will include; and what the reasons are for the change in level of financing for these changes in the final contracts. [42266]

Mr. Jamieson: London Underground is responsible for the development of contracts for the modernisation of the underground' infrastructure, including detailed provisions on safety change and qualifying change of law. I understand that London Underground concluded the revised level of and mechanism for financing would provide better value for money and a greater total of finance available for such changes. I understand that London Underground intends to make the contractual documentation publicly available following completion of the competitions.

Railway Industry

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 25 February 2002, ref 35798, columns 790–91W, who has been appointed as compliance officer; and what contractual agreement exists between his Department and that person. [39164]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department has appointed Roger Clarke, a retired senior civil servant and a Chartered Arbitrator, as Compliance Officer. He is engaged under the terms of a contract, the details of which are exempt information.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how long he expects it will take to establish an SPV on the railways once the specification for a project has been agreed. [42185]

Mr. Byers: This will be determined by the commercial negotiations required in each particular case.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he plans to make a statement on the future of Central Railway. [39420]

Mr. Spellar: Shortly.

Driving Licences

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people applied for driving licences in the United Kingdom in each year since 1990. [39749]

Mr. Jamieson: The information requested is as follows:

The Department does not record the number of driving licences applied for. DVLA records show the following driving licensing transactions processed (including Northern Ireland).

Million

Financial year	*Transaction volumes*
1990–91	6.35
1991–92	7.00
1992–93	6.52
1993–94	6.51
1994–95	6.46
1995–96	6.67
1996–97	6.93
1997–98	7.00
1998–99	6.40
1999–2000	5.55
2000–01	5.53

Local Government Finance

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the real terms cash and percentage increase in the *(a)* standard spending assessment between 1997–98 and 2001–02, *(b)* revenue support grant between 1997–98 and 2001–02, *(c)* total external support between 1997–98 and 2001–02 and *(d)* aggregate external finance between 1997–98 and 2001–02 broken down by (i) unitary, (ii) shire county, (iii) shire district, (iv) metropolitan district and (v) London borough council. [40188]

Dr Whitehead: The following table provides the information requested. The increases have been expressed at 2001–02 prices based on the GDP deflator.

Type of authority	Standard spending assessment Cash increase (£ million)	Standard spending assessment Percentage increase	Revenue support grant Cash increase (£ million)	Revenue support grant Percentage increase	Total external support[1] Cash increase (£ million)	Total external support[1] Percentage increase	Aggregate external finance[2] Cash increase (£ million)	Aggregate external finance[2] Percentage increase
Unitary authorities	3,164.234	75.7	1,265.017	65.1	2,316.131	71.8	2,912.769	86.0
Shire counties	–456.964	–2.7	–869.549	–12.8	–714.618	–5.8	309.337	2.4
Shire districts	–255.264	–10.2	–193.001	–22.5	–227.567	–13.0	–204.072	–11.2
Metropolitan districts	939.589	9.8	329.660	6.6	674.745	8.8	1,455.243	17.9
London boroughs[3]	659.821	9.0	89.866	2.2	320.230	5.5	1,013.070	16.4

[1] Revenue Support Grant plus redistributed national non-domestic rates plus SSA Reduction Grant (SSA Review) plus SSA Reduction Grant (Police Funding Review) plus Central Support Protection Grant plus principal formula Police Grant.

[2] Total External Support plus the City Offset plus Neighbourhood Renewal Fund plus other special and specific grants within AEF. The data on the other special and specific grants within AEF have been collated from statistical returns supplied by local authorities to DTLR, the other data come from administrative records held by DTLR.

[3] Includes City of London.

Between 1997–98 and 2001–02, the last round of local government reorganisation took place. In 1997–98, there were 27 unitary councils, 35 shire counties and 260 shire districts. In 2001–02, there were 46 unitary councils, 34 shire counties and 238 shire districts.

Also, between 1997–98 and 2001–02 there have been a number of changes in the function and funding of local authorities, for example in the way education for four-year-olds was funded.

It is not possible to calculate data for 1997–98 on a like-for-like basis with 2001–02. The data in the table do not make any allowance for local authority reorganisation or these changes in function or funding and the figures should therefore be treated with caution.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the White Paper on modernising local government finance will be published. [40013]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 6 March 2002]:* The Government's proposals for reforming the local government finance system were published on 11 December 2001 in Part 2 of our White Paper "Strong Local Leadership—Quality Public Services". Copies are available in the Libraries of the House.

Departmental Policies

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what funding his Department has provided to the cities of *(a)* London and *(b)* Westminster in the years 1992–93 to 2001–02, including grants and borrowing approvals for revenue and capital expenditure. [40180]

Dr. Whitehead: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Disabled Rail Passengers

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 11 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 20W, on disabled rail passengers, where the revised code was published; and if he will place the revised code in the Library. [40265]

Mr. Jamieson: The revised code of practice is available on request from the Strategic Rail Authority and is also on their website. I have placed copies in the Libraries of the House.

Departmental Staff

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of staff in his Department are dedicated to *(a)* roads, *(b)* rail, *(c)* aviation and *(d)* other forms of transport. [40205]

Dr. Whitehead: The tables give the proportion of permanent and casual staff (full-time equivalents) who are dedicated to *(a)* roads, *(b)* rail, *(c)* aviation and *(d)* other forms of transport, for DTLR(C) including GOs and the DTLR agencies. It takes no account of staff employed by other bodies, such as the Strategic Rail Authority, the Office of Rail Regulator or the Civil Aviation Authority.

This information excludes staff working on cross modal transport issues.

DTLR(C) and GOs—4,270 staff

	Percentage
Roads	11.5
Rail	1.9
Aviation	4.4
Other forms of transport	5.0
Total	22.8

Executive agencies—13,070 staff

	Percentage
Roads[1]	78.7
Rail	0
Aviation	0
Other forms of transport[2]	8
Total	86.7

[1] Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, Driving Standards Agency, Highways Agency, Vehicle Certification Agency and Vehicle Inspectorate.

[2] Maritime and Coastguard Agency.

All total figures are based on the Cabinet Office staff in post and diversity statistics for October 2001, published on 21 February 2002.

Form SP3

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many organisations are being asked to complete form SP3. [40216]

Dr. Whitehead: I understand that SP3 is a form used by the Patent Office and as such is not a matter for my Department.

National Air Traffic Services

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 806W, on NATS, if he will break down the costs of setting up the NATS PPP into the main heads of expenditure; what sums were paid to advisers; and who they were. [40618]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government's principal advisers on the NATS PPP were Credit Suisse First Boston, Slaughter and May and Deloitte and Touche. Insignia Richard Ellis, Ove Arup and Real Time Engineering also provided specialist advice. A total of £18.2 million has been paid in fees to these companies.

Total payments of £8.4 million and £23 million have been made to the CAA and NATS respectively, representing costs necessarily incurred by those organisations in preparing for the PPP. Other more minor items of expenditure account for the remaining £2.6 million.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 806W, in relation to the staff share allocation scheme in relation to the NATS PPP, how the valuation of shares will be calculated; by whom; what arrangements will be made for valuing shares of staff who leave; and by how much the shares have changed in value since they were allocated on 21 September 2001. [40619]

Mr. Jamieson: These are matters for NATS and NATS Employee Share Trust Ltd.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in relation to the NATS PPP, what pension arrangements were made for *(a)* those employees formerly employed by the CAA and *(b)* new employees of the NATS PPP. [40606]

Mr. Jamieson: NATS employees formerly employed by the CAA retain the right to remain in the Civil Aviation Authority Pension Scheme (CAAPS). The pension arrangements of persons employed by NATS Ltd subsequent to the establishment of the PPP are a matter for that company.

Transport 10-Year Plan

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 26 February 2002, ref. 37227, columns 1207–08W, on the 10-year plan, if he will state *(a)* the time scale over which this review will take place, *(b)* the parties who will be involved in this review and *(c)* when the outcomes of this review will be made available. [40620]

Mr. Jamieson: We will be undertaking the first of the planned periodic reviews of the 10-year plan for transport over the next few months in conjunction with the Government spending review, as envisaged in the plan itself. The review will give an update on progress towards the objectives set out in the plan and provides an opportunity to take account of new developments since its publication.

In carrying out the review we will be drawing on information and feedback from a wide range of sources, including forthcoming reports from the House of Commons Transport Sub-Committee and the Commission for Integrated Transport. There is no fixed timetable for the review, but we currently expect to publish the results in July.

En Route Centre, Swanwick

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the total internal costs, as defined in the Arthur D. Little report, of the New En Route Centre at Swanwick were up until the operational start date of the centre; and if he will make a statement. [40767]

Mr. Jamieson: Arthur D. Little (ADL) estimated that £76 million to £86 million would be incurred on the Swanwick project in direct internal NATS project management costs and Swanwick staff costs from project initiation until the operational date. ADL assumed that the centre would be operational from November 2001. In the event, the Swanwick Centre successfully entered operational service on 27 January 2002. Including this additional period, direct internal costs were £93.6 million.

Job Sharing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the extent of job sharing in his Department. [41041]

Dr. Whitehead: Approximately 8 per cent. of DTLR central staff work part-time. Of these, a smaller percentage job share. Information specifically on job sharers is not held centrally and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Job sharing forms just one strand of a range of possible alternative and flexible working arrangements. Other options include home working and flexitime. Under DTLR central posting arrangements, all posts are open to part-time workers or job sharers. The central Department supports a part-time workers network and operates a job share register to assist staff in identifying job share partners.

The DTLR agencies, in almost all cases, also operate a policy of advertising all posts as open to part-time workers or job sharers. All operate a range of flexible working options. Several also support part-time working or carers networks.

Cross-channel Freight

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the decision by EWS to reduce its cross-channel freight business. [41146]

Mr. Jamieson: EWS has made no such decision. The current reductions in cross-channel rail freight result from decisions taken by SNCF since November 2001 in the light of attacks on their staff at Fréthun.

The Government are pressing the French Government at the highest levels to provide adequate policing resources at Fréthun to support the anti-intrusion measures already being installed by SNCF in order to address the disruption to channel tunnel services caused by would-be illegal immigrants.

Rail Services (South-west)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the Strategic Rail Authority's funding approach to the south-west. [41145]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) on 24 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1052W.

Local Government Finance

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue funding has been made available for local government services in Liverpool in each year since 1997. [41122]

Dr Whitehead: Liverpool city council have reported the following funding from central Government:

Revenue and capital grants paid to Liverpool city council

£000

	Outturn				*Budget*
	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Revenue funding					
Specific and special grants inside AEF[1]	18,192	20,488	20,132	42,626	71,010
Revenue support grant	263,399	284,715	296,909	298,271	311,827
Redistributed non-domestic rates	102,791	106,533	114,392	128,468	124,481
Revenue grants paid into GFRA[2]	384,382	411,736	431,433	469,365	507,318
Capital funding					
Credit approvals	17,995	27,823	30,565	40,082	25,010
Central Government grants[3]	18,259	22,190	19,125	17,958	11,266
Total funding	420,636	461,749	481,123	527,405	543,594

[1] Aggregate external finance (AEF) is central Government support towards total standard spending. It comprises RSG, NNDR, and certain specific, supplementary and special grants. Within specific grants inside AEF, reported standards fund grant increased from about £2 million in 1999–2000 to about £20 million in 2000–01, and Neighbourhood Renewal Fund was budgeted to be £10.006 million in 2001–02.

[2] This includes all revenue grants paid into the General Fund Revenue Account (GFRA), but may exclude certain public funding, for example from some non-departmental public bodies, which is recorded as income and is not separately identifiable.

[3] Includes capital grants from all central Government Departments (including specified capital grants) but excludes capital grants from the European Union, non-departmental public bodies, and the National Lottery.

Sources:

Revenue Summary and GFRA Budget Estimates return. Capital Outturn returns and Capital Estimate return.

Departmental Underspend

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 27 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1367W, on departmental underspend, if he will list *(a)* the relevant editions of the Public Expenditure Provisional Outturn Paper to which he refers and *(b)* the written answers to which he refers; for what reason it is not possible to provide separate figures in respect of rail expenditure; and if he will place copies related documentation in the Library. [41245]

Dr. Whitehead: Provisional outturn against cash limits, and departmental expenditure limits which replaced cash limits in 1999–2000, for the financial years 1997–98 to 2000–01 is published in the following editions of the Public Expenditure Provisional Outturn White Paper:

1997–98: Cm 3988

1998–99: Cm 4416

1999–2000: Cm4812

2000–01: Cm 5243.

Written answers announcing amounts taken up under end year flexibility (EYF) arrangements, in respect of unspent provision in 1997–98 and later years, are:

3 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns 463–65W

11 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns 311–14W

30 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns 580–81W

5 November 1999, *Official Report*, columns 346–49W

7 February 2000, *Official Report*, columns 18–23W

31 March 2000, *Official Report*, columns 223–24W

13 June 2000, *Official Report*, columns 557–58W

9 November 2000, *Official Report*, columns 350–54W

26 February 2001, *Official Report*, columns 328–32W

27 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 574W

22 June 2001, *Official Report*, columns 12–13W

28 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 948–52W

13 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 398–401W.

The calculation of departmental EYF entitlement is undertaken at a high level of aggregation across departmental expenditure limits. Underspends on specific programmes may be partially offset by overspends elsewhere. Each Department draws down its EYF entitlement for specific purposes in accordance with need. It is therefore not possible to identify the areas to which EYF generated by a particular programme has been re-allocated. For that reason, DTLR does not keep central records of EYF entitlement generated by, and re-allocated to, railways.

Copies of command papers and the *Official Report*, are available in the Libraries of the House.

Rail Delays

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent assessment has been made by his Department of the total cost, in terms of customer and business time, of delays on Britain's railways. [40952]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department has made no such estimate.

Rail Safety

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what information he collates on the number of speed restrictions in place on the rail network in each Railtrack operating zone (i) in total and (ii) caused by gauge corner cracking. [40949]

Mr. Jamieson: This is an operational matter for Railtrack.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the *(a)* date, *(b)* location and *(c)* level of penalty of safety breach incidents that have resulted in prosecution of (i) train operating companies and (ii) Railtrack in each year since 1995–96. [40947]

Mr. Jamieson: Full details of each year's enforcement action on the railways for breaches of health and safety legislation, including prosecutions, is included in the HM Chief Inspector of Railways' Annual Report on the safety record of the railways in Great Britain, copies of which are in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his estimate is of the cost of installing a new train control and safety system throughout the UK railway industry. [41298]

Mr. Spellar: A rail industry group is investigating the options and costs of train control systems and is expected to report to the Health and Safety Commission this spring. The HSC will subsequently advise Ministers.

Motorways

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what measures are in place to ensure that motorway roadworks are phased to prevent simultaneous workings being carried out close to each other on the same motorway; [41141]

(2) when he expects the roadworks being carried out between junctions 24 and 25 of the M1 motorway to be completed; and what penalties will be imposed in the event that the works are not completed on time. [41142]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Mr. Tim Matthews, to write to the right hon. Member.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Mr. Greg Knight, dated 11 March 2002

I have been asked by the Transport Minister, David Jamieson, to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about phasing of motorway roadworks and about roadworks on the M1 between Junctions 24 and 25.

In line with the Road User's Charter targets, our aim is to see that a minimum of 90 per cent. of works carried out during a year are no more than 2.5 miles long and are at least 6 miles apart.

To achieve this, we have a system of booking road space so that works are co-ordinated. We also liaise with local highway authorities to avoid, as far as possible, works on the motorway conflicting with works on adjacent local roads.

There are, of course, exceptions where we have to carry out emergency works, or where it would be beneficial in terms of cost, safety and the environment.

The roadworks on the M1 between junctions 24 and 25 involve the installation of noise barriers, resurfacing the road with a low noise surface and putting in new drainage, advance work for a new communications network and improvements to structures. The work is being done in two stages, the first of which is due to finish this month. If it is delayed, and the delays are the fault of the contractor, then a penalty of £10,000 a day would be imposed. The second stage is due to start in April and take about two months. That contract will also be subject to similar penalties.

If you would like any further information please contact the Agency's Area Manager, Steve Forgham. His telephone number is 0121 678 8506.

Fire Authorities

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to amend the criteria for the calculation of SSA funding arrangements for the Humberside Fire Authority. [41306]

Dr. Whitehead: The Government, in co-operation with local government, are currently working up proposals for the new grant formula that will be introduced in 2003–04. We have therefore not yet finalised proposals for the revenue grant formula for the fire service.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to introduce precepting in place of the levying arrangements for combined fire authorities. [41307]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Telford (David Wright) on Monday 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 101W.

Accident Reports

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what procedures are used to consult other jurisdictions prior to the release of *(a)* marine and *(b)* air accident inquiry reports. [41415]

Mr. Jamieson: Normally the Marine Accidents Investigation Branch (MAIB) does not consult other jurisdictions before releasing a marine accident investigation report, unless (1) the jurisdiction may be adversely affected by the report; (2) the jurisdiction has co-operated with the MAIB in the investigation in accordance with the International Maritime Organization's Code for the Investigation of Marine Casualties and Incidents; or (3) a recommendation has been addressed to that jurisdiction.

The provisions for consulting other jurisdictions before releasing an air accident investigation report are laid down in Annex 13 to the Convention on International Civil Aviation. The Air Accidents Investigation Branch complies fully with these provisions.

National Rail Academy

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if a steering group has been established for the National Rail Academy. [41733]

Mr. Jamieson: An SRA taskforce has been formed and it had its initial meeting on 8 February 2002.

Regional Development Agencies

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of the total public sector budget for regeneration is allocated via the regional development agencies in the current financial year. [41679]

Ms Keeble: The total DTLR Urban Regeneration allocation for 2001–02 is £1,796 million. Of this, the regional development agencies, including the London Development Agency, have been allocated £1,363 million (76 per cent.).

Green Belt Development

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what proportion of planning applications for green belt development considered in each Government Office in each of the past three years was referred to an inspector; [41739]

(2) how many planning applications for green belt development have been considered in each Government Office in each of the past three years. [41738]

Ms Keeble: The information requested is not held centrally by the Department, and could not be obtained without disproportionate cost.

School Bus Schemes

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent estimates his Department has made on the impact of school bus schemes on road congestion. [41658]

Ms Keeble: We commissioned consultants to carry out an assessment of the potential take-up of additional home to school transport were this to be provided. The study, which reported in October 2001, found that 48 per cent. of parents who currently drive children to school would consider switching. We intend to commission an evaluation of First's pilot Yellow School Bus scheme which will include an assessment of the modal shift from car to bus.

Housing

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will introduce a gap-funding scheme for housing following the ban on the Partnership Investment Programme; and if he will make a statement. [41384]

Ms Keeble: Yes. We propose to seek the European Commission's state aid approval for a housing gap funding scheme shortly.

State Aids

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which organisations have been invited to participate in the conference organised by his Department on state aids on 21 March. [41483]

Ms Keeble: We have invited officials from the European Commission and all member states to participate in the meeting on state aids and regeneration which is being held on 21 March.

Single Regeneration Budget

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if SRB Round 6 funds can be used to gap-fund projects. [41386]

Ms Keeble: Following a ruling by the European Commission in December 1999 that the operation of the Partnership Investment Programme outside the Assisted Areas contravened state aid rules, the Department took the precautionary measure of disallowing gap funding schemes under SRB Round 6.

SRB funds to assist commerce or industry are permissible within the regional aid ceilings published by the European Commission.

South East Manchester Multi-modal Transport Study

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the Government will respond to the South-east Manchester Multi-modal Transport Study. [41391]

Mr. Jamieson: I am currently considering this report and the North-west Regional Assembly's recommendations and hope to make an announcement shortly.

Taxi Regulation

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he intends to publish draft regulations in connection with taxi regulation for all vehicles. [41335]

Ms Keeble: We have powers under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to introduce regulations setting standards of access for taxis in the same way as we have already done for trains and for buses and coaches. We are discussing with industry and our statutory advisers the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC) how to implement the requirements most effectively. We need to ensure that our proposals meet the needs of disabled people for taxi services but also protect the viability of the trade. We will consult when we have finalised our proposals.

White Papers

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the reason for the delay in the publication of the *(a)* aviation and *(b)* regions White Papers. [42228]

Mr. Byers: There is no delay. Our manifesto commitment is to produce plans this year for aviation and airports over the next 30 years, and that remains our intention. As to the regions, we remain similarly committed to taking forward proposals on elected regional government and will publish a White Paper as soon as it is ready.

Harbour Authorities

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will bring pilotage back under public jurisdiction. [42093]

Mr. Jamieson: Responsibility for the provision of pilotage services was assigned by the Pilotage Act 1987 to competent harbour authorities who have statutory powers in relation to the regulation of shipping movements and the safety of navigation. We have no plans to change this arrangement.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to whom a competent harbour authority is ultimately accountable. [42090]

Mr. Jamieson: The term "competent harbour authority" is used in the Pilotage Act 1987 for harbour authorities who have more general statutory powers in relation to the regulation of shipping movements and the safety of navigation. The Act extended these powers to include the provision of pilotage services. Harbour authorities are fully accountable for the exercise of their powers, as the prosecution of the Milford Haven Port Authority, following the Sea Empress grounding, has shown.

The purpose of the Department's Port Marine Safety Code has been to establish an agreed national standard as a measure by which a harbour authority can be more openly accountable to a wide range of interests for the policies and procedures adopted to ensure that the harbour is run safely.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what method of arbitration replaced the temporary procedure for resolving disputes on terms of employment contained in the Pilotage Act 1987 after the three-year expiry period. [42173]

Mr. Jamieson: The temporary arbitration procedure was a transitional provision to enable new arrangements to be established between previously licensed pilots and competent harbour authorities following the transfer of pilotage functions to those authorities under the Act. It is now spent.

Civil Servants (Relocation Companies)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many civil servants in his Department have used the services of Cendent or its subsidiaries *(a)* to relocate in London and *(b)* to be housed in London since May 1997; what the name was of the company employed in each case; and what were the dates on each occasion. [42364]

Dr. Whitehead: Since May 1997 my Department has used the services of Cendent on one occasion to relocate a member of staff from Bristol to London in April 2001.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which relocation companies his Department has used when relocating civil servants since May 1997; which relocation companies hold contracts with his Department for the relocation of civil servants; when the contracts were last renewed; where the contracts were advertised; and what the length and value of each contract is. [42361]

Dr. Whitehead: My Department has used two companies for the relocation of civil servants since May 1997.

ARC, who later merged to become ARC/Phoenix in October 1999 was awarded a contract from 5 October 1995 to 31 March 2000. This contract was superseded by a three-year contract from April 2000 with Bradford and Bingley Relocation Services Ltd. Cendent subsequently acquired the company in September 2000.

Both contracts were advertised through OJEC. The approximate annual value of the contract is £35,000 but fluctuates from year to year.

Electoral Commission

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to raise the limit on the expenditure which the Electoral Commission can incur on promoting awareness of electoral and democratic systems; and if he will make a statement. [41927]

Dr. Whitehead: I have today laid before Parliament an Order, under section 13(6) of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, setting a limit of £7,500,000 on the total expenditure in any one year which the Electoral Commission can incur on promoting public awareness of the matters specified under section 13(1) of that Act. The Order has been made with the consent of the Treasury, as required by the legislation.

Research Documentation

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 91W, on research documentation, for what reason the Department does not hold this information centrally. [42305]

Mr. Jamieson: The information is not currently available centrally without disproportionate cost because responsibility for DTLR research is devolved to individual policy areas and programmes are not managed centrally. However, the Department is developing a central research database facility which is currently being populated with data. This should enable more information on research to be made available from a central source in future.

Railway Industry Advisory Committee

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his reply of 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 89W, on RIAC membership, *(a)* by whom and *(b)* when the review of RIAC was conducted; what conclusions were reached; by whom the role of the RIAC was refocused; and what form the strategic advice to the HSC (i) has taken and (ii) will take. [42178]

Mr. Jamieson: The review of the Railway Industry Advisory Committee (RIAC) was carried out in early 2001 by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), at the request of the Health and Safety Commission (HSC), and as part of a general review of their industry advisory committees. Copies of the conclusions of the review and RIAC's revised terms of reference have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

The HSC considered these following publication of part 2 of Lord Cullen's public inquiry report, and implemented a key review conclusion through the replacement of the Chief Inspector of Railways as Chair by an independent member of the HSC (Margaret Burns) in November 2001. RIAC agendas and HSC minutes are available on the HSE website and indicate areas on which RIAC has advised the HSC.

Financial Investigations

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 785W, on financial investigations, what areas of his Department are involved; what the aggregate sum of money is; when they are expected to be completed; and if he will publish the results. [40586]

Ms Keeble: Since the investigations in question are still taking place, there is nothing I can add to my earlier answer at this stage.

Standard Spending Assessment (Care Home Registration)

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the adjustments made to each local authority standard spending assessment as a result of the transfer of care home registration to the National Care Standards Commission. [41375]

Mr. Raynsford: A table showing:

the 2002–03 Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) as it would have been had the transfer of care home registration to the National Care Standards Commission not occurred;

the actual 2002–03 SSA;

the difference; and

the percentage difference

for each authority with responsibilities for Personal Social Services has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

So that like-for-like comparisons between the 2001–02 and 2002–03 SSAs could be made, notional adjustments were also made to the 2001–02 SSAs to reflect these changes.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what adjustment was made to the East Riding of Yorkshire standard spending assessment as a result of the transfer of care home registration to the National Care Standards Commission. [41376]

Mr. Raynsford: The East Riding of Yorkshire would have had an SSA of £259.814 million if the transfer of care home registration to the National Care Standards Commission had not occurred in 2002–03. This is £395,000 (0.2 per cent.) more than the actual SSA received by the East Riding of Yorkshire following the transfer.

Electoral Spending

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much was spent by *(a)* central Government and *(b)* local councils on (i) electoral registration, (ii) advertising and (iii) the conduct of elections in each of the last five years. [40866]

Mr. Raynsford: Information about local authorities spending on electoral matters is not held centrally. Central Government have incurred expenditure on advertising—to give information about electoral matters—and on the conduct of elections. I will write to my right hon. Friend shortly giving information about the level of this expenditure in relation to elections in England and Wales for which I am responsible and place a copy of the letter in the Libraries of the House.

Solway Harvester

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what date the Chief Inspector of Marine Accidents received representation from the Attorney General of the Isle of Man on the release of the MAIB report on the Solway Harvester sinking. [41931]

Mr. Jamieson: The Chief Inspector of Marine Accidents received a letter from the Attorney-General of the Isle of Man on 15 February 2002 requesting that the press briefing and release of the MAIB report on the Solway Harvester sinking be deferred until 15 May.

Hijackings

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what measures are being investigated by his Department to protect commercial aircraft, their crews and passengers from terrorist hijacking. [41448]

Mr. Jamieson: The UK National Aviation Security Programme has for many years contained a range of measures to deter and prevent the hijacking of passenger aircraft. These measures were substantially enhanced in response to the attacks on 11 September. In particular it has been a requirement since 18 September 2001 for cockpit doors to be kept locked.

In addition, the Cabinet Office commissioned, through the Committee on Domestic and International Terrorism, a wide-ranging review of aviation security following these attacks. As a result a number of potential measures have been identified on which work is currently being taken forward. However it is too soon to say what will be introduced as a result.

Rural Bus Services

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what percentage of people living in *(a)* each predominantly rural constituency and *(b)* rural areas nationally live within 10 minutes' walk of a bus service operating at least hourly. [41447]

Ms Keeble: My Department's National Travel Survey indicates that 47 per cent. of rural households in England, defined as households in a settlement with less than 3,000 population, lived within about 10 minutes' walk of a bus service operating at least hourly in 1998 to 2000. This figure should be treated with caution as sample sizes for rural areas are small, despite aggregation of data over a three year period. For this reason, these data cannot be broken down to a constituency level.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what additional funding is being made available to meet the target laid down in the Rural White Paper for the proportion of the rural population living within 10 minutes' walk of a bus service operating at least hourly by *(a)* 2004 and *(b)* 2010. [41446]

Ms Keeble: We have made available £198 million for rural bus services in England over the period 2001–02 to 2003–04, through the Rural Bus Subsidy Grant and Rural Bus Challenge schemes. Funding for these schemes beyond 2003–04 will be decided in light of future spending reviews, reflecting our 10-year plan and Rural White Paper targets and commitments for rural transport. Local authorities also have the discretion to use revenue support funding allocated by my Department for additional rural bus services.

Congestion Charging (Disabled Drivers)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his policy is on congestion charging towards disabled drivers. [42217]

Ms Keeble: The Government recognise the enormous importance of personal mobility for many disabled people. We are committed to making regulations in due course to require an exemption from local road user charges for at least some disabled people covering the whole of England including London. These regulations will set a minimum standard which local authorities must meet. They will be free to introduce more generous concessions or exemptions if they wish.

We shall consult on the possible form of the England wide exemption after the current review of the disabled persons' parking badge scheme (the Blue Badge Scheme) is completed later this year.

Shoreham Harbour

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what reports he has received from Shoreham Port Authority about the spread of business usage at the Harbour; [42324]

(2) what discussions he has had with the Shoreham Port Authority about the establishment of cross Channel ferry services; [42318]

(3) what environmental impact assessment has been carried out with regard to the establishment of cross Channel ferry services from Shoreham Harbour; [42319]

(4) what representations he has received about the establishment of cross channel ferry services from Shoreham Harbour; [42317]

(5) what representations he has received from Shoreham Port Authority about extending their borrowing levels; [42315]

(6) what details he has received from Shoreham Port Authority about the number of people employed at Shoreham Harbour *(a)* by the Port Authority and *(b)* by businesses in the harbour in each of the last five years; [42358]

(7) what details he has received from Shoreham Port Authority as to the proportion of Shoreham Harbour in operational use and on plans they have to increase this; [42326]

(8) what details he has received from Shoreham Port Authority about the average number of daily lorry movements on port-related activity in each of the last 36 months. [42320]

Mr. Jamieson: None.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when his Department last met members of the Shoreham Port Authority; and where. [42316]

Mr. Jamieson: One of my officials met the vice-chairman and the chief executive on 1 February 2002 at the authority's offices.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the cost has been to *(a)* Shoreham Harbour and *(b)* SEEDA in consultation fees related to the Maritime Vision for Shoreham Harbour Project. [42321]

Mr. Jamieson: A steering group comprising several bodies runs the Shoreham Harbour Project and information in respect of consultation fees incurred by them is not held by my Department.

SEEDA has invested funding of £35,000 since April 2001 on the study (which includes consultation costs) in regard to the Maritime Vision for Shoreham Harbour. Prior to that date investment funding has been incurred by English Partnerships on the study through the former Partnership Investment Programme.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish remuneration figures for board members and executive employees of Shoreham Port Authority. [42322]

Mr. Jamieson: These are matters for the authority.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his policy is towards using areas of derelict land at Shoreham Harbour for housing. [42323]

Ms Keeble: The Government's advice on housing as set out in "Planning Policy Guidance note 3" (PPG3) give precedence to locating new housing on previously developed land within urban areas. Regional Planning Guidance for the South-east (RPG9) advises that development plans should seek to achieve at least 60 per cent. of all new development in the South-east on previously developed land.

Road Maintenance

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the trunk roads on which day-to-day maintenance is carried out by private sector companies. [42186]

Mr. Byers: The Highways Agency has overall responsibility for the management of the whole trunk road network in England. The day-to-day maintenance is, and has been for many years, contracted out to private companies.

Railtrack

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what conditions are attached to the European Commission's agreement to the payment of state aid for Railtrack in administration. [42188]

Mr. Byers: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 170W.

Road Network Management (Emergency Services)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with the Department of Health regarding the impact on the Ambulance Service of his proposals to improve management of the road network. [42184]

Mr. Byers: Discussions on improving the management of the trunk road network have taken place with representatives of the Ambulance Service as part of a cross-organisation review of road incident management.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with the Home Secretary on the impact on police investigations of his proposal to improve management of the road network. [42182]

Mr. Byers: Discussion on improving the management of the trunk road network are taking place at several levels, involving Ministers, officials and representatives of the Association of Chief Police Officers.

Local Authorities

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what discussions he had with *(a)* the LGA and *(b)* the ALG on the impact of the banding of local authorities on their ability to recruit and retain staff; [41991]

(2) what *(a)* research he commissioned and *(b)* representations he has received on the impact of the banding of local authorities on their ability to recruit and retain staff. [41992]

Mr. Byers: Discussions with the local government community were held during the preparation and drafting of the Local Government White Paper where the proposals to categorise authorities into four bands were announced.

The White Paper charged the Audit Commission with developing the methodology for Comprehensive Performance Assessment and ultimately categorising authorities. The LGA and other key stakeholders are working with them in the development of the methodology and practical trialing with 10 Pathfinder authorities.

The White Paper proposals taken together will enhance the status of authorities as community leaders and will lead to substantial improvement in service delivery. This is the best way of enabling authorities to recruit and retain high quality staff.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the questions tabled by the hon. Member for Cotswold on 12 February refs 37055 and 37057 on NATS, when he will receive an answer. [39760]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave on 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 806W, and 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 176W.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Post-GCSE Studies

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what arrangements she proposes to facilitate more advanced studies for pupils who have taken GCSE early in a school without a sixth form. [41203]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* The consultation document "14–19: extending opportunities, raising standards" refers to the value of institutional collaboration, in the use of facilities and teaching staff, and the potential of ICT and interactive learning. The Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth will also help in this respect, by offering online courses and summer schools, and by piloting individual education plans for the most able. The consultation document confirms that further guidance and support materials will be developed.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list her Department's total expenditure by month in each financial year since 1997–98. [32789]

Estelle Morris: Monthly figures for the Department could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, the Treasury has published full, financial year outturns for the years 1997–98 to 1999–2000 in Public Expenditure Analyses (Cm 5101). Provisional financial year outturns for 2001–01 have been provided in Public Expenditure 2000–01 Provisional Outturn (Cm 5243).

Public Bodies (Chairmen)

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the appointments made by her Department since 1 May 1997 of chairmen of *(a)* non-departmental public bodies, *(b)* commissions, *(c)* inquiries, *(d)* agencies and *(e)* task forces; and if she will list their (i) term of office, (ii) salary and (iii) known political affiliation (A) past and (B) present. [33894]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The i[illegible]rmation requested is listed in the following table. Inform[illegible]on on political affiliation is not collected.

Name	*Body*	*[illegible]m (years)*	*Annual salary (£)*
Non-departmental public bodies			
1997			
Clive Booth	Teacher Training Agency	3	15,759
Sir Anthony Tippett	Funding Agency for Schools	2	30,000
Sir William Stubbs	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority	3	47,000
Sir Michael Checkland	Higher Education Funding Council for England	3	37,822
1998			
Lord Davies of Oldham	Further Education Funding Council	3	37,014
Norman Dunlop[1]	Engineering Construction Industry Training Board	1	0
Keith Bridge	Education Transfer Council	2	15,000
Sir Anthony Battishill	Student Loans Company	2	67,000
1999			
Julie Mellor	Equal Opportunities Commission	3	62,500
Hugh Try[1]	Construction Industry Training Board	3	27,695
Jim Rowland	Engineering Construction Industry Training Board	5	9,232
Sue Maynard-Campbell	Advisory Committee for Disabled People in Employment and Training	2	0
Tim Melville-Ross	Investors in People UK	3	0
Bert Massie	Disability Rights Commission	4	65,600
2000			
Alan Pedder	Remploy	3	25,000
Nick Reilly	Adult Learning Inspectorate	4	0
Richard Greenhalgh	National College for School Leadership	3	0
Bryan Sanderson	Learning and Skills Council	4	40,000
Sir William Stubbs[1]	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority	3	42,559
Clive Booth[1]	Teacher Training Agency	3	16,767
Sir Anthony Battishill[1]	Student Loans Company	1	68,400
2001			
John Taylor	British Educational Communications and Telecommunication Agency	1	0
David Young	Higher Education Funding Council for England	3	40,000
Keith Beddell-Pearce	Student Loans Company	3	65,978
2002			
Richard Handover	Adult Learning Inspectorate	4	9,000
Commissions	None	—	—
Inquiries	None	—	—
Agencies	None	—	—
Task Forces			
2000			
Sandy Leitch	New Deal Task Force	2	0
2002			
Steve Morrison	Post 16 e-Learning Strategy Task Force	[2] —	0

[1] Denotes a re-appointment.

[2] Until the task force reports.

Fair Trade

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 61W, on fair trade goods, if she will review and increase the amount of fairly traded goods purchased by her Department during Fair Trade Fortnight. [35916]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My Department takes every opportunity to encourage suppliers and partners to promote and purchase fair trade products. As the vast majority of goods purchased are via third parties my direct influence to purchase these goods is limited. However I continue to support ethical trading in mainstream business and encourage suppliers and partners to become increasingly aware of fair trade products during Fair Trade Fortnight.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether fair trade products are sold in her Department. [39823]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My Department takes every opportunity to promote fair trade products. Fair trade products are offered for sale by our contracted caterer in all the main Department head office buildings.

Legal Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what legal costs have been incurred by her Department in each of the last four years. [34347]

Mr. Ivan Lewis:

1998–99—This information can be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

1999–2000—This information can be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

2000–01—£632,896.

2001–02—£607,490 (April-February).

Special Educational Needs

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of children with statements of special educational needs were categorised as autistic in *(a)* 2001, *(b)* 1996 and *(c)* 1991. [37422]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information requested is not available centrally.

Capita Contracts

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many contracts the Department has with Capita. [38384]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My Department has five contracts in total with Capita for a range of different services.

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the change in costs incurred by local education authority maintained schools as a result of the introduction of the climate change levy. [38586]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* Our assessment is that for a school that must pay the climate change levy (CCL), the increase in fuel costs in the financial year 2001–02 due to the levy was of the order of 10 per cent.

Not all schools have to pay the CCL. Those schools which are eligible to pay the lower rate of VAT on fuel of 5 per cent. are exempt from the levy.

Electricity sourced from new forms of renewable energy is also exempt from the CCL, as are supplies from registered sources of "good quality" combined heat and power.

Advertising

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the publicity and advertising campaigns run by her Department in each of the last four years, specifying the *(a)* purpose, *(b)* cost to public funds, *(c)* number of staff involved and *(d)* method of evaluation in each case. [39092]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department's total spend on advertising was:

	£
1998–99	15,673,000
1999–2000	11,901,000
2000–01	29,110,000
2001–02[1]	17,665,000

[1] Year to date.

Campaigns over £500,000 are:

Campaign	*Details*	£
1998–99		
New Deal	To promote awareness of New Deal and to inform potential clients and employers, and to sign up employers	4,772,000
Reading and Literacy	To encourage parents to get more involved in their children's reading (linked to National Year of Reading)	3,648,000
Disability Discrimination	To inform employers about how the Disability Discrimination Act affects them	1,924,000
National Traineeships	To encourage employers to take up National Traineeships	1,502,000
Learning Direct	Promoting the Learning Direct helpline to young people	619,000
Career Development Loans	To encourage young people to take out CDLs to improve their career prospects	604,000
Millennium Bug Busters	To promote to employers training on how to prepare for the Millennium Bug	585,000
1999–2000		
Disability Discrimination	To challenge the general public to change their attitude to disability and to inform employers about the Disability Discrimination Act	2,643,000
Maths Year 2000	To encourage parents to help with their children's maths (linked to Maths Year 2000)	2,322,000
Age Diversity	To address age discrimination in recruitment and employment practice	1,128,000
National Traineeships	To encourage young people to take up National Traineeships	1,077,000
One	To promote the launch of the One scheme in 12 pilot areas	873,000
Childcare Link	To promote a helpline telling parents what child care options are available in their area	810,000
Time Off for Study	To inform employers of their legal responsibilities under the Right to Time Off for Study Act	702,000
2000–01		
Don't Quit Now	To raise awareness of the benefits of staying in some form of learning after reaching the age of compulsory education	2,700,000
New Deal 50 plus	To increase participation in New Deal 50 plus	2,400,000
ICT Employability	To encourage those out of work to take up taster courses in ICT	2,011,000
Childcare Recruitment	To encourage recruitment into the child care sectors by young people and returners	1,821,000
Disability Discrimination	To tell SME service providers how aspects of the Disability Discrimination Act affect them	1,242,000
Modern Apprenticeships	To promote the availability of Modern Apprenticeships	856,000
Individual Learning Accounts	To encourage people to take up Individual Learning Accounts to improve their career prospects	612,000
Fast Track Teachers	To inform potential recruits about the fast-track teachers scheme	1,056,000
Parents' Magazine	To promote a magazine which helps parents to get more involved in their children's education	1,484,000

Campaign	*Details*	*£*
2001–02[1]		
Childcare Recruitment	To encourage recruitment into the child care sectors by young people and returners	2,504,400
Foundation Degree	To promote Foundation Degrees	667,000
New Deal 25+	To increase participation in New Deal 25+	633,000
Excellence Challenge	To widen participation of young people in higher education	1,750,000
Science Year 2001–02	To encourage more interest in science among young people	1,803,000
Adult Basic Skills 'Get On'	To encourage adults to improve their basic literacy and numeracy skills	4,597,000
Parents' Magazine	To promote a magazine which helps parents to get more involved in their children's education	770,000
Fast Track Teachers	To inform potential recruits about the fast-track teachers scheme	1,250,000
Millennium Volunteers	To encourage young people from 16 to 24 to become involved in volunteering activities	848,000
Foundation Degree (new terms)	To provide information on the new terms of the Foundation Degree	658,000
Get On—Adult Basic Skills	To encourage adults to improve their basic literacy and numeracy skills	1,820,000
Modern Apprenticeships	To promote the availability of Modern apprenticeships	1,670,000

[1] Year to date.

It is not possible, except at disproportionate expense, to provide a detailed breakdown of the number of staff working on each campaign.

The Department runs a number of campaigns in support of our key delivery priorities, in order to inform our target audiences of how they are affected by our policies. All of our campaigns follow the guidelines which govern Government information on issues of propriety and cost.

Detailed evaluation criteria are not held centrally and could be collated only at disproportionate cost. However, every campaign is measured vigorously against specific communication objectives using pre- and post-campaign research, conducted by independent research companies, to record shifts in awareness, attitudes, knowledge or behaviour among the target audience(s).

The Department employs tracking research to monitor these shifts over time and typically conducts telephone surveys of respondents to advertising campaigns to monitor satisfaction with the services offered and actions taken as a result of the campaign. It routinely tests the likely effectiveness of different creative approaches on the target audience(s) through market research, as part of the development of advertising campaigns. Lessons learned from previous campaigns are used to inform future ones.

Student Debt

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what was the average level of student debt, broken down by subject, upon graduating from a first degree in the last 12 months. [39707]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* Information on student debt is not collated by subject.

Information on student loan accounts is held by the Student Loans Company, and relates to publicly owned debt or to debts held in the private sector following the two Government debt sales.

The average debt of a borrower with a mortgage style student loan entering repayment at the start of financial year 1999–2000, the latest year for which data are available, was £3,210.

The first cohort of students on a three-year course who entered higher education under the new student support arrangements is due to enter repayment in April 2002. The average debt of a borrower with a new income contingent loan entering repayment in that year is estimated to be some £6,100.

Students who started their course in 1997–98, or earlier, repay their student loan on a mortgage-style (fixed-term) basis. Students commencing their course in 1998–99, or later, will repay their loans on an income-contingent basis. Their repayments will be linked to their income after leaving higher education so that leavers only repay when their income exceeds the threshold of £10,000 per annum. Information on students' private sector debt such as overdrafts and other commercial loans is not available centrally.

Science/Engineering Students

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many undergraduate engineering students received sponsorship *(a)* in total, *(b)* per subject and *(c)* in relation to other disciplines, during the last academic year. [39708]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* The available information, showing the number of full-time undergraduates whose tuition fees are paid by sponsors, is shown in the table. Contributions to tuition fees are income assessed. How much, if anything, a student pays depends on their income and that of their family.

Full-time undergraduates in the UK whose tuition fees are paid by sponsors[1] *2000–01*

Subject	*Number*	*As percentage of all students in the subject*[2]
Engineering and technology	490	0.8
Medicine and dentistry	102	0.1
Subjects allied to medicine	2,936	3.1
Biological sciences	96	0.2
Veterinary science	2	0.0
Agriculture and related subjects	21	0.2
Physical sciences	96	0.2
Mathematical sciences	17	0.1
Information technology	163	0.3
Architecture	92	0.5
Social studies	537	0.8
Law	530	1.8
Business/administration studies	452	0.5
Mass communication/documentation	20	0.1
Languages	42	0.1
Humanities	93	0.3

Full-time undergraduates in the UK whose tuition fees are paid by sponsors[1] 2000–01

Subject	*Number*	*As percentage of all students in the subject*[2]
Creative arts	98	0.1
Education	244	0.6
Combined subjects	350	0.4
Total all subjects	6,381	0.7

[1] Covers fees paid by the student's employer, UK industry/commerce, and sponsorship by HM forces.

[2] Excluding students who did not provide details of the source of their tuition fees.

The 1998–99 Student Income and Expenditure survey reported that an important source of income for part-time students was their employers. One in five gained help towards their study costs, which was worth £452 over the academic year for those who received such help.

Nursery Education

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average cost of providing a full-time nursery education place is in *(a)* East Sussex and *(b)* England; and what the comparable figures were for 1997. [37910]

Margaret Hodge: The Department does not hold information on the cost of full-time nursery education places.

The Department provides funding to early education settings for the provision of free, part-time early education places for three-year-olds at the current annual rate of £1,188. However, in addition, funding may be made available by local authorities from their own resources and the cost of places for four-year-olds is met by local authorities, drawing on funds made available through the standard spending assessment. The annual grant rate in 1997 was £1,100.

Child Care

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many new child care places were created in Cambridgeshire during 2000–01; and what the targets were for Cambridgeshire for the creation of new child care places in 2000–01. [39903]

Margaret Hodge: Cambridgeshire created 2,208 new child care places in 2000–01. Cambridgeshire's target for new child care places in 2000–01 was 2,982.

University Lecturers (Incompetence)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many university lecturers have been dismissed for incompetence in each year since 1990; what steps are being taken to improve the quality of undergraduate teaching; and if she will make a statement. [39947]

Margaret Hodge: The employment of lecturers is a matter for individual universities and no statistics are collected centrally on the number of lecturers dismissed or the reasons given for dismissal.

We are continuing to work closely with the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Quality Assurance Agency to ensure that revised systems are put in place to monitor and improve teaching quality. We have also requested that HEFCE produces, by July 2002, a strategic plan for enhancing the quality of teaching.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many press releases were issued by her Department *(a)* between 1 May and 31 December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive. [40032]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The number of press releases issued for each year from 1997 are as follows:

Date/year	*Number*
1 May 1997–31 December 1997	338
1998	598
1999	605
2000	538
2001	395

All press releases dating from 1998 can be accessed via the Department's website, www.dfes.gov.uk/pns/newslist. Press releases dating from 1995 can be accessed via the Central Office of Information (COI) website, www.coi.gov.uk.

Student Loans

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of students in each *(a)* LEA in England and *(b)* Government office region of England, were wholly or partially exempt from the payment of university tuition fees in academic year 2001–02. [40558]

Margaret Hodge: In England and Wales, under the student support scheme, students and their families only make a contribution towards their tuition fees if they can afford to do so. Students are assessed on family income.

Data on student support for 2001–02 are not yet available. The proportion of students in each LEA and Government office region of England in academic year 1999–2000, the latest year for which data are available, are shown in the following table.

Proportion of students in each education authority in England making contributions towards fees[1] *Academic year 1999–2000*

	Number of students contribution to fees			*Percentage of students contribution to fees:*		
	Nil student/ parent/spouse[2]	*Part student/ parent/spouse*	*Full student/ parent/spouse*	*Nil student/ parent/spouse*[2]	*Part student/ parent/spouse*	*Full student/ parent/spouse*
Corporation of London	17	5	12	50	15	35
Camden	1,035	115	447	65	7	28
Greenwich	991	248	414	60	15	25
Hackney	1,541	151	140	84	8	8
Hammersmith and Fulham	695	125	286	63	11	26
Islington	1,015	211	259	68	14	17
Kensington and Chelsea	832	129	100	78	12	9
Lambeth[3]	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—
Lewisham[3]	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—
Southwark	1,413	187	297	74	10	16
Tower Hamlets	1,365	68	73	91	5	5
Wandsworth	1,226	242	572	60	12	28
City of Westminster[3]	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—
Barking and Dagenham	467	127	86	69	19	13
Barnet	1,647	621	1,482	44	17	40
Bexley	591	297	534	42	21	38
Brent	1,883	705	581	59	22	18
Bromley[3]	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—
Croydon[3]	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—
Ealing	1,730	679	971	51	20	29
Enfield	1,283	494	1,047	45	17	37
Haringey[3]	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—
Harrow	1,169	694	1,181	38	23	39
Havering[3]	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—
Hillingdon[3]	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—
Hounslow	1,301	547	190	64	27	9
Kingston upon Thames[3]	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—
Merton	724	284	647	44	17	39
Newham	423	62	23	83	12	5
Redbridge	1,222	507	905	46	19	34
Richmond-upon-Thames	1,187	386	210	67	22	12
Sutton	465	259	719	32	18	50
Waltham Forest[3]	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—
Birmingham	4,768	1,425	1,537	62	18	20
Coventry	1,301	561	709	51	22	28
Dudley	917	597	701	41	27	32
Sandwell	993	453	347	55	25	19
Solihull	608	367	1,114	29	18	53
Walsall	927	445	496	50	24	27
Wolverhampton	1,243	462	556	55	20	25
Knowsley	601	188	158	63	20	17
Liverpool	2,317	695	572	65	19	16
St. Helens	647	422	524	41	26	33
Sefton	1,476	649	1,155	45	20	35
Wirral	1,339	750	1,175	41	23	36
Bolton[3]	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—
Bury	868	371	635	46	20	34
Manchester	2,296	366	418	75	12	14
Oldham	930	315	447	55	19	26
Rochdale	970	367	702	48	18	34
Salford	542	232	369	47	20	32
Stockport[3]	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—
Tameside	740	305	347	53	22	25
Trafford[3]	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—
Wigan	1,048	643	733	43	27	30
Barnsley	637	294	227	55	25	20
Doncaster	856	421	615	45	22	33
Rotherham	753	433	469	45	26	28
Sheffield[3]	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—
Bradford	2,334	738	1,082	56	18	26
Calderdale	841	328	556	49	19	32
Kirklees	1,660	634	1,093	49	19	32
Leeds[3]	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—
Wakefield	784	436	694	41	23	36
Gateshead	783	319	385	53	21	26
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	1,093	440	680	49	20	31
North Tyneside	758	382	631	43	22	36
South Tyneside	599	416	135	52	36	12
Sunderland	1,007	408	553	51	21	28
Isles of Scilly	8	5	8	38	24	38

Proportion of students in each education authority in England making contributions towards fees[1] Academic year 1999–2000

	Number of students contribution to fees			*Percentage of students contribution to fees:*		
	Nil student/ parent/spouse[2]	*Part student/ parent/spouse*	*Full student/ parent/spouse*	*Nil student/ parent/spouse*[2]	*Part student/ parent/spouse*	*Full student/ parent/spouse*
Bath and North East Somerset	605	267	701	38	17	45
Bristol City	1,459	436	860	53	16	31
North Somerset	539	321	759	33	20	47
South Gloucestershire	609	375	867	33	20	47
Hartlepool	328	124	157	54	20	26
Middlesbrough	590	246	381	48	20	31
Redcar and Cleveland	449	221	332	45	22	33
Stockton-on-Tees	637	311	550	43	21	37
Kingston upon Hull (Hull City)	825	231	213	65	18	17
East Riding	1,206	640	1,143	40	21	38
North East Lincolnshire	576	274	352	48	23	29
North Lincolnshire	609	308	439	45	23	32
North Yorkshire	2,392	1,142	1,975	43	21	36
York City	551	311	587	38	21	41
Bedfordshire	1,119	672	1,705	32	19	49
Luton	856	311	375	56	20	24
Buckinghamshire[3]	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—
Milton Keynes[3]	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—
Derbyshire	2,245	1,274	2,139	40	23	38
City of Derby	999	405	562	51	21	29
Dorset[3]	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—
Poole	458	235	411	41	21	37
Bournemouth	685	209	221	61	19	20
Durham	1,670	855	1,260	44	23	33
Darlington	419	283	171	48	32	20
East Sussex	1,356	684	1,465	39	20	42
Brighton and Hove	1,080	239	573	57	13	30
Hampshire	3,468	1,942	5,757	31	17	52
Portsmouth	754	224	309	59	17	24
Southampton	712	295	545	46	19	35
Leicestershire	1,778	1,220	2,260	34	23	43
Leicester City	1,649	604	374	63	23	14
Rutland	111	70	187	30	19	51
Staffordshire	2,595	1,644	2,531	38	24	37
Stoke-on-Trent	751	280	261	58	22	20
Wiltshire	1,631	282	2,082	41	7	52
Swindon	475	235	481	40	20	40
Bracknell Forest	203	135	460	25	17	58
Windsor and Maidenhead	311	191	842	23	14	63
West Berkshire	294	211	782	23	16	61
Reading	363	159	420	39	17	45
Slough	483	201	274	50	21	29
Wokingham	323	231	1,043	20	14	65
Cambridgeshire	1,544	882	2,496	31	18	51
Peterborough	564	276	475	43	21	36
Cheshire[3]	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—
Halton	438	210	266	48	23	29
Warrington[3]	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—
Devon	3,300	1,242	1,719	53	20	27
Plymouth	1,170	416	501	56	20	24
Torbay	612	220	234	57	21	22
Essex	3,041	1,608	4,650	33	17	50
Southend	488	193	421	44	18	38
Thurrock	235	136	205	41	24	36
Herefordshire	685	349	522	44	22	34
Worcestershire	1,794	1,101	2,172	35	22	43
Kent	4,163	2,196	3,821	41	22	38
Medway	637	439	585	38	26	35
Lancashire	5,189	2,119	3,527	48	20	33
Blackburn	832	195	254	65	15	20
Blackpool	578	214	178	60	22	18
Nottinghamshire	2,097	1,363	2,435	36	23	41
Nottingham	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—
Shropshire	1,113	583	1,007	41	22	37
The Wrekin	548	231	398	47	20	34
Cornwall	2,615	991	956	57	22	21
Cumbria	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—
Gloucestershire	3,275	519	1,492	62	10	28
Hertfordshire[3]	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—
Isle of Wight	577	255	278	52	23	25

Proportion of students in each education authority in England making contributions towards fees[1] Academic year 1999–2000

	Number of students contribution to fees			*Percentage of students contribution to fees:*		
	Nil student/ parent/spouse[2]	*Part student/ parent/spouse*	*Full student/ parent/spouse*	*Nil student/ parent/spouse*[2]	*Part student/ parent/spouse*	*Full student/ parent/spouse*
Lincolnshire	2,056	1,158	1,850	41	23	37
Norfolk	2,303	1,178	1,869	43	22	35
Northamptonshire	1,889	1,152	2,160	36	22	42
Northumberland	1,158	619	1,229	39	21	41
Oxfordshire	1,592	1,030	1,642	37	24	39
Somerset	1,719	1,077	1,561	39	25	36
Suffolk	2,081	1,204	2,011	39	23	38
Surrey	2,497	1,469	6,195	25	14	61
Warwickshire[3]	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—
West Sussex[3]	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—	*—
Regional Summary[4]						
North East	9,491	4,624	6,464	46	22	31
North West	20,811	8,041	11,460	52	20	28
Yorkshire and Humberside	14,024	6,190	9,445	47	21	32
East Midlands	12,824	7,246	11,967	40	23	37
West Midlands	18,243	8,498	12,351	47	22	32
South West	19,160	6,830	12,853	49	18	33
East of England	12,231	6,460	14,207	37	20	43
London	24,222	7,143	11,176	57	17	26
South East	18,813	9,901	24,991	35	18	47
England[5]	216,107	96,140	166,681	45	20	35

[1] Assessed by local education authorities to students normally domiciled in their area.

[2] Includes students on courses where the fees were not subject to income-assessment (e.g. PGCE courses; and some other ITT courses; and some courses at private colleges).

[3] Not all LEAs were able to provide full and accurate data in 1999–2000 on student support.

[4] Care must be taken when comparing regional data as these are based on only these authorities able to provide full and accurate fees information and no allowance has been made for the missing authorities.

* Data not available

Source:

F503G Student Support Survey

Further and Higher Education Act

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to revoke section 68(3) of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992; and if she will make a statement. [40799]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 6 March 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no such plans.

Ministerial Design Champion

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what meetings the Ministerial Design Champion for her Department has attended in his capacity as Design Champion in the last month; and if she will make a statement. [41958]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department's design champion has not been involved in any design championship activity in the last month.

Connexions Service

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what information on the Connexion Card database may be passed to *(a)* other parts of Connexions and *(b)* other public or private agencies (i) with and (ii) without the agreement of the data subject. [42136]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We anticipate that the name, address and date of birth on the young person's Connexions Card will be able to be used by the local Connexions Service to supplement the information that helps them to provide help and support to young people. Similarly, in order to run the scheme effectively, information may also be shared with the Learning and Skills Council. The arrangements governing the sharing of information comply with the Data Protection Act and section 114 of the Learning and Skills Act.

The Privacy Statement distributed to all young people when they register as card members allows them to choose whether or not they are content for information about them to be passed to commercial partners in order to receive information on goods and services. This permission can be altered by the young person at any time via the Connexions Card website. The information provided to commercial partners will be no more than to allow the mailing of information and is subject to the approval of my Department.

Local Education Authorities (Funding)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what assessment she has made of the amount of headteachers' time spent preparing bids for her Department's special funding; [42138]

(2) if she will list, for each local education authority, the schemes through which *(a)* the authority, *(b)* some or all maintained schools and *(c)* both are eligible to bid for additional funding; and what the aggregate additional funding paid through such schemes was, in the most recent year for which information is available. [42139]

Mr. Timms: No such assessment has been made.

Most additional education funding is allocated and paid to local education authorities through the Standards Fund and Special Grants. In 2001–02 the Standards Fund is worth £2.9 billion of Government grant and Special Grant worth £1.1 billion.

Almost all Standard Fund grants are allocated to LEAs on a formula basis and the Government expects LEAs to devolve grants to schools by a fair formula, in which case schools should not have to apply for grant. All Special Grants are allocated to local education authorities via a specified formula by which they must pass grant on to their schools.

Local Education Authorities

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will state, for each local education authority, whether they *(a)* have beacon status and *(b)* have failed an Ofsted inspection. [42140]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is as follows:

LEAs in which DfES has intervened on the basis of an adverse Ofsted inspection report:

Bradford
Bristol[1]
Derby
Doncaster
Dudley
Hackney
Haringey
Isles of Scilly
Islington[1]
Leeds
Leicester City[1]
Liverpool[1]
Redbridge
Rochdale
Rotherham[1]
Sandwell
Sheffield
South Tyneside
Southwark
Swindon
Thurrock
Waltham Forest
Walsall

[1] LEAs that have subsequently been re-inspected and received a positive report

LEAs that have been awarded Beacon status

Year 1 (1999–2000)—"Helping to Raise Standards by Tackling School Failure"

Blackburn with Darwen
Camden
North Tyneside
Suffolk

Year 2 (2000–01)—"Raising Attainment of Underachieving Groups"

Camden
North Lincolnshire
York

Year 3 (2001–02)—"Transition in Education"

Results are due soon

LEAs are awarded Beacon status for one year and are judged on their performance against a particular theme.

Shortage-subject Specialists

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what additional rewards are available to teachers trained to teach in primary education who subsequently become shortage-subject specialists. [42606]

Mr. Timms: The School Teachers' Pay Conditions Document 2001 allows employers to offer recruitment and retention allowances worth up to £5,085 a year to classroom teachers in any subject or phase.

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to extend golden hello payments to all teachers appointed as shortage-subject specialists in primary schools. [42605]

Mr. Timms: Golden Hellos are payable to eligible teachers in primary schools if they trained in a shortage subject and are responsible for teaching that subject to classes other than their own. My right hon. Friend has no present plans to change these criteria.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Community Court Orders

Mr. Heath: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what recent discussions he has had with the police and magistrates courts committees concerning the enforcement of warrants for the breach of community court orders; and if he will make a statement. [38886]

Mr. Wills: Lead responsibility for execution of community penalty breach warrants was transferred from the police to the Magistrates Courts Committees on 1 April 2001. No targets were set for execution of these warrants during the first year of operation to enable baseline data to be collected.

On 28 February the Lord Chancellor announced challenging targets for Magistrates Courts Committees for 2002–03 for enforcement of both financial and non-financial penalties. I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave on that day to my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac), *Official Report,* column 1554W.

My officials have a constant dialogue with representatives of the magistrates courts service on this subject. The police now play a supporting but important role in enforcement in line with the National Framework Agreement between the Home Office and the Lord Chancellor's Department. This agreement is working well and so there have been no recent discussions between my Department and the police on this subject.

Auld Report

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what consideration he has made of recommendations 106 and 107 of the Review of the Criminal Courts of England and Wales by Lord Justice Auld, October 2001. [41772]

Mr. Wills: The Government have taken no decisions on the report of Sir Robin Auld's Review. The period for comment closed on 31 January. The Government are now considering the recommendations in detail, taking account of the comments received. The Government will announce their conclusions by way of a White Paper in the spring.

Relocation Expenses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what her policy is on the payment of relocation expenses to staff in his Department. [41032]

Ms Rosie Winterton: In line with the Civil Service Management Code the Lord Chancellor's Department pays relocation expenses to staff who permanently transfer to another office, providing the following conditions apply: reimbursement is subject to a permanent compulsory move; the relocation terms are cost effective compared to the alternatives; and there must be a benefit to the Department or agency. Where posts are advertised with relocation terms then staff appointed to those posts may be entitled to reimbursement of their relocation expenses in accordance with our internal guidance.

Gravesend County Court

Mr. Pond: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* default unliquidated amounts, *(b)* default fixed amounts and *(c)* possession actions were issued by Gravesend county court in each six month period from January 1999. [40770]

Mr. Wills: Figures concerning the above are provided in the table. However, since a breakdown of default claims is not collected as requested, a total figure has been provided instead.

Default claims and possessions actions issued at Gravesend county court during selected periods

	Total default claims	*Total possession actions issued*[1]
January 1999 to June 1999	489	197
July 1999 to December 1999	439	252
January 2000 to June 2000	409	215
July 2000 to December 2000	436	182
January 2001 to June 2001	357	190
July 2001 to December 2001	483	235

[1] Includes mortgage and rent actions.

Mr. Pond: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many fixed date actions, excluding default fixed amounts, default unliquidated amounts and possession action, were issued by Gravesend county court in each six-month period from January 1999. [40771]

Mr. Wills: The figures requested are provided in the table.

Fixed date actions issued at Gravesend county court during selected periods

	Fixed date actions
January 1999 to June 1999	38
July 1999 to December 1999	78
January 2000 to June 2000	54
July 2000 to December 2000	94
January 2001 to June 2001	12
July 2001 to December 2001	56

Forfeiture

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he expects to publish a draft bill on the reform of forfeiture. [40407]

Mr. Wills: The Law Commission published a draft Termination of Tenancies Bill in 1994. It proposed the abolition of a landlord's right to terminate a tenancy by physical re-entry and by way of a court order for possession. A subsequent Law Commission consultative document reiterated the proposal to abolish all means of forfeiture. It also proposed, in relation to commercial properties only, that either the original proposals stand or that there should be a statutory right in very limited circumstances for a landlord physically to re-enter the property. The majority of responses to the consultation favoured the second option.

The Law Commission expects to publish a revised draft Bill in 2003.

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the scope is of the inquiry into forfeiture being carried out by the Law Commission; and when he expects the Law Commission to publish the results of its inquiry. [40406]

Mr. Wills: The scope of the current work being carried out by the Law Commission is:

> "That an examination be made of the law relating to the termination of tenancies, to facilitate the implementation of the report previously published [*Landlord and Tenant Law, Termination of Tenancies Bill*, 1994 Law Com No 221], with a view to modernising and simplification of the law in this area".

The Law Commission is currently reconsidering the draft Bill (attached to the 1994 report) in order that it might be brought into line with changes in civil court procedure, the enactment of the Human Rights Act 1998 and changes in case law.

The Law Commission expects that the result of this work will be published in final form in 2003.

Courts (Northern Ireland)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the size of the annual case load is in each type of court in Northern Ireland; and what her estimate of the annual case load based on the proposals contained in the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill is. [39664]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The annual case load for the years 1999 and 2000 for the various tiers of court in Northern Ireland are shown in the tables. The case load figures for the 2001 calendar year are currently being compiled.

It is not anticipated that the proposals contained in the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill will result in significant variation in overall case load size. There will be a redistribution of business as between the magistrates courts and the youth court consequent on the proposal to bring 17-year-olds within the ambit of the youth court. It is estimated that the business of the youth court will increase by some 50 per cent.

However, it is also expected that, as the pre-court restorative justice diversionary conferences provided for come on line, there may be reductions in the numbers of cases appearing before the youth courts. It is not possible to estimate the numbers of such reductions at this time.

Magistrates courts business dealt with—1999

	Case Load
Civil applications[1]	38,664
Criminal defendants[2]	50,702
Total	89,366

[1] Combines civil applications (33,562) and children order applications (5,102).

[2] Combines criminal defendants (48,777) and youth defendants (1,925).

Business dealt with 1999—County courts, Crown courts, High Court

	Case Load
County courts	
Civil business	45,440
Criminal business	2,451
Total	47,891
Crown courts	
Civil business	103
Criminal business	900
Total	1,003
High Court	
Civil business	21,045
Criminal business	53
Total	21,098

Magistrates courts business dealt with—2000

	Case Load
Civil applications[1]	38,604
Criminal defendants[2]	50,034
Total	88,638

[1] Combines civil applications (33,541) and children order applications (5,063).

[2] Combines criminal defendants (48,042) and youth defendants (1,992).

Business dealt with 2000—County courts, Crown courts, High Court

	Case Load
County courts	
Civil business	46,368
Criminal business	2,216
Total	48,584
Crown courts	
Civil business	215
Criminal business	963
Total	1,178
High Court	
Civil business	21,410
Criminal business	69
Total	21,479

Capita Group

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the contracts that have been awarded to the Capita Group by the Department. [39351]

Mr. Wills: As the question does not specify a time period the Lord Chancellor's Department, incorporating its associated offices and the Court Service, provides information from 1997 onwards:

Year/contracts	£
1997–98	
Nil	
1998–99	
2 contracts	20,377.50
1999–2000	
1 contract	1,151.50
2000–01	
5 contracts	22,985.94
2001–02[1]	
Nil	

[1] To date

The contracts were for the provision of business, management and specialist recruitment consultancy services.

Advertising

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will list the publicity and advertising campaigns run by the Lord Chancellor's Department in each of the last four years, specifying the *(a)* purpose, *(b)* cost to public funds, *(c)* number of staff involved and *(d)* method of evaluation in each case. [39089]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information is presented in the tables.

My Department conducts publicity and advertising campaigns to raise awareness among the public or legal specialists of new rights and responsibilities due to new legislation, to raise awareness of new services, or to recruit new members of the judiciary or for departmental staff recruitment.

We do not record the number of staff involved in any individual piece of work.

	Activity	(a) Purpose	(b) Cost to public funds (£)	(c) Number of staff involved	(d) Method of evaluation
1997–98					
Public Record Office	Local press advertising	To promote ad hoc open days/PRO exhibitions	Total: 4,465	n/a	Attendance/group types at events is recorded, but not attributed to specific advertisements
		To raise public awareness of PRO publications			
Land Registry	Local press advertising	To raise public awareness of lost land certificates	13,580	n/a	Response to each advert is monitored
1998–99					
LCDHQ	National press advertising via COI	To encourage diverse recruitment of lay magistracy	Total: 450,500	n/a	Monitored response to adverts via an inquiry line for information literature
Public Record Office	Local press advertising	To promote ad hoc open days/PRO exhibitions	Total: 7,640	n/a	Attendance/group types at events is recorded, but not attributed to specific advertisements
	Trade press adverts and targeted mailshots	To raise public awareness of PRO publications			Demand for publications is monitored
Land Registry	Local press advertising	To raise public awareness of lost land certificates	9,625	n/a	Response to each advert is monitored
Court Service	Local press advertising	To publicise court closures, as part of implementation of civil justice reforms	5,345	n/a	
1999–2000					
Public Record Office	Local press advertising	To promote ad hoc open days/PRO exhibitions	Total: 2,710	n/a	Attendance/group types at events is recorded, but not attributed to specific advertisement
	Trade press adverts and targeted mailshots	To raise public awareness of PRO publications			Demand for publications is monitored
Land Registry	Local press advertising	To raise public awareness of lost land certificates	13,960	n/a	Response to each advert is monitored
Court Service	Local press advertising	To publicise court closures or staff recruitment drives, as part of implementation of civil justice reforms	18,960	n/a	N/a at this stage
2000–01					
LCDHQ	Multi-media campaign (National and local advertising campaign)	To launch national roll-out of the Community Legal Service to stakeholders and the public. And to increase public awareness of Family Mediation	4,283,780	n/a	COI conducted tracking research of public awareness of CLS logo and service
Public Record Office	Local press advertising	To promote ad hoc open days/PRO exhibitions	Total: 8,950	n/a	Attendance/group types at events is recorded, but not attributed to specific advertisements.
	Trade press adverts/mailshots	To raise public awareness of PRO publications			Demand for publications is monitored.
	Trade press advertising	To promote PRO website to schools			Number of hits to website monitored
	Regional talks/exhibitions	To promote availability of 1901 Census website			N/a at this stage
Land Registry	Local press advertising	To raise public awareness of lost land certificates	2,505	n/a	Response to each advert is monitored
Court Service	Local press advertising	Staff recruitment	13,000	n/a	Not available at this stage
NICS	Local press advertising	Lay Magistracy recruitment	4,800	n/a	Not available at this stage.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Empty Properties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 6 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 943W, what the total area in square feet of all empty properties owned by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which he has had responsibility was in each year since May 1997. [37916]

Mr. Leslie: Information requested, covering 1997–98 to 2000–01 (inclusive), is as follows.

	Square feet
1997–98	179,000
1998–99	292,000
1999–2000	292,000
2000–01	160,000

With one exception, which is the subject of a forthcoming PFI, all buildings were surplus to the Department's requirements and were in the process of being disposed.

Notes:

1. The figures are for the "core" of the Department as none of its agencies, nor non-departmental public bodies have owned any empty properties.

2. Excluded from the figures is the project, commenced in 1998–99, to refurbish three vacant buildings. The first of these (Admiralty Arch) was completed and occupied by staff in 2000–01. When the other two buildings (Kirkland House and the Ripley Building) are completed in 2002–03, they will form 22 Whitehall; one of the Department's major buildings.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many press releases were issued by his Department *(a)* between 1 May and 31 December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive. [40031]

Mr. Leslie: The Cabinet Office released 159 press notices between 1 May and 31 December 1997.

The number of press notices the Cabinet Office released for each calendar year from 1998 to 2001 is as follows:

	Number
1998	277
1999	343
2000	433
2001	203

The Cabinet Office press office also issues press releases on behalf of the Privy Council Office. The figures for 1997, 1998 and 1999 include operational notes/invitations. The figures for 1999 and 2000 also include press notices issued by the Year 2000 Media Co-ordination Unit, which operated from the Cabinet Office.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many people were employed in a press or public relations function in his Department on 1 January in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000, *(e)* 2001 and *(f)* 2002. [39934]

Mr. Leslie: Before 1998 the number of press officers in the Cabinet Office press office is available only as an average for financial years. In the financial year 1996–97 the average number of press officers was seven.

The number of press officers employed in the Cabinet Office press office since 1998 is as follows:

	Number
January 1998	11
January 1999	14
1 January 2000	20
1 January 2001	16
1 January 2002	18

The Cabinet Office press office does not have specific personnel for performing public relations functions. Where required the press officers would fulfil some of this role.

Government Regional Offices (England)

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the *(a)* running cost and *(b)* total budget is of the English Government regional offices in 2001–02. [33993]

Mrs. Roche: The administrative running costs (including a small capital allocation) for each of the Government Offices for the Regions for 2001–02 are given in the table.

£000

GO	*Running costs 2001–02*
North East	9,694
North West	15,255
Yorkshire and Humber	10,467
West Midlands	10,184
East Midlands	8,388
East	9,238
South West	11,707
South East	10,330
London[1]	21,325
Total	106,588

[1] GO London figures include the Regional Co-ordination Unit

Job Sharing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the extent of job sharing in his Department. [41013]

Mr. Leslie: The Cabinet Office currently employs 12 members of staff on a job share contract.

The Cabinet Office is committed to supporting part-time working, job-sharing and other forms of alternative working patterns. It is Cabinet Office policy that all advertised posts will normally be open to anyone wishing to work an alternative working pattern, including part-timers and job sharers although there will be some instances where this is not possible due to the nature of the work. The flexibility of any alternative working pattern is decided in conjunction with local management to suit an individual's needs and the needs of their work.

Non-Governmental Organisation

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the non-Governmental organisations operating in the South West Region that receive public funds from his Department; and what amount of annual funding they received in the most recent year for which figures are available. [39133]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: Details of non-governmental organisations which receive grants from the Cabinet Office can be found on page 143 of the Cabinet Office Departmental Report 2001 (Cm 5119).

Information is not held about the regions covered by the non-governmental organisations which receive grants from the Cabinet Office.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

BSE

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when, and by whom, she was informed of the latest cases of meat from the offspring of BSE-infected cows entering the food chain; and when she informed the Food Standards Agency. [37864]

Margaret Beckett: DEFRA headquarters were verbally informed by the Animal Health Divisional Office on Friday 8 February. Ministers and the Food Standards Agency were informed on Monday 11 February when a more detailed report of the incident was received.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action she is taking in relation to the latest instances of meat from the offspring of BSE infected cows which has entered the food chain; and if she will make a statement. [37865]

Margaret Beckett: We are urgently checking to see whether there are any more cases and enhancing our computer systems to reduce the risk of this happening in future. We have also reminded farmers that animals subject to restriction notice must not enter the food chain.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the farms in North Yorkshire which became foot and mouth infected premises after their appeal against her Department's decision to cull on their land was upheld by the Divisional Veterinary Manager. [37528]

Margaret Beckett: The seven farms were premises under the following ownership:

D. M. and R. E. Capstick of Bellbusk parish, Settle—IP 2001/1739

P. T. Stephenson of Bishopdale parish—IP 2001/1812

Mr. and G. D. Beresford of Haltonwest parish, Settle—IP 2001/1663

J. H. Clarke Partners of Kepwick parish, Thirsk—IP 2001/1930

Bainbridge Partners of Lealholm parish, Whitby—IP 2001/1815

Wade and Son of Linton parish, Settle—IP 2001/1770

W. and D. Scaife and Son of Nether Silton parish, Thirsk—IP 2001/1847.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* sheep, *(b)* cattle and *(c)* other animals subject to the three kilometre cull policy during the foot and mouth outbreak in Cumbria were destroyed under voluntary arrangements; and if she will make a statement. [38824]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* During the foot and mouth outbreak the following number of animals were slaughtered in Cumbria as a result of 3km cull arrangements:

Sheep—405,557

Pigs—3,344

Goats—147.

These data are based on DEFRA's Disease Control System (DCS) Database as at 25 February 2002. The figures may be subject to revision as DEFRA's data cleansing exercise is carried out and as more data becomes available.

In the 3km cull animals were culled under the powers in the Animal Health Act 1981, on the basis that they had been exposed to infection. However, it was implemented by dealing first with those farms where keepers were willing to co-operate with the cull, hence the use of the term "voluntary cull" as a shorthand for the 3km cull operation.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if the flock of sheep in Kirkby Stephen in which one animal was found to be foot and mouth antibody positive was tested for the presence of antibodies prior to its arrival on the farm. [38825]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Yes, the flock of sheep from which the seropositive sheep originated had been tested previously for the presence of antibodies, with negative results.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether confirmed cases of foot and mouth are determined according to clinical signs of the disease, the presence of disease antibodies, the presence of a live virus, or by other means; and if she will make a statement on whether the criteria for determining infected premises has changed since 30 September. [38831]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* During last year's outbreak, diagnosis of foot and mouth disease (FMD) was normally confirmed by the National Disease Control Centre on the basis of clinical observations of a veterinary inspector on the spot. Some cases were confirmed on the basis of laboratory tests which confirmed the presence of FMD antibodies or virus. It is nearly five months since the last outbreak of foot and mouth and confirmation of any future case would need to be based on laboratory tests that confirm the presence of the virus.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what reports she has received from police officers on police involvement in the culling of animals during the foot and mouth epidemic. [41219]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* The Department has received no reports on police involvement in the culling of animals during the foot and mouth epidemic.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many suspected cases of foot and mouth disease there have been since 30 September. [40370]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* Since 30 September there have been 75 suspected cases of foot and mouth disease reported in the United Kingdom. All have been thoroughly investigated and in all cases no evidence of the foot and mouth virus was found.

Notes:

This figure includes:

Report cases which were later cleared on clinical examination;

Slaughter on Suspicion (SOS) and Test on Suspicion (TOS) animals slaughtered on the grounds of suspected clinical signs of the disease.

Not included in this figure:

Flocks and animals in flocks which were slaughtered on the basis of sero-positive reactions where there were no clinical signs of disease are not classified as suspect cases as these animals were slaughtered because DEFRA had evidence that the animals had been exposed to infection but there were no grounds to suspect disease.

Source:

DEFRA Disease Control System database as at 12:00 on 4 March 2002—figures are subject to change as more data become available.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on what dates, within the last two years, orders have been placed for the manufacture and printing of signs and notices indicating that the public should keep off premises owing to the presence of foot and mouth disease. [39990]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* The Department keeps stocks of a range of warning notices for the control of food and mouth disease. The following orders were placed by the Animal Disease Control Division of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, with the Department's own printing services.

(i) On 22 February 2001, an order for the printing of notice FM44 which says "Please keep out".

(ii) On 6 March 2001, an order for the printing of notice FM25, which says "No admittance on account of FMD".

(iii) On 24 may 2001, an order for the printing of poster FM28 "Notice to the General Public in FMD Infected Areas".

Information on orders placed by local Animal Health Offices and Disease Control Centres is not readily available.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the contractors involved in the slaughter and disposal of animals at Sparum Farm, Kidderminster, during the foot and mouth epidemic; and what the cost to public funds of their work was. [40369]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* The contractors involved in the slaughter and disposal of animals at Sparum Farm, Kidderminster, during the foot and mouth epidemic were: F. M. Caine and Sons, Ruttle Plant Hire Ltd. and Farm Assist Ltd. The invoices and accounts for this work have not been finalised.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 212W, on culls, what measures she is taking to compensate those animal owners whose appeals against culls were upheld; and if she will make a statement. [41970]

Mr. Morley: Compensation at market value is paid to farmers whose animals are slaughtered as part of foot and mouth disease control measures taken under the Animal Health Act 1981.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on what basis the decision was taken for interviews with Ministers and senior officials not to be recorded verbatim during the Anderson Lessons Learned inquiry; and if she will make a statement. [40704]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* This is a matter for the Lessons Learned inquiry. The conditions under which any person will be interviewed (not just Ministers and senior officials) in London by the inquiry are outlined in Dr. Anderson's "Procedures for Gathering Information at Inquiry Meetings", which is available on the Lessons Learned website.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 212W, on foot and mouth disease monitoring, how many sentinel animals have been tested for foot-and-mouth since restocking of culled premises began; and what proportion were identified as carrying the foot-and-mouth *(a)* live virus and *(b)* antibody. [41973]

Mr. Morley: 189,694 blood samples from sentinel animals have been tested since restocking began. Six samples (0.003 per cent.) have tested positive for Foot and Mouth Disease antibodies. No live virus has been detected.

Livestock Markets

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact on hauliers of new biosecurity requirements at livestock markets. [41216]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* Interested parties, including the Road Haulage Association (RHA), were consulted on the new biosecurity arrangements at livestock markets. These procedures form a key part of the Interim Animal Movements Regime introduced on 11 February. We are monitoring the operation of the new controls on cleansing and disinfection of vehicles and the impact they are having on hauliers and officials are in regular contact with the RHA about this.

Lottery Funds

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with *(a)* DCMS and *(b)* lottery distributing bodies regarding the use of Lottery funds to support projects in rural areas. [40327]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* The Minister for Rural Affairs met with the Under-Secretary for Culture, Media and Sport on 20 February, during which this issue was discussed. He is also holding a series of round-table meetings with the Community Fund and other relevant bodies, to discuss how we can better focus lottery distribution on rural areas.

On 1 March the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport announced the Community Fund's launch of a £10 million initiative to help those rural areas that have received low funding by the lottery in the past.

Illegally Logged Wood

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she is taking to seize shipments of illegally logged wood. [39989]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* When a shipment of wood arrives in the UK Her Majesty's Customs and Excise have powers under section 49 of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 to seize any shipment presented for clearance that has been imported contrary to a prohibition or restriction.

There are restrictions in relation to international trade in some woods under the terms of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). Those species of wood listed in Appendix I and II of CITES require import permits from the UK before they can be brought in. These are issued only where the UK Management Authority (DEFRA) is satisfied that the wood has been legally obtained in the country of origin and has the necessary permit for export form that country. Other species listed in Appendix III of CITES do not require import permits. For these species a self-completed import notification form must be presented to HM Customs prior to the arrival of the specimens, together with the relevant export permit(s) or certificate(s) of origin issued by the Management Authority in the exporting country. Both of these provide controls against illegal imports of wood.

Badger Culling

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what interim assessment has been made of evidence from the badger culling trials in Triplets B, C and F. [40411]

Mr. Morley: On the basis of advice from the Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB (ISG), results from the badger field trial, which is part of the Government's wide ranging strategy to tackle TB in cattle, are expected by the end of 2004. Preliminary findings have not yet emerged but the Government will continue to liaise closely with the ISG during the course of the trial.

Triplet B—Devon/Cornwall

		Trial Area	
	Hartland B1	*Putford B2*	*Bude B3*
Number of cattle herds in trial area	90	153	129
Historical incidence of TB in cattle in herds in trial area			
Confirmed breakdowns:			
Three year (1995–97)	37	48	35
12 month (1997)	16	26	11
Annual incidence:			
Three year (1995–97)[1]	0.1370	0.1046	0.0904
12 month (1997)[1]	0.1778	0.1699	0.0853
Total surface area (trial area and inner buffer zone) (sq km)[2]	119	143	130
Total area for which permission for trial operations was sought (trial area and inner buffer zone) (sq km)	114	125	120
Number of land occupiers visited in trial area and inner buffer zone	164	270	232
Treatment	Reactive	Proactive	Survey only
Aggregated data on badger removal operations in localised areas under the 'interim strategy' 1986–97			
Total number of badgers caught	306	377	331
Percentage of badgers caught found to be infected with TB	32	20	37
Number of badgers trapped during the course of the trial to date	107	397	None

Triplet C—East Cornwall

		Trial Area	
	Otterham C1	*Launceston C2*	*Lanreath C3*
Number of cattle herds in trial area	151	180	107
Historical incidence of TB in cattle in herds in trial area			
Confirmed breakdowns:			
Three year (1996–98)	21	16	14
12 month (1998)	7	9	5
Annual incidence:			
Three year (1996–98)[1]	0.0464	0.0296	0.0436
12 month (1998)[1]	0.0464	0.0500	0.0467
Total surface area (trial area and inner buffer zone) (sq km)[2]	145	157	151
Total area for which permission for trial operations was sought (trial area and inner buffer zone) (sq km)	137	154	140
Number of land occupiers visited in trial area and inner buffer zone	259	315	237
Treatment	Reactive	Survey only	Proactive

Triplet C—East Cornwall

		Trial Area	
	Otterham C1	Launceston C2	Lanreath C3
Aggregated data on badger removal operations in localised areas under the 'interim strategy' 1986–97			
Total number of badgers caught	162	360	257
Percentage of badgers caught found to be infected with TB	19	24	22
Number of badgers trapped during the course of the trial to date	178	None	357

Triplet F—West Cornwall

		Trial Area	
	Madron F1	Godolphin F2	StithiansF3
Number of cattle herds in trial area	137	206	253
Historical incidence of TB in cattle in herds in trial area			
Confirmed breakdowns:			
Three year (1997–99)	20	25	17
12 month (1999)	6	19	8
Annual incidence:			
Three year (1997–99)[1]	0.0487	0.0405	0.0224
12 month (1999)[1]	0.0438	0.0922	0.0316
Total surface area (trial area and inner buffer zone) (sq km)[2]	145	149	164
Total area for which permission for trial operations was sought (trial area and inner buffer zone) (sq km)	91	113	103
Number of land occupiers visited in trial area and inner buffer zone	252	527	658
Treatment	Proactive	Survey only	Reactive
Aggregated data on badger removal operations in localised areas under the 'interim strategy' 1986–97			
Total number of badgers caught	469	246	414
Percentage of badgers caught found to be infected with TB	13	13	19
Number of badgers trapped during the course of the trial to date	451	None	None

[1] Number of breakdowns divided by total number of herds (per annum), expressed as a decimal figure

[2] Some of this surface area will automatically be unsuitable for trial operations (including, for example, settlements, airfields, roads, rivers, lakes, quarries, etc.)

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what evidence has been gathered from the badger culling trials in Triplets B, C and F. [40412]

Mr. Morley: Data from Triplets B, C and F is summarised in the table and is available on DEFRA's website at: http://defraweb/animalh/tb/. Other evidence has also been collected from these triplets including the prevalence of TB in badgers caught in the trial, locations of capture, and the number and location of cattle TB breakdowns in trial areas. These data have not been released so as not to discourage participation in the trial, or encourage either illegal killing of badgers or interference with trial operations.

Triplet B—Devon/Cornwall

		Trial area	
	Hartland B1	Putford B2	Bude B3
Number of cattle herds in trial area	90	153	129
Historical indicence of TB in cattle in herds in trial area:			
Confirmed breakdowns:			
Three year (1995–97)	37	48	35
12 month (1997)	16	26	11
Annual incidence:			
Three year (1995–97)[1]	0.1370	0.1046	0.0904
12 month (1997)[1]	0.1778	0.1699	0.0853
Total surface area (trial area and inner buffer zone) (km^2)[2]	119	143	130
Total area for which permission for trial operations was sought (trial area and inner buffer zone) (km^2)	114	125	120
Number of land occupiers visited in trial area and inner buffer zone	164	270	232
Treatment	Reactive	Proactive	Survey only

Triplet B—Devon/Cornwall

		Trial area	
	Hartland B1	*Putford B2*	*Bude B3*
Aggregated data on badger removal operations in localised areas under the 'interim strategy' 1986–97:			
Total number of badgers caught	306	377	331
Percentage of badgers caught found to be infected with TB	32	20	37
Number of badgers trapped during the course of the trial to date	107	397	None

---

[1] Number of breakdowns divided by total number of herds (per annum), expressed as a decimal figure

[2] Some of this surface area will automatically be unsuitable for trial operations (including, for example, settlements, airfields, roads, rivers, lakes, quarries, etc.)

Triplet C—East Cornwall

		Trial area	
	Otterham C1	*Launceston C2*	*Lanreath C3*
Number of cattle herds in trial area	151	180	107
Historical indicence of TB in cattle in herds in trial area:			
Confirmed breakdowns:			
Three year (1996–98)	21	16	14
12 month (1998)	7	9	5
Annual incidence:			
Three year (1996–98)[1]	0.0464	0.0296	0.0436
12 month (1997)[1]	0.0464	.05009	0.0467
Total surface area (trial area and inner buffer zone) (km^2)[2]	145	157	141
Total area for which permission for trial operations was sought (trial area and inner buffer zone) (km^2)	137	154	140
Number of land occupiers visited in trial area and inner buffer zone	259	315	237
Treatment	Reactive	Survey only	Proactive
Aggregated data on badger removal operations in localised areas under the 'interim strategy' 1986–97:			
Total number of badgers caught	162	360	257
Percentage of badgers caught found to be infected with TB (%)	19	24	22
Number of badgers trapped during the course of the trial to date	178	None	357

---

[1] Number of breakdowns divided by total number of herds (per annum), expressed as a decimal figure

[2] Some of this surface area will automatically be unsuitable for trial operations (including, for example, settlements, airfields, roads, rivers, lakes, quarries, etc.)

Triplet F—West Cornwall

		Trial area	
	Madron F1	*Godolphin F2*	*Stithians F3*
Number of cattle herds in trial area	137	206	253
Historical indicence of TB in cattle in herds in trial area:			
Confirmed breakdowns:			
Three year (1997–99)	20	25	17
12 month (1999)	6	19	8
Annual incidence:			
Three year (1997–99)[1]	0.0487	0.0405	0.0224
12 month (1999)[1]	0.0438	0.0922	0.0316
Total surface area (trial area and inner buffer zone) (km^2)[2]	145	149	164
Total area for which permission for trial operations was sought (trial area and inner buffer zone) (km^2)	91	113	103
Number of land occupiers visited in trial area and inner buffer zone	252	527	658
Treatment	Proactive	Survey only	Reactive
Aggregated data on badger removal operations in localised areas under the 'interim strategy' 1986–97:			
Total number of badgers caught	469	246	414
Percentage of badgers caught found to be infected with TB	13	13	19
Number of badgers trapped during the course of the trail to date	451	None	None

---

[1] Number of breakdowns divided by total number of herds (per annum), expressed as a decimal figure

[2] Some of this surface area will automatically be unsuitable for trial operations (including, for example, settlements, airfields, roads, rivers, lakes, quarries, etc.)

Circus Animals

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will meet the All Party Group on Animal Welfare in order to discuss its recommendations on circus animals; and if she will make a statement. [42053]

Mr. Morley: The Department is currently consulting widely on the content of a possible Animal Welfare Bill. The consultation includes the issue of animals in circuses. I will be happy to meet the group as part of the consultation process.

Sheep Transportation

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the safety standards are for the transport of live sheep on ships; when they were last reviewed; and if she will make a statement. [42127]

Mr. Morley: The requirements for the protection of welfare of sheep during transport on ships are set down in Directive 91/628/EEC as amended by Directive 95/29/EC and implemented in GB by the Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order 1997, as amended. We look forward to the European Commission's expected proposals to amend and update this directive.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many times the ship the Kalifeh has (1) breached safety guidelines when carrying sheep since January 2000; and if she will make a statement; [42130]

(2) been refused entry to a European port while carrying sheep; and if she will make a statement. [42129]

Mr. Morley: Safety and standards in the maritime industry are a matter for the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. With regard to standards for animal welfare, the MV Kalifeh 1 is known to have carried sheep twice from the UK. Both voyages were from Northern Ireland and the vessel was inspected by the Northern Ireland Veterinary Service and assessed as suitable to carry sheep. The vessel has not been refused entry to a European port following departure from the UK. However, on 16 February 2002 the French authorities refused a consignment of 274 sheep as a result of alleged irregularities in procedures relating to the animals which originated in the Republic of Ireland. This matter was resolved between the authorities in France and the Republic of Ireland.

Job Sharing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the extent of job sharing in her Department. [41048]

Mr. Morley: It is departmental policy, as an equal opportunity employer, to meet requests for all types of flexible working, including part-time working and job sharing, wherever the nature of the work allows.

There are currently 83 people employed in DEFRA on a job share contract.

Departmental Website

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total cost of her Department's website was in real terms in each of the last four years; and how many hits it received in each of those years. [36148]

Alun Michael: The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs was created only in June 2001. Many units across DEFRA contribute to the maintenance of the Department's website as part of their communications activities, and an overall figure cannot be arrived at without incurring disproportionate cost. The DEFRA website has received 30,581,206 hits between 8 June 2001, the date on which DEFRA was created, and 20 November 2001, the latest date for which usage statistics are currently available.

Relocation Expenses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is on the payment of relocation expenses to staff in her Department. [41029]

Mr. Morley: Staff in DEFRA and its executive agencies who are transferred from one workplace to another in the Department's interest and at its instigation are reimbursed reasonable costs for expenses necessarily incurred in moving home where the distance between the old and new workplaces merits a home move.

Where it is possible to travel between the old and new workplaces on a daily basis, the Department meets any increased travel and associated costs for a limited period.

Limited help may also be available to new staff who need to move home to take up appointment with the Department.

Hunting

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the estimated size of the *(a)* fox, *(b)* hunting dog and *(c)* hunting horse population in the UK has been in each year since 1995 for which figures are available. [40694]

Alun Michael: There is no way to collect such information, but the Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Hunting with Dogs, which was chaired by my noble Friend Lord Burns and published in June 2000 (Cm 4763), estimates the pre-breeding fox population of England and Wales as 217,000. The population almost trebles in early summer.

The report contains information based on data returned in response to a survey of hunts conducted by Produce Studies Ltd. in February 2000. This provided an estimate that there are 793 horses owned by hunts in England and Wales and 19,162 hounds used for hunting in England and Wales.

Dangerous Substance Rules

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what actions she is taking in response to the Reasoned Opinion relating to the dangerous substance directive and the waste oils directive. [40665]

Mr. Meacher: The Government are dealing with points made by the Commission in its Reasoned Opinions relating to the implementation of directives concerning the classification, packaging and labelling of dangerous substances and the waste oils.

Pollution Control

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department has taken to *(a)* increase the rate of response in the local authority pollution control statistical survey and *(b)* assess the performance of inspection of polluting processes of those local authorities who failed to respond to the local authority pollution control statistical survey in 2000–01. [38641]

Mr. Meacher: The rate of correct returns received at the time of publication of the 2000–01 statistical survey was 82 per cent.

As a result of late returns and the inclusion of returns which had outstanding errors and queries at the time of publication, we now have a return rate of 92 per cent.

We are pleased with this response rate, which we believe to be the result, among other things, of introducing electronic returns, despatching survey forms earlier, and improved guidance. We will, however, be writing to the 14 authorities that failed to send returns, and considering what steps can be taken to reduce errors and queries and tackle late returns, or whether it may be more sensible to publish the statistical report a little later in the year. We will also be contacting all authorities in the residual 8 per cent. to ascertain their inspection frequency in 2000–01.

Sustainable Construction

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will place in the Library copies of *(a)* the "Green Guide for Buyers" and *(b)* "Towards More Sustainable Construction". [40788]

Mr. Meacher: Both documents can be found on the Greening Government website: the guide for buyers at http://defraweb/environment/greening/greenpro/greenbuy/index.htm and the construction guide at http://defraweb/environment/greening/land/suscon/index.htm. The "Green Guide for Buyers" was revised in February 2001 and produced in electronic format only as the information it contains needs to be updated regularly. However, copies of "Towards More Sustainable Construction in the Library—a green guide for managers on the Government estate" that was published in April 1999 will be placed in the Library.

Toxic Substances

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what consideration she has given to further guidance and controls since the unauthorised disposals of toxic ash residues from the incinerator and fuel plants at Byker, Newcastle. [40575]

Mr. Meacher: The Environment Agency is currently piloting new procedures to track the destination of ash following disposal by municipal waste incinerators. Subject to a satisfactory outcome of the pilot exercise, the agency intends to apply this approach to all municipal waste incinerators in England and Wales, and any other municipal waste derived fuel plant that is similar to the one at Byker.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what quantity of toxic ash residues was disposed of in unauthorised ways from the incinerator and fuel plants at Byker, Newcastle; and how much of this material was dumped outside the city boundaries of Newcastle upon Tyne. [40564]

Mr. Meacher: In its investigations the Environment Agency established that approximately 2,000 tonnes of ash from the Byker plant were deposited in and around Newcastle over a five-year period from 1993 to 1998 by Newcastle city council.

There are two sites outside Newcastle upon Tyne that the Environment Agency has identified as receiving ash from the Byker plant. Approximately 11 tonnes was deposited at Northumbria Horse Holidays, Annfield Plain, Durham and 40 tonnes was deposited at Murton Riding School, Murton village, Shiremoor. Newcastle city council deposited the ash at the owners' requests for use as exercise arena surfacing.

All ash deposits known to the Environment Agency in and around Newcastle have been removed by Newcastle city council and disposed of to an appropriately licensed landfill site.

Waste

Mr. Curry: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many hazardous waste landfill sites will be available when co-disposal of hazardous and non-hazardous waste is banned; what volume of hazardous waste will have to be disposed of in specialist sites; and if she will make a statement. [40861]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* The EC landfill directive bans the co-disposal of hazardous and non-hazardous waste from July 2004.

The choice about whether to operate co-disposal sites as hazardous or non-hazardous sites beyond July 2004 is a commercial decision for landfill operators. We will not have a clear picture of likely capacity until operators submit site conditioning plans in July 2002 stating the classification (hazardous, non-hazardous or inert) they are seeking for the site following the end of co-disposal.

We are currently working with the waste industry and the Environment Agency to forecast how much hazardous waste will need to continue to be landfilled following the end of co-disposal. This will depend on the proportion of the total hazardous waste arising that can be recovered or recycled, the extent to which the waste can be treated to allow it to go to non-hazardous landfill sites, and the availability of alternative disposal routes such as incineration.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) when she will reply to the question tabled by the hon. and learned Member for Harborough for answer on 30 November 2001, on public speeches on agriculture; [28312]

(2) for what reason she has not provided an answer to the question tabled by the hon. and learned Member for Harborough on 28 November 2001, on public speeches on agriculture, ref. 20000. [41092]

Mr. Morley *[holding answers 18 January and 7 March 2002]:* I regret that the original question was overlooked. However, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State replied on 7 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 485W.

Public Appointments (Warrington, North)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many people from Warrington, North she has appointed to non-departmental public bodies since 1997. [39447]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* To the best of my knowledge one person living in Warrington, North has been appointed to non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) by Ministers of this Department and it predecessors since 1997.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received regarding the specification of works under the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme; and if she will make a statement. [38305]

Mr. Meacher: HEES measures are installed to the requirements of two technical specifications: one for insulation the other for heating. The scheme uses a system of heating packs based on six property types rather than individually designed heating systems.

The pack approach has been designed to meet the heating industry's codes of practice. The design process was carried out for my Department by Advantica, Gas and Research Technology Centre (a commercial arm of British Gas). In designing the heating packs Advantica took into account statistical data from the 1996 English House Condition Survey, in particular data relating to dwellings occupied by the over-60s on low-income.

Both scheme managers have received comments on the scope of the scheme and its specifications, which we continue to keep under review.

Land Economy

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what financial support her Department makes available to landowners to promote stewardship of *(a)* wetlands and *(b)* woodlands. [38496]

Alun Michael: This Department and its agencies offer a broad range of land management agreements, which may provide landowners with financial support to promote stewardship of wetlands, woodlands and other types of land. Examples include the Environmentally Sensitive Areas, Countryside Stewardship and Farm Woodland Premium Schemes. The Forestry Commission's Woodland Grant Scheme provides financial support for the management, and planting, of woodland. These schemes are available through the England Rural Development Programme which offers £190 million in this financial year. It would be well-nigh impossible to separate out the spending on wetlands or woodlands and a couple of examples may help to explain why this is the case.

The Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESA) scheme includes some well-known wetlands (Somerset Levels; Broads; Suffolk River Valleys; Essex Coast; North Kent Marshes; Avon and Test Valleys). Total ESA payments to farmers in these areas will amount to £10 million this year. However, this figure would be difficult to separate into categories of land. In addition, the Environment Agency, English Nature and the Countryside Agency all make contributions to individual cases through their own mechanisms in pursuance of the objectives we have agreed with them.

Taking the Somerset Levels as an example, in the raised water level area, the Environment Agency provides funds for sluices and the ESA scheme contributes towards land management and ditch maintenance. In parts, there is SSSI land on which England Nature provides grants under the Wildlife Enhancement Scheme. In the Suffolk River Valleys ESA, financial support to farmers comes from a combination of ESA funds and Countryside Stewardship support. The Environment Agency and English Nature also support some cases. Further public sector support is also available from the local authority. Some schemes are supported by private money from the RSPB and National Trust. Many of these cases would also cover land other than wetland and woodland.

This joined up approach is now producing excellent results. The ESA and Countryside Stewardship schemes cover hundreds of individual cases which include wetland and woodland areas but dissecting the national spend on wetlands and woodland from each case could be achieved only at a disproportionate cost.

Tail Docking

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she plans to introduce legislation to ban the tail docking of dogs. [41802]

Mr. Morley: The Department is currently consulting widely on the content a possible Animal Welfare Bill. The consultation includes the issue of whether tail docking should be banned. A copy of the consultation document can be found on the DEFRA website www.defra.gov.uk.

Hens

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish the scientific evidence upon which the Welfare of Laying Hens Directive 1999/74/EC was based. [41230]

Mr. Morley: The European Commission Scientific Veterinary Committee on Animal Welfare published a report on the Welfare of Laying Hens in October 1996. This report provided the basis for the Welfare of Laying Hens Directive 99/74/EC.

Waterways

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the accessibility of the UK's waterways to canoeists. [40706]

Alun Michael: The research report "Water-Based Sport and Recreation: the facts", published in December 2001, found that the lengths of water for canoeing on canals, rivers with public navigation rights and rivers with formal access agreement total 5,490 km. This amounts to 27 per cent. of the major river and canal network or 6 per cent. of the major and minor river and canal network.

DEFRA officials are currently discussing the report with other Government Departments and agencies. Following those discussions, I shall consider what further work or action is needed in the light of the report's findings.

Warm Home Scheme

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Government's warm home scheme was introduced; how it was advertised to possible claimants; what overlap there was between this scheme and similar ones provided by local authorities; and if she will make a statement. [40330]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* The two scheme managers, TXU and Eaga, were appointed in March 2000, this enabled them to start marketing the scheme prior to the launch date of 1 June 2000. The scheme managers adopted a number of forms of advertising.

Referral networks were set up and are maintained by the scheme managers. Referral partners come into contact on a day-to-day basis with householders who may be eligible for assistance and are ideally placed to pass details directly to the scheme managers. These can involve local authority staff, Citizen Advice Bureaux, doctors, local health workers and Energy Efficiency Advice Centres.

Leaflets were issued through targeted drops and stocks left at key local venues such as post offices, local authority reception areas, libraries and supermarkets. There was also some limited use of local advertising on the radio and posters inside buses.

The consultation paper issued before the launch of the scheme, said that there would be limited funding for measures in the properties of social landlords, including properties owned by local authorities. This was limited to a maximum of £45 million or two years from the start of the scheme. All social funds available under the scheme have now been allocated.

Organic Action Plan

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will announce the organic action plan. [42179]

Mr. Morley: The development of the organic farming sector will be carried forward in the context of an organic action plan, taking account of the recommendations of the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food.

Refrigerators (Disposal)

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her understanding in December 1998 was of the purpose of, and requirements for the UK, of EU Regulation 2037/2000. [34838]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* The proposal for a Council Regulation (EC) on substances that deplete the ozone layer (ODS) was published by the European Commission on 14 August 1998. The environmental purpose of the regulation was to further protect the ozone layer during a decade when ozone depletion was expected to peak.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish the requests made by her Department to the European Commission for clarification of the practical implications of implementing EU Regulation 2037/2000 in the UK. [40366]

Mr. Meacher: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) on 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 922W.

Nitrates

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many replies she has received to the consultation paper on nitrate vulnerable zones; and if she will place a list of consultees in the Library. [41496]

Mr. Meacher: As of 6 March 2002, we have received 12,696 replies to our consultation entitled "How Should England Implement the 1991 Nitrates Directive?".

A list of responding consultees will be placed in the Library, though this will exclude those who have requested their reply be confidential. These currently number 2,535.

UN Ancient Forests Summit

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials will attend the UN Ancient Forests Summit at the Hague in April. [36399]

Mr. Morley: The United Kingdom expects to send a delegation comprising officials from a wide range of Government Departments to the meeting formally known as the 6th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity. Forest biodiversity is one of the main issues on the agenda, and we are committed to seeking a successful outcome that will make a real contribution to the conservation and sustainable use of all forest biodiversity, including that in ancient forests.

Correspondence

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letters from the hon. Member for South Suffolk of *(a)* 18 June on behalf of Ms Lesley Denny and Mrs. Eileen Denny, *(b)* 25 June on behalf of Mrs. J. M. Wellington, *(c)* 25 June welcoming her to her job, *(d)* 26 June on a public inquiry into foot and mouth disease, *(e)* 4 July on behalf of Mrs. A. R. Gascoigne, *(f)* 24 July on behalf of Mrs. J. Fenton, *(g)* 16 July on behalf of Mr. R. N. Bracher, *(h)* 24 July on behalf of Mrs. J. MacDonald, *(i)* 24 July on behalf of Mr. J. Sanderson, *(j)* 24 July on behalf of

Mr. K. Bendon, *(k)* 23 July about cleaning and disinfection of farms affected by foot and mouth disease and *(l)* 30 July and 29 August on behalf of Mrs. P. M. Baylis. [7582]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* The hon. Member has received replies to the following:

(a) 18 June on behalf of Ms Lesley Denny and Mrs. Eileen Denny, reply sent on 31 January 2002.

(b) 25 June on behalf of Mrs. J. M. Wellington, reply sent on 26 January 2002.

(c) 25 June welcoming her to her job, reply sent on 23 February 2002.

(d) 26 June on a public inquiry into foot and mouth disease, reply sent on 23 February 2002.

(f) 24 July on behalf of Mrs. J. Fenton, reply sent 23 January 2002.
(h) 24 July on behalf of Mrs. J. MacDonald, reply sent 30 January 2002.

(i) 24 July on behalf of Mr. J. Sanderson, reply sent 29 January 2002.

(j) 24 July on behalf of Mr. K. Bendon, reply sent on 8 March 2002.

(k) 23 July about cleaning and disinfection of farms affected by foot and mouth disease, reply sent 23 January 2002.

(l) 30 July and 29 August on behalf of Mrs. P. M. Baylis, reply sent 5 January.

We have no record of receiving letters *(e)* 4 July on behalf of Mrs. A. R. Gascoigne, and *(g)* 16 July on behalf of Mr. R. N. Bracher.

Small Businesses

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many registered small businesses there were in the United Kingdom, broken down by *(a)* category and *(b)* region in each year since 1990. [40820]

Nigel Griffiths: I have been asked to reply.

The number of VAT registered businesses is the best available measure of the registered small business population. Most VAT registered businesses are small but the figures will include a small number of large business. Due to significant changes in the VAT threshold in 1991 and 1993[1] it is difficult to compare the 1994 to 2001 time series with previous data.

The figures have been placed in the Library.

HEALTH

Health Spending

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in what year he expects United Kingdom spending on health to equal the European average; on what basis this estimate is made; and if he will make a statement. [4849]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The average health expenditure as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) of European Union countries has been around 7.9 to 8 per cent. for a number of years. By 2003–04 total health spending in the US will be around 7.6 per cent. of GDP. Spending plans beyond that time will be made in the coming spending review.

This forecast is based on current national health service spending plans, and an assumption that private expenditure remains at around 1 per cent. of GDP.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those health purchasing authorities which were overspent in 2000–01. [42195]

Mr. Hutton: The annual accounts for 2000–01 show only one health authority—Bexley and Greenwich failed to achieve financial balance. The health authority merged on 1 April 2001.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those health service budget heads which *(a)* were underspent in 2000–01 and *(b)* are expected to be underspent in the current year, in each case showing the extent of underspend. [42194]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested for 2000–01 is contained in the Department of Health Appropriation Account and Expenditure Statements (HC 335-II 22 February 2002). A copy is held in the Library.

Information for the current year will not be available until after the end of the financial year.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the purchasing health authorities which were headed for a current year overspend between October and December 2001, stating *(a)* the then estimated overspend and *(b)* the latest estimated overspend. [42193]

Mr. Hutton: By year-end we expect all health authorities to live within their agreed resource limits and not to overspend.

Heart Disease

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will indicate *(a)* when the National Institute for Clinical Excellence will commence its work into the investigation and management of heart failure, *(b)* whom the institute will invite to participate in the production of a clinical guideline and *(c)* when he anticipates that the institute will produce clinical guidelines into the investigation and management of heart failure; and if he will make a statement. [1414]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The development of a guideline on the management of heart failure began in September 2001. The Chronic Condition Collaborating Centre has been asked to lead the development on behalf of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence. The provisional date for publication of the guidelines is summer 2003. The collaborating centre will consult the organisations listed.

British Heart Foundation
British Geriatrics Society
Medtronic
AstraZeneca UK Ltd.
Roche
British In Vitro Diagnostics Association
Novartis Pharmaceuticals UK Ltd.
NHS Information Authority, (PHSMI Programme)
Department of Health
Family Heart Association
Age Concern England
Cardiomyopathy Association
Contact a family
Chartered Society of Physiotherapy
Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain
Royal College of General Practitioners (Wales)
Ambulance Service Association
Association of British Clinical Diabetologists
Royal College of Nursing
Royal College of Anaesthetists
Royal College of Midwives (Wales)
Royal College of General Practitioners
Royal College of Physicians
Royal College of Nursing (Wales)
Royal College of Surgeons of England.

Health Inequalities

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the extent of variation in access to health services in England. [2841]

Yvette Cooper: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The Department has commissioned a number of reviews to assess health inequalities, as well as National Service Frameworks which analyse the evidence and set out blueprints to raise standards and reduce variations. There are also a range of measures to assess performance (including national health service performance indicators which measure access). Improving access to health care is a core underpinning principle of the new NHS reforms and the NHS Plan sets out a substantial programme for addressing variations across the country.

Bed Blocking

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of days hospital beds are blocked because of local authority delays in providing *(a)* care packages and *(b)* aids or adaptations to patients' homes for each local authority area in the north-west; and if he will make a statement. [2107]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Information is not available in the form requested. However, on 3 March 2002 some 82 people were in hospital beds in the north-west region awaiting public funding of post-hospital care, compared with 168 in August 2001. There were another 29 people awaiting domiciliary care packages of some form, compared with 45 in August 2001. It is not possible to break these down by local authority area.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letters to him dated 6 August 2001 and 25 September 2001 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Mr. S. Holden. [12671]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to my right hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my right hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The reply to my right hon. Friend's letters of 6 August and 25 September regarding his constituent Mr. Stephen Holden was sent on 5 November 2001.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter of 8 October from Sandi O'Donnell of Resvil to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State regarding a survey of carers' and patients' preferences in housing for people with learning disabilities. [20413]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

A reply was sent on 26 November 2001.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to reply to the letter of 24 October from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. A. Battersby. [22189]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to my right hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my right hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

A reply to the letter of 24 October from my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) about Mr. A. Battersby was sent to him on 11 December.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to reply to the letter of 31 October from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mrs. E. Johnson. [22186]

Jacqui Smith: A reply was sent on 5 November.

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to reply to the letters of 25 September and 26 November 2001, from the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald about the provision of general practitioner services in Staplehurst. [36389]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the right hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the right hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

A reply was sent on 8 March.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will answer the letter of 3 September from the hon. Member for Woodspring on the treatment of British patients in European hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the cause of the delay. [10805]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

A reply was sent on 31 October 2001.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will answer the letter of 22 August from the hon. Member for Woodspring on free nursing care; and if he will make a statement on the cause of the delay. [10806]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

A reply was sent on 31 October 2001.

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the hon. Member for Broxbourne will receive a reply to her letters of 6 December, 2 January, 29 January and 26 February relating to correspondence from her constituent Mr. Phillip Goldsmith of Broxbourne. [39558]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* A reply was sent on 8 March 2002.

Sir Michael Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the hon. Member for West Worcestershire will receive an answer to the letter written to the Secretary of State for Social Security on 24 April on behalf of Mrs. Copson, which was transferred to his Department on 8 May (ref: POH (3)5505/6). [12384]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

A reply to the hon. Member's letter was sent from the chief executive, National Health Service Pensions Agency, on 5 November 2001. I apologise for the unacceptable delay in replying to the hon. Member's correspondence, due to the Department not receiving the original correspondence transferred from the Department for Work and Pensions.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will answer the letter of 19 March sent to him by the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East about his constituent, Ms Lesley Talbot. [24284]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The Department has no record of receiving this correspondence. The Department's ministerial correspondence unit requested a duplicate copy of the correspondence. The issues raised in the correspondence were the responsibility of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). DWP will arrange for a reply to be sent shortly.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the Public Service Agreement target for procurement savings by NHS trusts in 2001–02. [14900]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

All national health service trusts have targets for procurement savings in their procurement strategies. They will all be measured against these targets by the Audit Commission and the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency and the results will be made available in April.

Also, trusts have been set targets to increase efficiency across the range of services they provide. This is embodied in the new public service agreement target for value for money that was agreed as part of spending review 2000:

> "The cost of care commissioned from trusts which perform well against indicators of fair access, quality and responsiveness, will become the benchmark for the NHS. Everyone will be expected to reach the level of the best over the next five years, with agreed milestones for 2003–04."

The aim of this new target is to ensure that cost-savings are not at the expense of service quality. The year 2001–02 is the first year covered by this new public service agreement target. We will be monitoring progress against this new target as data become available.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress towards meeting the Public Service Agreement target of a reduction in the death rate from suicide and undetermined injury by at least 20 per cent. by 2010. [14886]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) on 23 October 2001 *Official Report*, column 147W.

General Practitioners

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish an evaluation of the NHS Executive North West's recruitment of foreign general practitioners. [24601]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The Department is working with the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges to establish a suitable evaluation process for the international recruitment programme including the recruitment of general practitioners from abroad in the north-west.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what percentage of GPs in *(a)* Pendle and *(b)* East Lancashire are due to retire before 2004; what steps he is taking to attract young doctors to the area; and if he will make a statement. [12046]

Ms Abbott: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002 *Official Report*, column 192W.

Figures are not available centrally in the format requested. However, during 2002–03, 14 (5.1 per cent.) general practitioners (GPs) in the East Lancashire Health Authority area are expected to retire. A further 8 (2.9 per cent.) GPs are due to retire during 2003–04.

18 GPs currently within the Pendle Primary Care Group are aged over 55.

East Lancashire Health Authority is pursuing a number of initiatives both in the long and short term to help address the problems in recruiting and retaining GPs.

Notes:

These figures have been extracted from a study by Lancashire University in 1998 relating to workforce planning for general medical and other primary care staff.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many GPs are expected to be recruited to carry out GP appraisals; if these GPs will be expected to continue in general practice; what remuneration they will receive for performing appraisals; and what estimate has been made of the amount of time a GP appraiser would be expected to spend on appraisals in a calendar year. [12711]

Mr. Hutton: *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

General practitioners (GPs) who are to be GP appraisers should be practising general practitioners. To date, primary care trusts and groups have identified over 900 such GPs to participate in the initial appraiser training programme, which starts this month.

This programme is intended to provide an initial cohort of trained GP appraisers. It is, however, for Primary Care Trusts themselves, working with their local GPs, to decide how many GP appraisers they each need, the level of commitment required and the remuneration to offer. These decisions may be informed by the work commissioned by my Department from the School of Health and Related Research at the University of Sheffield which suggests it is reasonable to expect a GP appraiser to undertake between 10 and 25 appraisals annually.

Information for Health Strategy

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 26 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 737W, when his Department expects to receive the assessment by Professor Protti of the Information for Health Strategy. [25350]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The report commissioned from Prof. Protti by the Information Policy Unit and the NHS Information Authority to inform internal thinking about policy and development issues in implementing "Information for Health" has now been received and is being considered.

PFI Contracts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in how many current NHS private finance initiative contracts a preferred bidder was designated; and in respect of how many of these the preferred bidder did not get the contract. [33282]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

53 private finance initiative (PFI) schemes with a capital value of over £10 million appointed preferred bidders of which 42 have proceeded to sign contracts and 11 are still in negotiations.

A further seven (PFI) schemes with a capital value of over £10 million appointed preferred bidders, but did not proceed on to sign contracts.

Detailed information is not held centrally for schemes with a capital value below £10 million.

NHS Waiting Lists

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of a correlation between NHS waiting lists and consultants' income from private patients. [34664]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

From the small number of studies related to this issue no conclusions either way can be drawn from the current evidence on any correlation between NHS waiting lists and consultants' income from private patients.

Speech Therapists

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the allocation of speech and language therapists for children with *(a)* severe learning difficulty and *(b)* moderate learning difficulty. [38437]

Jacqui Smith: Speech and language therapists have a broad range of responsibilities and children with severe and moderate learning difficulties are one of many important groups they can help. The proportion of their time devoted to the treatment of people with severe and moderate learning difficulties varies according to local needs assessment.

Children's Refuges

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children's refuges there are; where they are located; and how much his Department contributes to funding their operation. [4089]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 17 July 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

There is one children's refuge, which is located in London. Funding for the refuge is provided by the Department of Health and by the Greater London Association of Directors of Social Services (GLADSS). For the financial years 2001–02 and 2002–03, each member of [illegible]ADSS has contributed 0.9 per cent. of their Quality Protects grant towards the refuge's costs. The Department acts as a conduit for this funding as well as making its own financial contribution. The approximate funding required for the coming financial year (2002–03) will be in the region of £390,000.

Whittington Hospital

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will commence a programme for the refurbishment of the Whittington hospital; and if he will state *(a)* the total cost, *(b)* the cost of financing by the public sector and *(c)* the cost of funds from private sources. [7550]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The first stage of development, which is mainly new build, at the Whittington is expected to commence in April 2002 with a total building cost of around £28 million. £3.9 million is being funded publicly and is currently under way. £24.1 million is expected to be provided by the private sector. Future planned works are currently in the earliest planning stages and capital costs for these are not currently available.

Residential Homes

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many residential homes (a) in the private sector and (b) owned by local authorities have closed since 1 May 1997. [8922]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The table shows the number of residential care homes by sector, in England on 31 March in each of the last five years. These figures take account of new homes, those that closed and those that made changes to their registration status or extended their existing facilities. It is not possible to determine the precise number of homes that have closed from this information.

Residential care homes, 1997 to 2001, England, as at 31 March

Rounded numbers

	Residential care homes[1]	*(a) Private sector residential care homes*[2]	*(b) Local authority staffed homes*
1997	24,500	22,200	2,300
1998	24,900	22,700	2,200
1999	24,800	22,700	2,100
2000	24,800	22,700	2,000
2001	24,100	22,200	1,900

[1] Includes dual registered homes.

[2] Consists of voluntary, private, small homes and dual registered homes.

Note:

Figures may not add to totals because of rounding.

Source:

Department of Health annual returns.

Treatment Abroad

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what legal advice he has received on the European Court of Justice judgment for receiving health care treatment abroad; and if he will place it in the Library. [11042]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Legal advice was received from two counsel. It is not normal practice to publish advice obtained by the Secretary of State and there is no reason to depart from that practice in this case.

Outpatient Waiting Times

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the maximum permitted out-patient waiting time is for NHS patients; and if he will make a statement. [13486]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 14 November 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The waiting time standard as set out in the Patient's Charter for a first out-patient appointment from general practitioner (GP) referral is for patients to be seen within 26 weeks. The service is aiming to achieve no patients waiting over 26 weeks following GP referral by the end of March 2002 as a first step towards reducing the maximum wait to three months by the end of March 2005.

Suicide

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the change in the suicide rate between the 1995 and 1997 baseline and the most recent data. [13966]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 15 November 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 147W. There are insufficient data available to assess whether the recent rise is a reliable indicator of a particular trend.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of the proportion of young men who commit suicide while suffering from mental illness; and if he will make a statement. [13967]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 15 November 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The National Confidential Inquiry into Suicide and Homicide by People with Mental Illness collect data on suicides by people in contact with mental health services in the year before death. In March 2001, the inquiry published its five-year report, "Safety First", which was based on the detailed study of 5,582 suicides by psychiatric patients in the UK between 1996 and 2000.

The inquiry is crucial to gaining a better understanding of the circumstances surrounding homicides and suicides committed by people with mental illness. The Department is committed to taking appropriate action in response to the findings of the inquiry.

Ward Refurbishments

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funds have been made available to hospital trusts in the last five years specifically for the refurbishment of hospital wards. [26496]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The general policy over the last five years has been that the refurbishment of hospital wards is one of the priorities funded from the general capital that is available to national health service trusts. The private finance initiative is also being used to refurbish wards. A summary of capital investment available to the NHS Hospitals and Community Health Service (HCHS) over the last five years is:

HCHS capital spending

£ million

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Government spending	1,068	782	928	1,353	1,949
Receipts from land sales	471	500	549	575	351
PFI investment	58	170	381	632	788
Total investment	1,597	1,452	1,858	2,560	3,088

Source:

Figures taken from 2001–02 departmental report

During the last five years two budgets have been set up, both in 2001–02, to target funds specifically at ward refurbishment.

Year	Budget	£ million
2001–02	Refurbishment of psychiatric wards	15
2001–02	Conversion of Nightingale wards	40

Prescribing Budgets

Andy Burnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the expected level of the overspend is on the general practitioner prescribing budget in the Wigan and Bolton health authority; and what the expected average overspend is on the prescription budget for health authorities in England. [31109]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The latest forecast of the overspend on practice prescribing budgets for Wigan and Bolton health authority suggests there will be a 12.1 per cent. overspend in 2001–02. This position is based on practice budgets notified to the Prescription Pricing Authority and prescribing data up to and including December 2001. The expected average overspend on prescribing budgets for all health authorities in England indicates a 7.2 per cent. overspend nationally.

Note:

The prescribing budgets notified to the PPA are practice level prescribing budgets. They do not necessarily reflect the total resource set aside locally for prescribing as primary care trusts, primary care groups and health authorities may hold contingency reserves.

MMR Vaccine

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many girls received the rubella vaccine in *(a)* each county or health authority and *(b)* England in each of the five years before the introduction of the MMR vaccine; and what proportion those who had received the vaccine represented of the total number of girls under 12 years of age. [34360]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 7 February 2002]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Prior to the introduction of the combined measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine, coverage for rubella for girls was measured by 14 years of age. A table of the available information has been placed in the Library.

MMR Vaccination

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he has taken to improve MMR vaccination rates since 1 January. [34878]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Last year, the Department worked with general practitioners and health professionals to give them the most up-to-date information on MMR, so that they could discuss the issues with parents with the help of full access to the facts.

Currently, the Department is working on ways to ensure parents can get answers to their questions including using NHS Direct and the internet, as well as through local health professionals.

A conference was held on Monday 25 February this year, where the latest issues and research were discussed with District Immunisation Co-ordinators, consultants in communicable disease control and representatives from the nursing profession; information packs were made available to all delegates who attended.

The Department will also be working with health authorities and primary care trusts, particularly in low uptake areas, to provide additional information to parents and to ensure all parents are given the opportunity to have their children immunised.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what incentives are payable to general practitioners for achieving MMR vaccination targets; and what the targets are. [35214]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Measles, mumps and rubella is one of the vaccinations which form part of the childhood immunisation programme. The others are diphtheria, tetanus, poliomyelitis, pertussis and haemophilius influenza type b (Hib). General practitioners who provide General Medical Services receive on average a payment of £2,730 per annum for reaching 90 per cent. coverage in childhood immunisations. The average payment for the lower target of 70 per cent. coverage is £910. Actual payments depend on list size. Similar arrangements apply to GPs who work under the arrangements for Personal Medical Services, though the actual payments under this system are agreed locally.

NHS Purchasing

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the status is of the National Service Framework in assisting purchaser health authorities to determine the quality of service in *(a)* NHS and *(b)* independent hospitals; and if he offers guidance to purchasers on securing quality service from independent hospitals. [40693]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* The National Service Frameworks (NSFs) and the National Cancer Plan set clear national standards for the prevention, investigation and treatment of leading causes of ill health and premature death. They also recommend how services can be organised so that they are effective, efficient and dependable and set out the criteria that will be used to monitor progress.

As these frameworks are being implemented, together with effective clinical governance, and backed up by more quality-focused methods of monitoring and performance management, the quality of care for people with coronary heart disease, cancer, mental health problems and for older people is improving rapidly.

National health service patients treated in independent hospitals remain NHS patients. When commissioning treatment from the independent sector, NHS commissioners must be satisfied that the treatment will be of a high standard, with reference to relevant national standards and service guidance. Quality requirements can be set out in contracts between the NHS and the independent providers.

The Department is developing guidance to help NHS bodies effectively commission high quality services from independent hospitals.

Care Homes

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the care homes in England are small businesses. [41270]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* The information requested is not held centrally.

Dentistry

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many students in higher education were training to be dentists in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1992, *(c)* 1997 and *(d)* 2001 or the most recent available date. [36392]

Margaret Hodge: I have been asked to reply.

The available data are shown in the table. Figures for 2001–02 will be available at the end of April 2002.

Full-time students[1] on undergraduate courses in dentistry[2]. Great Britain

Academic year	*Students*
1979–80	4,140
1992–93	3,550
1995–96	3,910
1996–97	4,170
1997–98	4,180
1998–99	4,050
1999–2000	4,090
2000–01	4,080

[1] Home and overseas students. Census count as at 31 December in years up to 1992–93, and 1 December in subsequent years. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest 10.

[2] Covers clinical and pre-clinical dentistry.

Coronary Heart Disease

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of primary care teams have met the target set down in the national service framework on coronary heart disease requiring every primary care team to have *(a)* all medical records and hospital correspondence held in a way that allows them to be retrieved rapidly in date order, *(b)* appropriate medical records that contain easily and *(c)* a systematically developed and maintained practice-based CHD register which is actively used to provide structured care to people with CHD; and what measures he intends to take to ensure that the targets are met at the earliest possible opportunity. [1412]

Yvette Cooper: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Health authority service and financial framework (SAFF) returns for March 2001 show over 90 per cent. of primary care practices plan to be meeting these milestones by March 2002.

Local health communities are currently taking stock of progress towards the NHS Plan and national service framework milestones as part of the local modernisation review process. Departmental regional offices are working closely with local health communities to ensure these milestones are delivered in a realistic timeframe.

Deferred Hospital Admissions

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in respect of each health purchasing authority in the south-east and south-west regions in 2000–01, whether they improved their budget position during that year by deferring admission of patients for certain procedures. [42196]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Cancer Nurses

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the *(a)* pay, *(b)* conditions and *(c)* recruitment of nurses specialising in cancer care. [38235]

Mr. Hutton: All nurses, including those specialising in cancer care are graded in accordance with the nationally agreed clinical grading structure.

We have accepted in full the recommendations of the independent Pay Review Body for 2002–03. From 1 April all nursing staff will receive an above inflation increase of at least 3.6 per cent. Pay has increased across the board for all nurses by at least 26 per cent. in cash terms since 1997.

We remain committed to working with unions, professional organisations and employers to introduce a new pay system that will offer staff working in the national health service a more attractive career structure, fairer pay and consistent conditions of service.

The NHS Plan set out our commitment to increasing the work force and the NHS Cancer Plan confirmed our commitment to investment in the cancer nursing work force. The Department's census shows that since the launch of the NHS Plan in September 1999 until September 2001, there was a net increase in nurses working in the NHS of 20,740. This increase will enable the recruitment of additional cancer-site specific nurse specialists, chemotherapy nurses, palliative care nurse specialists and additional nurses on cancer wards.

We are committed to continue increasing the number of nurses employed in the NHS and improving retention, increasing training places, encouraging former staff to return, and increasing international recruitment. The NHS is also changing to become a modern, flexible employer. The current recruit, return and retain campaign covers all nurses, including those involved in cancer services and the staffing of all NHS services should inform a Trust's recruitment and retention strategy.

Temodal

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if Temodal has received approval from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence; what plans he has to increase its availability to NHS patients; and if he will make a statement. [1415]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence issued guidance to the NHS on the use of temozolomide (Temodal) for the treatment of recurrent malignant glioma (brain cancer) in April 2001.

On 5 December 2001, the Government announced that they would meet their commitment to ensure that patients receive drugs and treatments recommended by NICE on the NHS if deemed appropriate by their clinicians. Directions have been issued obliging health authorities and primary care trusts to provide appropriate funding for recommended treatments.

Hospital Beds (Merseyside)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State what estimate he has made of the additional number of beds that would be required to eliminate queueing for a bed on wards at *(a)* Whiston hospital, Aintree, *(b)* University hospital, *(c)* the Royal Liverpool teaching hospital and *(d)* Alder Hey hospital; and if he will make a statement. [2168]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The Whiston hospital, University hospital, Aintree and the Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen hospital each has a higher than average proportion of patients experiencing a long wait in an Accident and Emergency (A&E) department or elsewhere for admission to a bed in a ward.

The reasons that patients have to wait in accident and emergency or elsewhere for a bed in a ward are complex and not always solved solely by the addition of extra beds. However, more ward beds have been opened in each of the hospitals as part of the overall strategy for reducing the length of time patients are waiting for admission to a bed.

Health Authority Restructuring

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the change to overall management costs in the NHS of his health authority restructuring proposals. [1845]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Changes to health authorities are one strand of the Shifting the Balance of Power initiative. The number of health authorities will reduce and, subject to the National Health Service Reform and Health Professions Bill, become strategic health authorities later this year. In addition, the number of primary care trusts will increase. There will also be changes to the Department. The reductions in bureaucracy made as a result of the whole reform programme will release savings of £100 million by 2004.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress he has made on restructuring health authorities; and when he expects the changes to be fully implemented. [1846]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Following the announcement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on the shifting the balance of power initiative in April 2001, 22 simultaneous public consultation exercises on the boundaries of the proposed new health authorities were conducted between 7 September 2001 and 30 November 2001. The names of the 28 new, larger and more strategic, health authorities in England were announced on 18 December 2001. The names of their chairs (designate) were announced by the Appointments Commission on 19 December 2001. The names of the chief executives (designate) were announced on 21 December 2001. The 28 new health authorities will be established on 1 April 2002, when the 95 existing health authorities will be abolished. Subject to progress with the NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill, the new health authorities are expected to be designated strategic health authorities and to be fully operational in their new roles from October 2002.

Long-term Care

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the arrangements that he intends to put in place from October to ensure homeowners will no longer be required to sell their homes to pay for their long-term care. [2540]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Deferred payments arrangements came into force on 1 October 2001. Under this power, on admission to permanent residential accommodation, councils can agree to defer the contributions to care costs that residents would normally make from the sale of their home. Once the home is sold, the resident or their estate repays the council. If this repayment is made within 56 days, interest is not charged.

Councils have been given a grant to cover the cost of agreeing to deferred payments.

Health Action Zones

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce health action zones covering the Greater London area. [2848]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

There are already four health action zones (HAZs) in the Greater London area. East London and the City and Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham HAZs were established in 1998, and followed by Brent and Camden and Islington HAZs in 1999. There are no plans for further HAZs.

Health Authorities (Lancashire)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the merger of health authorities in Lancashire. [2935]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Following the announcement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on "Shifting the Balance of Power", the current 75 health authorities will be merged to form 28 strategic health authorities.

Three strategic health authorities will cover the north-west: Greater Manchester, Cheshire and Merseyside, and Cumbria and Lancashire. All of the proposed strategic health authorities have already been subject to a formal period of public consultation. The health authorities in Lancashire and Cumbria will therefore merge on 1 April 2002, but subject to legislation, the new health authorities will form the strategic health authority by the autumn.

Hospital Trusts

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the powers he has to remove a chair of a hospital trust, indicating the circumstances where these procedures apply. [2937]

Ms Blears: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Under the terms of paragraphs 9(3), (4) and (6) of the National Health Service Trusts (Membership and Procedure) Regulations 1990, and paragraph 2(2) of the National Health Service Trusts (Membership and Procedure) Amendment Regulations 1997, the Secretary of State for Health can terminate the appointment of a chair or non-executive director of a national health service trust if:

> he is of the opinion that it is not in the interests of the health service that a person who is appointed as chair or non-executive director of an NHS trust should continue to hold that office;
>
> the chair or non-executive director has not attended a meeting of the trust for a period of three months; or
>
> if it appears to the Secretary of State that the chair or non-executive director has failed to comply with the requirements of the regulations with regard to disclosure of pecuniary interests in matters under discussion at meetings of the trust.

Enforcement of these provisions has now been delegated by the Secretary of State to the NHS Appointments Commission.

Hospices

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what Government funding is available nationally for *(a)* hospices and *(b)* children's hospices. [2853]

Yvette Cooper: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

It is for the national health service locally to make arrangements for financial support for both adults' and children's hospices, given the extent of local diversity both of the services provided and of alternative sources of local support.

In the NHS Cancer Plan we pledged that the NHS contribution to the costs of specialist palliative care (including hospices) would increase. By 2004 the NHS will invest an additional £50 million. This investment is intended to help tackle inequalities in access to specialist palliative care and enable the NHS to increase their contribution to the cost hospices incur in providing agreed levels of service.

Hospices will also benefit from £70 million allocated by the New Opportunities Fund (NOF) to support palliative care projects for adults and children. £22 million has been allocated for adults and £48 million for children to support palliative care projects for adults and children suffering from any type of life threatening disease, including services provided by children's hospices.

Mental Health

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of mental health patients received a care plan in the last 12 months. [3452]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 July 2001]:* I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Information collected by the Department's common information core at end March 2001 shows that 94 per cent. of mental health patients on the enhanced level of the care programme approach (CPA) had a written care plan. Information is not available about the number of other mental health patients who have care plans, or of the number that received care plans over the past 12 months. March 2001 data are the latest currently held centrally but the Department plans to collect information about care plans for all those on CPA from April.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what local arrangements have been made under the Health Act 1999 to integrate council and NHS mental health services for *(a)* adults, *(b)* adolescents and *(c)* children; and if he will make a statement. [12020]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

A number of partnership arrangements under the Health Act 1999 have been set up to integrate mental health services, covering a total budget of approximately £300 million. A large proportion of this money has been allocated to adult services. Some of these projects incorporate child and adolescent mental health services, and there are also some separate projects for these groups.

Details of Health Act partnership arrangements are available at http://www.doh.gov.uk/jointunit/notifications.pdf.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those appointed as non-executive directors of the new Five Boroughs mental health care trust; and what proportion of those members are from the Warrington, North constituency. [41440]

Mr. Hutton: Of the six non-executive positions on the board of the Five Boroughs Partnership national health service trust, only the chair has been appointed to date. He does not live in Warrington, North. The NHS Appointments Commission expect to make four further appointments very shortly.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the extra spending on mental health services over three years announced in "Modernising Mental Health Services" has been *(a)* allocated and *(b)* spent in each of the three years. [8176]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002 *Official Report*, column 192W.

The allocation of additional central investment on mental health care over the three years from 1999 is shown in the table, (a) for each year, and (b) between health and social services (£ millions). The mental health national service framework contains national milestones and target dates which are monitored to ensure that they are being met.

Mental health investment: NSF/NHS Plan implementation

	NHS	*PSS*[1]
Revenue investment		
1999–2000	68.5	[2]46.0
2000–01	66.0	13.0
2001–02	12.35	[3,4]20.0

	Capital investment
1999–2000	4.5
2000–01	9.0
2001–02	[5]68.0

[1] Personal social services

[2] 8 for camhs

[3] Of the £20 million, £1 million went to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions for the Homeless Mentally Ill initiative and a further £1 million is to be used for central initiatives.

[4] 5 for camhs

[5] Includes £5 million for acute psychiatric ward refurbishment, £9 million for Fallon, and £10 million additional funding issued mid-year.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will meet the Secretary of State for Education and Skills in order to discuss training for school staff in the skills and knowledge to ensure children have access to early assessment and support in relation to mental health. [37389]

Jacqui Smith: Ministers and officials have regular meetings with colleagues at the Department for Education and Skills to discuss all matters surrounding child and adolescent mental health. I met Cathy Ashton on 6 February 2002. They are also represented on the child mental health External Working Group (EWG) of the Children's National Service Framework. The EWG will look at the access children have to early assessment.

Cancer Research

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent on research into the causes and treatment of *(a)* prostate and *(b)* testicular cancer in (i) 1971, (ii) 1980, (iii) 1990 and (iv) 2000. [4274]

Yvette Cooper: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The main Government agency for research into the causes of and treatment for diseases is the Medical Research Council (MRC), which receives its funding via the Department of Trade and Industry. The Department's direct expenditure is on research into policy and the delivery of effective practice in health and social care. The Department's indirect expenditure provides national health service support funding for research commissioned by the research councils and charities that takes place in the NHS.

Figures are not available centrally for expenditure on prostate and testicular cancer research in 1971, 1980 and 1990. The MRC spent £340,000 on prostate cancer research in 2000–01. The Department's direct expenditure was £1,150,000 in 2000–01 but figures for the Department's indirect expenditure on prostate cancer research were not collected centrally in 2000–01. The MRC spent £220,000 on testicular cancer research in 2000–01. The Department had no direct expenditure in 2000–01 on testicular cancer research and figures for indirect expenditure were not collected for 2000–01.

Dialysis (East Lancashire)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of people in East Lancashire who will require dialysis in each year up to 2005. [3841]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The estimated number of patients from East Lancashire requiring dialysis in the years up to 2005 are as follows:

	Haemodialysis	*Peritoneal dialysis*	*Total*
2001	117	64	181
2002	123	67	190
2003	128	70	198
2004	135	73	208
2005	138	75	213

Note:

The calculations were made using the Hennel, Wood and Mallick model and were based on the 1999 stock of renal patients and an annual uptake rate of 92 new patients per million. This is an uptake rate of 80 per million adjusted for the age distribution and ethnicity in the population of East Lancashire.

Pain Clinics

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy for there to be a pain clinic in every major hospital; and if he will make a statement. [5311]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Chronic pain services exist in 220 acute hospitals, 88 per cent. of acute hospitals in the United Kingdom.

The Clinical Standards Advisory Group (CSAG) report on "Services for Patients with Pain" published in April 2000 highlighted variations between hospitals in quality and access to pain management services. Trusts should review the services they provide against the standards set out in the CSAG report and other guidance. In this review account should be taken of the needs of both adults and children, and include patients with acute pain resulting from sudden illness or accident, as well as post-operative pain and chronic pain. Trusts should also agree with commissioners the services and resources which are appropriate to meet local needs.

St. George's Hospital, Tooting

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were treated at the accident and emergency department of St. George's hospital, Tooting, in 2000. [4881]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

In the financial year 1999–2000, St. George's Healthcare National Health Service Trust had a total of 82,718 accident and emergency attendances, 78,898 being first attendances.

Bed Blocking (Buckinghamshire)

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations have been cancelled in Buckingham, in each quarter in 2000 and 2001, as a result of hospital beds being occupied by *(a)* delayed discharge patients who were awaiting social services funding or assessment or *(b)* delayed discharge patients who had fully funded social services packages arranged. [5638]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The information is not available in the format requested.

Drug Treatment Programmes

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the level of participation of problem drug users in drug treatment programmes in each year since 1997. [5886]

Ms Blears: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

It is estimated that there were around 118,500 drug misusers in treatment in England in 2000–01 (from "Statistics from the Regional Drug Misuse Databases on drug misusers in treatment in England, 2000–01");

comparable information is not available for earlier years. The number of users presenting to drug misuse agencies (including both doctors and other agencies) in England in each of the six month periods ending 31 March 1997 to 31 March 2001 is given in the table. Figures exclude treatment in prisons.

Number of users presenting for treatment to drug misuse agencies in England during the six month periods ending 31 March 1997 to 31 March 2001

	Number
March 1997	25,925
September 1997	21,996
March 1998	23,916
September 1998	28,599
March 1999	28,499
September 1999	30,545
March 2000	31,815
September 2000	33,093
March 2001	33,234

Source:

Statistics from the Regional Drug Misuse Databases, Department of Health

Trivax Vaccines

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which health authorities inoculated children with Wellcome's Trivax vaccines that came from *(a)* batch 3741 and *(b)* batch 3732; how many children were so vaccinated; how many adverse reactions were reported in respect of each batch, including fatalities; if he will take steps to trace those who have been inoculated with vaccines from these batches; and if he will make a statement. [5695]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 20 July 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Batches 3741 and 3732 of Diphtheria, Tetanus and Pertussis (DTP) vaccine are believed to have been manufactured and distributed in Eire in the late 1960s and early 1970s. At that time DTP vaccine was not provided by the Department but was either purchased by local health authorities or obtained by general practitioners (GPs) from local retail pharmacists. Thus, information on whether batches 3741 and 3732 were supplied to United Kingdom doctors is not held centrally. Should such vaccines have been issued, the only information on who might have received them will depend on GPs or local health authority clinics maintaining records that will be now over 30-years-old. The Department has asked the then manufacturer's present owners, GlaxoSmithKline, to investigate their records. The National Institute for Biological Standards and Control has also been asked to investigate whether they tested these vaccines.

Extensive investigation of the safety of pertussis vaccines was undertaken during the 1970s and early 1980s following negative publicity about brain damage following pertussis immunisation. In 1981 a major report was published by the Committee on Safety of Medicines and the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation which investigated pertussis vaccine, including suspected adverse reactions to the vaccine. The report of this investigation was published in 1981 ("Whooping Cough", HMSO, ISBN 0 11 3207646) and advises on page 47 that

> "From 1964 onwards, all vaccines used in the UK also conformed to World Health Organisation standards of preparation and potency".

The Yellow Card database has been interrogated for reports of suspected adverse reactions to the vaccine batches 3714 and 3723 which were available between 1968 and 1971. No such reports have been identified. For reports received in the late 1960s and early 1970s, full data are not available for all reports. For those reports where full information is available, the batch number of the suspected vaccine is not always provided. The Yellow Card used at that time did not specifically ask reporters to provide information on batch numbers. The Yellow Card used currently asks specifically for information on batch and since 1992, where this information has been provided by the reporter, there has been full electronic capture of this information on the database.

Investigation of reports of suspected adverse reactions following pertussis containing vaccines (principally DTP vaccine) reveals no rise in reactions during the period when, if they were used in the UK, batches 3741 and 3732 might have been given (late 1960s and early 1970s) (see table).

Breakdown of reports of suspected adverse reactions

Year	*Number of reports received*
1964	92
1965	69
1966	42
1967	63
1968	40
1969	44
1970	36
1971	44
1972	37
1973	19
1974	37
1975	15
1976	46
1977	127
1978	143
1979	168
1980	209

Note:

Suspected adverse reaction reports for pertussis containing vaccine collected via the Committee on Safety of Medicine's Yellow Card Scheme

These figures represent suspected adverse reactions associated with single and multi-component pertussis-containing vaccines. It should be noted that a report of a suspected adverse reaction does not necessarily mean that it was caused by the vaccine. Many vaccines are administered in combination and in these circumstances it may be difficult to ascribe the cause of the reaction to an individual vaccine.

Adverse reporting rates are influenced by many factors, including the extent of use of a drug or vaccine and any publicity about the vaccine.

Blood Donors

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what disciplinary action has been taken over the statement of the chairman of the National Blood Authority concerning gay men who consider blood donation. [5994]

Yvette Cooper: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health, Lord Hunt of Kingsheath met the chairman of the National Blood Authority on 24 April. The chairman sent a letter of apology to the *Pink Paper* which was published on 3 May.

Nursing Homes

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nursing and residential care *(a)* homes and *(b)* beds have closed in Oxfordshire in each year since 1997. [6099]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The number of residential and nursing care establishment closures in 1999 and 2000, together with number of new registrations, are presented in the table. Information is not available centrally on the number of beds associated with closures or new registrations.

Number of care home establishment closures and new home registrations in Oxfordshire, year ending 31 March

	Residential[1]	*Nursing*[2]
Number of establishment closures		
1999	13	n/a
2000	16	1
Number of new registrations		
1999	8	n/a
2000	17	7

n/a = not available

[1] Oxfordshire county council

[2] Oxfordshire health authorities

Source:

Registration and Inspection Survey

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nursing and residential care *(a)* homes and *(b)* beds have closed in Essex in each year since 1997. [6332]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The number of residential and nursing care establishment closures in 1999 and 2000, together with the number of new registrations, are presented in the table. Information is not available centrally on the number of beds associated with closures or new registrations. Information is not available for the years ending 31 March 1997 and 1998 as the registration and inspection survey was first collected in its current format for the year ending 31 March 1999.

Number of care home establishment closures and new home registrations in Essex, year ending 31 March

	Residential[1]	*Nursing*[2]
Number of establishment closures		
1999	n/a	1
2000	33	17
Number of new registrations		
1999	n/a	11
2000	58	11

n/a = not available

[1] Essex county council and Southend and Thurrock councils

[2] North Essex and South Essex health authorities

Source:

Registration and Inspection Survey

Hospital Waiting Times

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which health authority population includes the highest proportion of patients waiting over a year for in-patient treatment. [6475]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

East Kent health authority has the highest proportion of patients waiting over a year for inpatient treatment. At the end of January 2002 there were 14.3 patients waiting over 12 months for in-patient treatment per 10,000 population.

The Department is monitoring its progress closely and is working to improve this performance.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the *(a)* national average waiting time and *(b)* Avon health authority waiting time was for glaucoma and cataract operations in the last 12 months. [10070]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The median average waiting time for glaucoma and cataract operations are given in the following table.

Glaucoma and cataract operations. Median waiting times (in days)

Area of residence	*Median waiting time*
Avon health authority	109
All areas	159

Notes:

Waiting time statistics from HES are not the same as the published waiting list statistics. HES provides counts and waiting times for all patients admitted to hospital within a given period whereas the published waiting list statistics count those waiting for treatment at a given point in time and how long they have been on the waiting list. Also, HES calculates the waiting time as the difference between the admission and decision to admit dates. Unlike published waiting list statistics, this is not adjusted for self-deferrals or periods of medical/social suspension.

A finished consultant episode is defined as a period of patient care under one consultant in one health care provider. The figures do not represent the number of patients, as one person may have several episodes within the year.

Figures in this table have not yet been adjusted for shortfalls in data.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give figures for *(a)* in-patient waiting lists and *(b)* in-patient waiting times for each financial year between April 1971 and March 1976. [10821]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 192W.

The information on waiting lists is shown in the table. The data given refer to waiting lists rather than waiting times, as information on waiting times of patients on the list between 1971 and 1976 is not available.

Size of in-patient waiting list
June 1971 to March 1976

	Number of patients
June 1971	519,322
December 1971	493,731
June 1972	496,569
December 1972	479,199
June 1973	542,074
December 1973	508,617
June 1974	508,390
December 1974	517,424
June 1975	532,613
December 1975	588,483
March 1976	583,851

Notes:

Figures relate to ordinary admissions only, as number of people waiting for day cases were not collected until 1987.

Source:

Department of health waiting times returns

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients requiring knee replacement operations have been waiting for *(a)* less than 12 months, *(b)* one to two years and *(c)* more than two years. [11786]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002 *Official Report,* column 192W.

The number of patients waiting for trauma and orthopaedics, the specialty that includes knee replacements, at end June 2001 are shown in the table.

As part of the National Health Service Plan, the maximum waiting time for inpatient treatment will be cut from 18 months now to six months by the end of 2005. As a first step towards this reduction, the maximum wait for a NHS operation will be cut to 15 months by the end of March 2002.

Patients waiting for elective trauma and orthopaedics admissions
Quarter ended 31 December 2001
NHS trust based

	Patients waiting
Total	258,776
Less than 12 months	245,570
12–24 months	13,206
Over 24 months	0

Source:

Department of health form KH07

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average accident and emergency department waiting times were *(a)* at the Royal United hospital, Bath, *(b)* in the UK and *(c)* in each region in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [12857]

Ms Blears: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 192W.

The Government do not collect statistics on average waiting times in accident and emergency (A&E) departments centrally.

The Government are committed to reducing waiting times in A&E and the NHS Plan includes the target that by March 2004 no patient will wait more than four hours in A&E from arrival to admission, transfer or discharge. The NHS is currently on track to reach this target with 77 per cent. of attenders spending four hours or less in A&E.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were waiting *(a)* over six months, *(b)* over nine months, *(c)* over 12 months, *(d)* over 15 months and *(e)* over 18 months for in-patient treatment in the mid-Essex hospital trust area for (i) the latest available month and (ii) the previous month. [41921]

Ms Blears: The information requested is shown in the table.

Inpatient data for mid-Essex hospital services NHS trust

	November 2001	*December 2001*
Of those waiting, number who have waited:		
More than six months	2,426	2,605
More than nine months	1,232	1,209
More than 12 months	452	370
More than 15 months	61	58
More than 18 months	0	0
Total number waiting	8,787	9,228

Source:

KH07 quarterly return/monthly waiting times returns

Spinal Injuries

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many serious spinal cord injuries occurred in each of the last five years. [6750]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The information requested is not collected centrally. We do, however, have some data on the incidence of spinal injury consultations, as detailed in the table:

Finished consultant episodes (FCEs[1]) by main diagnosis NHS Hospitals England 1996–97 to 2000–01

	Spinal cord injuries[1]
1996–97	11,490
1997–98	11,433
1998–99	10,900
1999–2000	11,071
2000–01	10,813

[1] An FCE is defined as a period of patient care under one consultant in one health care provider.

Note:

1. Data in this table is grossed for both coverage and unknown/invalid clinical data, except for 1998–99 to 2001–01 which are ungrossed.
2. The figures do not represent the number of patients, as one person may have several episodes within a year.
3. The main diagnosis is the first of seven diagnosis fields in the HES data set, and provides the main reason why the patient was in hospital.

Hip Replacements

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate his Department has made of the average cost of financing a hip replacement operation for a 65-year-old British citizen in each EU country. [7600]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The Department has not undertaken a review of the cost of treatments and procedures across all member states of the European Union. Within the national health service in England, we collect and publish the costs of a range of treatments and procedures on an annual basis. This information is made available to the NHS and general public and can be found on the Department's website. The cost of a primary hip replacement for a British citizen (carried out as a planned in-patient procedure), is detailed in the table for four preceding years.

	£
1997–98	3,678
1998–99	3,755
1999–2000	3,899
2000–01	4,179

The costs are not differentiated by age, therefore the costs apply equally to patients of any age, not just those who are 65 years old.

Residential Care Homes

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received on changes in the number of places in residential care homes. [6173]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 16 October 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

I regularly receive representations from a number of different sources such as hon. and right hon. Members, care home owners, interested individuals, organisations and local councils about the provision of residential and nursing home care.

Primary Care Trusts

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if public health medicine will be under the authority of primary care trusts. [9055]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

As a result of the changes outlined in 'Shifting the Balance of Power', primary care trusts (PCTs) will be responsible for the delivery of the majority of the public health services. From 1 April 2002, for the first time, all PCTs will have a Director of Public Health on its board.

PCTs will be performance managed in this role by the new strategic health authorities and supported through the Regional Directors of Public Health and their teams co-located with Government offices of the regions.

Hospital Closures

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospitals closed in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000 and *(e)* 2001 to date. [10511]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Information on hospital closures ceased to be collected in 1991 following the introduction of the national health service internal market and trusts.

The Government intend to make the best use of existing and new hospitals to improve access and standards of care for the whole population. The largest hospital building programme in the history of the NHS is under way. Since May 1997, 68 major hospital developments worth over £7.6 billion have been approved to proceed.

Last year, for the first time since 1971, the number of general and acute beds increased by 714.

Combined Heat and Power

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 17 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1242W, if he will list those CHP projects that have been installed in NHS properties since 1997. [11063]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

We do not currently collect this information. However, we intend to take action and capture data on the number and age of combined heat and power (CHP) installations in the national health service as part of the estates returns information collection performance monitoring system from 2001–02. We recognise the importance of obtaining the necessary information on CHP installations within the NHS.

Energy Efficiency Week

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action his Department took in recognition of Energy Efficiency Week. [11512]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment (Mr. Meacher) on 30 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 592W.

Eye Tests

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many free eye tests were undertaken in Pendle in each year since 1995. [12401]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Information specific to the Pendle area is not available centrally. However the total number of sight tests carried out within the East Lancashire health authority from 1996–97 onwards is as follows:

	Number
1996–97	81,242
1997–98	82,270
1998–99	80,493
1999–2000	103,719
2000–01	105,480

Notes:

1. Information for the year 1995–96 has been excluded due to health authority boundary changes and as such the data are not comparable.
2. Nearly all the increase for the years 1999–2000 and 2000–01 is due to the extension of eligibility for national health service sight test to all those aged 60 and over from 1 April 1999.

Zyban

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on how the underspend on anti-smoking initiatives has been spent. [12771]

Ms Abbott *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The 1998 White Paper "Smoking Kills" set out an overall strategy on tobacco control including health education and cessation services.

The commitments we made in that document have been kept under review in the light of experience across the whole programme and changing priorities. In fulfilling our commitment in the NHS Plan, we have made Buproprion (Zyban) and all nicotine replacement therapies available on NHS prescription. This required the addition of substantial sums to the unified budgets to meet the expected cost of this development.

Taking this into account together with the resources made available for smoking cessation services and health education the overall provision for tobacco control measures exceeds the White Paper commitment.

Bed Shortages

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has held with *(a)* senior health service officials, *(b)* senior clinicians and *(c)* patient groups on the possibility of bed shortages in hospitals (i) in London and (ii) elsewhere in the United Kingdom this winter. [13114]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 7 November 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Ministers hold regular discussions with key groups of health service officials, clinicians and patient groups. Health service circular 2001/014/local authority circular (2001)17 published in July 2001 gave guidance to the national health service in England on planning capacity. Under this guidance all health authorities established local capacity planning groups to plan capacity for winter 2001–02. As a result the NHS went into winter with 1,225 more general and acute and 198 critical care beds than the same time in 2000–01. The results of the bed census which was carried out at the end of November 2001 were published in "NHS Emergency Pressures—Making Progress" which was placed in the Library in December 2001.

Hearing Aids

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answers to the hon. Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey) of 24 April 2001, *Official Report*, columns 171–72W, on digital hearing aids, whether first wave sites will receive funding for the continued provision of digital hearing aids throughout the financial year 2002–03; and if the allocated money for national roll-out will cover two years. [14568]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 13 November 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The first wave trusts will receive funding to allow them to continue providing digital hearing aids throughout 2002–03. The £20 million announced on 24 December 2001 will also allow another 30 sites to be providing digital hearing aids by the end of 2002–03.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients have been given *(a)* digital hearing aids and *(b)* analogue aids at each of the designated pilot sites since the instigation of each trust's pilot status. [16852]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The Royal National Institute for Deaf People manages the project on behalf of the Department. The project team has provided information showing that by the end of January 2002, 21,347 adults had been assessed for digital aids by the 20 trusts involved in the pilot project. 16,352 of these had been fitted with 22,346 digital hearing aids. In addition some 400 other patients had received analogue aids. It is not possible to break down these figures by site.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the anticipated savings to public funds from the private finance initiative schemes for mental health and community services. [15248]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 22 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 411W, and 413W) in which I listed all major private finance initiative contracts which have reached financial close since May 1997 with figures for projected savings on each.

The table includes two mental health and community services schemes: the West Berkshire priority care NHS trust (now Berkshire Healthcare NHS trust) and the Leeds community and mental health services NHS trust.

Value for money in private finance is assessed on a case by case basis upon presentation of the full business case. None of the other 60 major and medium sized hospital schemes comprising the NHS plan target have yet to reach this stage so it is not possible to anticipate the savings to public funds for these schemes.

Value for money figures are not held centrally for schemes with a capital value below £20 million.

Private Health Care Provision

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 5 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 112W, on private health care provision, how the money being made available to the NHS to buy treatment for NHS patients in the private sector will be spent on different medical specialties; how much money he estimates will be saved compared with carrying out the same treatments in the NHS itself; and if he will make a statement. [14027]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 14 November 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

£40 million has been allocated to buy additional elective cases in the private sector this year. It was targeted to those health authorities most in need of short term support.

The funding will be used to free up national health service capacity but the exact number of cases purchased, the specialties which the money will be spent on, and the prices of the different procedures is not yet known. This will depend on the final details of contracts negotiated with the private sector. We will make the final figures available after the end of the financial year.

Suicides

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what key indicators are used to assess whether a person is actively contemplating suicide; and what plans he has to raise awareness of them among *(a)* health professionals and *(b)* the public. [13968]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 15 November 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Information about the factors associated with suicide, including the social, economic and clinical indicators for vulnerable individuals and groups is provided in the National Service Framework for Mental Health, along with the action needed to achieve the target in "Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation" to reduce the death rate from suicide by at least one fifth by 2010. We are also in the process of developing a national suicide prevention strategy which we will launch for public consultation in spring 2002.

The Department continues to work in partnership with mental health service users, voluntary sector charities and professional organisations to provide better information about mental health issues, to challenge the stigma and discrimination that is often associated with mental ill health and to contribute to a reduction in suicide rates.

Fair Trade Goods

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his Department's policy is in relation to departmental spending for supplies concerning the purchase of fair trade goods. [15207]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

I refer the hon. member to the reply given to him by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development on 16 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 931W.

Service Delivery

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to what extent the NHS has met its targets for service delivery since 1997. [20267]

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the extent to which the NHS has improved in terms of delivery since 1997. [19967]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) and to the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) for the delay in responding to these questions. I refer both hon. Members to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Progress made to date is outlined in both the Department of Health's annual departmental report and the Modernisation Board's annual report ("The NHS Plan—a Progress Report"); both of which are available through the Library. These documents clearly show that, thanks to the hard work of frontline staff and managers, the NHS is making good progress towards its targets for service delivery. Our on-going monitoring includes these examples of good progress:

> The Q3 access survey shows the NHS is on target to meet the 2004 primary care access milestones.
>
> Since May 1997, 68 major hospital developments (64 PFI and four public) worth over £7.6 billion have been approved to proceed. 10 of these (eight PFI and two public) are already operational and are treating patients.
>
> Since 1997 the number of nurses has increased by 31,520. Between September 1999 and September 2001 the number of nurses increased by 20,740 or 9.9 per cent. This means the NHS plan target has been reached well in advance of the 2004 target. We are now focusing on achieving the manifesto commitment and on retaining existing staff.
>
> There are now 20 per cent. (4,320) more consultants than there were in 1997. The number of consultants increased by 10.6 per cent. (2,460) between the NHS plan baseline (September 1999) and September 2001.
>
> 668 new critical care beds since January 2000 represents a 28 per cent. increase, putting us on course to achieve the target of a 30 per cent. increase by January 2003.
>
> 714 new beds in general and acute wards puts us over a third of the way towards the target of 2,100 by April 2004.
>
> 163 rapid access chest pain clinics were open by the end of quarter 3. The plan target was 100 clinics by April 2002.
>
> The target of 6,000 extra heart operations by April 2003 should be achieved this year.
>
> 91.3 per cent. (67,650) of patients referred urgently with suspected cancer were seen within two weeks during Q2 2001–02.
>
> By the end of March 2002 no patients should have to wait more than 15 months from the time of being placed on an in-patient waiting list. Latest figures show that, at the end of January 2002, 72 per cent. of trusts are already meeting this target.
>
> In the last 22 months, 97 per cent. of GP surgeries have been connected to "NHSnet", providing desktop email, access to the internet and a communications infrastructure for general practice across the NHS.

Rheumatoid Arthritis

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what submissions he has received seeking the increased use of anti-TNF therapies for the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis; and what assessment he has made of the level of financial support from pharmaceutical companies for these submissions. [26031]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

We are not aware of having received any formal submissions on this subject. The National Institute of Clinical Excellence are currently evaluating anti-TNF therapy, so we would expect that they would receive any submissions. There has, however, been correspondence from MPs and the public, as well as several parliamentary questions, on anti-TNF therapy.

Head Injuries

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the ability of local authorities to commission vocational rehabilitation programmes for individuals with acquired brain injury on the basis of optimum outcome. [30795]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

We have made no such assessment. Local authorities, as part of the wider welfare to work strategy, are currently taking the lead on the joint investment plans on welfare to work for disabled people initiative.

At the local level, local authorities are working with a range of partner agencies and organisations including health and social services, employment services, Jobcentre Plus, local education authorities, Connexions and Learning and Skills Councils, user groups, and employers' representatives.

NHS Professionals

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses holding substantive positions within the NHS are now registered with NHS Professionals. [30767]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The information requested is not collected centrally. The Audit Commission report "Brief Encounters: Getting the Best from Temporary Nursing Staff" published in September 2001 finds that:

> "Typically, over half (about 58 per cent.) of bank staff are substantive post holders".

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he has put in place to record complaints about NHS Professionals. [30765]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

No central mechanism has been developed to record complaints about national health service professionals. This issue will be addressed as part of the on-going development of the service.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of bookings received by NHS Professionals in December 2001 were successfully filled by NHS Professionals using its own nurse database. [30771]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

National health service professionals was launched on 22 November last year. In December, NHS professionals saw an average fill rate of 58 per cent. with more established pilots sites like Burnley and Pinderfields and Pontefract having a 84 per cent. and 89 per cent. fill rate respectively over the same period.

Leonard Cheshire Foundation

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with representatives of the Leonard Cheshire Foundation concerning funding for long-term care. [36906]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Representatives of the Leonard Cheshire Foundation have regular opportunities to discuss a range of issues, including the funding of long-term care, with Ministers and officials. I met with representatives of the Leonard Cheshire Foundation on 4 February 2002.

Speech Therapy

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many speech and language therapists are employed in the national health service. [36776]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

As at 30 September 2001 there were 5,680 qualified speech and language therapists employed in the national health service.

This represents an increase of 17 per cent. more speech language therapists since 1997.

Nurses

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to change the number of whole-time equivalent nurses performing non-clinical duties with *(a)* NICE, *(b)* CHI and *(c)* the NHS Modernisation Agency. [37372]

Mr. Hutton: The number of nurses performing non-clinical duties with the National Institute of Clinical Excellence, the Commission for Health Improvement and the Modernisation Agency is a matter for each of the organisations to determine and will be kept under review.

There are currently two nurses working in NICE, 26 in CHI and 52 in the Modernisation Agency. Nurses are also employed on short term contracts and are represented on internal committees established by the organisations. There are 350,400 qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff employed in the national health service.

Nurses working in these organisations are using their clinical, leadership and management skills as nurses to improve the quality of care delivered in the NHS.

Practice Nurses

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many practice nurses were employed by general practitioners in England in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* the most recent year for which information is available. [37390]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is in the table.

Between 2000 and 2001 there was a 4.2 per cent. increase in the number of practice nurses (whole time equivalent).

Practice nurses employed by Unrestricted Principals and Equivalents (UPEs)[1] *in England as at 1 October 1997 and 30 September 2001*

(headcount) and whole time equivalents (WTE)		
Practice Nurses	1997	2001
Headcount	18,389	19,846
WTE	10,082	11,163

[1] UPEs include GMS Unrestricted Principals, PMS Contracted GPs and PMS Salaried GPs.

Source:

Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics.

NHS Pensions

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will change the rules whereby women who worked for the NHS prior to 6 April 1988 do not have their contributions to the superannuation scheme prior to that date counted towards the calculations of their widower's pension, whereas male contributions prior to that date are counted towards their widow's pension. [37106]

Mr. Hutton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the former Member for North Norfolk (Mr. Prior) on 13 January 1999, *Official Report,* column 212W.

Residential Care (Lancashire)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many care beds in private homes there were in Lancashire in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000, *(e)* 2001 and *(f)* today. [37841]

Ms Jacqui Smith: Information on the number of residential and nursing care beds in independent care homes in Lancashire at 31 March of each year is shown in the table.

Number of care beds in independent care homes in Lancashire[1,2], *1997 to 2001*

Rounded numbers

Year[3]	*Number of care beds in independent care homes*	*Number of care beds in independent residential care homes*	*Number of care beds in independent nursing care homes*
1997[4]	19,850	12,200	7,650
1998	20,390	12,620	7,780
1999	20,100	12,790	7,310
2000	19,830	12,900	6,930
2001	18,870	12,690	6,190

[1] Following local government reorganisation, information for Lancashire includes Lancashire County (remaining) and Blackpool and Blackburn with Darwen Unitary Authorities.

[2] Information includes nursing care beds figures from East Lancashire, North West Lancashire and South Lancashire health authorities but excludes figures from Morecambe Bay health authority whose boundaries cover part of Cumbria local authority.

[3] At 31 March.

[4] The number of nursing beds in 1997 refers to the period 1 October 1996 to 31 March 1997.

Source:

Department of Health's annual returns.

Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what regulatory exemptions from the Care Standards Act 2000 are available to operators of simple hyperbaric oxygen therapy in the community who are registered charities. [37605]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 192W.

There are no exemptions from regulation under the Care Standards Act for operators of simple hyperbaric oxygen therapy chambers who are registered charities. However, the standards for hyperbaric facilities for therapeutic use are considerably fewer than for those used to treat patients with acute medical conditions, and proportionate to their simpler operation.

Northwood and Pinner Community Hospital

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 19 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 112W, what progress has been made on the modernisation of Northwood and Pinner community hospital; and if he will make a statement. [39324]

Mr. Hutton: The Hillingdon modernisation review began in the autumn of 2001. Its purpose is to set the strategic context for the longer term development of Hillingdon health and social care services, including the estate and facilities required to deliver these services. Proposals for the future of Northwood and Pinner community hospital will emerge from the strategic plans currently being drawn up for the development of the Hillingdon hospital infrastructure and services, and will take account of the needs of Harrow residents. The proposals are being developed to support the priorities identified within the local modernisation review.

NHS Concordat

Andy Burnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 6 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 1047, on the NHS Concordat, how many patients have been treated under the NHS Concordat by each health authority area. [37279]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North, and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 192W.

This information is not available centrally.

Residential and Nursing Homes

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the definition of registered used for a *(a)* residential and *(b)* nursing home. [41438]

Jacqui Smith: The definition under the Registered Homes Act 1984, Part I for the registration of a care homes is:

> "any establishment which provides or is intended to provide, whether for reward or not, residential accommodation with both board and personal care".

The definition under Part II of the 1984 Act for registration of a nursing home is more extensive covering premises providing nursing, maternity care and other specified services.

Under the Care Standards Act (CSA) 2000, the definition of a care home or nursing home for registration is as follows:

> an establishment is a care home if it provides accommodation, together with nursing or personal care:

The definition then sets out persons to whom such services are provided. The changes under the CSA 2000 remove the old requirements in relation to "board" under the 1984 Act, and include nursing and personal care in the same definition. From 1 April 2002, the other services covered by Part II of the 1984 Act will become independent hospitals.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health where new *(a)* nursing and *(b)* residential homes have been registered in each of the last three years. [41437]

Jacqui Smith: Details of the number of new homes registered are available for 1998–99 and 1999–2000. These are in the publications for 1998–99 and 1999–2000 entitled 'Activity, workload and resources of Local Authority, Health Authority and Joint Inspection Units: summary results of a survey in England'. Copies of the publications are in the Library and on the website at: http://www.doh.gov.uk/public/regandinspect.htm for 1998–99 and http://www.doh.gov.uk/public/regandinspect2.htm and http://www.doh.gov.uk/public/regandinspect3.htm for 1999–2000.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) which bed and breakfast accommodation has been utilised in place of residential or nursing home beds in the last 12 months; [41435]

(2) how many local authorities have utilised bed and breakfast accommodation for *(a)* residential and *(b)* nursing home facilities in the last 12 months. [41436]

Jacqui Smith: I am not aware of any cases where local authorities have used bed and breakfast accommodation in place of either residential or nursing home care during the past 12 months.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 5 March 2002 to the hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble), *Official Report*, column 275W, on parliamentary questions, what the average time taken is *(a)* to draft an answer for submission to a Minister for approval, *(b)* for the Minister to approve and *(c)* from approval to providing the answer to the hon. Member, for parliamentary questions tabled since June 2001. [41775]

Mr. Milburn: I regret that this information cannot be provided because the record management database, from which it would be drawn, is currently not reliable for the reasons set out in the answer to which the hon. Member refers.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 5 March 2002 to the hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble), *Official Report*, column 275W, on parliamentary questions, what evidence he has of the systematic falsification in recording the handling of parliamentary questions in his Department. [41774]

Mr. Milburn: There is evidence that the record management database used in the Parliamentary Section has been falsified—apparently deliberately—to show answers as having been dealt with when they had not.

This is the subject of the investigation now under way. I will report to the House on the outcome of the investigation as soon as possible.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 5 March 2002 to the hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble), *Official Report*, column 275W, on parliamentary questions, what systems his Department uses to monitor the number of unanswered parliamentary questions. [41777]

Mr. Milburn: The record management database in the Department's Parliamentary section provides this information and has been used to monitor progress on outstanding questions.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 5 March 2002 to the hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble), *Official Report*, column 192W, ref. 41128, on parliamentary questions, what form his investigation into the systematic falsification of records in his Department will take; when he expects to complete the investigation; how much the investigation will cost; and if he will place a copy of the report in the Library when the investigation has been completed. [41779]

Mr. Milburn: The investigation is being carried out under the personal supervision of the Department's Director of Corporate Affairs; and it will report to the Permanent Secretary. The aim of the investigation is to establish the facts about what appears to be the systematic falsification of the record management system in the parliamentary section and to ensure that the necessary remedial action is taken. I have undertaken to report to Parliament on the outcome of the investigation; and I will do this as quickly and as fully as possible, subject to the need to avoid prejudicing any disciplinary proceedings. It is too early to give an estimate of the cost of the investigation.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 5 March 2002 to the hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble), *Official Report*, column 192W, ref. 41128 on parliamentary questions, if he will break down by political party, the number of questions that were systematically recorded as being answered but were not. [41778]

Mr. Milburn: A total of 214 parliamentary questions were found to be falsely recorded on the Department's record management database as having been answered when they had not. These were broken down by political party as follows.

	Number
Conservative	86
Labour	71
Liberal Democrat	45
Scottish Nationalist	10
Plaid Cymru	2

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble), of 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W, ref. 41128, on parliamentary questions, when he first was informed of the evidence suggesting systematic falsification in recording the handling of parliamentary questions. [41696]

Mr. Milburn: I was first informed of this on 28 February, following which a full audit of outstanding questions was carried out. This provided the basis for the answer to which the hon. Member refers.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 5 March 2002 to the hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble), *Official Report*, column 192W, ref. 41128, on parliamentary questions, how many extra civil servants he has drafted into the Department's parliamentary section to reduce the backlog of unanswered parliamentary questions; and what he estimates the additional costs to his Department will be. [41776]

Mr. Milburn: To meet the commitment to aim to deal with all outstanding questions due for reply before 14 February by 12 March, three extra staff have been redeployed to the Parliamentary Section. The section is also receiving additional support from other areas of the Private Office. This involves re-prioritising work, rather than incurring additional overall costs, except for the additional cost of paying for a temporary replacement for the suspended member of staff which it is too early yet to estimate.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 5 March 2000 to the hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble), *Official Report*, column 275W, ref 41128, on parliamentary questions, if he will list the roles and responsibilities of the civil servant who has been suspended in his Department. [41781]

Mr. Milburn: The individual concerned works in the Parliamentary Section of the Department. It would be inappropriate to give further details which might identify the individual, as departmental disciplinary procedures are being followed.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to answer questions numbers *(a)* 9513, *(b)* 17418, *(c)* 16461, *(d)* 13966, *(e)* 13780, *(f)* 12020, *(g)* 10511, *(h)* 13967, *(i)* 13968, *(j)* 13853, *(k)* 13856 and *(l)* 14110. [41971]

Mr. Milburn: The aim is to reply to all these questions by 12 March.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how Ministers in his Department ensure that answers to parliamentary questions are given as speedily as possible. [42273]

Mr. Milburn: Ministers and officials throughout the Department are committed to providing speedy answers to questions and respecting the tight timetables this involves.

There are departmental procedures which provide for advice to be submitted to Ministers within a set timetable and for regular monitoring of the process of answering questions at all stages.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what procedures are in place in his Department to pursue answers to parliamentary questions which have not been given a substantive reply by a named day. [42203]

Mr. Milburn: This information is derived from the record management database in the Parliamentary Section and follow-up action is pursued by staff in the section.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many officials in his Department are involved in answering parliamentary questions; and how subject responsibilities are allocated among those staff. [42201]

Mr. Milburn: Questions are assigned to the official dealing with the subject area raised. As this can involve officials across the whole Department, it is not possible to give a reliable estimate either of the potential number involved or the number involved at any one time.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how Ministers in his Department check the appropriateness of their answers to parliamentary questions; [42272]

(2) what are the procedures followed by Ministers for signing off answers to parliamentary questions. [42274]

Mr. Milburn: The procedure is for the answers to all parliamentary questions to be approved by a Minister. If Ministers are not satisfied with the advice on the reply, they will seek further advice.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the official in his Department suspended for alleged falsification of recording answers to parliamentary questions was suspended; if he will name him; and what grade his post is. [42275]

Mr. Milburn: The official was suspended on 28 February. It would not be appropriate to name the official, who works in the Department's Parliamentary Section, or to provide further details which could identify the person concerned, as departmental disciplinary procedures are being followed.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the procedures within his Department for *(a)* registering parliamentary questions when received in the parliamentary unit, *(b)* monitoring the progress made in answering them and *(c)* registering that they have been answered. [42207]

Mr. Milburn: Action on the different stages in the process of handling parliamentary questions is recorded on a database in the parliamentary section, including when they are received and when they have been answered. The database is used to monitor the progress of outstanding questions.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how his Department monitors the time it takes to answer parliamentary questions. [42200]

Mr. Milburn: The record management system in the Department's parliamentary section provides this information and has been used to support monitoring of the handling of parliamentary questions.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many parliamentary questions have been *(a)* answered and *(b)* unanswered in each month the House has been sitting since July 2001. [41780]

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many parliamentary questions have been answered by his Department since 7 June 2001 by each of the Ministers responsible; and how many are awaiting answer. [42202]

Mr. Milburn: I regret that the information is not readily available in the form requested because the record management database from which it would be drawn is currently not reliable, for the reasons set out in the reply that I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Consultants Contracts

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in his negotiations over NHS consultants' contracts, including the proposed seven year commitment to whole-time NHS work; and if he will make a statement. [41378]

Mr. Hutton: Our proposals for the new consultant contract were published in February 2001 and these, alongside the British Medical Association's own proposals, form the basis of continuing negotiations

The proposals envisage that for an initial period, perhaps seven years, the terms of the contract would prevent newly appointed consultants engaging in similar work outside the national health service whether the individual is employed on a full-time or part-time basis. This is designed to maximise consultants' contribution to the NHS, but not to prevent doctors from working part-time if they wish to do so.

Child Protection

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to ensure adequate funding of area child protection committees; and if he will make a statement. [41938]

Jacqui Smith: Area child protection committee (ACPC) expenditure, and administrative and policy support, is a matter for local agreement. As a multi-agency forum, the ACPC should be supported in its work by its main constituent agencies, reflecting the investment of each agency in activities which are of benefit to all, in particular inter-agency training.

East Riding and Hull Health Authority

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many posts will be made redundant when the East Riding and Hull health authority is terminated. [41377]

Jacqui Smith: No decision has yet been taken on this issue.

Arrangements are being made for staff to be transferred to strategic health authorities until such time as their futures are determined.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost was of constructing the East Riding and Hull health authority HQ in Willerby. [41371]

Jacqui Smith: The cost of constructing the East Riding and Hull health authority HQ in Willerby in 1993 was £3.4 million.

Intermediate Care (Adur/Worthing/Arun PCT)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason the Adur/Worthing/Arun PCT has not qualified for additional allocations from the intermediate care investment programme. [42212]

Ms Blears: There was a joint bid from Worthing and Southlands and Worthing, Adur and Arun primary care groups for intermediate care capital. This bid, to provide 25 dedicated overnight beds and 10 day places for assessment and care is currently being developed.

Cancelled Operations

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cancelled operations there were in the last two years in each hospital trust in England. [7606]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Data on the number of operations cancelled at the last minute are placed in the Library. Data on the number of last minute cancelled operations by national health service trust were not collected until April 2001, prior to this, data were collected on last minute cancelled operations within each health authority.

A cancellation is counted as 'last minute' when the operation is cancelled on, or after, the day the patient is due to be admitted to hospital, for non-medical reasons.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his definition is of operations cancelled for non-clinical reasons. [42306]

Mr. Hutton: Operations cancelled for non-clinical reasons include any operation cancelled by the hospital except where the patient is not medically fit for surgery or where surgery would no longer be medically appropriate at the scheduled time.

Clinical Decisions

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with representatives of healthcare professionals on the impact of Government targets on clinical decision-making. [36520]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 26 February 2002]:* Ministers in the Department regularly meet representatives of the health care professions to discuss all aspects of the Government's strategy for investment and reform in the national health service.

Mixed Sex Wards

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS trusts have applied for extra funding to implement the Department's policy of partitioning hospital wards to ensure non-mixed sex wards; and if he will make a statement as to the level of the financial settlement received by individual authorities and name those authorities in receipt of this extra funding. [42263]

Ms Blears: Guidance on maintaining privacy and dignity was first issued to the service in 1997 and the date for achieving single sex accommodation in 95 per cent. of trusts is December 2002.

Trusts are expected to use their centrally allocated funding, including block allocation for building improvements, by prioritisation of their resources over that period of time. No extra funding programme exists and it is for trusts to manage their capital to address these issues.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer given to the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor) on 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1077W, if he will make a statement on the progress being made to reach the target of eliminating mixed sex accommodation in 95 per cent. of national health service trusts by December. [42359]

Ms Blears: The national health service is continuing to work to the target to eliminate mixed sex accommodation in 95 per cent. of national health service trusts by December 2002.

On-going monitoring of progress continues to ensure that the target date is met.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer given on 22 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 763W, if he will define the meaning of partitioning in mixed-sex wards in hospitals. [42360]

Ms Blears: Partitioning can be used to divide wards into bays as a means of achieving an acceptable method of protecting patients' privacy and dignity.

To ensure that they provide adequate physical separation, sound reduction and visual privacy the partition must be permanent, rigid and fixed to the building structure.

A mobile privacy screen alone is not an acceptable solution to enhancing privacy and dignity for the patient.

"NHS Plan News"

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost is of producing and distributing "NHS Plan News"; and how many copies were distributed. [42307]

Mr. Hutton: The cost of producing and distributing "NHS Plan News" was £800,000 a year for four quarterly issues. This is a cost of 0.2p per copy. Approximately, one million copies per edition were distributed.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his plans are to replace "NHS Plan News". [42368]

Mr. Hutton: As part of the continuous drive for effectiveness and value for money in its communications the Department is currently seeking proposals from commercial organisations about partnership arrangements to produce a regular publication for NHS staff. A commercial tendering process is under way. Any contract awarded as a result of this will be duly announced.

Brighton Health Care NHS Trust

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many formal complaints have been received by the Brighton Health Care NHS trust in each of the last five years. [42284]

Ms Blears: Information on complaints received by national health service trusts is contained in "Handling Complaints: Monitoring the NHS Complaints Procedures" statistical report. Copies are available in Library.

Ambulances

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance has been provided to hospital trusts from his Department for requiring NHS patients to pay for private ambulance services for transfer between hospitals to obtain specialist treatment within the NHS; and on what basis NHS ambulances will not be provided. [42278]

Ms Blears: In 1991, guidance was issued to the national health service which set out eligibility for transport (HSG(91)29 issued in 1991 with booklet "Ambulance and other patient transport services"). A copy is in the Library. The guidance states that if a patient has a medical need for transport as determined by the clinician in charge of their case, then transport should be provided free of charge, as part of NHS treatment. Medical need for non-emergency patient transport must be determined locally by a clinician and will depend on the medical condition of the patient, the availability of private or public transport and distance to be travelled. The principle applied is that a patient should be able to reach hospital in a reasonable time, in reasonable comfort, without detriment to their medical condition. Transport may be provided by either a NHS ambulance trust or other private or voluntary organisation.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from the Brighton Healthcare NHS Trust about shortage of funds restricting availability of ambulances to transfer NHS patients to alternative hospitals for treatment. [42280]

Ms Blears: There has not been any restriction placed on the use of ambulance services at Brighton Health Care NHS Trust by the Surrey Ambulance Service NHS Trust (SAST). In agreement with Brighton Health Care, an additional dedicated routine services ambulance has been made available since 1 February 2002, controlled by Brighton Health Care, to assist with transfers and discharges. This operates from 09.30 to 18.30 daily.

"Primary Care" Magazine

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost is of producing and distributing "Primary Care" magazine; and how many copies have been circulated. [42351]

Mr. Hutton: The cost of producing and distributing "Primary Care" magazine and its accompanying website is approximately £38,900 per edition, depending on advertising revenue. It is mailed to 27,000 GPs and practice managers working in primary care and distributed to 1,000 Department of Health managers 10 times a year. A further 1,000 are printed for potential advertisers, requested copies and storage. This is a cost of approximately 1.3 pence per copy.

Hospital Food

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria he uses to judge the success of the Better Hospital Food programme being implemented in NHS hospitals. [42264]

Ms Blears: The Better Hospital Food programme was announced in the NHS Plan and is a long-term initiative designed to improve the quality, availability of and access to food in hospitals. The programme is supported by an additional £38.5 million over four years.

There are two key areas through which success will be judged—patient satisfaction and nutritional outcomes.

The NHS Plan required NHS trusts to secure year-on-year increases in patient satisfaction levels with the standard of food. From this year the National Patient Survey includes questions related to the food served in hospital, and in addition hospitals undertake regular surveys of patients on this issue. Through the Better Hospital Food programme a Patient Catering Survey has been designed to test the quality of the services on offer against criteria designed in consultation with patients which addresses those issues which patients have said are important. This will be available for all hospitals to use shortly.

There are clear links between good nutrition and good health. Through an ad hoc working group which includes nutritional experts, representatives of the British Dietetic Association, NHS dietitians and nurses, principles for nutritional screening are being devised which will facilitate the measurement of both under and over-nutrition on entry to hospital. This will allow early intervention of clinical and dietetic staff to address problems which, unchecked, may lead to prolonged ill health. In addition research will be undertaken to establish the clinical outcomes of improved nutrition and to provide a tool to ensure that the nutritional aims of the Better Hospital Food programme are taking effect.

Assaults on Staff

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to announce the figures for recorded violent incidents against NHS staff for 2000–01. [42199]

Mr. Hutton: Figures for reported incidents of violence against national health service staff in 2000–01 are currently being analysed by the Department. The figures will be published as soon as the Department is satisfied the figures are sufficiently robust and reflect NHS trust mergers and other organisational changes in NHS.

NHS Leadership Centre

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer given to the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham on 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 676W, on the NHS Leadership Centre, when he expects the appointment to be made on a permanent basis. [42387]

Mr. Hutton: The post is still being held on a temporary basis. This arrangement will be kept in place for the time being in order to provide a period of stability for the Leadership Centre. It remains our intention to fill the post on a permanent basis, following open competition, later in the year.

MRSA Superbug

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer given to the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham on 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1087W, to how many in-patient deaths the MRSA superbug has been a contributory factor. [42309]

Ms Blears: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1087W.

Mid Sussex NHS Trust

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he anticipates spinal cord stimulation treatment will be available in the Mid Sussex NHS Trust. [42211]

Ms Blears: Mid Sussex national health service trust has no immediate plans to provide this treatment. The treatment is, however, available though the trust at St. Thomas's Hospital in London.

Radiographers

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many qualified radiographers *(a)* joined and *(b)* left the NHS in each of the last five years. [42288]

Mr. Hutton: Information regarding the number of radiographers joining and leaving the national health service is not collected centrally.

The number of qualified radiographers increased by 940 (eight per cent.) between 1997 and 2001 (11,770 in 1997 to 12,710 in 2001).

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many qualified NHS radiographers per head of population there are in each health authority area. [42289]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

NHS hospital and community health services (HCHS): qualified radiographers working in the scientific, therapeutic and technical area of work by health authority area in England as at 30 September 2001

	whole-time equivalents	Whole-time equivalents radiographers per 100,000 population	headcount	Headcount radiographers per 100,000 population
England	10,650	21	12,710	25
Northern and Yorkshire	1,510	24	1,820	29
Bradford	110	23	140	30
County Durham and Darlington	80	13	90	15
East Riding and Hull	110	19	130	23
Gateshead and South Tyneside	70	19	80	23
Leeds	330	45	390	53
Newcastle and North Tyneside	170	36	190	41
North Cumbria	60	18	80	25
Northumberland	50	16	60	19
Sunderland	50	18	60	21
Tees	170	31	200	37
Wakefield	60	20	80	24
North Yorkshire	140	18	170	22
Calderdale and Kirklees	110	19	140	23
Trent	1,010	19	1,200	23
Barnsley	40	16	40	18
North Derbyshire	40	11	60	15
Southern Derbyshire	110	20	140	24
Doncaster	50	19	60	21
Leicestershire	180	19	220	23
Lincolnshire	130	20	160	24
North Nottinghamshire	40	10	50	13
Nottingham	180	28	210	32
Rotherham	30	14	40	16
Sheffield	170	32	190	36
South Humber	30	10	30	11
West Midlands	1,020	19	1,260	24
Birmingham	310	25	350	29
Coventry	100	32	120	39
Dudley	50	17	70	23
Herefordshire	20	14	30	17
Sandwell	30	10	40	12
Shropshire	90	21	120	28
North Staffordshire	110	23	140	29
South Staffordshire	80	13	100	16
Walsall	40	14	40	17
Warwickshire	50	10	70	13
Wolverhampton	70	29	80	33
Worcestershire	80	14	100	19
North-west	1,670	25	2,020	31
South Lancashire	20	7	20	8
Liverpool	150	33	190	43
Manchester	280	65	320	74
Morecambe Bay	70	23	100	30
St. Helen's and Knowsley	60	19	80	23
Salford and Trafford	70	15	80	17
Sefton	120	42	150	52
Stockport	40	13	50	17
West Pennine	80	17	90	19
Bury and Rochdale	60	14	60	16
North Cheshire	70	22	110	35
South Cheshire	110	16	140	21
East Lancashire	100	20	120	23
North-west Lancashire	170	36	200	43
Wigan and Bolton	120	22	150	26
Wirral	150	47	170	52
Eastern	1,030	19	1,240	23
Bedfordshire	90	16	110	20
North Essex	140	16	170	18
South Essex	110	15	130	18
Suffolk	110	16	150	22
Cambridgeshire	210	43	250	51
Norfolk	190	18	230	22
Hertfordshire	170	16	200	19

NHS hospital and community health services (HCHS): qualified radiographers working in the scientific, therapeutic and technical area of work by health authority area in England as at 30 September 2001

	whole-time equivalents	Whole-time equivalents radiographers per 100,000 population	headcount	Headcount radiographers per 100,000 population
London	1,750	24	1,920	26
Hillingdon	40	16	40	17
Kensington, Chelsea and Wesminster	210	51	230	55
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	40	9	40	9
Croydon	30	9	40	11
Kingston and Richmond	50	13	60	16
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	250	32	260	35
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	140	22	160	25
Barking and Havering	90	23	100	25
Brent and Harrow	90	19	100	21
Camden and Islington	280	73	300	78
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	140	20	150	22
East London and the City	180	28	180	29
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	110	13	130	15
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich	110	15	130	17
South-east	1,530	17	1,880	21
Berkshire	130	15	160	19
Buckinghamshire	100	14	130	18
East Kent	100	16	110	19
West Kent	180	18	220	22
East Surrey	40	9	50	11
West Surrey	160	25	200	31
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	150	19	170	22
West Sussex	90	12	110	15
Northamptonshire	100	17	130	21
Oxfordshire	160	26	200	31
North and Mid Hampshire	60	11	80	14
Southampton and South West Hampshire	140	25	170	30
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South-east Hampshire	120	18	160	23
South-west	1,130	23	1,370	27
Somerset	70	14	90	18
South and West Devon	150	24	180	30
Wiltshire	100	17	130	21
Avon	320	32	380	37
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	100	20	120	23
Dorset	170	25	210	29
North and East Devon	90	19	110	23
Gloucestershire	130	22	150	27

Notes:

1. Figures are combined totals for qualified therapeutic and diagnostic radiographers
2. Staff in post figures are round to the nearest 10
3. Radiographers per 100,000 population are rounded to the nearest whole number
4. Due to rounding totals may not equal the sum of component parts
5. The former Solihull HA population figure is included in the Birmingham HA total
6. Population figures are 1998 based population projections for England for 2001 by HA

Source:

Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census.

Office for National Statistics

Surgical Instruments

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action his Department will take with NHS trusts who are found to be persistently reusing single-use surgical instruments having previously been advised to cease such actions. [42262]

Ms Blears: The Department has advised national health service trusts on a number of occasions that they should not reuse instruments designated as single use. We would regard doing so as a serious breach of governance. The specific action to be taken in a particular case would need to be determined in the light of the individual circumstances of the case.

Oncology Specialists

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many working time equivalent oncology specialists have been employed in each of the last five years by *(a)* the Worthing and Southlands Hospital Trust and *(b)* the Brighton Healthcare NHS Trust. [42279]

Ms Blears: The information requested is shown in the table.

Hospital medical staff within Brighton Health Care NHS Trust and Worthing and Southlands Hospitals NHS Trust in the medical oncology and clinical oncology specialties—as at 30 September

Whole time equivalents

	All oncology		*Clinical oncology*		*Medical oncology*	
	All	*Consultant*	*All*	*Consultant*	*All*	*Consultant*
1997						
Brighton Health Care Trust	10	[1]—	10	[1]—	[2]—	[2]—
Worthing and Southlands Hospitals NHS Trust	[1]—	[2]—	[1]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
1998						
Brighton Health Care NHS Trust	10	10	10	10	[2]—	[2]—
Worthing and Southlands Hospitals NHS Trust	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
1999						
Brighton Health Care NHS Trust	10	10	10	10	[2]—	[2]—
Worthing and Southlands Hospitals NHS Trust	[1]—	[1]—	[2]—	[2]—	[1]—	[1]—
2000						
Brighton Health Care NHS Trust	10	10	10	10	[1]—	[2]—
Worthing and Southlands Hospitals NHS Trust	[1]—	[1]—	[2]—	[2]—	[1]—	[1]—
2001						
Brighton Health Care NHS Trust	10	10	10	10	[2]—	[2]—
Worthing and Southlands Hospitals NHS Trust	[1]—	[1]—	[2]—	[2]—	[1]—	[1]—

[1] Denotes five or less

[2] Denotes zero

Note:

Figures are rounded to the nearest 10

Source:

Department of Health medical and dental work force census

Administration and Estates Staff

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will define what categories of staff come under the heading Administration and Estates Staff. [42330]

Mr. Hutton: The following staff groups are collected under the heading "administration and estates staff" in the non-medical work force census; senior manager, manager, clerical and administrative, maintenance and works and unclassified. This includes clerical and administrative staff who support clinicians.

Administration and estates staff can work in central functions, hotel and property, scientific, therapeutic and technical support, clinical support and ambulance service support.

Since 1997 the number of administration and estates staff working in the national health service has increased by 27,330, 14 per cent. (from 196,700 in 1997 to 224,030 in 2001).

Patient Records

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the number of hard copy patient records going missing in hospital departments; and what steps he is taking to reduce it. [42327]

Ms Blears: The Department of Health does not make assessments of the loss of hard copy patient records in hospitals, but measures are in place to minimise such losses.

The Department promotes good practice in managing hospital records by issuing guidance on standards, procedures and management of hospital records. National health service organisations are required each year to provide assurances on the arrangements in place for ensuring the proper management of both paper and electronic patient's records. If a patient's record is mislaid, local management is accountable and should investigate the reasons why this occurred and takes all reasonable steps to prevent recurrence.

In addition, the Department is promoting better ways of managing records. The Information for Health strategy sets out plans for the development of electronic patient records and electronic health records, with substantial progress expected by 2005.

Physiotherapists

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many working time equivalent physiotherapists were employed by the Brighton Healthcare NHS Trust in each of the last five years; and what the current vacancy rates are. [42282]

Ms Blears: The information requested is shown in the table.

NHS hospital and community health services (HCHS): qualified scientific, therapeutic and technical staff working within the physiotherapy area of work in Brighton healthcare NHS trust as at 30 September each year—whole-time equivalents

	All staff
1997	70
1998	70
1999	80
2000	80
2001	80

Notes:

1. The current three month vacancy rate for Brighton healthcare NHS trust is 1.3 per cent. and the number (wte) of three month vacancy rate is less than 10.

2. Three month vacancies are vacancies as at 31 March 2001 which trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more (whole time equivalents).

3. Three month vacancies rates are three month vacancies expressed as a percentage of three month vacancies plus staff in post from the September 2000 non-medical work force census (whole time equivalent).

4. Numbers are rounded to the nearest 10.

5. Percentages are rounded to the nearest decimal point.

Source:

Department of Health non-medical work force census

Department of Health vacancy survey March 2001

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the *(a)* vacancy rates and *(b)* full role figures are for physiotherapy posts for NHS hospitals in Sussex. [42283]

Ms Blears: The information requested is shown in the table.

Department of Health Vacancies Survey, March 2001—vacancies in NHS trusts by health authority areas and trusts[1], qualified physiotherapists three month vacancy rates[2,3] numbers and staff in post

Whole time equivalents

	Three month vacancy rates (percentage)	*Three month vacancies*	*Staff in post*
England total	5.0	660	12,990
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove HA	0.6	0	180
Eastbourne Hospitals NHS Trust	0.0	0	40
Hastings and Rother NHS Trust	0.0	0	50
South Downs Health NHS Trust	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Brighton Health Care NHS Trust	1.3	0	80
Eastbourne and County Healthcare NHS Trust	0.0	0	20
Sussex Ambulance Service NHS Trust	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—
West Sussex HA	5.1	10	140
Worthing Priority Care Services NHS Trust	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—
Sussex Weald and Downs NHS Trust	0.0	0	30
Worthing and Southlands Hospitals NHS Trust	6.3	0	60
The Royal West Sussex NHS Trust	12.6	0	20
Mid Sussex NHS Trust	0.0	0	30

[1] HA figures are based on trusts, and do not necessarily reflect the geographical provision of health care.

[2] Three month vacancies are vacancies as at 31 March 2001 which trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more (whole time equivalents)

[3] Three month vacancy rates are three month vacancies expressed as a percentage of three month vacancies plus staff in post from the September 2000 non-medical work force census (whole time equivalent)

[4] Indicates where staff in post and numbers of vacancies are less than five

[5] Indicates zero

Notes:

1. Percentages rounded to one decimal place
2. Staff in post figures are as at September 2000

Sources:

1. Department of Health Vacancies Survey March 2001
2. Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census

Hospital-acquired Infections

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the policy is of the Brighton Healthcare NHS Trust for isolating patients who contract hospital-acquired infections. [42281]

Ms Blears: The management of patients who contract hospital acquired infections at Brighton Health Care NHS Trust is dependent on their medical condition and the location of their care, such as an intensive care unit. Patients would be placed in a degree of isolation taking account of these two factors.

Bed Availability

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the latest level of bed availability in each hospital trust. [42215]

Ms Blears: The latest information on the average daily number of available beds at each national health service trust is on the Department's website www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 12 March 2002

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Russia

10. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance he is providing for the regeneration of Russia. [39573]

Mr. Bradshaw: We provide regenerational support to Russia worth £40 million this year in three ways: as a leading shareholder in the World Bank and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development; as a major contributor to the EU's Technical Assistance programme; and through a substantial bilateral development programme.

War on Terrorism

12. **Joyce Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his EU counterparts on their role in the coalition against international terrorism. [39575]

Mr. Straw: We regularly discuss the progress of the international campaign against terrorism with our partners within the EU.

24. **Mr. Savidge:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the United States Administration about recent developments in the international campaign against terrorism. [39587]

Mr. Bradshaw: We regularly and frequently discuss the campaign against terrorism with the United States Administration. For example, the Foreign Secretary met Colin Powell on 31 January and discussed this dossier.

Guantanamo Bay

13. **Geraint Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation of *(a)* Mr. Feroz Abbasi from Croydon and *(b)* other UK citizens being held at Guantanamo Bay. [39576]

Mr. Bradshaw: A team of British officials paid a second visit to Guantanamo Bay between 26 February and 1 March. All five British detainees, including Feroz Abbasi appeared to be in reasonable health. Mr. Abbasi's solicitors have made an application for judicial review in relation to his detention and access to legal representation. As this is currently before the UK courts, It would not be right for us to comment on this further.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the detaining power at Camp X Ray has indicated to him *(a)* the status of British nationals held there and *(b)* whether they will face the tribunals the detaining power has proposed; and what representations he has made to the detaining power over this issue. [40617]

Mr. Bradshaw: The status of the British detainees and the legal procedure to which they might be subject is complex. The British Government have asked the US authorities to clarify these matters and will continue to do so. In response to our approaches, the US Government have given us the assurance that they would treat the detainees humanely and consistently with the principles of the Geneva convention.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether UK intelligence and security officials have had access to *(a)* British nationals detained at Camp X Ray and *(b)* evidence gathered from them by the detaining power. [40569]

Mr. Bradshaw: I refer my hon. Friend to my statement in the House on 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 623–24W and to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (Mr. Robertson) on 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 69–70W. Access to evidence gathered by the detaining power is a matter for that detaining power, in this case the US.

St. Helena

14. **Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to visit the Island of St. Helena for the celebrations to mark the 500th anniversary of the island's discovery. [39577]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Secretary of State has no plans to visit St. Helena during its quincentennial year.

The House will be pleased to note that the Overseas Territories Bill, which received Royal Assent on 26 February, will enable St. Helenians to become British Citizens by the time they celebrate their Quincentenary.

EU Overseas Aid

15. **Mr. Baron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his EU counterparts regarding the EU overseas aid package. [39578]

Peter Hain: At the General Affairs Council on 18 February 2002.

British Overseas Territories

16. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is on the right for self-determination for British overseas territories. [39579]

Peter Hain: Our relationship with the Overseas Territories is one of partnership, founded on the principle of self-determination.

Pakistan

17. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Pakistan Government on the impact on Pakistan of the conflict in Afghanistan. [39580]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met President Musharraf on 23 November in Islamabad. He also met Foreign Minister Sattar there and again in Istanbul on 12 February. He discussed Afghanistan and the situation in Pakistan. He expressed our continuing appreciation for President Musharraf's courageous stand against terrorism and underlined our long-term commitment to Pakistan.

Sudan

18. **Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next intends to visit Sudan to discuss the implications of the civil conflict. [39581]

Mr. MacShane: I have no plans to visit Sudan in the near future. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development visited Sudan in January. The UK Special Representative for Sudan, Alan Goulty, will represent me during a trip to Sudan later this month.

Middle East

19. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the relationship between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. [39582]

34. **Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has held with Chairman Arafat and Prime Minister Sharon on the peace process in the last two months. [39599]

Mr. Bradshaw: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary earlier in the House today to the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker).

20. **Mr. Luke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with peace groups in Israel on the peace process. [39583]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary had the first meeting between the new peace coalition and a visiting Foreign Minister when he was in Jerusalem on 14 February. I met peace camps when I was in the region in February. We support efforts to bring people on both sides together in the search for peace.

Kashmir

21. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with representatives of the Governments of India and Pakistan about the future of Kashmir. [39584]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary remains in close contact with his Indian and Pakistani counterparts and discusses a range of issues, including Kashmir, with them. He most recently met the Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh during his visit to Delhi on 27 February. He met the Pakistani Foreign Minister, Abdul Sattar, in Istanbul during the OIC (Organisation of Islamic Conference) Conference on 12 February and during his visit to Islamabad on 23 November 2001. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister also discussed Kashmir during his visit to the region in January 2002.

27. **Mr. Michael Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with India and Pakistan on the subject of Kashmir. [39590]

Mr. Bradshaw: We remain deeply concerned at the continuing tensions between India and Pakistan. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary remains in close contact with his Indian and Pakistani counterparts and discusses a full range of issues, including Kashmir. We will continue to urge both countries to resolve all outstanding issues, including Kashmir through dialogue. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made this clear during his visit to the region in January.

Zimbabwe

22. **Mr. Boris Johnson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Britain's relations with Zimbabwe. [39585]

Mr. MacShane: It is no secret that Britain's relations with Zimbabwe are at their lowest ebb since independence.

25. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his counterpart in the Southern African Development Community to help maintain democracy and secure economic recovery in Zimbabwe. [39588]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary was unable to attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Coolum on 2–5 March. But my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my noble Friend Baroness Amos discussed the situation in Zimbabwe at length with Southern African Heads of State.

Colombia

23. **Paul Goggins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he is taking to support the peace process in Colombia. [39586]

Mr. MacShane: The UK strongly support the Colombian peace process, as I made clear in a press release on 23 January. We are particularly active in the EU. We have invited the Colombian presidential candidates to the UK to exchange views on the situation in Colombia, including prospects for the peace process.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will use the forthcoming session of the UN Commission on Human Rights to promote human rights in Colombia, with special reference to *(a)* the safety of human rights defenders and *(b)* groups at particular risk; [41619]

(2) if he will take steps to ensure that this year's UN Commission on Human Rights adopts a resolution calling for the Colombian Government to implement fully the recommendations made by the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights in Bogota. [41620]

Mr. MacShane: We are currently discussing preparations for the forthcoming session of the UN Commission on Human Rights with EU partners. We will be contributing fully to a range of EU initiatives, including a chairman's statement on the situation in Colombia. Our concerns about human rights violations in Colombia, and especially the threats to vulnerable communities, trade unionists and human rights defenders, will be reflected in this statement.

World Cup

26. **Colin Burgon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions she has had with the Japanese Government in connection with preparations for the world cup. [39589]

Mr. Bradshaw: When he visited Japan from 25–29 January, my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs held a number of meetings on the World Cup. He assured the Japanese Government that we will continue to co-operate closely with them to ensure that preparations are in place for a successful tournament. Our posts in Japan have been in close contact with the Japanese world cup organising committee, stadium authorities, police and security authorities, to provide advice and assistance. They have also facilitated contacts between the Home Office, police and other relevant agencies and their Japanese counterparts.

Central America

28. **Phil Sawford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he is taking to support the work of organisations helping street children in central America. [39591]

Mr. MacShane: We regularly raise our serious concerns on child rights issues with all the Governments of Central America, where our Missions monitor the situation closely. We work closely with Casa Alianza, a non-governmental organisation, and support its efforts to protect street children in Central America.

Nepal

29. **Mr. Purchase:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the situation in Nepal since the recent rebel attack in the Accham district; and if he will make a statement. [39592]

Mr. Bradshaw: We were appalled by the barbaric attacks on the Nepalese Army and Police by the Maoists in Achham on 16 February. I discussed the attacks with the King of Nepal, the Nepalese Prime Minister and the Nepalese Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs when I visited Kathmandu on 19–20 February. The situation in Nepal is extremely serious, and the UK is supportive of the efforts of the democratically elected Government of Nepal to bring security to its people. Without security, the Nepalese people will not be able to achieve the development and prosperity that they need and deserve.

EU Accession

30. **Dr. Naysmith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions are taking place between his Department and the countries applying for entry to the EU; and if he will make a statement. [39593]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary earlier in the House today to the hon. Member for Lewes. (Norman Baker).

Afghanistan

31. **Joan Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made on the implementation of the Bonn agreement with respect to women's human rights. [39596]

Mr. Bradshaw: Since the signing of the Bonn Agreement on 5 December, progress has been made in restoring rights to women in Afghanistan. We have encouraged the involvement of women in the Afghan Interim Administration and the Special Commission for the Convening of the Loya Jirga, established under the Bonn Agreement. We welcome the appointment of two women to the Cabinet of the Interim Administration, including Dr. Sima Samar as Vice Chair and Minister for Women, and three women to the Loya Jirga Commission.

Women have begun to return to work and girls are going back to school. We welcome the commitment made at the Tokyo Donor's Conference by Hamid Karzai, Chair of the Interim Administration, to ensure that the needs of women are a high priority in the reconstruction process. Life for women in Afghanistan has always been difficult. Afghanistan has more than a million war widows. NGO and UN run projects to get women back to work will have a huge impact on the lives of many Afghan women and children.

But more needs to be done. We have long said that we would expect any Afghan Government to recognise international human rights norms, including women's rights. We believe that adherence to international human rights norms, including the UN Charter and CEDAW (the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which the then Afghanistan government signed on 14 August 1980, but did not ratify) are key to restoring the rights of women.

Iraq

32. **Ann Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the human rights situation in Iraq. [39597]

Mr. Bradshaw: Iraq's human rights record is appalling. We remain committed to doing what we can to bring about improvements in the human rights situation in Iraq and take every opportunity to raise this issue in international fora.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 5 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 731, on Iraq, if he will specify to which diplomatic ploys by Saddam Hussein he was referring. [39724]

Mr. Bradshaw: Recent moves by the Iraqi regime include:

Demarching the EU to establish high-level EU-Iraq relations. We have made clear that this would not be appropriate while Iraq remains in breach of its international obligations.

Resuming dialogue with the UN. While we commend the UN Secretary-General's efforts to persuade Iraq to comply with relevant Security Council resolutions, including by allowing in the UN weapons inspectors, we note that the Iraqi regime has so far made no concrete commitment to do so.

Announcing, via the Iraqi media, that a British team is welcome to visit Iraq to prove that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction. Although we have received no such offer, we have made clear that we regard this as a propaganda stunt. Iraq is obliged to grant full, unconditional access to UN weapons inspectors.

We regard these moves as diplomatic ploys because we have yet to see any sign that the Iraqi regime is genuinely intending to co-operate with the UN. It will take actions, not words, to persuade us otherwise.

38. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his US counterpart concerning American policy towards Iraq. [39603]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary regularly discusses a wide range of issues with his US counterpart including policy towards Iraq. He last visited the US for policy discussions on 31 January.

India

33. **Mr. Gareth R. Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he has taken to advance proposals in the Delhi declaration, and in particular the recommendation that India take up a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. [39598]

Mr. Bradshaw: In the last two months I have visited India once and met twice with India's External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh. We have discussed a number of areas of partnership including terrorism, peacekeeping, defence relations, and Afghanistan and other regional issues. The two Prime Ministers' Personal Envoys, David Manning and Brajesh Mishra, also met on 4 February.

I discussed Security Council reform with Jaswant Singh on 27 February. We looked forward to progress on this issue at the United Nations.

Ms Dari Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the India-UK Round Table's contribution to furthering the partnership in education and science and technology. [39594]

Mr. Bradshaw: The India-UK Round Table has produced wide-ranging and constructive recommendations which complement the British and Indian Governments' efforts to develop a strong partnership. HMG, with the British Council, have taken many of the Round Table's recommendations into account, including those aimed at attracting more Indian students to the UK, and developing closer links between Indian and UK universities and research institutions in areas such as information technology. The Round Table meets again in April 2002.

Drug Trade

35. **Lawrie Quinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made in the international fight against the drug trade. [39600]

Mr. MacShane: The international fight against the illicit drugs trade requires political commitment, and practical co-operation. We work bilaterally and multilaterally through the EU and the UN International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) in our efforts to combat the illegal drugs trade.

The FCO's Drugs and Crime Fund (£7.3 million in 2001–02, rising to £10 million in 2002–03), supports a broad range of project work overseas, including counter-drugs work and capacity-building for law enforcement in all of the key countries concerned in the supply of heroin and cocaine to the UK and Europe. FCO-funded training for overseas law enforcement agencies and UK operational co-operation with them has led to some notable drug seizures, removing some of the heroin and cocaine consignments destined for the UK and Europe. We have just strengthened our financial commitment to the work of UNDCP with a further contribution of £2.34 million for counter-narcotics and capacity-building project work in Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, South-eastern Europe, Bolivia, Colombia, Peru and Ecuador.

Gibraltar

36. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the Chief Minister of Gibraltar to discuss the future status of Gibraltar. [39601]

Peter Hain: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I met the Chief Minister of Gibraltar most recently on 25 January. We are in regular contact with the Chief Minister in writing and through the Governor of Gibraltar.

Mr. Francois: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place a draft copy of the Anglo-Spanish Comprehensive Agreement over the future of Gibraltar before the House. [42692]

Peter Hain: We have kept the House fully informed at every stage of the Brussels Process, including in the Government Adjournment debate on 31 January, and we will continue to do so. Copies of the communiqués from the three Brussels Process Ministerials that have taken place since July 2001, have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Iran

37. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on UK relations with Iran. [39602]

Mr. Bradshaw: The UK, through critical engagement, aims to support reform in Iran while maintaining a robust dialogue on issues of concern. These include Iranian support to terrorist groups in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Iran's reported development of weapons of mass destruction and aspects of its human rights record.

We hope to continue to engage Iran on a wide range of issues of common interest, including bilateral co-operation in the fight against drugs and international support for the Interim Administration and reconstruction in Afghanistan. However, Iran's rejection of David Reddaway as our ambassador has had an impact on the conduct of our bilateral relations.

Indonesia

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the progress the Indonesian Government have made towards reform of the security sector in Indonesia, with specific reference to the *(a)* accountability of the armed forces to the civilian authorities, *(b)* territorial structure of the armed forces, *(c)* accountability of security forces personnel for human rights violations and *(d)* business interests and non-budgetary funding of the armed forces. [40680]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Indonesian Government have made progress in the reform of the security sector since the democratic elections of 1999.

Civilian oversight of the armed forces has been put in place by the nomination of a civilian Defence Minister and the agreement to end military representation in the DPR (Parliament), by 2004 and the MPR, (Parliament, regional representatives and professional leaders) by 2009.

With the exception of the recent establishment of KODAM (the regional military command) in Aceh, there has been no significant changes in the structure of the military.

Accountability of the security forces for committing human rights abuses has increased by the establishment of ad hoc human rights courts.

The KPN (Supreme Audit Authority) are now starting to audit charitable foundations controlled by military.

There is now active debate in the Indonesian media and civil society about the need for security sector reform. We remain engaged through our Global Conflict Prevention Pool Security Sector Reform programme.

We also continue to apply pressure on the Government of Indonesia bilaterally and with our European partners, particularly on the issue of human rights.

Job Sharing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the extent of job sharing in his Department. [41039]

Mr. Bradshaw: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) on 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 687W.

Gender Pay Gap

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the extent of the gender pay gap among staff in his Department. [40995]

Mr. Bradshaw: In response to the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) Task Force "Just Pay" report, the Government have committed Departments and agencies to review their pay systems by April 2003 and prepare action plans to close all equal pay gaps. The Cabinet Office issued comprehensive guidance in January 2002 to assist Departments and agencies in carrying out these reviews.

Shafiq Rasul

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his most recent assessment is of the health of Shafiq Rasul, at Camp X-Ray; and if he will make a statement. [40826]

Mr. Bradshaw: A team of British officials visited Guantanamo Bay between 26 February and 1 March. They met the British detainees separately, including Shafiq Rasul. All the detainees appeared to be in satisfactory physical health. Releasing further information about the condition of individual detainees would not be appropriate without their permission.

Madagascar

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent coup in Madagascar; what discussions he has had with *(a)* Government and *(b)* opposition on the prospect of another presidential poll in Madagascar; and what representations he has made to other Governments in the area on the situation in Madagascar. [41126]

Mr. MacShane: The UK, along with EU partners, the US, the Organisation of African Unity and the UN, continues to encourage the two parties, at both local and international level, to find a common solution to the impasse. Resident Ambassadors in Antananarivo, including the UK's, have been following developments closely, and maintain contact with representatives of both sides.

Medical Insurance

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received on the availability of insurance cover for medical treatment overseas for injuries received from terrorist activities. [41190]

Mr. Bradshaw: None.

Gujarat

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with representatives of the Indian Government about the violence in Gujarat. [40969]

Mr. Bradshaw: Our High Commission in Delhi has been in contact with the Indian Home Affairs Ministry to seek their support in ensuring the protection and safety of British nationals. Our consular staff in Mumbai are in constant touch with the police and the local authorities. Following a meeting with representatives of Muslim organisations on 5 March, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary stated that he was "greatly concerned and saddened at the deaths in both communities in

Gujarat, and hoped that calm would be restored as quickly as possible". He also said that he "appreciated the efforts of the Government of India to this end".

Union Duties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he intends to answer the question of 13 February from the hon. Member for Buckingham regarding staff involvement in union duties. [41579]

Mr. Bradshaw: The hon. Member received an answer to his question on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 202W.

European Commission

Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether it is intended that votes taken at the proceedings of the European Commission should be recorded. [41646]

Peter Hain: We are not aware of any proposal to record the votes of the College of Commissioners. The treaty establishing the European Community states that the rules governing the internal procedure of the Commission are a matter for the Commission.

Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library a verbatim report of the proceedings of the European Commission. [41645]

Peter Hain: The Commission does not publish verbatim reports of their meetings. But since 1 January 2002, the Commission publishes summary records of the meetings of the College on its website. These can be accessed at www.europa.eu.int/comm/secretariat—general/meeting/archives—en.htm for a period of three months following the date of the proceedings.

Investment Dispute

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he intends to take to inform British *(a)* missions and *(b)* international investors of the consequences of the World Bank's Ad Hoc Committee's decision to uphold the International Centre for the Settlement of Investment Disputes judgment in the case of WENA Hotels against the Government of Egypt. [39723]

Mr. Bradshaw: International Centre for the Settlement of Investment Disputes publishes awards rendered in its proceedings on its website (http://www.worldbank.org/icsid/) and in its journal, provided it has the consent of both parties. Either party may also decide to publish awards on its own initiative.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 21 January from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Houria Meziani. [42796]

Mr. Bradshaw: I regret that, due to an administrative error, my right hon. Friend has not yet received a reply to his letter of 21 January.

The matter is being checked urgently and a reply will be sent in the next few days.

General Affairs Council

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether a Scottish Executive Minister will be a member of the UK delegation to the forthcoming General Affairs European Union Council of Ministers meeting on 11–12 March; and what information is being provided by his Department to guarantee effective pre-council scrutiny by the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament. [42686]

Peter Hain: I attended the General Affairs Council on 11–12 March, representing all parts of the UK.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 27 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 66W, which appeared on 4 March 2002.

DEFENCE

Afghanistan

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what role British forces are playing in the destruction of the Afghan opium poppy crop; [40387]

(2) what instructions have been given to British forces in Afghanistan in respect of preventing the export of heroin to the United Kingdom; [40388]

(3) what role British forces are playing in the tracking down and destruction of heroin stockpiles in Afghanistan; [40386]

(4) how many tonnes of heroin stockpiled in Afghanistan have been destroyed by *(a)* British forces and *(b)* the Afghan Government. [40391]

Mr. Ingram: The International Security Assistance Force's role in Afghanistan is to assist the Afghan Interim Authority in providing security and stability in Kabul. Some opiate stockpiles may have been destroyed during coalition military attacks on terrorist targets. I understand that the Afghan Interim Authority is planning to destroy the opium crop this month.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with the Afghan Government about the role of British forces in Afghanistan. [39595]

Mr. Hoon: I met the Afghan Defence Minister in London on 31 January 2002. I also met members of the Afghan Interim Administration (AIA) in Kabul on 5 February 2002, notably the Chairman of the AIA and the Interior and Defence Ministers. We discussed a variety of issues, including the role of British forces in Afghanistan.

Air Conditioning

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which consultant was used to advise on the installation of air conditioning during the recent refurbishment of *(a)* his Department's main building and *(b)* RAF High Wycombe. [41171]

Dr. Moonie: Main building will be comfort cooled using a chilled beam system. This system incorporates heat recovery on both air and water systems. The Ministry of Defence's advisers were Roger Preston and Partners.

TPS Consult advised the Ministry of Defence on the chiller replacement project in the Strike Command Operations Centre at RAF High Wycombe.

A400M

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what factors will be considered in the decision about which company will supply the A400M engine for the European project; and if he will make a statement. [41602]

Dr. Moonie: The prime contract with the Airbus Military Company is for the development and production of the A400M, including its engines. The contract specifies overall performance guarantees that the company must achieve. It is for the prime contractor, therefore, to define the selection criteria against which to judge potential engines and engine manufacturers; but among these would undoubtedly be performance and cost.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Government Costs

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the cost of governing Northern Ireland *(a)* under devolution excluding the cost of reserved matters and *(b)* under direct rule. [36707]

Dr. John Reid: *(a)* The cost of governing Northern Ireland after devolution is a matter for the Assembly—however, the Department of Finance and Personnel provided the following NI Block totals.

(b) The table shows the cost of governing NI in the year before devolution began (1998–99), and the years in which devolution/suspension took place (1999–2000 and 2000–01).

£ million

Year	*NIO WW*	*NI Block DEL*	*AME*
1998–99	975 16	4,687	3,534
1999–2000[1]	11,026 37	4,914	3,631
2000–01[1]	1,138 39	5,249	4,[illegible]5

[1] Devolution began in December 1999 and was suspended between February and May 2000, with the result that in:
1999—2000 £4,221K for NI Assembly was included in the NIO totals.
2000—01 £1,733K for NI Assembly was included in the NIO totals

Ministerial Private Offices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the running costs were of *(a)* his Ministers' private offices, separately identifying expenditure on staff, and *(b)* his Department in each year from May 1997 to the nearest date for which the information is available. [40983]

Dr. John Reid: For the 1997–98 financial year, no breakdown is available from May, therefore the total is for the whole year. For the 2001–02 financial year—the total spend is not yet available, therefore the figure is an estimate based on spend to date.

Details of the Department's (including it's agencies, but excluding NDPBs as we do not have access to a breakdown of their expenditure) total expenditure on:

£

(a)	*Ministers*	*Staff*
1997–98	3,218,755	[1]—
1998–99	2,109,653	1,317,114
1999–2000	1,810,886	1,319,753
2000–01	1,897,659	1,209,805
2001–02	1,163,750[2]	[2]1,186,332

[1] Total—including staff
[2] Est

(b) The Northern Ireland Office

Year	*£*
1997–98	1,012,450,000
1998–99	985,989,705
1999–2000	1,044,332,169
2000–01	1,199,617,636
2001–02	[1],120,667,473

[1] Est

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the annual budget for communications activities, including press, public relations, marketing and internal communications, was for his Department for each financial year from 1997–98 to 2001–02. [39913]

Dr. John Reid: Details of the Department's (including its agencies, but excluding NDPB's as we do not have access to a breakdown of their expenditure) total expenditure on:

Press/public relations/marketing

	£
1997–98	1,077,706
1998–99	2,466,691
1999–2000	695,017
2000–01	591,075
2001–02	[1]1,201,623

[1] To date. Estimated total is £1,441,173.

It is not possible to identify separate costs for internal communications (i.e. staff magazines or press cuttings).

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Industrial Action

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General how many days have been lost owing to industrial action by staff in her Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years. [36195]

The Solicitor-General: In my own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, no days have been lost owing to industrial action by staff in each of the last four years.

In the Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible details are as follows:

Crown Prosecution Service

There has been only one instance of industrial action in the Crown Prosecution Service in the last four years. On that occasion, in January 2000, 2,079 days were lost.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

There have been no instances of industrial action in the Treasury Solicitor's Department since 5 November 1993.

Serious Fraud Office

There have been no instances of industrial action in the Serious Fraud Office in the last four years.

Legal Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what legal costs have been incurred by her Department in each of the last four years. [34345]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* The legal costs incurred by my own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, are included in the Crown Prosecution Service and Treasury Solicitor's Department figures.

Crown Prosecution Service

The legal costs associated with Counsel fees, witness expenses and other prosecution costs incurred by the Crown Prosecution Service in each of the last four years were as follows:

£95.2 million in 1997–98

£98.1 million in 1998–99

£99.4 million in 1999–2000

£107.8 million in 2000–01.

'Other prosecution costs' includes costs awarded against the CPS, which in each of the last four years were as follows:

£0.3 million in 1997–98

£0.9 million in 1998–99

£0.3 million in 1999–2000

£0.3 million in 2000–01.

Expenditure on administration related legal costs, comprising Lawyer Agents and Treasury Solicitor's fees, was as follows:

£3.8 million in 1997–98

£4.3 million in 1998–99

£5.3 million in 1999–2000

£6.3 million in 2000–01.

The cost of employing Counsel and Solicitor advocates in the Crown and Higher Courts increased by 6 per cent. in real terms in 2000–01 compared with the previous year. The increase is a result of greater complexity of cases and length of trails, largely as a result of the introduction of the Human Rights Act 1998.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

The Treasury Solicitor's Department provides legal services to other Government Departments. The legal costs incurred in the last four years were as follows:

£20,063,000 in 1997–98

£20,179,000 in 1998–99

£22,408,000 in 1999–2000

£26,743,000 in 2000–01

£22,340,000 in 2001–02 (to 31 December 2001).

In the course of its work over the last four years, the Treasury Solicitor's Department has also incurred costs instructing barristers and solicitor agents, expert witnesses, inquiry agents and other case expenses. These costs were as follows:

£16,672,000 in 1997–98

£25,945,000 in 1998–99

£25,795,000 in 1999–2000

£31,564,000 in 2000–01

£22,470,000 in 2001–02 (to 31 December 2001).

The vast majority of these costs were recovered through payments from other Government Departments, and were accounted for by them. The Treasury Solicitor's Department incurred the following costs on legal services on its own account for cases undertaken in the general public interest:

£5,307,000 in 1997–98

£3,874,000 in 1998–99

£4,244,000 in 1999–2000

£6,113,000 in 2000–01

£2,139,000 in 2001–02 (to 31 December 2001).

Serious Fraud Office

The Serious Fraud Office makes use of external legal services as part of its normal operational and administrative functions.

The Serious Fraud Office's legal costs fall broadly into three areas:

1. The instruction of counsel in cases;
2. Specific advice from external firms;
3. Other civil litigation work carried out by the Treasury Solicitor's Department.

The legal costs incurred in each of the last four years were as follows:

Instruction of Counsel

£2,563,795 in 1997–98

£2,789,951 in 1998–99

£2,460,647 in 1999–2000

£3,315,211 in 2000–01

£3,568,958 in 2001–02 (to date).

Advice from external firms

£0 in 1997–98

£3,373 in 1998–99

£13,185 in 1999–2000

£43,699 in 2000–01

£19,990 in 2001–02 (to date).

Civil Litigation Work by Treasury Solicitor's Department

£86,229 in 1997–98

£46,447 in 1998–99

£36,036 in 1999–2000

£1,650 in 2000–01

£2,686 in 2001–02 (to date).

Fair Trade Goods

Mr. Weir: To ask the Solicitor-General, pursuant to her answers of 16 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 895W, and 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 745W, on fair trade goods, if she will review during Fair Trade Fortnight the amount of fairly traded goods used in her Department. [35451]

The Solicitor-General: In my own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, there are no plans to review the amount of fairly traded goods used in the Department but it is always ready to use fair trade products when these represent good value.

In the Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible, details are as follows:

Crown Prosecution Service

A review undertaken by the Crown Prosecution Service and its catering provider regarding the use of fair trade products, led to a proposal to promote fair trade confectionery in the staff restaurant facility.

In response to earlier parliamentary questions from the hon. Member, the Crown Prosecution Service reviewed its suppliers' use of fair trade products. This review found that, although the supplier was willing to switch to fair trade products as ingredients in foods, this would mean that the overall cost of meals provided would no longer be competitive with other providers in the area. Therefore it was decided that Fair Trade confectionery items would be sold (on a promotional basis), within the canteen facility.

The Crown Prosecution Service's involvement with fair trade is in relation only to its catering supplier, which manages the canteen in Crown Prosecution Service headquarters at Ludgate Hill. There are no other canteen facilities elsewhere in the Crown Prosecution Service. Therefore, the overall value of the contract is very small.

However, the Crown Prosecution Service encourages ethical purchasing as part of it's purchasing policy.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

The Treasury Solicitor's Department has no plans to review the amount of fairly traded goods used in the Department, but is always ready to use fair trade products when these represent good value.

The Treasury Solicitor's Department encourages ethical purchasing as a part of it's purchasing policy.

Serious Fraud Office

The Serious Fraud Office has no plans to review the amount of fairly traded goods used in the Department.

When purchasing goods the Serious Fraud Office supports the principles of Government procurement, which means ensuring that the Department obtains overall value for money.

The Serious Fraud Office encourages ethical purchasing as a part of it's overall purchasing policy.

Union Duties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General how many staff in her Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies receive paid leave to undertake union duties; how many days they are allocated; and what has been the cost to public funds in each of the last four years. [36219]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* In my own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, no staff receive paid leave to undertake trade union duties.

In the Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible details are as follows:

Crown Prosecution Service

Facility time allocation in the Crown Prosecution Service is in the form of a block allowance to the two recognised trade unions and it is for the unions to allocate the allowance to their accredited representatives. In each of the last four years, the unions have received a block allowance of 2,674 days. The number of staff receiving paid leave to undertake union duties and the cost to public funds in each of the last four years are as follows:

	Number of staff	*Cost* £
1997–98	74	175,984.46
1998–99	92	122,797.73
1999–2000	99	192,346.36
2000–01	129	213,683.55

The cost of facility time as a percentage of the total salary bill for the last four years has been a constant 0.1 per cent. (rounded up).

Treasury Solicitor's Department

Seven members of staff in the Treasury Solicitor's Department receive paid leave to undertake union duties. The total allocation is 40 days per year. The cost to the public funds in each of the last four years was as follows:

£9,943.79 in 1997–98

£11,348.83 in 1998–99

£11,689.57 in 1999–2000

£12,096.37 in 2000–01.

Serious Fraud Office

No staff in the Serious Fraud Office receive paid leave to undertake trade union duties.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will list the statutory instruments issued by her Department in the last 12 months, indicating *(a)* the purpose of each and *(b)* the cost of each to (i) public funds, (ii) businesses and (iii) individuals. [36220]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* The Attorney-General has not made or laid any statutory instruments before Parliament in the last 12 months.

In the Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible details are as follows:

Crown Prosecution Service

No statutory instruments have been issued by the Crown Prosecution Service in the last 12 months.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

No statutory instruments have been issued by the Treasury Solicitor's Department in the last 12 months. Members of the Department have however assisted in the preparation of statutory instruments issued by the Departments they advise.

Serious Fraud Office

No statutory instruments have been issued by the Serious Fraud Office in the last 12 months.

Publications

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will list the publications issued by her Department in each of the last four years; and what the *(a)* circulation, *(b)* cost and *(c)* purpose of each was. [34201]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* The Attorney-General each year lays before Parliament the Law Officers' Departments Departmental Report setting out the Government's Expenditure Plans and Main Estimates for the Departments for the coming years. The costs of production are not borne by the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers and the circulation figures are not known.

In August 2000 the Attorney-General published a Report by His Honour Gerald Butler QC on the future and role of Treasury Counsel at the Central Criminal Court and published a Government Response to that report in November 2000. Both reports were copied and bound within LSLO. The cost was met within the budgets held for photocopying and stationery and is not separately available. About 100 copies of each were produced.

Crown Prosecution Service

The publications issued by the Crown Prosecution Service in each of the last four years were as follows:

1997–98

Departmental Report (Crown Prosecution Service entry in Law Officers' Spring Departmental Report)

Circulation: 250

Cost: £6,838

DPP's Annual Report to the Attorney-General

Circulation: 4,500

Cost: £17,480

1998–99

Departmental Report (Crown Prosecution Service entry in Law Officers' Spring Departmental Report)

Circulation: 250

Cost: £5,900

DPP's Annual Report to the Attorney-General

Circulation: 4,500

Cost: £22,695

1999–2000

Departmental Report (Crown Prosecution Service entry in Law Officers' Spring Departmental Report)

Circulation: 250

Cost: £6,851

DPP's Annual Report to the Attorney-General

Circulation: 4,500

Cost: £17,574

Business Plan 1999–2000

Circulation: 1,500

Cost: £8,300

2000–01

Departmental Report (Crown Prosecution Service entry in Law Officers' Spring Departmental Report)

Circulation: 250

Cost: £7,024

DPP's Annual Report to the Attorney-General

Circulation: 4,500

Cost: £26,208

Business Plan 2000–01

Circulation: 2,500

Cost: £9,251.

For the purposes of this answer, publications have been taken to mean those significant documents that are issued by the service as a whole to serve both an internal and external audience.

Publication of the "Departmental Report" is mandatory. It is one of the key mechanisms through which Departments demonstrate their accountability to Parliament and the public. The CPS distributes copies to senior management within headquarters, libraries, business managers and to the Chief Crown Prosecutors in the 42 areas across England and Wales. Copies are also sent to the Attorney-General and Solicitor-General and to the Parliamentary Clerk for laying in both Houses, for the benefit of Members.

The purpose of the "Business Plan" is to set out clearly the vision, aim and objectives, and priorities of the CPS, what it wants to achieve with the resources it has been given and the actions it needs to take in order to deliver the plan. They are the blueprint for all other plans in the CPS so that staff know how their day to day tasks fit in with the bigger picture. And, to inform counterparts in other criminal justice departments and their agencies and service, and those with an interest in criminal justice about the direction and priorities of the CPS.

The Crown Prosecution Service's one year "Business Plan"; and the "Director of Public Prosecutions' Annual Report to the Attorney-General" are circulated to all middle and senior managers in the CPS with a summary going to all staff; they are circulated to criminal justice departments and their agencies/services both nationally and locally; to some members of the judiciary; and to those with an interest in criminal justice.

The Director of Public prosecutions is required by statute to produce an "annual report to the Attorney-General" on the performance of the CPS. The report is laid before Parliament.

Because of uncertainties associated with the election of 1997 and the Gildewell Review of the CPS, which did not report until June 1998, no Business Plans were published for 1997–98 and 1998–99.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

The publications issued by the Treasury Solicitor's Department in each of the last four years were as follows:

1998

Departmental Report (Treasury Solicitor's Department entry in Law Officer's Spring Departmental Report)

Circulation: Parliament, Law Officers, Treasury Solicitor's Department management and the general public.

Cost: £500

Purpose: To present the Department's spending plans to Parliament and the public.

Treasury Solicitor's Department Annual Report 1996–97

Circulation: Parliament, Law Officers, Treasury Solicitor's Department management and staff.

Cost: £12,000

Purpose: Executive Agency requirement.

Government Legal Service Journal (two editions)

Circulation: All Government Legal Service lawyers.

Cost: £3,000

Purpose: To strengthen the corporate identity of and communication within the Government Legal Service.

Government Legal Service Recruitment Brochure

Circulation: Universities and other educational establishments; inquirers and potential applicants.

Cost: £18,500

Purpose: To raise the profile of and attract recruits to the Government Legal Service.

1999

Departmental Report (Treasury Solicitor's Departmental entry in Law Officer's Spring Departmental Report)

Circulation: Universities and other educational establishments; inquirers and potential applicants.

Cost: £18,500

Purpose: To raise the profile of and attract recruits to the Government Legal Service.

Government Legal Service Journal (two editions)

Circulation: Universities and other educational establishments; inquirers and potential applicants.

Cost: £3,500

Purpose: To raise the profile of and attract recruits to the Government Legal Service.

2000

Departmental Report (Treasury Solicitor's Department entry in Law Officer's Spring Departmental Report)

Circulation: Universities and other educational establishments; inquirers and potential applicants.

Cost: £3,500

Purpose: To raise the profile of and attract recruits to the Government Legal Service.

Government Property Lawyers' Annual Report and Accounts 1997–98 and 1998–99

Circulation: Parliament, Law Officers, Treasury Solicitor's Department management and staff.

Cost: £7,000

Purpose: Executive Agency requirement

Treasury Solicitor's Department Annual Report 1999–2000

Circulation: Parliament, Law Officers, Treasury Solicitor's Department management and staff.

Cost: £10,000

Purpose: Executive Agency requirement

Government Legal Service Journal

Circulation: Parliament, Law Officers, Treasury Solicitor's Department management and staff

Cost: £2,500

Purpose: Executive Agency requirement

Government Legal Service Recruitment Brochure

Circulation: Parliament, Law Officers, Treasury Solicitor's Department management and staff

Cost: £8,000

Purpose: Executive Agency requirement

2001

Departmental Report (Treasury Solicitor's Department entry in Law Officer's Spring Departmental Report)

Circulation: Parliament, Law Officers, Treasury Solicitor's Department management and staff

Cost: £8,000

Purpose: Executive Agency requirement

Treasury Solicitor's Department's Resource Account 1999–2000

Circulation: Parliament, Law Officers, Treasury Solicitor's Department management

Cost: £1,000

Purpose: Departmental requirement

Treasury Solicitor's Department's Annual Reports for 2000–01

Circulation: Parliament, Law Officers, Treasury Solicitor's Department management

Cost: £7,500

Purpose: Departmental requirement

Government Legal Service Journal (four editions)

Circulation: Parliament, Law Officers, Treasury Solicitor's Department management

Cost: £12,000

Purpose: Departmental requirement

Government Legal Service Annual Report for 1999–2000

Circulation: Law Officers, senior Government Legal Service management and all Government Legal Service lawyers

Cost: £21,000

Purpose: To report on key Government Legal Service issues such as recruitment, retention, mobility and diversity.

2002

Government Legal Service Recruitment Brochure

Circulation: Law Offices, senior Government Legal Service management and all Government Legal Service lawyers

Cost: £10,000

Purpose: To report on key Government Legal Service issues such as recruitment retention, mobility and diversity.

This list includes only professionally produced publications for external use. Publications produced in-house have not been included.

Serious Fraud Office

The Serious Fraud Office has three major publications which are the Annual Report, the Departmental Report and the Resource Accounts. The total cost of publications over the last four years is as follows:

£54,448.63 in 1997–98

£28,219.34 in 1998–99

£22,440.36 in 1999–2000

£49,498.62 in 2000–01

£64,072.64 in 2001–02.

Owing to the nature of the Serious Fraud Office's records relating to its publications, individual costs and circulation figures could not be made available without incurring disproportionate cost.

Departmental Publicity

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what assessment she has made of the total real terms expenditure of her Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies on publicity in each of the years *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01 and *(e)* 2001–02 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole of the present year; and if she will break these figures down to indicate expenditure on (A) advertising and (B) press and public relations. [36156]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* My own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, keeps no separate figures for expenditure on publicity but the sums involved are minimal.

Crown Prosecution Service

The total real terms expenditure by the Crown Prosecution Service on publicity broken down by *(A)* advertising and *(B)* press and public relations for each of the years *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01, and *(e)* 2001–02 *(i)* to date and *(ii)* as estimated for the whole of the present year is as follows:

	£
1997–98	
Advertising	83,000
Press and public relations	59,000
Total	142,000
1998–99	
Advertising	101,000
Press and public relations	108,000
Total	209,000
1999–2000	
Advertising	105,000
Press and public relations	179,000
Total	284,000
2000–01	
Advertising	195,000
Press and public relations	109,000
Total	304,000
2001–02 (to date)	
Advertising	566,000
Press and public relations	140,000
Total	706,000
2001–02 (estimated for whole year)	
Advertising	688,000
Press and public relations	168,000
Total	856,000

Responsibility for advertising expenditure rests with local managers in CPS areas and functional managers in CPS headquarters.

Responsibility for expenditure on press and public relations rests with the Head of Communications Division with budget approval by the CPS board. Expenditure is primarily associated with promotional material for distribution at recruitment fairs and conferences and to raise the profile in local communities.

Advertising expenditure is restricted to recruitment of new staff. The marked increase in expenditure in the current year is a result of additional investment in the CPS from SR2000 and a nationwide recruitment drive to achieve the target in 'The Way Ahead', of employing 300 extra lawyers by 2004.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

The expenditure on advertising and publicity by the Treasury Solicitor's Department in the last four years is as follows:

	£
1997–98	
Advertising	40,196
Press and public relations	33,376
Total	73,572
1998–99	
Advertising	20,177
Press and public relations	44,364
Total	64,541
1999–2000	
Advertising	12,021
Press and public relations	6,401
Total	18,422
2000–01	
Advertising	68,647
Press and public relations	19,611
Total	88,258
2001–02 (to date)	
Advertising	72,310
Press and public relations	20,250
Total	92,560

Expenditure on advertising by the Treasury Solicitor's Department is directly related to the recruitment of lawyers to the Government Legal Service (GLS) and administrative staff.

Publicity costs cover GLS representation at careers fairs, printing and publication of the GLS Journal and printing and publication of annual reports and departmental reports.

In addition the Bona Vacantia division of the Treasury Solicitor's Department regularly places advertisements in the press seeking kin in cases where individuals have died intestate with no apparent claimants to the estate under administration. Over the period in question the real terms expenditure has been as follows:

	£
1997–98	173,576
1998–99	149,273
1999–2000	189,868
2000–01	189,805
2001–02[1]	192,800

[1] To date

Serious Fraud Office

The Serious Fraud Office is a small department with no agencies or non-departmental bodies. It has a press office capability which is small in relation to its high public profile, achieving good value at a reasonable cost. The Serious Fraud Office does not run advertising campaigns.

Expenditure on publicity by the Serious Fraud Office in each of the last four years was as follows:

	Actual £	*Real terms*[1] £	*Growth (per cent.)*
1997–98	171,565	171,565	0
1998–99	144,637	140,704	–17.99
1999–2000	128,900	122,440	–28.63
2000–01	172,184	160,718	–6.32
2001–02[2]	177,918	162,020	–5.56
2001–02[3]	200,000	182,129	6.16

[1] GDP deflator.

[2] To date.

[3] Estimated for whole year.

The above figures represent direct costs including staff salaries and publications relating to press and public relations for the Serious Fraud Office.

Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what the cost of refurbishing each Ministerial private office was in each year since May 1997. [37822]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* The Ministerial Private Office at the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers is decorated and refurbished as part of a rolling programme of redecoration and refurbishment of the entire premises in accordance with the terms of the building's lease. No separate figures for the costs involved in refurbishing and redecorating the Private Office are available.

Empty Paper

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what the total area in square feet of all empty properties owned by *(a)* her Department, *(b)* her agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which she has had responsibility was in each year since May 1997. [37808]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* My own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, does not own or lease any empty properties and has not owned or leased any empty properties in each of the last four years.

In the Department for which the Attorney-General is responsible, details are as follows:

Crown Prosecution Service

The total area in square feet of all empty property owned by the Crown Prosecution Service in each year since May 1997 is as follows:

24,720 square feet in 1997–98

24,720 square in 1998–99

51,809.4 square feet in 1999–2000

19,851.1 square feet in 2000–01

19,288.[illegible] square feet in 2001–02.

The Crown Prosecution Service currently has direct financial and managerial responsibility for offices in 108 locations. This comprises four freehold sites, 25 buildings were the leasehold interest relates to the whole property and a further 63 buildings where the leasehold interest only relates to part of the premises.

In May 1997, the Crown Prosecution Service had contactual commitments on six empty office buildings with a total floor area of 24,720 sq ft.

This increased to nine buildings by may 199, and an additional 27,089 sq ft.

This reduced by May 2000 to a total of 19,851 sq ft in six premises.

By May 2001 there were six empty office buildings which the Crown Prosecution Service had as leasehold interests, with a total floor area of 19,288 sq ft.

Expressed as a percentage against the total floor area under Crown Prosecution Service stewardship, the amount of vacant office space decreased between May 1997 and December 2001 from 4.6 per cent. during financial year 1997–98 to 2.2 per cent. for financial year 2001–02.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

The Treasury Solicitor's Department has not empty properties. The Treasury Solicitor's Department headquarters building (Queen Anne's Chambers, SW1) is fully occupied, but some small shop units in the frontage, let to commercial concerns, have been vacant from time to time as follows:

291 square feet in 2000–01

478 square feet in 2001–02 (to date).

In 1999, following closure of the Government Property Lawyers, the building they used was largely vacated. The following square feet of space was vacant space in 1997–98 and subsequent financial years:

zero square feet in 1997–98

zero square feet in 1998–99

15,950.67 square feet in 1999–2000

24,913.33 square feet in 2000–01

10,136.47 square feet in 2001–02 (to date).

Serious Fraud Office

The Serious Fraud office does not currently own or lease any empty property and has not owned or leased any empty property in each of the last four years.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Fuel Poverty

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her estimate is of the extent to which fuel poverty has changed in Great Britain as a result of recent changes in gas charges to domestic consumers. [36782]

Mr. Wilson: The increases in gas prices have largely been offset by decreases in electricity prices and therefore should not adversely affect the numbers in fuel poverty at present.

The Government have recognised in their fuel poverty strategy the importance of fuel prices in tackling fuel poverty and will monitor the situation carefully as part of its overall monitoring of progress towards its fuel poverty targets.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assumptions about *(a)* energy prices, *(b)* improvements in energy efficiency standards and *(c)* household incomes were used to arrive at the reduced incidence of fuel poverty cited in the UK Fuel Poverty Strategy document published in November 2001. [42198]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* The estimates of fuel poverty in England in 1998 were based on income and energy efficiency information collected from a sample survey (the Energy Follow UP Survey to the English House Condition Survey (EFUS)). The estimates for 1999 and 2000 were based on the results from the 1998 EFUS, but taking account of estimated changes in incomes and fuel prices. No account was taken of changes in energy efficiency since 1998. The detailed assumptions underlying these estimates are set out in the "Fuel Poverty in England in 1999 and 2000" document which, as stated in the UK Fuel Poverty Strategy, was published at www.dti.gov.uk/energy/fuelpoverty/index.htm.

Parental Leave Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the *(a)* financial costs and *(b)* benefits to her Department of the parental leave directive. [42491]

Ms Hewitt: The costs of implementation of the parental leave directive to my department have been nil.

The benefits for the department's staff are further opportunities to take leave for the care of their children which gives greater flexibility when balancing their responsibilities at work and at home.

The benefits to the department include enhancing the DTI's reputation as an employer of choice and contributing to the diversity of the work force; benefits which are directly passed on to our customers.

Flexible Working

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many and what proportion of the staff of her Department are *(a)* job sharing, *(b)* term working and *(c)* engaged in another form of flexible working. [42430]

Ms Hewitt: Currently in DTI HQ there are 28 job shares; there are no individuals working school term times only and the staff survey shows that 78 per cent. of staff state that their managers allow working patterns to help them balance work and home life.

Currently our data is limited, as many flexible working patterns are negotiated locally. However, on 2 April of this year the department will be launching a new flexible working policy (including full guidance for managers and staff) to ensure that new ways of working are available to all individuals and that the benefits to stakeholders, customers, managers and staff are fully maximised. We will also be putting in place mechanisms to monitor the increased take-up of flexible working.

Job Advertisements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the job advertisements placed by her Department in the last 12 months specifying where the advertisements were placed and the cost in each case. [39055]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested is in the following table.

Post	*Advertised*	*Cost (£)*[1]
Chief Executive, Insolvency Service	Financial Times	5,770.00
Director, Industrial Development Unit	Sunday Times/Times/Financial Times	17,865.00
Chief Executive, NWML	Sunday Times/Times	7,195.00
Solicitor and DG, Legal Services	Sunday Times/Times	7,320.00
Chief Executive, Companies House	Sunday Times/Times	12,805.00
Regional Director, GO-NE	Sunday Times/Times	11,058.00
Director, Future and Innovation	Sunday Times/Times	11,105.00
Chief Executive, SBS	Sunday Times/Times	9,770.00
Chief Economic Adviser	Sunday Times/Times/Financial Times	19,220.00
Director, UK Foresight Programme	Sunday Times/Times	11,732.50
Environmental Specialist/Senior Manager	New Scientist	6,715.00
	Ends Report	1,450.00
	Aberdeen Press and Journal	3,672.00
	Aberdeen Press and Journal	2,700.00
Library Information Professionals	LA Record	1,222.00
Administrator/Admin. Assistant, Cardiff	Western Mail/South Wales Echo	11,107.80
Technical Advisers	Daily Telegraph	5,964.00
Investigation Officers	Police Review	4,600.00
	Guardian	2,400.00
Finance Managers, London	Accountancy Age	3,000.00
	Financial Times	6,000.00
Administrator/Admin. Assistant, London	Ethnic Media Group	4,028.40
	The Voice	2,080.60
	Ready, Willing and Able	300.00
	Metro	3,314.40
	Evening Standard	5,285.04

Post	*Advertised*	*Cost (£)*[1]
Administrator, Edinburgh	The Scotsman	4,395.40
Security Inspectors, Harwell	Telegraph	8,521.60
Administrator, Edinburgh	The Scotsman	5,402.80
Personal Assistant, Harwell	The Wantage and Grove Herald	874.80
	Newbury Weekly News	786.80
Secretarial Support, London	Disability Now	1,792.56
	Evening Standard and Metro	8,538.16
	Ethnic Media Group	4,142.64
	Ms London and Nine to Five	2,650.80
Administrator, Watford	Watford Observer	900.48
Porter/Messenger, London	Evening Standard	1,892.08
Admin. Assistant, Birmingham	Birmingham Mail	3,427.28

[1] Excluding VAT

Cowboy Builders

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has for the future of the Quality Mark to combat cowboy builders. [43124]

Mr. Wilson: I am pleased to announce that the Quality Mark is going to be rolled out across the country over a three to four year period. The progressive rollout will begin with urban areas in England and Wales and districts that have already demonstrated interest in the scheme.

The Quality Mark was established to combat the problem of cowboy builders by creating a list of approved tradesmen. Homeowners can call the Quality Mark hotline on 0845 300 8040 or log on to www.qualitymark.org.uk to find an independently assessed tradesman in one of 18 trades to work in their home. The scheme was piloted for six months in Birmingham and Somerset. 150 tradesmen have achieved the Quality Mark and 25,000 consumers have phoned or logged on to access the list of approved tradesmen.

The pilot has been evaluated by a review group including industry, consumer and regulatory interests. The group published their report on 28 February and found that:

> Quality Mark meets the broad aims of the Cowboy Builders Working Group report which originally recommended the scheme;
>
> the mechanisms, standards and independent audits work and are set at the right levels; and
>
> the partnership with industry and stakeholders works well.

The review recommended that a shadow ownership group, featuring the main partners, and working with DTI, should be established quickly to drive forward the implementation of Quality Mark. Membership and terms of reference of the group will be outlined shortly. There will also be a launch event in the coming weeks.

Finally I would like to make it clear that reputable tradesmen all over the country can join the Quality Mark scheme immediately through the hotline or website. This is the only scheme that gives reputable tradesmen the opportunity to demonstrate their professionalism and separate themselves from the cowboys. I encourage tradesmen and local authorities to get behind the Quality Mark so that people around the country can benefit from the scheme as homeowners in Birmingham and Somerset have.

Small Businesses

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what support will be made available to small businesses to enable them to comply with the legal requirement to provide disabled access once the extension of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 is implemented in October 2004. [39770]

Nigel Griffiths: The Small Business Service is currently working with the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) to produce a factsheet and audio guide informing small businesses about the requirements of the DDA, including the requirement which will be implemented in October 2004.

The DRC published a revised Code of Practice on rights of access to goods, facilities, services and premises for disabled people on 26 February 2002. This statutory code explains the law and provides practical guidance for service providers on their current duties and those that will come into force in 2004.

As well as the code, the DRC have recently published "A practical guide for small businesses and other small service providers". The guide offers advice on how small businesses and service providers might meet the needs of their disabled customers. A range of leaflets focusing on specific types of business is also available from the DRC. Advice and information on all aspects of the DDA is available via the DRC helpline.

The Government are also working on raising awareness of the DDA among small businesses. In January we launched a large national campaign which featured small businesses in seven adverts on the theme of "How well do you serve your disabled customers?"

Engineering Industry

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if she will make a statement on the references in the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council's digest of engineering statistics, "Engineers for Britain—The State of the Profession Towards 2002", as to *(a)* the general trend in the industry being for reduction and *(b)* the levels of dissatisfaction employers have with the skills of engineering graduates; [39704]

(2) if she will make a statement on the conclusions of the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council in its digest of engineering statistics, "Engineers for Britain—The State of the Profession Towards 2002",

(a) that British engineering industry may suffer from a concealed skills shortage and *(b)* on the role for technological change and education in the process of economic growth; [39528]

(3) if she will respond to the recommendation of the Engineering Council and Physical Sciences Research Council in its digest of engineering statistics, "Engineers for Britain—The State of the Profession Towards 2002", on the availability of information on the contribution to the economy of the engineering profession. [39531]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* The Government are aware of the importance of the contribution that the engineering and technology community makes to the UK economy and that it has the potential to make a greater contribution in the future. That is why we supported the work led by Dr. Robert Hawley, the last Chairman of the Engineering Council, that has led to the establishment of the Engineering and Technology Board (ETB) chaired by Sir Peter Williams. We are also supporting the ETB in the work it has embarked on to make itself more relevant to the concerns of all in the wider engineering and technology community.

It is also why, in the last Budget, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills announced that they had commissioned Sir Gareth Roberts, President of Wolfson College Oxford, to undertake an independent study into the provision of skilled scientists and engineers in the UK. Sir Gareth's report is expected shortly.

Many of the matters raised in the Engineering Council's Digest of Engineering Statistics will be considered by the Government in the context of Sir Gareth's Report and I anticipate that they will inform the future work of the ETB.

Enterprise Grant Scheme

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many bids under the enterprise grant scheme have been made by businesses within the former South Yorkshire coalfield area since 1999; and what the value and the details of the grants awarded are. [41481]

Alan Johnson: The Enterprise Grant Scheme (EGS) has been operational since 1 January 2000. It is available to small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) with fewer than 250 employees to support capital investment projects of up to £0.5 million.

The whole of South Yorkshire is covered by the EGS where grant can be awarded of up to 15 per cent. of eligible capital expenditure up to a maximum of £75,000. Since 1 January 2000, 116 EGS applications have been received from South Yorkshire companies resulting in 86 formal offers of grant with a grant value of £2.1 million against estimated capital costs of £18 million. These projects are expected to create or safeguard 530 jobs. Separate statistics are not available for the former South Yorkshire coalfield areas but approximately half of the offers relate to businesses in these areas. Details of the individual grant offers made to companies are commercially confidential.

Accountancy Contracts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the contracts agreed by her Department with the five largest accountancy firms since May 1997; and what was the total value of contracts with each. [42096]

Ms Hewitt: Contracts agreed with Arthur Andersen were listed in my reply to the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) on 11 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 61W. Their total value was £4,917,000. Detailed information on contracts agreed with the other four largest accountancy firms is not centrally available for the earlier years and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost; but for the calendar years 2000–01, central records indicate the following numbers of contracts and total values:

£

Accountancy firms	*Number*	
Deloitte & Touche	12	6,489,547
Ernst & Young	59	1,708,722
Pricewaterhouse Coopers	33	1,597,403
KPMG	7	133,783

Wind Farms

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry who *(a)* owns and *(b)* runs the wind farms in the UK; and how much has been paid by the Government to develop wind power in each of the last three years. [41328]

Mr. Wilson: Wind farms in the UK are commercial developments, usually owned and run by the project developer. The table below sets out public support for approved wind energy projects given through the Non Fossil Fuel Obligation (NFFO) and the comparable arrangements operating in Scotland and Northern Ireland. This is public expenditure, but paid for by the electricity consumer through the Fossil Fuel Levy.

£ million

	NFFO	*SRO*	*NFFO-NI*
1998–99	35.1	7.2	7.3
1999–2000	7.3	8.1	7.8
2000–01	6.8	7.1	7.3

Support from NFFO is lower after 1998–99 because NFFO 1 and 2 contracts terminated on 31 December 1998.

Spend on research projects into wind energy from my Department's Sustainable Energy Programme has been running at close to £1 million each year, and there may be other relevant research funded by the Research Councils.

Wind farms will also benefit from the proposed Renewables Obligation now before Parliament. Again the cost will be borne by the electricity consumer.

LNM Holdings

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which Government Departments or agencies have conducted an assessment of the background of Mr. Mittal of LNM Holdings in the last 10 years; and if she will make a statement. [38504]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 67W.

I can also confirm that no such assessment was carried out by my own Department or its agencies.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Lost/Stolen Property

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list those items valued at less than £50 each which have been stolen or lost from her Department in each of the last four years. [34206]

Clare Short: There were no reported thefts of official property valued at under £50 during the period 1 January 1998 to 31 December 2001. A small number of items of personal property were reported as having been stolen during this period.

Burkina Faso

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what charities and NGOs her Department funds in Burkina Faso. [34649]

Hilary Benn: DFID is currently supporting the work of five non-governmental organisations in Burkina Faso. Through our Small Grants Scheme we assist the work of the Association Kobinkale. We are also supporting the work of Action on Disability and Development, Anti-Slavery International, PLAN International and ACCORD through the Civil Society Challenge Fund (CSCF) and the Joint Funding Scheme (JFS).

Commonwealth Development Corporation

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much private sector investment has been committed through the PPP of the Commonwealth Development Corporation. [41985]

Clare Short: CDC was transformed in 1999 into a public limited company which as yet remains wholly Government-owned. CDC already joint-manages a number of funds containing private capital.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the *(a)* existing and *(b)* target rate of return is on development projects undertaken by CDC Capital Partners. [41986]

Clare Short: Since CDC was transformed into a public limited company in 1999, no target rate of return has been set by the Government. The existing rates of return on CDC's investments vary between industry sector and region. CDC invests in commercially viable businesses and aims to generate attractive rates of return.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 5W, how much of each sum invested in poorer countries by the CDC was invested in countries in sub-Saharan Africa in the five years from 1996 to 2000; and if she will break these investments down by country. [34314]

Clare Short: The total value of CDC's investments in sub-Saharan Africa in the five years from 1996 to 2000, broken down by country, was as follows.

£ million

	1996	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Malawi	9	10	7	4	—
Mozambique	2	3	8	17	6
Zambia	17	13	5	14	11
Zimbabwe	10	4	5	7	3
Kenya	2	1	7	7	10
Tanzania	6	13	21	3	18
Uganda	4	8	3	—	—
Swaziland	19	1	—	2	—
Cote d'Ivoire	11	2	4	14	3
Ghana	7	17	11	4	3
Nigeria	—	—	—	—	1
Sierra Leone	—	—	0	—	—
Total	87	73	72	74	56

Strategic Export Controls

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development for what reason her Department is no longer a signatory of the annual report on Strategic Export Controls. [36510]

Clare Short: To date, my Department has not been a signatory to the four annual reports on Strategic Export Controls that have been published.

I made this decision on the basis of the few export licence application my Department advises upon in relation to the number passed by the Department of Trade and Industry to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence and the fact that no licences have been refused under the sustainable development criterion.

Equipment Leasing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the equipment leasing arrangements entered into by her Department in each of the last four years; and what the cost to public funds in each case is. [38936]

Clare Short: The following equipment has been leased to my Department:

	£000
Reproduction/photocopying equipment	
1998–99	88
1999–2000	76
2000–01	102
2001–02	110
Air conditioning equipment	
2001–02	16

Ethiopia

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how aid to Ethiopia is linked to *(a)* the restoration of civil liberties and *(b)* the independence of the courts there; and if she will make a statement. [40822]

Clare Short: We are developing a partnership with Ethiopia to help reduce the very high levels of poverty there. In building this partnership we are encouraged by the Action Plan presented to the Ethiopian Parliament by the Ethiopian Prime Minster in October last year which has an emphasis on the improvement of democratic governance and which recognises the need to make progress on issues such as civil liberties and the independence of the judiciary.

DFID's expectations of a development partnership, which include the pursuance of policies that promote responsive and accountable government are set out in the 1997 White Paper on International Development.

Ministerial Private Offices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the running costs were of *(a)* her Ministers' private offices, separately identifying expenditure on staff and *(b)* her Department in each year from May 1997 to the nearest date for which the information is available. [41038]

Clare Short: The gross running cost for DFID from 1997–98 to 2000–01 (the last year for which figures are available) were as follows:

£ million

	1997–98	*1998–999*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Staff Costs	32	37	37	40
Other	24	22	28	30
Total	55	59	65	70

Figures for the running costs of Ministers' private offices are not recorded separately.

LNM Holdings

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will place in the Library the briefing provided to Mr. John Kerby at the EBRD on LNM Holdings. [39139]

Clare Short: No. All such briefings are provided on a confidential basis between officials.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment her Department made of LNM Holding's credit rating before supporting their application for a £70 million bank loan. [39145]

Clare Short: Adherence to sound banking is one of EBRD's three core principles. The bank routinely prepares rigorous financial analysis for all investments. DFID does not duplicate EBRD systems, as this would be wasteful and unnecessary.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she had discussions with the Prime Minister's Office before supporting the £70 million EBRD loan to LNM Holdings. [39108]

Clare Short: As I have made clear, the proposed loan was uncontroversial and within published and approved EBRD and UK objectives. Officials therefore did not consult Ministers.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether officials from her Department consulted the British Embassy in Bucharest before approving the £70 million EBRD loan to LNM Holdings. [39138]

Clare Short: No.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she was informed of LNM's application for a loan from the EBRD when officials from her Department asked Mr. John Kerby to support it. [39144]

Clare Short: As I have repeatedly made clear, Ministers were not consulted about this loan because it was judged by officials to fall within published EBRD and UK objectives and was uncontroversial.

AMO Congo

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what funds her Department directs to AMO Congo. [32117]

Clare Short: My Department is not funding any projects with AMO in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Records show that our embassy in Kinshasa donated some computer equipment to AMO in April 1998.

Litigation

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many cases *(a)* her Department and *(b)* its agencies have defended in (i) industrial tribunals and (ii) the courts in each year since 1997; how many were concluded in their favour; and what the total cost to his Department of litigation was in each year. [41107]

Clare Short: Details of the number of cases DFID (there are no agencies) has defended in industrial tribunals and court cases since 1997, and showing the numbers of outcomes in our favour are contained in the table.

	Industrial tribunal cases	*Court cases*	*Numbers concluded in DFID's favour*
1997	1	0	1
1998	1	0	1
1999	0	0	n/a
2000	1	0	On-going
2001	1	0	On-going

The Department pays for on-going legal advice by arrangement with Scottish Executive/Treasury Solicitor etc. However, there are no central records of the costs.

Refurbishment

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development who provided, or is providing, the *(a)* windows and *(b)* doors for the refurbishment of the International Development building on 1 Palace Street. [41348]

Clare Short: The replacement secondary glazing units were supplied by Sealtite Ltd. Doors were supplied by Shadbolt International.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what organisation provided the certification for the doors and windows for the refurbishment of the International Development Building on 1 Palace Street to show that they were produced from sustainably managed sources; and if she will place a copy of these certificates in the Library. [41347]

Clare Short: There were no timber-framed windows fitted as part of the recent refurbishment of 1 Palace Street. Doors were supplied by Shadbolt International. Details of this company's environmental procurement policies are set out on their website at www.Shadbolt.co.uk, and these were followed during the 1 Palace Street refurbishment contract. The company is a member of the WWF95+ Group, which supports the use of independent third party certification and labelling of forest products.

Public Appointments

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many appointments to public bodies have been made through her Department *(a)* from April 2000 to March 2001 and *(b)* since 31 March 2001; and how many of these were (i) men and (ii) women. [42157]

Clare Short: My Department has made the following appointments to public bodies:

	Male	*Female*
Commonwealth Scholarship Commission		
April 2000—March 2001	1	2
Since 31 March 2001	8	2

The other two active DFID public bodies, apart from the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, are the Crown Agents Holding and Realisation Board and the Overseas Service Pensions Scheme Advisory Board—neither of them have recruited during the relevant periods.

The Commonwealth Development Corporation became a public limited company on 8 December 1999 but the Secretary of State has retained the right to appoint two non-executive Directors on the board. The first two (both male) were appointed on 8 December 1999 but following the resignation of one of the two HMG Directors in early 2001, a new appointment (male) was made on 25 June 2001.

Parliamentary Questions

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many answers to parliamentary questions have not been answered by her Department under exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information in each year since 1994. [29416]

Clare Short: No questions have been unanswered by my Department under this exemption since 1994.

Air Conditioning

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what measures were taken by her Department to ensure that the consultant advising on the installation of air conditioning during the recent refurbishment of 20 Victoria Street, London was aware of the Government's policy on the use of hydrofluorocarbon refrigerants in air-conditioning; and if she will make a statement on the measures taken by the consultant to source practical and safe alternatives to hydrofluorocarbon-based air-conditioning. [41175]

Clare Short: The consultants used in the design and selection of the water source heat pump installation confirmed to DFID that the exercise was undertaken in the full knowledge of the Government's policy on the use of hydrofluorocarbon refrigerant in air conditioning, the Kyoto agreement, the latest ACRIB recommendations (Air Conditioning and Refrigeration Industry Board) and BS EN378. The specification of a water source heat pump installation at 20 Victoria Street made the best use of the existing risers and plant space. This system also contains a small amount of refrigerant in each heat pump unit and so avoids any refrigerant leaks from the pipework, which contains only water.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which consultant was used to advise on the installation of air conditioning during the recent refurbishment of 20 Victoria Street, London. [41174]

Clare Short: John Melville Partnership (JMP) were the mechanical and electrical consultants employed on behalf of DFID by our project managers, Debenham Tie Leung (DTZ).

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether an installer capable of installing not-in-kind air conditioning was invited to quote for the recent refurbishment of 20 Victoria Street, London; and if she will make a statement. [41176]

Clare Short: One supplier expressed an interest in tendering and offered a propane-based refrigerant for the project.

This was not taken due to:

(1) Propane systems carry an inherent fire risk when installed in an office environment such as 20 Victoria Street, and consequently the danger from leaks of propane are more serious than that of R407C.

(2) Propane systems are still relatively new to the UK air conditioning market unlike the R407C units specified.

(3) Propane systems require additional maintenance to ensure that safety checks/measures are in place, which increases the running costs of a building.

(4) The received quotation from the supplier for the propane-based equipment was significantly in excess of the specified system.

Special Advisers

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many special advisers were employed by her *(a)* between 1 May and 31 December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive; and what the total amount spent on special advisers by the Department was for each of those years. [41252]

Clare Short: Two special advisers have been employed by DFID in each year since 1997. The salary costs set out are held by financial year.

	£
1997–98	43,250.04
1998–99	61,386.87
1999–2000	72,885.00
2000–01	72,292.77

Other costs are not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate expense.

HIV

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of the UK's overseas aid budget is given to addressing global HIV. [41751]

Clare Short: In 2000–01, my Department invested over £150 millions in HIV/AIDS related programmes out of total UK Government development assistance expenditure of £3.2 billion.

Global Fund for AIDS/TB/Malaria

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of GDP is given to the Global Fund for AIDS/TB/malaria by *(a)* the UK and *(b)* other member states of the EU. [41783]

Clare Short: The UK's contribution of US $200 million over the next five years to the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and malaria (GFATM) represents 0.002 per cent. of estimated GNI over that period.

The same information for the other member states of the EU could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Accountancy Contracts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the contracts agreed by her Department with the five largest accountancy firms since May 1997; and what was the total value of contracts with each. [42105]

Clare Short: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given on 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 896W.

Golden Jubilee

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what events *(a)* she is and *(b)* other Ministers in her Department are planning to attend as part of the Golden Jubilee celebrations; and what events her Department is planning to arrange to celebrate the Golden Jubilee. [33254]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport gave on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 58W.

Departmental Events

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the *(a)* conferences, *(b)* seminars, *(c)* workshops, *(d)* exhibitions and *(e)* press conferences which have been sponsored by her Department and which took place on non-departmental premises in each of the last four years giving the title, purpose, date and cost of each. [34297]

Clare Short: This information is not held centrally and it would incur a disproportionate cost to provide it.

Accommodation Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the cost was of hotel accommodation for departmental staff working away from home in each of the last four years. [41058]

Clare Short: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Job Sharing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the extent of job sharing in her Department. [41049]

Clare Short: My Department currently employs 18 job sharers on official job share contracts.

We maintain a job share register where staff can find potential job share partners or new job share opportunities. We have also provided guidance to all our employees which commend the value to both the organisation and the individual of job sharing and other flexible working patterns.

Press Office

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many staff in her Department's press office have received *(a)* termination and *(b)* redundancy payments in each of the last four years. [41087]

Clare Short: No such payments have been made to press office staff in the last four years.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much money has been given by the United Kingdom to the Zimbabwean Government as support of their Land Acquisition Act 1991; and for what reason the United Kingdom ceased making payments in support of the Land Acquisition Act 1991. [42697]

Clare Short: The Land Act 1992; which allowed compulsory land purchase for resettlement after the expiry of a 10-year constitutional limitation to the acquisition of agricultural land from willing sellers; was not in itself an obstacle to UK funding for land reform. The UK Government spent £44 million on the Land Reform and Resettlement Programme Phase 1 between 1981 and 1996.

The UK and other donors made clear their willingness to support transparent land reform that took full account of the needs of poor Zimbabweans since 1996. This failed to find favour with the Zimbabwe Government. The Land Reform and Resettlement Programme Phase 2 proposed in 1998 was not supported by the UK as it has not been implemented in a transparent, fair, orderly, or sustainable manner. It has not attracted support from the international community for the same reasons.

Gender Pay Gap

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the extent of the gender pay gap among staff in her Department. [41006]

Clare Short: The Department undertook a review of its pay systems in 2001 and implemented a range of measures to deal with the historical anomalies of the system which affected both sexes. The major change was the introduction of guaranteed progression for satisfactory performers to the top of the pay range. We now propose to undertake a formal Equal Pay Audit during the next 12 months to identify any other action required to address unjustified gender pay gaps. We have already embarked upon a diversity audit to ensure that all our systems, including those which ultimately link to our pay system such as postings and promotion arrangements, are free of gender and other bias.

Relocation Expenses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her policy is on the payment of relocation expenses to staff in her Department. [41030]

Clare Short: Our policy is to offer support for the additional costs staff necessarily incur in relocating. The level of support, which is currently under review, depends on the nature of the relocation, particularly whether it is in the UK or overseas. Relocation assistance normally includes the costs associated with preparing for relocation, securing accommodation, and a range of travel, freight, storage and other necessary expenses.

SCOTLAND

Unsung Heroines Award Ceremony

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the total cost to her Department was of hosting the Unsung Heroines' awards ceremony at Edinburgh Castle on 7 March. [42527]

Mrs. Liddell: The reception, which honoured Unsung Heroines in the context of International Women's Day, will cost approximately £3,900.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list those hon. Members who submitted nominations for the Unsung Heroines awards ceremony. [42528]

Mrs. Liddell: All right hon. and hon. Members representing Scottish constituencies were invited to submit nominations. The Members representing the following constituencies put nominations forward:

Aberdeen Central (Mr. Doran)
Aberdeen North (Mr. Savidge)
Aberdeen South (Ms Begg)
Airdrie and Shotts (Mrs. Liddell)
Angus (Mr. Weir)
Argyll and Bute (Mr. Alan Reid)
Ayr (Ms Osborne)
Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Viscount Thurso)
Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes)
Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington)
Clydesdale (Mr. Hood)
Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Tom Clarke)
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Ms McKenna)
Cunninghame South (Mr. Donohoe)
Dumbarton (Mr. McFall)
Dumfries (Mr. Russell Brown)
Dundee East (Mr. Luke)
Dunfermline East (Mr. Gordon Brown)
Dunfermline West (Ms Squire)
East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram)
East Lothian (Ms Picking)
Eastwood (Mr. Murphy)
Edinburgh Central (Mr. Darling)
Edinburgh East and Musselburgh (Mr. Strang)
Edinburgh North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz)
Edinburgh Pentlands (Dr. Lynda Clark)
Edinburgh South (Mr. Griffiths)
Falkirk East (Mr. Connarty)
Falkirk West (Mr. Joyce)
Glasgow Anniesland (Mr. Robertson)
Glasgow Maryhill (Ms McKechin)
Glasgow Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy)
Glasgow Springburn (Mr. Speaker)
Gordon (Mr. Bruce)
Greenock and Inverclyde (Mr. Cairns)
Hamilton North and Bellshill (Dr. John Reid)
Hamilton South (Mr. Tynan)
Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Stewart)
Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. Des Browne)
Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell)
Livingstone (Mr. Cook)
Motherwell and Wishaw (Mr. Roy)
North East Fife (Mr. Campbell)
Paisley North (Mrs. Adams)
Paisley South (Mr. Alexander)
Ross, Skye and Inverness West (Mr. Kennedy)
Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood)
Stirling (Mrs. McGuire)
Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Lyons)
West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir Robert Smith)
West Renfrewshire (Mr. Sheridan).

Public Appointments

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many appointments to public bodies have been made through her Department *(a)* from April 2000 to March 2001 and *(b)* since 31 March 2001; and how many of these were (i) men and (ii) women. [42152]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

I have made no appointments to public bodies since that date.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Business Contracts

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will list the *(a)* title, *(b)* date of award, *(c)* length of contract, *(d)* cost and *(e)* terms of reference of research or other contracts awarded since (i) 1 May 1997 and (ii) 1 January 2001 by (A) his Department and (B) the Health and Safety Executive to (1) Balfour Beatty plc, (2) Bombardier Transportation (formerly Adtranz), (3) WS Atkins plc, (4) Amey/Amec, (5) Bechtel-Halcrow, (6) Jarvis and (7) AEA Technology; [38962]

(2) if he will list the projects on which *(a)* Balfour Beatty plc, *(b)* Bombardier Transportation (formerly Adtranz), *(c)* WS Atkins plc, *(d)* Amey/Amec, *(e)* Bechtel-Halcrow, *(f)* Jarvis, *(g)* Seeboard Group plc, *(h)* Thames Water plc and *(i)* AEA Technology are engaged (i) for and (ii) with his Department; [38988]

(3) if he will list the *(a)* title, *(b)* date of award, *(c)* length of contract, *(d)* cost and *(e)* terms of reference of all technical support framework agreements since (i) 1 May 1997 and (ii) 1 January 2001 between (A) his Department and (B) the Health and Safety Executive with (1) Balfour Beatty plc, (2) Bombardier Transportation (formerly Adtranz), (3) WS Atkins plc, (4) Amey/Amec, (5) Bechtel-Halcrow, (6) Jarvis and (7) AEA Technology; if he will list all (x) published documentation and (y) unpublished written reports; and if he will place copies of related documentation in the Library. [38970]

Dr. Whitehead: The information requested is not held centrally and can be provided only at disproportionate cost. With reference to information on published and unpublished documentation, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 4 March 2002, *Official Report,* columns 90–91W.

Resignations

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what date his Department received a written letter of resignation from *(a)* Jo Moore and *(b)* Martin Sixsmith. [40211]

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his statement of 26 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 563–64, on the resignation of Mr. Martin Sixsmith, what evidence he has collated that *(a)* at least one of his officials briefed the press that the line used by the Prime Minister's official spokesman on 14 February was incorrect and *(b)* an official said that he was ringing on behalf of Mr. Sixsmith; and whether he knows the identity of those officials. [39905]

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when Mr. Martin Sixsmith's three conditions for resignation described in Sir Richard Mottram's statement of 25 February were met. [39906]

Mr. Byers: I refer the hon. Member to the statement I made to the House on 26 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 563–64, and that of Sir Richard Mottram, the Permanent Secretary of my Department, made on Monday 25 February, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the date was on which Mr. Martin Sixsmith ceased to be employed by his Department. [39511]

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his oral statement on 26 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 574, if he will place in the Library the letter of resignation from Mr. Martin Sixsmith dated 15 February; and by what means Mr. Sixsmith formally tendered the resignation announced on the same day. [40081]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the statement of Sir Richard Mottram, the Permanent Secretary of my Department, made on Monday 25 February 2002. A copy of this is available in the Libraries of the House.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) whether Mr. Martin Sixsmith was receiving a salary from his Department on 26 February; [40088]

(2) if he will make a statement on the investigation into authorised briefings by civil servants in his Department; and by when he expects the investigation to be completed; [40097]

(3) if he will publish the terms of Mr. Martin Sixsmith's resignation; [40094]

(4) whether the investigation into authorised briefings by civil servants in his Department is confined to his Department's press office; [40096]

(5) whether Mr. Martin Sixsmith is to receive a one-off payment from public funds in relation to his resignation. [40093]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by Sir Richard Mottram, the Permanent Secretary of my Department, on Monday 25 February 2002. A copy of this is available in the Libraries of the House.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) on what date Mr. Martin Sixsmith's employment ceased; [40087]

(2) what *(a)* direct and *(b)* indirect involvement he had in the negotiations with Mr. Martin Sixsmith over one-off payment from public funds in relation to his resignation. [40095]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the statement I made to the House on 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 463–64, and that of Sir Richard Mottram, the Permanent Secretary of my department, made on 25 February, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Poverty

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of fuel-poor households in the social rented sector occupy dwellings which comply with the proposed thermal comfort criteria as set out in his Department's consultation paper on the Decency Standard. [39891]

Ms Keeble: Social landlords are working towards the target to ensure that all social housing is brought up to a decent standard by 2010, which includes a requirement for the dwelling to provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort. But investment will not be focused solely on bringing non decent homes up to the minimum decent home standard. Where landlords carry out work to heating and insulation, the published guidance will encourage them to maximise the energy efficiency of the dwelling.

The 2001 baseline for the decent home target will come from the 2001 English House Condition Survey, which will be available later this year. This will also provide data on the level of fuel poverty in the social rented sector.

Press Office

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will place in the Library the standard contract for full-time employees within his Department's press office. [40099]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* All DTLR contracts are in line with the framework set out in the Civil Service Management Code, a copy of which is in the Libraries of the House.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the standard notice period is in the employment contracts of press officers within his Department. [40092]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* The central framework for the terms and conditions of resignation is set out in the Civil Service Management Code. Departments and Agencies are responsible for ensuring their own arrangements comply with the central framework.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will *(a)* list the advertisements that his Department has placed publicising vacancies in the press office since June 2001 and *(b)* estimate the total cost of such advertising. [40108]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* DTLR has placed the following external advertisements for press officers in The Guardian.

	Press officers
24 September 2001	Grade 7, Senior Press Officer, Press Officer, Assistant Press Officer
1 October 2001	Head of News
8 October 2001	Senior Information Officer

Note:
The dates given are those when the advert first appeared

The cost is £32.3 thousand.

Disciplinary Code

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will place in the Library the disciplinary code of conduct that operates within his Department; [40100]

(2) if he will list the basis on which civil servants under their terms of employment could be *(a)* disciplined and *(b)* dismissed for making unauthorised briefings to the press. [40101]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* The central framework for the rules and codes of practice relating to discipline are set out in the Civil Service Management Code. Departments and Agencies are responsible for ensuring their own disciplinary arrangements comply with the central framework.

Special Advisers

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish a list of the special advisers in his Department, indicating which Minister they are assigned to and their responsibilities. [40085]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* DTLR's special advisers are Dan Corry and Michael Dugher, who cover the range of departmental responsibilities.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the standard notice period is in the employment contracts of special advisers. [40091]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* Copies of the special advisers model contract are available in the Libraries of the House and it is also available on the Cabinet Office website.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether he intends to replace Jo Moore with a new special adviser; and whether the post will be advertised and selected through open competition. [40086]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* I will give consideration to the appointment of a new special adviser in due course.

Trade Union Representation

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of the employees in his Department are represented by a trade union. [40098]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* The Department does not hold records on the proportion of its staff represented by trade unions. However, the Department considers effective consultation and involvement of staff important. It is a personal decision whether or not to join a trade union; but the Department encourages staff to join an appropriate trade union and to play an active part within it, making sure their views are represented.

Dismissal Complaints

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many complaints of *(a)* constructive and *(b)* unfair dismissal were brought against (i) his Department and (ii) the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions since May 1997. [40109]

Mr. Byers: *[Holding answer: Monday 4 March 2002]:* The following numbers of complaints of *(a)* constructive and *(b)* unfair dismissal were brought against the Department since May 1997.

i) DTLR
  (a) 0
  (b) 4 (of which 1 case withdrawn by complainant.)
ii) DETR
  (a) 2 (of which 1 case withdrawn by complainant)
  (b) 24 (to date 10 cases found in favour of Department).

Accommodation Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the cost was of hotel accommodation for departmental staff working away from home in each of the last four years. [41065]

Dr. Whitehead: The costs of hotel accommodation for departmental staff working away from home are not held centrally and so cannot be determined without disproportionate cost.

Relocation Expenses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his policy is on the payment of relocation expenses to staff in his Department. [41021]

Dr. Whitehead: My Department's policy on the payment of relocation expenses is set out in Chapter 9 of the DTLR(C) Staff Handbook which has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Passenger Rights

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the *(a)* voluntary agreements and *(b)* legislation in place regarding passenger rights relating to (i) delays, (ii) cancellations and (iii) overbooking for (A) air passengers, (B) rail passengers, (C) ferry passengers and (D) coach passengers; what changes have taken place since 1997; and what further changes are planned. [40956]

Mr. Jamieson: In respect of air passengers, European Voluntary Commitments on air passenger rights came into effect on 14 February 2002. The commitments include notifying passengers of known delays, cancellations and diversions, assisting passengers facing delays and reducing the number of passengers involuntarily denied boarding. All major full service UK airlines and most airports have signed up to the Commitments. European Council Regulation 295–91 provides a certain level of protection for passengers denied boarding due to overbooking, establishing common rules for a compensation system in scheduled air transport.

The European Commission has recently published a proposal to update the Regulation and to extend it to cover cancellation and delay. In addition, the 1929 Warsaw Convention on air carrier liability, which has been ratified by the UK, provides rights to passengers suffering damage caused by delay. Air passengers travelling as part of an inclusive tour are also covered by a European Council Directive on Package Travel (Directive 90–314) which was implemented in the UK by SI 1992–3288. This Directive provides certain rights relating to delays and cancellation.

The rights of rail passengers to compensation for delays and cancellations are covered through the National Rail Conditions of Carriage (NRCoC), which set the minimum standards, and through individual train operator charters which often provide more generous entitlements. Since 1997 the standard of compensation provided by many train operators has improved through franchise agreements. For the future, the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) is working with the Rail Passenger Council (RPC) and the Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC) to review Passenger Charter compensation arrangements. They are looking to develop recommendations for an improved comprehensive system of compensation for poor punctuality and reliability that can be applied across the network. The first step in this process is to carry out research among passengers. This is currently being commissioned and should commence shortly.

All ferry passengers have rights under the Supply of Goods and Services Act 1982. This requires a trader to carry out a service with reasonable care and skill and, where it is not specified, within a reasonable time. If the trader fails to comply with these requirements the law treats the matter as a breach of contract and a consumer could, if necessary, pursue a claim for redress through the civil courts. No changes in the statutory rights legislation have been taken since 1997 nor are any planned.

In respect of coach passengers, scheduled operators do not operate a policy of overbooking. Passengers' rights in the event of delays and cancellations are covered by the conditions of carriage of the operator concerned. These conditions are governed by fair trading legislation, and have generally not changed significantly since 1997.

Performance Indicators

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what date he decided to develop a quarterly set of key indicators against which progress on improving the railways could be measured; what process of consultation his Department undertook when developing these indicators; which individuals and organisations were consulted with regards to the development of these indicators; and if he will make a statement. [40957]

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of State announced on 23 January 2002 that his Department would publish a set of benchmarks against which progress and improvements in delivering a better railway could be judged. The set of indicators focuses on the issues that matter most to passengers: punctuality, reliability, safety and quality. The Strategic Rail Authority was consulted on the choice of indicators.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether the indicators of delivery in the railway industry published in Fact Sheet 4: General Railway Facts for the National Rail Summit 2002 are being monitored; and if he will make a statement. [41118]

Mr. Jamieson: The following table denotes' where information on each of the items listed in the delivery section of Fact Sheet 4: General Railway Facts for the National Rail Summit 2000 is regularly provided. All the publications are placed in the Library of the House at the time of publication.

	SRA annual report	*National rail trends*	*On track*	*DTLR performance measure scorecard*
Investment	[2]—	[1]—	—	—
Passenger journeys	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	—
Punctuality	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Train miles	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	—
Additional train services	[1]—	—	[1]—	—
Improvements to station facilities	[1]—	—	[1]—	—
New stations opened	[1]—	—	[1]—	—
Rolling stock	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[3,4]—

[1] Information regularly provided in publication.

[2] Includes information on franchise payments.

[3] Planned for future publications.

[4] In the form of average age of stock, from 18 March.

London Commuter Services

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what information he collates regarding delays and cancellations on London commuter rail services; and where it is available. [40951]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) is responsible for the Public Performance Measurement (PPM) which measures the performance of train operating companies. The SRA publishes information quarterly in 'National Rail Trends' and six-monthly in 'On Track'. The information is also on the SRA web site. The March and subsequent publications of National Rail Trends will include information on the individual train operating companies.

The PPM information in the Department's rail performance scorecard is provided by the SRA. It can be accessed on the Department's website—www.dtlr.gov.uk. The next scorecard will be published on 18 March alongside National Rail Trends.

Railways

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps his Department *(a)* has taken and *(b)* plans to take to address skill shortages within the railway industry. [40945]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) will take the lead on proposals for a National Rail Academy, to promote the development of the key skills and competencies needed to run a railway on a safe and effective basis. The SRA will also become a member of the Rail Industry Training Council and will work jointly with the Department of Education and Skills to promote an action plan on manpower planning, recruitment and training and development.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the £8.1 billion of uncommitted public investment in rail in the 10 year plan is intended to meet repayment and interest due as a result of private sector investment in the plan. [41762]

Mr. Jamieson: The £8.1 billion of uncommitted public capital funding, along with the rest of the £33.5 billion of public sector funding, will work in partnership with the private sector investment to deliver our Ten Year Plan objectives for rail. It will be allocated in the most cost-effective and efficient way to deliver much needed investment in the railways.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the responsibilities held by his Department which will be transferred to the European Railways Agency. [41757]

Mr. Jamieson: None. The European Commission's draft Regulation to establish a European Railway Agency (COM(2002)23 Final) indicates that the Agency will have no autonomous decision-making powers and that its responsibilities will be limited to carrying out technical work on behalf of the European Commission and the member states.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether the Department's modelling of rail demand for the 10 year plan period took into account differing levels of service reliability and overcrowding. [41655]

Mr. Jamieson: Yes, with the results of their impact under the basecase and our Ten Year Plan investment case outlined in Chapters 2 and 3 of the Ten Year Plan Background Analysis document.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of the total 10 year plan spending targets will be taken up by revenue support for private investment. [41664]

Mr. Jamieson: The 10 Year Plan assumes that £8.5 billion of the £134 billion of public expenditure in the Plan provides revenue support for £56.3 billion of private investment. However to avoid double counting when adding public expenditure and private investment together, revenue support for private investment is not included in the 10 Year Plan total of £181.9 billion. Therefore it is not appropriate to provide a figure for revenue support as a proportion of this total figure. However revenue support for private investment represents 6.3 per cent. of public expenditure in the plan.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the working groups for the TSIs on European rail interoperability have met; and if he will make a statement. [41734]

Mr. Jamieson: The working groups that are responsible for drafting the rail interoperability Technical Specifications for Interoperability (TSIs) have been meeting since 1996 when the high-speed rail interoperability Directive (96/48/EC) came into force. These working groups have now started work on TSIs for conventional rail, following adoption of the conventional rail interoperability Directive (2001/16/EC) last year. The interoperability "Article 21 Committee", the committee comprising the European Commission and the member states that formally adopts the TSIs, has also met regularly since 1996.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions who will be representing the UK on the working groups on the TSIs on European rail interoperability. [41735]

Mr. Jamieson: The working groups to draft the rail interoperability Technical Specifications Interoperability (TSI's) have been set up under the auspices of AEIF, the European Association for Railway Interoperability. AEIF comprises representatives from the UIC (the International Union of Railways), UNIFE (the Union of European Railway Industries) and UITP (the International Union of Public Transport) and the working group representatives are drawn from these organisations based on individual nominations by member companies.

The UK is well represented on these working groups, from both railway companies including Railway Safety and manufacturing industry. The UK is also represented on the interoperability "Article 21 Committee", the committee comprising the European Commission and the member states that formally adopts the TSIs. Until the end of 2001, representation was provided by the Department, but the Strategic Rail Authority has now taken over this role.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how often he receives reports on *(a)* punctuality, *(b)* cancellations, *(c)* investments made and *(d)* the safety record of the railways. [41291]

Mr. Spellar: I receive a range of reports and information, in the course of day to day business, on the operation of and investment in the railways.

Rents

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) of 12 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 871W, on rents, if he will provide similar estimates to those he provided for Hendon for the real terms percentage changes in each year he predicts for formula rents for council tenants in *(a)* Selby and *(b)* York until 2011. [41264]

Ms Keeble: As I said in my answer of 6 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1004W, to my hon. Friend, the underlying increase in "formula" rents will be the same for all local authorities.

It is possible to make estimates of how average "actual" rents might change in real terms between 2001–02 and 2011–12 if the national average local authority formula rent were to increase by an average of about 1.5 per cent. per year, and each local authority were to move its actual average rent to its average formula rent over that period (ignoring the impact of rent caps and the limit on annual rent changes for individual tenants). This was the basis of the figures given to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) on 12 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 871W. On the same basis, the figures for Selby and York would be as follows:

Percentage

	Selby	*York*
Estimated real increase 2002–03	1.3	0.7
Estimated average real increase 2001–02 to 2011–12	1.8	1.3
Average real increase 1991–02 to 2001–02	3.1	4.3

However, these figures are only estimates based on a number of assumptions. Ultimately the level of "actual" local authority rents over the next ten years is a matter for the local authority. The level will depend, among other things, on the outcomes of future spending reviews, changes in property values and the decisions taken by individual local authorities.

Asbestos

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to review Health and Safety Executive regulations on *(a)* blue, (b), brown and (c) white asbestos. [41356]

Dr. Whitehead: I have no plans for a fundamental review of the asbestos regulations.

The Health and Safety Commission (HSC) has recently consulted on proposals to amend the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 1987, which govern work with all types of asbestos.

The Asbestos (Licensing) Regulations 1983, which require most work with asbestos insulation, asbestos coating and asbestos insulating board to be carried out by an HSE licensed contractor, are soon to be subject to a routine periodic review by the HSC (next year). If amendments are proposed the HSC will consult upon them.

Proposals to amend The Asbestos (Prohibitions) Regulations 1992, which ban the marketing, supply and use of all types of asbestos, are currently being reviewed to consolidate them and ensure that they are fully consistent with EC Directives

Once the HSC has considered the results of any of these consultations they will put their proposals to me for consideration.

Research Documents

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 813W, on research documents, what criteria the Department uses when defining a research programme; who within a programme is responsible for selecting the best method of publication; if he will list the types of publication available to programmes; and for whose needs availability on demand of programme details can be tailored. [41389]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department's research programmes are defined by the evidence needs of policy areas and listed in the Departmental website (annexe A of the DTLR(C) Research Overview). As previously indicated, publication methods for the dissemination of research results are chosen by the relevant research programme manager and the policy area responsible. Contact points for the individual programmes are also listed in the website.

There are many publication methods including formal Government publication routes, academic journals, and reports by private sector research contractors. Publications from individual programmes may be checked through their areas on the website or through the listed contact points. Methods may be specific to individual projects or follow standard practices developed for particular audiences (e.g. Local Transport Notes and traffic advisory leaflets, Road Safety research series, Building Regulations' Approved Documents and Housing's Research Summaries). Where targeted at specific groups of users—for example road safety officers, local government officers, cycling groups—the results of research may be distributed through advisory leaflets or best practice guidance.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 813W, on research documents, in which locations a record of research is held; on what date work started on improved database facility; what form it will take when completed; and on what date the improved database facility will be completed. [41390]

Mr. Jamieson: Records of research are held within the policy divisions and their research management teams. The staff and records for DTLR(C) research programmes are largely accommodated in four London buildings—Eland House, Ashdown House (Victoria), Great Minster House and Horseferry House. Some work is also undertaken at Moreton-in-Marsh. HSE and Agencies—who are located in other buildings—handle their own research.

Work started to improve access to records of research in the former DETR in March 2001. The aim was to provide a unified database of information about all research projects in the former Department. The work has been taken forward within DTLR. The initial development phase of the database software was completed last month. The extensive job of populating the database for the year 2001–02 is now under way aiming at completion within three months. A specification for further work to present this information in a form suitable for access through the DTLR website is in preparation.

Railtrack

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 784W, on Railtrack, what action was taken by his Department in response to the examples of key areas of failure highlighted by the report of the Environment, Transport, and Regional Affairs Committee, 'Rail Investment: Renewal, Maintenance and Development of the National Rail Network'; and for what reason Railtrack was not placed into railway administration until October 2001. [41331]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government's response to the main conclusions and recommendations of the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee's report was presented to Parliament by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 15 October 2001 (Cm 5283). The Government's response drew the Committee's attention to the reasons behind the placing of Railtrack plc into Railway Administration on 7 October 2001.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the cost has been to the Government of meeting Railtrack plc's operational bills. [41581]

Mr. Jamieson: £1.96 billion.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the cost has been to the Government of advisers involved in Railtrack administration. [41582]

Mr. Jamieson: From 7 October 2001 to the end of February 2002, the cost of advisers working for my Department on the administration of Railtrack and on the process of exiting administration was about £5.6 million.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions from which organisation he has obtained legal advice about a possible challenge from Railtrack shareholders. [41583]

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of State has instructed the Treasury Solicitor to act on his behalf in relation to threatened action from Railtrack shareholders.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which companies tendered for the public relations work on Railtrack administration. [41765]

Mr. Jamieson: Finsbury were originally engaged by Schroder Salomon Smith Barney (SSSB) on their own account, to assist them in their work as the Department's banking advisers.

At the end of December 2001, it was decided to extend Finsbury's involvement. They now work direct to the Department. The extension of Finsbury's involvement was by single tender in view of the knowledge and expertise they had accumulated at that stage.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many rail investment projects of over £5 million have been started by Railtrack in administration since the appointment of the administrator. [41301]

Mr. Spellar: Twenty.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much money has been *(a)* granted and *(b)* lent to Railtrack in administration. [41300]

Mr. Spellar: Railtrack plc has received £162 million of grant and £1.8 billion under the Government loan facility.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what estimate his Department has made of the cost to Government of underwriting the debt of the successor company to Railtrack in administration; [42806]

(2) what steps the Government will take to ensure that the receiver company to Railtrack in administration has a minimum BBB credit rating. [42811]

Mr. Byers: Bidders for Railtrack will need to put forward their proposals for the financing of the successor company. These proposals will need to demonstrate how bidders will ensure that the successor company will have a sufficiently high investment grade credit rating to raise the necessary finance for its activities in an efficient and cost effective manner. They will also need to set out any proposals for Government support.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the data room for Railtrack in administration will be open to bidders. [42626]

Mr. Byers: This is a matter for the Administrator.

Agencies and Organisations

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the public sector agencies and organisations that receive funding from his Department. [41740]

Dr. Whitehead: The following public sector organisations receive funding from the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions: -

Housing Corporation

The Commission for Local Government in England

Regional Development Agencies

- East of England Development Agency
- East Midlands Development Agency
- North East Development Agency
- North West Development Agency
- South East England Development Agency
- South West of England Development Agency
- West Midlands Development Agency
- Yorkshire and Humberside Development Agency
- Strategic Rail Authority
- Local Government Standards Board for England
- Valuation Office Agency
- Valuation Tribunals
- Audit Commission
- Health and Safety Commission (a Crown NDPB) incorporating (Health and Safety Executive/Health and Safety Laboratory)
- English Partnerships
- Urban Regeneration Agency
- Commission for New Towns

Housing Action Trusts

- Castle Vale HAT
- Liverpool HAT
- Stonebridge HAT
- Tower Hamlets HAT
- Waltham Forest HAT
- Civil Aviation Authority
- London Underground
- Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government
- Employers' Organisation for Local Government
- The Fire Services Examination Board
- The National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales
- The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
- The Local Government International Bureau
- The Local Authorities Co-ordinating Body on Food and Trading Standards
- Public Private Partnerships Programme
- National Youth Agency
- All local authorities in England.

The Department also has a number of grant regimes that are open to application by both private sector and public sector organisations. information on the nature of recipients is not collated across regimes.

London Underground

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if final agreement has been reached with tube lines and Metronet over risk transfer under PPP. [41580]

Mr. Jamieson: London Underground is responsible for negotiation of contracts with tube lines and Metronet for the modernisation of the underground's infrastructure. Final contracts can only be agreed following the completion of consultation with the Mayor and Transport for London.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the sections of the London Underground which are forecast to see significant reductions in crowding levels as a result of the PPP. [41650]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer to the answer given to the hon. Member on 4 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 731–32W.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many trains will be refurbished or replaced in the first seven and a half years of the London Underground PPP. [41742]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer to my answer to the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) on 4 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 88W.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what instructions London Underground has received about the phasing of spending plans under the PPP; and what spending projects London Underground must include in the second 15 year period. [41743]

Mr. Jamieson: London Underground is responsible for the development of PPP contracts for the modernisation of the underground's infrastructure. The Secretary of State has set out proposals on the level of grant that can be provided to support London Underground over the next seven and a half years, but has issued no instructions to London Underground about the phasing of spending plans.

The draft contract sets out detailed requirements for the whole 30 year contract period, and that periodic reviews every seven and a half years will allow London Underground to revise its requirements to reflect changing circumstances.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether final contracts have been agreed with tube lines and Metronet. [41682]

Mr. Jamieson: London Underground is responsible for negotiation of contracts with Tube Lines and Metronet for the modernisation of the underground's infrastructure. Final contracts can only be agreed following the completion of consultation with the Mayor and Transport for London.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what role his Department has played by means of *(a)* legislation and *(b)* direction in ensuring that London Underground makes the contractual documentation relating to the PPP publicly available following completion of the competition. [42118]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* None.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 88W, on PPP contracts, for what reason the acceptance of a safety case as a condition precedent is a matter for London Underground Ltd. and the bidders. [42177]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* The modernisation plans can only proceed if London Underground's revised safety case is accepted by the Health and Safety Executive. The decision to include this legal requirement as condition precedent to a contract between London Underground and the bidders is a matter for the parties to the contract.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the provision for taking over the work of Infracos under the London Underground PPP if the consortiums fail; and with whom this provision will lie. [42120]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* London Underground is responsible for the development of contracts for the modernisation of the underground's infrastructure.

The contract provides powers for London Underground to step in to take over the work of the infrastructure companies for health, safety or security reasons or if the infrastructure does not comply with a corrective action notice in relation to a failure to perform its obligations. If an infrastructure company defaults on the contract there are provisions for the contract to be transferred to another party or, if no suitable party is found, for London Underground itself to take over the contract.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 169W, on London Underground, under what powers he is able to put in place interim staff for an arbiter before a permanent appointment can be made. [42292]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* Under section 227 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his reply of 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 86W, on value for money and safety assessments of the London Underground PPP contracts, if he will provide a list of the other information sent to the Mayor and Transport for London on 7 February; and how long before the LT board meeting of 7 February the value for money analysis was completed. [42112]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* Information provided to the Mayor and Transport for London in relation to consultation on the modernisation proposals is a matter for London Transport. The exact timing of the completion of London Transport's value for money analysis is a matter for London Transport.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 87W, on PPP cost overruns, what would be regarded as inefficient or uneconomic behaviour. [42267]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* London Underground is responsible for the development of contracts for the modernisation of the underground's infrastructure.

The Greater London Authority Act 1999 requires the PPP Arbiter, among other things, to promote efficiency and economy in relation to a PPP agreement, and to take into account factors notified by the parties to the agreement or specified in the agreement.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what role his Department has played in setting the level of performance required for the Infracos under the London Underground PPP. [42117]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* The Secretary of State wishes to see a comprehensive modernisation of the underground with increased capacity, improved reliability and higher quality. The detailed level of performance required from the infrastructure companies has been set by London Underground.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what is the *(a)* status of and *(b)* expected date for finalising each of the bids to operate trains on the London Underground under the proposed PPP scheme. [42812]

Mr. Byers: The proposed PPP contracts are for the modernisation of the underground's infrastructure. London Underground will continue to operate the entire tube network, including trains.

London Underground is responsible for the contracts. Final contracts can only be agreed following the completion of consultation with the Mayor and Transport for London.

Congestion Charging

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what work his Department has done to assess the impact on the targets in the 10-year plan if local authorities fail to implement congestion charging schemes as outlined in the plan. [41657]

Mr. Jamieson: Modelling by the Department of the results of implementing the 10-year plan, but omitting the eight road user charging and 12 workplace parking levy schemes that the plan assumed local authorities would introduce outside London, shows that congestion would reduce to 5 per cent. below 2000 levels, compared with a 6 per cent. reduction if the assumptions in the plan are met.

A number of local authorities are actively examining possible schemes. Whether they go ahead will be a matter for them, taking into account local factors. We would, in any case, expect most schemes to come forward towards the end of the 10-year plan period.

The assumptions in the 10-year plan will be reviewed as part of the first review of the plan. We will publish the results later this year.

East Thames River Crossings

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has for new East Thames river crossings; and on what time scale. [41649]

Mr. Jamieson: None. The proposed East Thames river crossings are a matter for the Mayor and Transport for London.

Road Noise

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent estimate he has made of the cost difference between low and high noise road surfaces. [41653]

Mr. Jamieson: A recent estimate by the Highways Agency suggests that there is very little difference in whole life cost between low and high noise road surfaces. This estimate takes account of both the initial cost and the expected life of the surface, which can both vary between individual products and applications.

Inter-Urban Road Travel

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether it is his policy to charge for inter-urban road travel. [41662]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government have no plans at present to introduce general charges for road users to travel on the inter-urban road network, although we are looking seriously at plans to ensure that foreign hauliers pay their fair share of costs on our roads.

Airport (South-East)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the sites under consideration for a new airport in south east England. [41744]

Mr. Jamieson: There will be a full public consultation on possible sites before Ministers come to conclusions. Consultation is scheduled for Spring 2002.

10-year Plan

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the sustainable distribution strategy set out in section 12 on page 45 on the 10-year plan background analysis. [41660]

Mr. Jamieson: The assumptions about developments in the distribution industries listed on page 45 of "Transport 2010: The Background Analysis" were informed by polling experts in the haulage/logistics industries, academics and vehicle manufacturers.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the policy changes that will be required to deliver land use planning directed at increasing the attractiveness of public transport, walking and cycling as described in section 12 on page 44 of the 10-year plan background analysis. [41659]

Mr. Spellar: In developing the 10-year plan, the Department assumed that land use planning would contribute to lower traffic growth (and thus greater use of other modes) by promoting accessibility to development by public transport, walking and cycling. The Government issued Planning Policy Guidance note 13 (PPG13) on Transport in March 2001, setting out national land use planning policy on transport, to support the integrated transport strategy and 10-year plan. Other PPGs support the same objective of promoting sustainable transport choices.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether the amount transferred from the unallocated budget in the 10-year plan to the rail budget has been moved from the years in which it was originally allocated. [41666]

Mr. Jamieson: The revised amounts and profile of the unallocated budget and the rail budget are shown in the revised version of Table A3 from the 10-year plan, copies of which were placed in the House Library on 25 February.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will provide a schedule of budget allocations to the 10-year plan at constant 2001 prices. [41665]

Mr. Jamieson: The information requested for transport spending plans expressed in 2001–02 prices is shown in the table.

Transport spending review 2000 plans: 2001–02 to 2003–04

£ million, 2001–02 prices

	2000–01 plans	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2003–04*	*Three year totals*
Total	5,018	6,056	7,324	8,879	22,260
of which:					
Capital	2,391	3,258	4,410	5,883	13,551
Resource	2,627	2,798	2,914	2,996	8,709
of which:					
Strategic roads	1,548	1,632	1,759	1,832	5,222
Local	1,203	1,788	2,035	2,207	6,030
Railways	1,508	1,607	2,266	3,398	7,271
London	578	826	1,045	1,222	3,093
Other transport	181	204	220	220	645

Notes:

1. The table is based on Table A1 (p98) in 'Transport 2010: The 10 Year Plan' which is expressed in outturn or cash prices.
2. Both tables exclude £2.7 billion of transport-related Revenue Support Grant funding for local authorities, but include £37/139/209 million (cash) of other public funding for transport compared with the Transport spending totals shown in Treasury's Spending Review 2000 White Paper.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate the 10-year plan model made of the impact of changes in average non-regulated rail fares on demand for *(a)* rail and *(b)* road traffic. [41656]

Mr. Jamieson: The 10-year plan rail demand modelling work assumed that non-regulated fares would increase in line with inflation. As there is no real change in non-regulated fares they had no impact upon changes in either rail or road traffic demand in the model.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the starting date was for the 10 years of the Transport Plan. [41302]

Mr. Spellar: The start date for spending under the 10-year plan was the beginning of the current financial year on 1 April 2001.

Road Journeys

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the number of road journeys that will be saved as a result of the rail measures in the 10-year plan. [41652]

Mr. Jamieson: We estimate that just under two-thirds of the increased passenger rail demand will be from car users switching to rail. However, this shift does not translate directly into a saving in road journeys, as the reduced level of road traffic will be partly offset by other travellers attracted to the less congested roads.

Channel Tunnel

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he has assessed *(a)* future capacity levels in the channel tunnel and *(b)* the need for a new tunnel in the future. [41745]

Mr. Jamieson: At the end of 1999 Eurotunnel sent to the Governments of France and the UK, through the Channel Tunnel Intergovernmental Commission, a package relating to two tunnel projects, one road and one rail. Eurotunnel submitted this package in order to discharge an undertaking entered into when the Concession Agreement was signed in 1986. At that time Eurotunnel stated that according to its traffic forecasts, the capacity of the existing tunnel would be sufficient to meet demand for the next 20 years.

Ministerial Travel

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when *(a)* he and *(b)* his ministerial colleagues last travelled by bus on departmental business. [41680]

Dr. Whitehead: Cabinet Office Guidance on ministerial travel states that Ministers should use the most efficient and cost-effective travel arrangements. Ministers have travelled on buses during a number of visits and are keen to encourage their use.

Local Government Finance

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the total value is of PPP schemes launched by local authorities since 1997. [41678]

Dr. Whitehead: This information is not held on PPP schemes other than those which receive central Government support for the capital element under the Private Finance Initiative. The total capital value of PFI schemes signed by local authorities since 1997 is £2.8 billion. Schemes worth another £1.4 billion are in procurement.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to change the system of financial credit-rating of local authorities. [41729]

Dr. Whitehead: We have never required or encouraged local authorities to seek commercial credit ratings and have no plans to do so. All local authorities are rightly regarded as highly creditworthy and do not need credit ratings to obtain loans.

Rail and Bus Passengers

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what work the Department carries out to monitor rail and bus passenger satisfaction. [41663]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) commissions a bi-annual National Passenger Survey. The results are published in "On Track" in June and December. The SRA also publishes information on customer complaints about rail services, quarterly in "National Rail Trends" and six-monthly in "On Track". These documents are placed in the Library of the House each time they are published.

For local bus travel, since April 2000, the Department has carried out quarterly surveys of passenger satisfaction in England outside London. A similar survey is carried out in London by Transport for London. The results are published by DTLR each quarter in the Transport Statistics Bulletin "Bus Quality Indicators: England". Copies of each quarterly report are in the Library of the House.

DTLR also commissions more general research into public attitudes to transport issues. Questions about perceptions of local buses and of rail services, covering both users and non-users of services, were asked in the Omnibus Survey of households run by the Office for National Statistics, in January 2001. Results were published on the Department's website in an article "Attitudes to Local Transport Issues", a copy of which I am arranging to place in the Library of the House. Further questions on buses were asked in the British Social Attitudes Survey 2001, but results will not be available until autumn 2002.

Crossrail

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) whether his estimate of the impact of the delay in the construction of Crossrail on crowding levels on the London Underground takes into account forecast growth in underground usage during the period of the 10-year plan; [41651]

(2) what impact the delay in Crossrail, as envisaged in the SRA Strategic Plan, has on the modelling described in the Background Analysis of the 10-year plan. [41648]

Mr. Jamieson: Modelling work undertaken for the 10-year plan considered the broad strategic impact on crowding on rail and tube services of a Crossrail type link which opened at the end of the 10-year plan period. A later opening date would have no direct impact on these results. The separate modelling work reported in the Background Analysis of the 10-year plan was undertaken to assess growth in passenger kilometres. This did not assume the construction of Crossrail because it is primarily intended to relieve overcrowding, and is not expected to contribute greatly to passenger growth.

South West Regional Assembly

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to vary the numbers of members at present sitting in the Shadow South West Regional Assembly; and how many members will be elected to the proposed South West Regional Assembly. [41393]

Dr. Whitehead: "South West Regional Assembly" is the name used by the regional chamber designated by the Secretary of State under s.8 of the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998. It is not a "shadow" body of a possible future elected regional assembly for the south-west, but a voluntary body which has been recognised by Ministers for the purposes of scrutiny of the South West Regional Development Agency. The number of members of the assembly is therefore primarily a matter for the assembly.

The forthcoming Regional Governance White Paper will set out our proposals for elected regional assemblies in future, including their number of members.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what *(a)* salaries and *(b)* expenses are available to members of the Shadow South West Regional Assembly; and if he will make a statement on the remuneration of members of the proposed assembly. [41394]

Dr. Whitehead: Salaries and expenses of the existing the South West Regional Assembly are a matter for the assembly. The forthcoming Regional Government White Paper will set out our proposals for elected regional assemblies in future.

Regional Development Agencies

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what role RDAs will play in shaping a new EU regeneration framework. [41482]

Ms Keeble: We will be consulting the RDAs and a range of other organisations working in the regeneration field about our proposals to ensure that regeneration schemes are state aid proof, including the possibility of a new framework.

Refuges

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list those local authorities which have refuges which are *(a)* 100 per cent. funded and *(b)* part-funded by his Department; and if he will list other sources of funding and limits which apply. [41671]

Ms Keeble: This Department does not fund refuge provision directly.

Refuge accommodation is mainly owned by registered social landlords (57 per cent.) and local housing authorities (32 per cent.). Most of the remainder are owned by refuge groups and the private sector.

Revenue support for refuges is provided principally through transitional housing benefit, social housing management grant, local authority funding plus a range of charitable sources.

The Department does not hold information about the funding of refuges in individual local authority areas.

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list those local authorities which *(a)* have refuge provision at the rate of one place per 10,000 of population and *(b)* do not meet this target. [41667]

Ms Keeble: There is no target for refuge provision.

There is a best value performance indicator, (BVPI 176) which is—"the number of domestic violence refuge places per 10,000 population, which are provided or supported by the authority". Local authorities are required to set their own performance target against this indicator, which appeared in the indicator set for the first time in 2001–02 and remains in the 2002–03 set of BVPIs. No data on local authority performance against this indicator are available yet; local authorities will provide their performance data for BVPI 176 to the Audit Commission for 2001–02 after 31 March 2002. The data will then be audited and will be available in autumn 2002.

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list per *(a)* constituency, *(b)* local authority area and *(c)* region those areas which have refuge provision which does not meet the target of one place per 10,000 population as recommended in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. [41672]

Ms Keeble: There is no target for refuge provision contained in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.

There is a best value performance indicator, (BVPI 176) which is—"the number of domestic violence refuge places per 10,000 population, which are provided or supported by the authority". Local authorities are required to set their own performance target against this indicator, which appeared in the indicator set for the first time in 2001–02 and remains in the 2002–03 set of BVPIs. No data on local authority performance against this indicator are available yet; local authorities will provide their performance data for BVPI 176 to the Audit Commission for 2001–02 after 31 March 2002. The data will then be audited and will be available in autumn 2002.

Landlords

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent discussions he has had with the British Federation of Landlords and Private Tenants groups on bringing small landlords within the same tax regime as other small businesses. [41670]

Ms Keeble: There have been no discussions recently between these bodies and Ministers of this Department on the tax regime for landlords. Tax matters are, in any event, a matter for the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

A34

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when construction of the A34 Alderley Edge bypass will begin. [41392]

Mr. Jamieson: The South East Manchester Multi Modal study covers the A34 Alderley Edge bypass.

I am currently considering this report and the North West Regional Assembly's recommendations and hope to make an announcement shortly.

Homelessness

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 93W, ref. 38443, what criteria are used to determine *(a)* unacceptable numbers of applicants accepted as homeless and *(b)* numbers accommodated under the legislative provisions by a local authority. [41430]

Ms Keeble: There are no criteria for determining that the level of applicants accepted as statutorily homeless is unacceptable. A range of information about local housing authorities' activities under the homelessness provisions of the Housing Act 1985 and the Housing Act 1996 is submitted quarterly by authorities to the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. A summary of this is published by the Department in a quarterly statistical release. The data published include the number of households being accommodated in temporary accommodation, pursuant to a duty under the homelessness provisions, at the end of the relevant quarterly period.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 93W, ref. 38444, if he will publish the guidance used to determine the trigger point at which he should intervene to secure an authority's compliance with its statutory duty to house the homeless. [41431]

Ms Keeble: We have agreed a protocol with the Local Government Association that sets out the key principles and procedures for the use of the best value intervention powers. The protocol has been published as Annexe D of the Department's Circular 10/99. Copies of the circular have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Weight Limits (Bridges)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he takes to ensure that maximum weight limits on local bridges are enforced; and if he will make a statement on the penalties applicable to those in breach of those limits. [37634]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I have been asked to reply.

The police are responsible for enforcing these limits. Weight limits on bridges are notified by traffic signs, and failure to comply with such signs is an offence under section 36 of the Road Traffic Act 1988. The maximum penalty for this offence is a fine not exceeding £1,000 plus a three point endorsement.

Wembley Park Underground

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how he plans to respond to the London Development Agency/London Underground report on the options for increasing capacity at Wembley Park underground station. [43231]

Mr. Byers: I welcome this report, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House. It demonstrates that it should be possible to make real improvements to capacity and access—particularly for disabled people—without the need to rebuild Wembley Park Station.

While the report's proposals are significantly less expensive than rebuilding the station, they cannot be accommodated within the £20 million which the Government have already agreed to make available for infrastructure improvements. In the light of this new evidence, I have now decided that if the stadium development proceeds, I should make available additionally up to £7 million from my transport provision. This would make it easier for people travelling to the new stadium, as well as those living and working in the area. I understand that the Mayor of London has also agreed to make available a similar sum.

Multiple Occupation

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the reason for the delay in the drafting of legislation for the regulation of HMOs. [42229]

Mr. Byers: The Government are committed to introducing a national licensing scheme for houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) and we consulted on our proposals in 1999. We remain committed to legislating for this at the earliest possible opportunity.

The Government are also currently supporting my hon. Friend for Brighton, Kemptown's Home Energy Conservation Bill. This Bill would introduce reforms to the current discretionary HMO registration regime, most notably by making it mandatory and providing for a revised definition of an HMO.

Public-Private Partnerships

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 4 March 2002, ref. 37622, on reputational externalities, what is the size of the adjustment made for reputational externalities in the calculations underlying the final assessment report; and if he will make a statement. [41396]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 4 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 83W.

Public Bodies

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many appointments to public bodies have been made through his Department *(a)* from April 2000 to March 2001 and *(b)* since 31 March 2001; and how many of these were (i) men and (ii) women. [42150]

Ms Keeble: Ministers in this Department have appointed or reappointed *(a)* 116 people in the year April 2000 to March 2001 *(i)* 82 of whom are men and *(ii)* 34 women and *(b)* 100 people since 31 March 2001 *(i)* 58 of whom are men and *(ii)* 42 women.

Transport and Telecommunications Council

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether a Scottish Executive Minister will be a member of the UK delegation to the forthcoming Transport and Telecommunications European Union Council of Ministers meeting on 25–26 March; and what information is being provided by his Department to guarantee effective pre-council scrutiny by the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament. [42690]

Mr. Jamieson: There are no plans for a Minister from the Scottish Executive to be a member of the UK delegation to the Transport and Telecommunications Council on 25–26 March.

In developing the UK position, there is regular contact between Ministers and officials of the Department and the Scottish Executive on those issues in which there is a Scottish interest, as required by the memorandum of understanding between the UK Government and the three devolved Administrations. The then Transport Minister in the Scottish Executive attended the Transport Council on 28 June 2001 as part of the UK delegation.

Councils

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of *(a)* district, *(b)* county and *(c)* Metropolitan councils he estimates will be judged as coasting. [42628]

Mr. Byers: No such estimate exists. The categorisation will be for the Audit Commission.

Vehicle Registration

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to move to a system of continuous registration of all motor vehicles; and if he will make a statement. [42558]

Mr. Jamieson: A proposal to introduce continuous registration—under which the keeper of a vehicle would retain a statutory responsibility to license it until DVLA was notified of a change of keeper—was one of a number of proposals set out by the Government in its consultation document on abandoned vehicles in October 2001. My right hon. Friend intends to make an announcement on the outcome of the consultation shortly.

National Celebrations

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what arrangements his Department has made to celebrate *(a)* St. Patrick's Day, *(b)* St. George's Day, *(c)* St. Andrew's Day and *(d)* Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee; and how his Department celebrated St. David's Day. [42301]

Dr Whitehead *[Holding answer: Monday 11 March 2002]:* The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has fully supported the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in making suitable arrangements for Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee celebrations. Details of those events may be found on the Golden Jubilee website at www.goldenjubilee.gov.uk.

My Department has no specific arrangements to celebrate St. Patrick's Day, St. George's Day or St. Andrew's Day. My Department did not specifically celebrate St. David's Day.

Shoreham Harbour

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the dates and minutes of meetings of the Maritime Vision for Shoreham Harbour Steering Group since its inception. [42357]

Mr. Jamieson: The Shoreham Maritime Regeneration Strategy was set up in May 1998 to foster the regeneration of Shoreham Harbour. The Shoreham Maritime Steering Group is seeking to implement this strategy and has since been holding regular meetings. Although the Government Office for the South East is a partner of the Steering Group, it is not within the remit of the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to publish the dates and minutes of these meetings.

Shoreham Harbour Link Road

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what feasibility study he has carried out into the provision of a road link between the A259 at Shoreham Harbour with the A27; and when he plans to publish the findings; [42390]

(2) what discussions he has had with Shoreham Port Authority about the provision of a link road between the A259 at Shoreham Harbour and the A27. [42356]

Ms Keeble: No discussions have been held with Shoreham Port Authority regarding the provision of a link road between the A259 and the A27. There is no Government-led study into such a link road but there is a wider local authority study currently taking place. This work includes a variety of separate work streams looking at the regeneration potential for the port area, and the feasibility of facilitating much of the future potential for local and port development.

Fire Stations

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many functioning fire stations there were, broken down by fire brigade area, in each year since 1997. [42235]

Mr. Byers: The number of fire stations in each fire authority area in England and Wales as at 1 January from 1997 to 2002 is in the table:

Number of fire stations in England and Wales at 1 January 1997–2002

Fire authority	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Avon	23	23	23	23	23	23
Bedfordshire and Luton	14	14	14	14	14	14
Buckinghamshire	20	20	20	20	20	20
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough	28	28	28	28	28	28
Cheshire	24	24	24	24	24	24
Cleveland	15	15	15	15	15	15
Cornwall	31	31	31	31	31	31
County Durham and Darlington	16	15	15	15	15	15
Cumbria	38	38	38	38	38	38
Derbyshire	31	31	31	31	31	31
Devon	58	58	58	58	58	58
Dorset	29	29	29	29	29	30
East Sussex	24	24	24	24	24	24
Essex	51	51	51	51	51	51
Gloucestershire	20	20	20	20	20	20
Greater Manchester	43	43	43	43	43	43
Hampshire	54	54	54	54	52	52
Hereford and Worcester	26	26	26	26	26	27
Hertfordshire	32	32	[illegible]	32	32	32
Humberside	31	31	31	31	31	32
Isle of Wight	10	10	10	10	10	10
Isles of Scilly	7	7	7	7	7	7
Kent and Medway Towns	66	66	66	66	66	66
Lancashire	40	40	40	40	40	40
Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland	20	20	20	20	20	20
Lincolnshire	37	37	37	37	38	38
London	113	113	113	113	112	112
Merseyside	27	27	27	26	26	26
Mid and West Wales	57	57	57	57	57	57
Norfolk	40	40	40	40	40	40
North Wales	44	44	44	44	44	44
North Yorkshire	37	37	37	37	37	37
Northamptonshire	22	22	22	22	22	22
Northumberland	19	19	19	19	19	19
Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham	25	25	25	25	25	25
Oxfordshire	24	24	24	24	24	24
Royal Berkshire	20	20	20	20	20	20
Shropshire	23	23	23	23	23	23
Somerset	24	24	24	24	24	24
South Wales	50	50	50	50	50	50
South Yorkshire	24	24	24	24	24	24
Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire	30	30	30	30	30	30
Suffolk	36	36	36	36	36	36
Surrey	24	24	24	24	24	24
Tyne and Wear	18	19	19	19	19	19

Number of fire stations in England and Wales at 1 January 1997–2002

Fire authority	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Warwickshire	20	20	20	19	19	19
West Midlands	41	41	41	41	41	41
West Sussex	28	28	28	28	28	28
West Yorkshire	50	50	50	50	50	50
Wiltshire and Swindon	25	25	25	25	25	25

Source:

DTLR calendar year returns.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the annual budget for communications activities, including press, public relations, marketing and internal communications, was for her Department for each financial year from 1997–98 to 2001–02. [39921]

Dr. Howells: The spend in my Department on communications activities including press, public relations, marketing and internal communications from 1997–98 to 2001–02 was:

Year	*£*
1997–98	493,098
1998–99	471,303
1999–2000	762,438
2000–01	775,904
2001–02	[1]602,700

[1] Estimated outturn

Film Production

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which film production companies in the north-east received grants from the UK Film Council; and how much they received in the last 12 months. [40630]

Dr. Howells: One Lottery grant has been made to film production companies in the north-east in the last 12 months of £40,000 to the Northern Production Fund. The Film Council has also funded Northern Film and Media (through its Regional Investment Fund for England), which has enabled that organisation to invest non-Film Council funds in the region. This includes a total of £213,629 to film production companies and individuals for production and development activity.

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many films were produced by film production companies in the north-east in *(a)* 1996, *(b)* 1997, *(c)* 1998, *(d)* 1999, *(e)* 2000 and *(f)* 2001. [40632]

Dr. Howells: I understand from Northern Film and Media that 78 films were produced in the north-east in the period 1996 to 2001, 50 of which were produced by companies based in the region. The following list shows the start and end dates of the 50 productions.

Production Name	*Production Type*	*Production company*	*Start*	*End*
Ludwig's First at the Fair	Short film	Tyne Castle Film and Video	31 May 1995	31 August 1998
Dance For A Stranger	Short film	Ipso Facto	5 January 1996	15 January 1996
Untitled	Short film	Studio Arts TV	24 June 1996	24 June 1996
Refuge	Short film	Lightyears Films	29 August 1996	4 September 1996
The Creatives	Short film	Absolutely Productions	26 October 1996	26 October 1996
Looking	Short film	Purple Film Productions	8 January 1997	13 January 1997
An Egg's and Egg	Short film	Ipso Facto Films	24 February 1997	25 February 1997
Four Hours Insecurity	Short film	Chariot Productions	1 July 1997	8 July 1997
Wasps	Short film	Ipso Facto Films	29 August 1997	6 September 1997
Untitled	Short film	Roy Martin	16 September 1997	17 September 1997
Untitled	Short film	Carpet Films	20 September 1997	20 September 1997
Built for the Stone Age, Living in the Space Age	Short film	Wishful Thought	29 September 1997	5 October 1997
Bird	Short film	Zoo Films	28 October 1997	1 November 1997
Chariots of Desire	Short film	Odd Couple Productions	25 January 1998	29 January 1998
Sleep	Short film	Airship Films	1 March 1998	7 March 1998
Panino	Short film	Bridge and Tunnel Films	26 April 1998	1 May 1998
The Block	Short film	Shiney Beast	6 July 1998	15 July 1998
In Between	Short film	Indica Films	15 July 1998	21 July 1998
Wing	Short film	Miranda Tuffnel	31 July 1998	23 September 1998
Flying Home	Short film	Hard Place Productions	1 August 1998	5 August 1998
The Gatherers	Short film	Cumbria Film Independents	2 August 1998	6 August 1998
Psyche Out	Short film	Pilgrim Films	20 August 1998	23 August 1998
Orpheus	Short film	Ad Hoc Films	31 August 1998	30 January 1999
Mrs. Buchan	Short film	Ipso Facto Films	1 September 1998	7 September 1998
Ravine	Short film	RVK Productions	24 September 1998	27 September 1998
Heads (Tease)	Short film	Hard Place Films	13 October 1998	14 October 1998
Untitled	Short film	Ipso Facto	31 October 1998	31 October 1998
Safe	Short film	Y I Productions	25 January 1999	29 January 1999
Nasty Neighbours	Feature film	Ipso Facto	22 February 1999	23 February 1999
Untitled	Short film	Canny Productions	1 March 1999	7 March 1999
Untitled	Short film		27 May 1999	30 May 1999

Production Name	*Production Type*	*Production company*	*Start*	*End*
Rob of the Rovers	Short film	Pinball Films	28 June 1999	1 July 1999
Mavis and the Mermaid	Short film	Shoreline Films	23 September 1999	1 October 1999
The Good, the Bad and the Feathered	Short film	Eagle Films	13 October 1999	19 October 1999
Millennium Movies	Short film	A19 Films and Video	1 November 1999	29 November 1999
Stars in Her Eyes	Short film	Ethel Factor	6 November 1999	10 November 1999
Going, Going	Short film	MJW Productions	5 December 1999	8 December 1999
Whipped Cream	Short film	Packham Pear Productions	26 February 2000	29 February 2000
Gabriel and Me	Feature film	Samuelson Productions/IMP	19 June 2000	26 June 2000
Fish	Short film	Pilgrim Films	26 July 2000	30 July 2000
Stix	Short film	Little California Films	22 September 2000	29 September 2000
Playback	Feature film	Canny Pictures	15 January 2001	28 January 2001
Grainger Town Poetry Films	Short film	International Media Productions	26 February 2001	26 February 2001
Flickerman and the Ivory Skinned Woman	Short film	Pilgrims Films	26 March 2001	29 March 2001
Ticket to Ride	Short film	Ipso Facto	24 April 2001	29 April 2001
Star Man	Short film	Yipp Films	3 June 2001	10 June 2001
Momentum	Short film	24:25 Films Ltd.	16 July 2001	20 July 2001
Sweet Dreams	Short film	International Media Productions	14 June 2001	19 June 2001
Danny and his Amazing Teeth	Short film	Ipso Facto Films	29 July 2001	2 August 2001
King of the Road	Short film	Pilgrim Films	18 July 2001	23 July 2001

Accommodation Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the cost was of hotel accommodation for departmental staff working away from home in each of the last four years. [41068]

Dr. Howells: In DCMS travel and subsistence administration is contracted out and there is no electronic record of hotel accommodation. To provide this information would involve a manual check of each travel and subsistence claim which could be undertaken only at disproportionate cost.

Gender Pay Gap

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the extent of the gender pay gap among staff in her Department. [41002]

Dr. Howells: In response to the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) Task Force "Just Pay" report the Government have committed Departments and agencies to review their pay systems and prepare any necessary action plans to close any equal pay gaps by April 2003. The Cabinet Office issued comprehensive guidance in January 2002 to assist Departments and agencies in carrying out these reviews. DCMS will be carrying out its review within the next six months and the Royal Parks Agency will be building it into their programme.

Relocation Expenses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her policy is on the payment of relocation expenses to staff in her Department. [41033]

Dr. Howells: The underlying principle of DCMS's policy on the payment of relocation expenses to staff is that reasonable costs associated with a compulsory permanent transfer to a new workplace will be reimbursed; and anyone joining DCMS from other locations does so on purely voluntary terms. To date there has been no call to use this policy primarily because DCMS is a London based organisation.

In the Royal Parks Agency where Parks Managers are required to relocate to Parks Lodges they receive a relocation package of £2,500 and reimbursement for removal expenses.

Images of England Website

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) whether *(a)* owners and *(b)* tenants will be informed in writing if their properties are to be listed on the Images of England website being established by English Heritage; [40838]

(2) what representations she has received on the publication of details of listed private properties on the Images of England website and *(a)* the Data Protection Act 1998 and *(b)* the ECHR; [40839]

(3) whether owners and tenants may permanently remove their property from the Images of England website being set up by English Heritage to catalogue listed buildings. [40840]

Dr. Howells: English Heritage undertook a comprehensive and successful series of regional press campaigns to publicise the "Images of England" project. They made it clear that it was their intention to photograph every building on the statutory list for the project; owners or occupiers will not therefore be informed individually. Owners who do not wish their building to appear should contact English Heritage, but they should bear in mind that information on every listed building is already in the public domain. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received two letters about Data Protection and Human Rights legislation in this context.

National Collections

James Purnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) whether overseas loans are taken into account when her Department assesses the proportion of total collection on display to the public; [40333]

(2) what loans from the Royal Armouries collection have not been returned after a period of three years. [40334]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 6 March 2002]:* The number of overseas loans varies substantially from one museum to another and is not a key performance measure used by my Department.

I shall place in the Library details of loans made from the Royal Armouries' collections over three years ago that have not yet been returned.

Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether funding for the heritage economic regeneration scheme is allocated only to areas of deprivation; and if she will make a statement. [40968]

Dr. Howells: The heritage economic regeneration scheme was set up by English Heritage in 1998 to boost the country's deprived urban and rural communities. English Heritage issues guidance to local authorities which explains the funding criteria. They advise that this does not preclude them from assisting schemes in areas which do not rank highly in the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Region's deprivation indices, providing there is a clear regeneration need.

Litigation

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many cases *(a)* her Department and *(b)* its agencies have defended in (i) industrial tribunals and (ii) the courts in each year since 1997; how many were concluded in their favour; and what the total cost was to her Department of litigation in each year. [41116]

Dr. Howells: During the period in question:

The Department for Culture Media and Sport defended no cases in either industrial tribunals or the courts;

The Historic Royal Palaces Agency defended one industrial tribunal in 1997 which found in its favour. There were no cases which went to the courts;

The Royal Parks Agency defended one industrial tribunal in 1997 which found against it and compensation of £3,500 was awarded. The agency defended two industrial tribunals in 2001 both of which were found in its favour. There were no cases which went to the courts.

Other than the compensation figure, no information is available on the cost of the litigation.

Special Advisers

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many special advisers were employed by her *(a)* between 1 May and 31 December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive; and what the total amount spent on special advisers by the Department was in each of those years. [41249]

Dr. Howells: Details of special advisers employed in the Department are shown in the table.

	Special advisers		
Period year	*Full-time*	*Part-time*	*Total*
1997[1]	2	0	2
1998	1	1	2
1999	1	1	2
2000	2	0	2
2001	3	0	3

[1] 1 May to 31 December 1997

The information about the total amount spent on special advisers by the Department could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

NESTA

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to review National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts funding programmes. [41338]

Mr. Caborn: NESTA has established itself as a significant supporter of creativity and innovation over the past two years and is currently undertaking evaluation studies of its three funding programmes. The Department is taking a close interest in the outcome of this work and this evidence will be taken into account in the Quinquennial Review of NESTA, which is scheduled to take place in 2004–05.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the NESTA-funded projects in the last two years; and what assessment she has made of NESTA projects. [41339]

Mr. Caborn: Since its inception, NESTA has made more than 200 awards, totalling over £15 million. These awards range widely across the arts and sciences, and have made some interesting connections between the two. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport takes a close interest in NESTA's progress and believes that it is making a valuable contribution in line with its objectives. I am asking the chief executive of NESTA to write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible with the details of each award made so far and shall ensure that a copy of the letter is placed in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament.

North West Arts Board

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the proposed transfer of the North West Arts Board's staff, assets and liabilities to the Arts Council of England. [40405]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* The proposed transfer of the North West Arts Board's staff, assets and liabilities to the Arts Council of England is a matter for the North West Arts Board and the Arts Council of England. I understand that North West Arts Board agreed the resolution to proceed with the transfer to the Arts Council of England at their meeting on 4 March.

Free Television Licences

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many pensioners in Telford are in receipt of free television licences. [41425]

Dr. Howells: TV Licensing, which administers the free television licence scheme for the BBC as licensing authority, is not able to provide geographical breakdowns of the number of free licences issued. However, estimates based on the 1991 Census indicate that there were approximately 3,200 people aged 75 or over in the Telford constituency.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many pensioners in Clwyd, South are in receipt of free television licences. [41900]

Dr. Howells: TV Licensing, which administers the free television licence scheme for the BBC as licensing authority, is not able to provide geographical breakdowns of the number of free licences issued. However, estimates based on the 1991 Census indicate that there were approximately 4,800 people aged 75 or over in the Clwyd, South constituency.

Portable Antiquities Scheme

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she expects to announce future funding plans for the portable antiquities scheme. [42367]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State for the Arts expects to be able to make an announcement about the future funding of the portable antiquities scheme when she attends the Standing Conference on Portable Antiquities on Thursday 14 March. Copies of this announcement will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament.

Broadcasting Restrictions

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the groups and organisations which are restricted from being able to broadcast by radio and television; and on statutory restrictions on material which can be broadcast. [41370]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* In relation to ownership, the statutory rules broadly have the effect of disqualifying the following groups from holding licences;

non-EEA individuals and bodies (except licences to provide television multiplex services, national or local radio multiplex services, digital additional services, local delivery services, non-domestic satellite or radio services, licensable programme services and licensable sound programme services)

local authorities

political organisations

religious organisations (regulators have discretion to waive this in relation to cable/satellite TV and local analogue, cable or satellite radio services)

certain publicly funded bodies (this applies only to radio licences, apart from radio restricted service licences)

advertising agencies

a person who is, in the opinion of the regulators, subject to influence from a body which is itself disqualified, the effect of which is, or is likely to be, adverse to the public interest.

The Government's proposals for media ownership are set out in the consultation paper on media ownership rules published by DCMS and DTI in November 2001.

In terms of material which by statute may not be broadcast, the broadcasting regulators, for example the ITC, are required to publish rules on a number of matters which are set out in the current Broadcasting Acts. They include material which is likely to encourage or incite to crime or to lead to disorder, and the advertising of specific products, including tobacco and prescription drugs.

Community Land Purchases

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport under which section of its remit funds from the National Lottery are provided for funding community land purchases; and how much has been used for this purpose in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the UK to date. [42529]

Mr. Caborn: Statutory policy directions set by the Government determine the type of activities the New Opportunities Fund (NOF) can support under its programmes.

Under its directions for the Green Spaces and Sustainable Communities programme NOF has committed £10.78 million to the Scottish Land Fund, administered for NOF by Highlands and Islands Enterprise. Since February 2001 the Scottish Land Fund has awarded 17 grants for acquisition purposes totalling £4,084,613. This programme is exclusive to Scotland and no other NOF funds have been allocated for community land purchases in the UK.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Multiple Food Retailers

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has given to establishing an independent regulator for multiple food retailers. [42170]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* We have no plans to establish an independent regulator for multiple food retailers. The Code of Practice on Supermarkets' Dealings with Suppliers, which applies to supermarkets that have 8 per cent. or more of the market, provides for independent dispute resolution. The supermarkets currently falling above this threshold (Asda, Safeway, Sainsbury and Tesco) have all given legally binding undertakings to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to abide by the code and it will now come into force on 17 March 2002. In addition, we are encouraging wider adoption of the code in the food chain on a voluntary basis.

Organic Farming

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish a strategy for increasing levels of organic farming. [42169]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* The development of the organic farming sector will be carried forward in the context of an organic action plan, taking account of the recommendations of the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food.

Illegal Meat Imports

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the dates and locations of spot checks on illegal meat imports carried out by her Department in the last two years. [38842]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Responsibility for enforcing legislation on imported meat rests with the local and port health authorities not with my Department. All Customs officers dealing with passengers look for the range of restricted and prohibited goods, including meat, as part of their normal duties. DEFRA's State Veterinary Service staff are responsible for enforcing rules on imports of live animals and animal products not intended for human consumption. Officials from the three bodies co-operate from time to time on special joint exercises to deter and detect illicit imports in passengers' baggage, including meat.

Since April 2001, members of the State Veterinary Service have been involved in around nine joint exercises at Heathrow (covering 20 flights). They have also participated in some of the exercises organised by Crawley borough council who have responsibility for Gatwick airport.

Information for 2000 and other locations is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Waste

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on research being undertaken by the Environment Agency concerning the health effects of bioaerosols arising from the incineration and composting of waste. [41218]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answers given on 31 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 473W, on the health effects of bioaerosols from composting. Bioaerosols are not the subject of specific research by the Environment Agency in relation to incineration because the micro-organisms do not survive the incineration process—the residues are essentially sterile in a biological sense. The Environment Agency is, however, currently undertaking a research project relating to waste incineration entitled "Human Health Review of Incineration and Combustion Techniques". The aim of this project is to provide a comprehensive assessment of the nature and degree of any human health impacts of substances released to the environment, from a range of combustion and waste incineration processes burning a range of virgin and waste derived fuels.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what assessment she has made of the Waste Electrical Electronic Equipment Directive's requirement for manufacturers to be responsible for the treatment and collection of historic waste; [38120]

(2) if she will make a statement on financial responsibility for collecting waste electrical goods from households under the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive; [38119]

(3) what assessment she has made of the feasibility of a visible fee for new electronic and electrical goods, levied at the point of sale, to fund the collection, disposal and treatment of waste electrical goods. [38122]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

The Department of Trade and Industry is preparing an updated Regulatory Impact Assessment on all costs and benefits associated with the WEEE Directive. I will be depositing this in the Libraries of the House during the next month.

The directive as currently drafted states that producers will, as a minimum, be responsible for the collection costs of WEEE when deposited at a central point. A final decision on implementation cannot be taken until the directive is adopted and we have consulted business again.

The Government will consider the possibility of visible fees alongside other options for fulfilling the financial obligations of the WEEE Directive, as long as the adopted text provides for this.

Local Produce

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the economic impact of initiatives promoting local produce within the respective areas. [39410]

Mr. Morley: The Department has not itself undertaken any assessment of the economic impact of initiatives promoting local produce. However, the Countryside Agency, which we grant-aid, is contributing to the funding of the New Economics Foundation's Plugging the Leaks programme. Among other things, the programme is piloting a tool which allows local groups to measure the economic impact of various activities including local food initiatives.

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what initiatives her Department is supporting to promote local produce in the south-west. [39411]

Mr. Morley: Through Food from Britain and the Countryside Agency, the Government have contributed to the funding of the Regional Food Group, Taste of the West. Taste of the West provide various business support and promotional activities including, "Meet the Buyer" events, the publication of regional food and drink guides, attendance at local, regional and national shows, the holding of workshops and seminars and the promotion of farmers' markets. We have also provided funding for the National Association of Farmers' Markets which promotes the development of farmers' markets throughout the country.

In addition, the Department has awarded grant under the Agriculture Development Scheme, the Rural Enterprise Scheme and the LEADER+ initiative to a variety of projects that involve the promotion of local food and drink within the region. One example is the recent award under the third round of the Agriculture

Development Scheme to the South West Regional Food and Drink Group to support a pilot model for a regional food trade organisation.

Correspondence

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire which was acknowledged on 11 December, reference 162918. [36041]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 14 February 2002]:* I am sorry for the delay in replying to my hon. Friend. His letter raised issues that are for the Treasury to answer and it has been passed to them for reply.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects to reply to the letter of 20 December 2001 from the hon. Member for Totnes regarding constituent Mr. Trevor Pennington and a declaration by Devon county council on 27 February 2001. [36394]

Mr. Morley: A reply to the hon. Member's letter was sent on 6 March 2002.

Civil Servants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what was the *(a)* percentage and number of rail journeys undertaken on first class tickets, *(b)* average cost of a first class journey by rail and *(c)* total cost of rail travel in each of the past four years broken down by grade of civil servant. [37496]

Mr. Morley: Unfortunately it is not possible to provide this detailed information without incurring disproportionate costs.

Rail Journeys (Staff)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make it her policy that rail journeys undertaken by staff in her Department should ordinarily be on standard class tickets. [40431]

Mr. Morley: Section 8 paragraph 8.2.1 of the Civil Service Management Code requires Departments and agencies to ensure staff use the most efficient and economic means of travel in the circumstances, taking account of any management benefit or the needs of staff with disabilities. These central principles are repeated in departmental and agency staff handbooks which also stress that official journeys may be taken only after other options of conducting official business (such as via telephone, email or video conferencing) have been considered unsuitable. These rules ensure that any official journey is undertaken only when appropriate and by the most appropriate means.

Following the creation of DEFRA my officials are reviewing a wide range of travel policies and procedures to take account of our responsibilities towards the environment. Indeed, the Department is developing a new framework, provisionally titled "Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate", that will cover key operational areas across Government and, among other things, require Departments to promote greener modes of travel.

Gender Pay Gap

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the extent of the gender pay gap among staff in her Department. [41005]

Mr. Morley: As part of a review of its pay system, DEFRA commissioned two pay equality audits by independent consultants (the Institute for Employment Studies). These were carried out between July and October 2001. The consultants were aware that the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) Task Force "Just Pay" report had been issued. They were provided with a copy of that report and a draft version of the Cabinet Office's Equal Pay guidance (which was subsequently finalised and issued in January 2002).

The purpose of the two audits was to assess existing and any continuing pay equality issues "before and after" implementation of proposed changes to the pay system. The reports provided a range of statistical studies, including pay level analysis by gender.

The first audit provided baseline information by assessing DEFRA's current pay system and staff pay levels. The second audit then reviewed pay levels (projected through three years) following assumed implementation of pay system proposals. The results indicated that the changes proposed to the pay system would bring about improvements.

DEFRA is aware that the Government have committed Departments and agencies to review their pay systems by April 2003 and prepare action plans to close any equal pay gaps. The information from these earlier audits will provide essential background for a more comprehensive equal pay audit.

Common Agricultural Policy

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with EU *(a)* member and *(b)* applicant states on CAP reform; and if she will make a statement. [40707]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had discussions on CAP reform with colleagues from Spain, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia and Poland since 1 January 2002.

Ruddy Duck

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much has been spent on the campaign to eradicate the ruddy duck in Britain; how much is expected to be spent by the conclusion of the campaign; and if he will make a statement. [39533]

Mr. Meacher: The Government are undertaking a control trial to test the feasibility of eradicating the UK's population of ruddy duck within 10 years, determining the financial cost of such a programme and indicating the number of birds needed to be culled each year to achieve this.

The control trial is being undertaken to investigate the best possible way for the UK to conserve the globally threatened white-headed duck which is threatened by the ruddy duck. The control trial has not yet concluded and no decision has yet been taken on whether to proceed on a campaign to eradicate the ruddy duck.

The total cost of the control trial is approximately £900,000 (this has increased slightly as a result of disruption to the work programme caused by foot and mouth disease). Payments of approximately £140,000 remain before the control trial concludes on 30 June 2002.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the estimated population of the ruddy duck in Britain was at the start of the campaign for their eradication; what the population is; and if he will make a statement. [39535]

Mr. Meacher: No decision has yet been taken on whether to undertake a campaign to eradicate the ruddy duck in the United Kingdom. Figures are given in relation to the Government's control trial.

The Wetland Bird Survey (WeBs) data are the best source of information for ruddy duck numbers. During the winter of 1998–99, prior to commencement of the control trial, these counts identified a minimum of 3,641 birds (although this does not include information from one important site). The most recently published WeBs counts are for 1999–2000. These found a minimum of 4,565 birds.

The Government consider that action needs to be taken to ensure that the globally endangered white-headed duck, the only native European species of stiff-tailed duck, does not become extinct. The success of the control trial however should not be judged simply on the number of ruddy ducks controlled. The contractors must design a population model to establish the feasibility of eradication, estimate the cost of such a strategy, carry out population counts at various sites and test methods of control at various habitats and during various seasons, including the examination of trapping as an alternative to shooting at sites where shooting is not feasible.

Salmon Fishing (Severn Estuary)

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received from the Blackrock Lave Net Salmon Fishermen's Association about the future of salmon fishing in the Severn estuary; and if she will make a statement. [40711]

Mr. Morley: We have received a number of representations on behalf of the Blackrock Lave Net Salmon Fishermen's Association in connection with the Environment Agency consultation on a Salmon Action Plan for the Severn estuary. The plan seeks to ensure the long-term sustainability of salmon stocks and the fisheries it supports. Views have been sought on several options to reduce the numbers of salmon caught and so protect stocks. The agency will take into account all comments received and aims to publish the final plan in the summer. Should this recommend fishing restrictions these would be subject to a further public consultation and require DEFRA approval.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will issue her draft combined heat and power strategy for consultation. [41129]

Mr. Meacher: We will issue the draft strategy for consultation shortly.

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action her Department plans to take to achieve the Government's target to double the UK use of CHP by 2010. [40940]

Mr. Meacher: The Department is developing a CHP strategy in close collaboration with other Government Departments. This will set out the measures needed to achieve the target to double installed Good Quality CHP electrical capacity to at least 10,000 MW by 2010. We will issue the draft strategy for consultation shortly.

Flooding (Lee Valley)

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects the Environment Agency to publish its pre-feasibility report on the Lower Lee Valley Flooding Strategy. [40679]

Mr. Morley: This Department provides grants for flood and coastal defence capital works, and associated studies, which meet essential technical, economic and environmental criteria and achieve an appropriate priority score. Further to increases in spending plans in the last two spending reviews, additional funding of £51 million over the four years from 2000–01 was announced in November 2000 following the severe flooding that year. An increased priority was given to urban flooding defences and the grant rates for all river flood defences were increased by 20 per cent.

Operational responsibility for flood management measures rests with the local operating authorities, normally the Environment Agency and local councils, who decide which projects to promote and their timing. I understand that the initial scoping report for the Lower River Lee Flood Defence Strategy is currently being reviewed by the agency and they plan to publish a summary of it in April this year. The purpose of the report is to identify flooding problems and key issues.

EU Directives

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what studies she has made of the way in which other EU states implement directives and regulations affecting farmers and food production; and what assessment she has made of the compliance costs in each country. [36583]

Mr. Morley: The responsibility for monitoring the regulatory situation in member states and for maintaining a level playing field through the proper implementation and enforcement of EU legislation is a matter for the European Commission. In developing its own regulatory reform plan, DEFRA does have regard among other matters, to practice in other member states where appropriate.

Welfare of Laying Hens Directive

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will review the impact of the welfare of laying hens directive 1999/74/EC on the British egg industry five years after its implementation. [41229]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* The directive makes provision for a review in 2005.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether she intends to incorporate directive 1999/74/EC (welfare of laying hens) into domestic legislation. [41225]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* Directive 99/74/EC will be incorporated in England by amending the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2000. Separate regulations will be made to implement this directive in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if all the systems detailed in the welfare of laying hens directive 1999/74/EC will be available to UK producers. [41224]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* Yes: English implementing legislation will include all the systems detailed in the welfare of laying hens directive 99/74/EC. Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland will follow suit.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with her counterparts in each EU member state on the welfare of laying hens directive 1999/74/EC; and what her estimate is of the *(a)* speed and *(b)* vigour with which the directive will be implemented in other member states. [41227]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* Member states are responsible for bringing into force the necessary regulations to comply with this directive and for communicating the main provisions of national law into the EU Commission.

The EU Commission is responsible for monitoring enforcement by member states.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what assessment she has made of the impact on *(a)* jobs, *(b)* productivity and *(c)* profitability of the welfare of laying hens directive 1999/74/EC; [41223]

(2) what assessment she has made of how much the welfare of laying hens directive 1999/74/EC will cost the British egg industry. [41228]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* A regulatory impact assessment has been produced, following public consultation. It will be published to accompany the statutory instrument to implement the welfare of laying hens directive.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what mechanisms for appeal will exist against legal enforcement of the welfare of laying hens directive 1999/74/EC. [41226]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* The regulations implementing the laying hens directive are made under the Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1968. A person can be convicted of an offence under this legislation; the appeal mechanism is to a higher court.

The regulations could be challenged in the ECJ as not correctly implementing the directive; through judicial review proceedings; or by a challenge on human rights issues.

Pig Farming

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement about the rearing of pigs in factory farms. [40465]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* There is comprehensive legislation to protect the welfare of pigs on farm. In particular, the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2000 specify detailed conditions under which pigs must be kept. There is also a code of practice.

Last October the EU Council of Agriculture Ministers adopted a pig welfare directive which will eventually bring conditions in all other member states up to British pig welfare standards.

Farming and Food White Paper

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her plans to implement the recommendations of, "Farming and Food: A Sustainable Future". [40464]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* The Commission's report will make a substantial contribution to a new strategy for sustainable food and farming, which we aim to launch in the autumn. We will work with a wide range of stakeholders to determine how best to take forward the Commission's ideas and deliver positive changes on the ground. As responsibility for addressing the Commission's recommendations rests with industry and other organisations as well as Government, we will be looking for their active involvement. Before Easter we will publish a steering document which will inform and guide this and launch the stakeholder engagement process.

Meat Exports

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the future viability of the UK export market; when she expects actual exports of livestock and animal products to resume; and if she will make a statement. [37920]

Mr. Morley: It is for industry, rather than the Government, to assess the viability of export markets, although the Government have an important role to play in helping to secure the removal of barriers to exports. Indications from the UK industry are that many traditional overseas buyers are keen to resume business, although it will take time to regain and exceed the level of business (£1.37 billion in the livestock and livestock product sector) seen in 2000.

The European Commission has now lifted restrictions on exports of meat, animal products and live animals. Exports to other EU member states can thus resume and have already done so in many cases. Exports to third countries can also recommence as soon as we have received the requested confirmation from the importing countries of their import conditions. We are actively pursuing such confirmation from priority export markets.

Olive Oil

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to impound olive oil that is suspected of being contaminated with polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons. [6055]

Yvette Cooper: I have been asked to reply.

I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

On 4 July 2001, the Food Standards Agency was notified of the contamination of Spanish olive-pomace oil with high levels of benzo(a)pyrene, a polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon that could cause cancer. To protect consumers, the agency advised retailers to withdraw all Spanish olive-pomace oil from the UK market and recall fat spreads and dressings containing olive-pomace oil as an ingredient. This advice does not apply where it can be shown that the olive-pomace oil or products in which it is used contain acceptably low levels of benzo(a)pyrene.

On 14 August 2001, the agency alerted the public following notification of high levels of benzo(a)pyrene in two batches of olive-pomace oil produced in Greece. The UK distributor withdrew the batches and any remaining in circulation should not be used. The agency is continuing to be notified where high levels of benzo(a)pyrene are found in olive-pomace oil produced in the European Union. Where these products are sold in the UK they have been removed from sale.

On 29 November 2001, the agency completed a survey of olive and olive-pomace oils to determine the levels of benzo(a)pyrene in oils sold in the UK from Greece, Italy and Spain. Where elevated levels of benzo(a)pyrene were found during the survey in some samples of olive-pomace oils, action was taken to prevent the sale of the product and the European Commission notified.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Student Drop-out Rates

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students have dropped out of university at the end of the first year for each university; and of those how many were subsequently re-admitted or started a new course at another university in each of the past three years. [36624]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* The available information on the non-continuation of students beyond the first year in each university, and the proportion who resume after a year out, is contained in "Performance Indicators in Higher Education in the UK" published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, a copy of which is available from the House Library.

Secondments

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the names of staff who have been seconded to her Department from the private sector since May 1997, indicating *(a)* the names of the organisation from which each has come, *(b)* their responsibilities and civil service grades within her Department, *(c)* the organisation responsible for paying their salary and *(d)* the start and end dates of their secondment. [35839]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* Since May 1997 23 staff have been seconded to this Department from the private sector. The following table sets out *(a)* the names of the relevant private sector organisations, *(b)* the secondees' responsibilities and their grades, *(c)* the organisation responsible for paying salary and *(d)* the start and end date of the secondment.

Inward secondees from private sector from May 1997 to date

Name of parent organisation	*Responsibilities*	*Grade*	*Funding arrangements*	*Start/end date*
Ernst and Young	School Leadership Division, Policy adviser	Consultant	DfES	9/10/2000 to 31/3/2001
International Computers Ltd.	Ufl Transition Team, Assisted in establishment of Ufl organisation as a public private partnership	G7	Parent Organisation	2/6/1998 to 30/11/1998
Aqumen Services	Private Finance Division, Advising Department on public/private finance.	Adviser	DfES	10/4/1998 to 1/11/1998
Ernst and Young	Teachers Pay and Pensions, Policy Adviser	Consultant	DfES	1/1/2000 to 31/12/2000
Pannell, Kerr, Foster	Private Finance Division, Finance Adviser	G7	DfES	30/7/1997 to 31/3/1998
The Link Group	Workplace Learning Division, Head of Learning Projects	G6	Parent Organisation	2/4/2001 to 31/3/2002
XANSA	New Deal Task Force, Co-ordination of Ambition IT Project	G7	Parent Organisation	1/1/2001 to 30/9/2001
Ernst and Young	National College for School Leadership, Consultant	Consultant	Parent Organisation	15/5/2000 to 14/11/2000
Next Employment Agency	Member of the Secretariat for the National Disability Council	SEO	Parent Organisation	1/9/1998 to 31/8/2000
Ernst and Young	Transforming Secondary Education, Policy adviser	Consultant	DfES	3/10/2000 to 22/12/2000
Enigma Productions	Financial and Analytical Services, Financial adviser	Consultant	DfES	13/3/2000 to 12/3/2001

Inward secondees from private sector from May 1997 to date

Name of parent organisation	*Responsibilities*	*Grade*	*Funding arrangements*	*Start/end date*
National Westminster Bank	Financial and Analytical Services, Adviser on Communications	G6	Shared	6/3/2000 to 5/3/2001
Ernst and Young	Transforming Secondary Education Delivery, Unit Policy Adviser	Consultant	DFES	10/1/2000 to 22/12/2000
Nationwide Anglia Building Society	People Skills Division, Assistant Director developing the Work-Life Balance Campaign.	G7	DfES	5/9/2001 to 4/9/2002
Ernst and Young	Teachers Pay and Pensions, Policy adviser	Consultant	DfES	27/9/2000 to 31/1/2001
Glaxo Wellcome	Schools Directorate, Adviser on best practice in Science	Adviser	Employing Organis[illegible]	3/11/1998 to 31/1/2000
National Westminster Bank	Business Manager	Adviser	Shared funding	13/3/2000 to 12/3/2001
Centre for British Teachers	Schools Impact and Feedback Division, Policy Adviser	G6	DfES	1/4/2001 to 31/3/2004
Price Waterhouse Cooper	Surestart Unit, Providing financial and audit advice	G7	DfES	1/10/2000 to 30/9/2001
National Westminster Bank	Performance and Innovation Unit, Project Manager	G7	DfES	6/3/2000 to 23/6/2000
Centre for School Standards	Pupil Standards Division, Support on delivery and operational matters.	EO	DfES	14/1/2002 to 12/7/2002
International Communications Ltd.	Lifelong Learning and Technologies Division, Assist with the operation of Learning Direct and the Ufl launch 2000	G6	DfES	1/2/2000 to 31/3/2001
Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research	Research for Analytical Services	SRO	DfES	6/1/1997 to 21/10/1997

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many staff in her Department have been seconded to jobs in the *(a)* private and *(b)* public sector in each of the last four years. [31768]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 7 February 2002, *Official Report,* columns 1129–30W.

Departmental Retirement Ages

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the retirement ages that apply to the employees of her Department and its agencies, including how many and which categories of employees are affected by each; and if she will make a statement on her Department's policy on flexible retirement. [32832]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Within my Department, all staff outside the senior civil service can choose to retire between 60 up to a maximum retirement age of 65. This is subject to satisfying fitness and efficiency requirements. Staff in the senior civil service grades retire at age 60. Out of a total of 4,258 staff, 109 are in the senior civil service grades.

My Department's policy on flexible retirement is intended to improve opportunities and choice for people aged 50 to 65 in the Department and to support the Department's equality strategy.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether her duty under section 10 of the Education Act 1996 extends to the promotion of education for asylum seekers in detention and reception centres. [37278]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* No individual or class of persons is owed a specific duty under section 10 of the 1996 Act. The Secretary of State does not have a specific duty to promote education for asylum seekers in detention and reception centres. The duty is very wide and general and applies to "the people of England and Wales". However, one of the Secretary of State's roles when exercising this duty is to work with all bodies and institutions with education responsibilities and to assist them to provide effective education. The Department has been in contact with the Home Office and local education authorities and encouraged them to work together to provide facilities and services that are appropriate to meet the educational needs of the residents of these centres.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether education provided to asylum-seeking children in accommodation centres will deliver the national curriculum. [42408]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Under the current legislation the national curriculum applies to schools maintained by local education authorities. This Department is working closely with the Home Office on issues relating to the education of children of asylum seekers in accommodation centres. A final decision has yet to be made about the detail of the education provision that will be made available in accommodation centres.

Human Rights

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the activities undertaken by the UK in the framework of the Decade for Human Rights Education. [40527]

Margaret Hodge: There are a number of activities undertaken by the UK which promote human rights education relevant to the UN Decade for Human Rights. These include:

> the introduction of citizenship education, which teaches children about legal and human rights, as part of the Personal, Social and Health Education and Citizenship framework in primary schools. This will be a compulsory subject in the National Curriculum from September 2002 in England. Citizenship education is also available within the curricula of Wales and Scotland.
>
> the introduction of a human rights perspective into the Department for International Development's work, as set out in DFID's Target Strategy Paper, "Realising Human Rights for Poor People".

a "human rights helpline" and website managed by the Home Office on the Human Rights Act. National roadshows have also been held to explain its implications to a wider audience.

the website developed by the British Council, which provides a news service on human rights issues in the UK. It also contains information on international developments on civil and political rights, the rights of children, and the rights of minority groups. A set of booklets on Citizenship Education and Human Rights Education has also been distributed to UK and overseas audiences.

Opportunity Bursaries

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many opportunity bursaries were awarded in each university in England in 2001–02. [40559]

Margaret Hodge: Of the 6,580 opportunity bursaries allocated to participating institutions, a total of 6,129 had been awarded by December 2001. Information is not held about the number of opportunity bursaries awarded by individual institutions. The following table shows the number of students with an opportunity bursary in attendance at each institution as at December 2001. Students awarded a bursary by one institution who took up an HE place elsewhere are counted within the total for the institution they transferred to.

The 451 opportunity bursaries that were not awarded from the initial allocations were redistributed to institutions in January 2002. We expect all opportunity bursaries available in 2001–02 to be taken up.

Institution	*Number of opportunity bursaries initially allocated 2001–02*	*Number of opportunity bursary holders attending each institution 2001–02*[1]
Universities		
Anglia Polytechnic University	64	53
Aston University	46	37
University of Bath	27	23
University of Birmingham	96	85
Bournemouth University	36	36
University of Bradford	63	72
University of Brighton	45	27
University of Bristol	33	26
Brunel University	59	56
University of Cambridge	53	40
University of Central England	95	89
University of Central Lancashire	126	127
City University	23	27
Coventry University	109	119
De Montfort University	152	169
University of Derby	85	85
University of Durham	54	58
University of East Anglia	34	15
University of East London	71	76
University of Essex	31	31
University of Exeter	30	19
University of Gloucestershire	34	23
Goldsmiths College	23	18
University of Greenwich	78	95
University of Hertfordshire	88	88
University of Huddersfield	118	118
University of Hull	72	67
Imperial College	33	31
Keele University	36	38
University of Kent at Canterbury	40	21
King's College London	53	35
Kingston University	69	63
Lancaster University	57	55
University of Leeds	124	97
Leeds Metropolitan University	92	96
University of Leicester	58	62
University of Lincoln	89	85
University of Liverpool	93	98
Liverpool John Moores University	145	127
London Guildhall University	79	77
Loughborough University	62	75
University of Luton	91	91
University of Manchester	102	90
UMIST	40	32
Manchester Metropolitan University	188	188
Middlesex University	115	114
University of Newcastle	74	62
University of North London	80	38
University of Northumbria at Newcastle	115	104
University of Nottingham	55	57
Nottingham Trent University	133	135
University of Oxford	45	36
Oxford Brookes University	32	26
University of Plymouth	80	73
University of Portsmouth	78	84
Queen Mary, University of London	54	42
University of Reading	35	34
Royal Holloway, University of London	24	26
University of Salford	121	107
University of Sheffield	83	83
Sheffield Hallam University	158	158
University of Southampton	55	19
South Bank University	81	73
Staffordshire University	133	140
University of Sunderland	139	118
University of Surrey	21	19
University of Surrey Roehampton	27	26
University of Sussex	30	23
University of Teesside	88	78
Thames Valley University	43	43
University College London	47	54
University of Warwick	43	37
University of West of England, Bristol	84	84
University of Westminster	72	73
University of Wolverhampton	153	159
University of York	38	31
Bath Spa University College	14	15
Bolton Institute of Higher Education	49	28
Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College	39	36
Canterbury Christ Church University College	20	20
Chester College of Higher Education	21	21
University College Chichester	13	13
Edge Hill College of Higher Education	36	30
King Alfred's College, Winchester	15	15
Liverpool Hope	40	49
University College Northampton	69	51
St. Mary's College	13	14
Southampton Institute	71	67
University College Worcester	19	20
York St. John College	22	23
Bishop Grosseteste College	11	10
Central School of Speech and Drama	11	8
Cranfield University	11	6
Cumbria College of Art and Design	11	7
Dartington College of Arts	11	11
Falmouth College of Arts	11	11
Harper Adams University College	11	11
Kent Institute of Art and Design	17	16
University of London	11	0
London School of Economics and Political Science	11	6
The London Institute	44	43
Newman College	11	11
Northern School of Contemporary Dance	11	8
Norwich School of Art and Design	11	11
School of Oriental and African Studies	11	4
School of Pharmacy	11	11
Ravensbourne College	11	11
RCN Institute	11	0
Rose Bruford College	11	1
Royal Academy of Music	11	11
Royal College of Music	11	7
Royal Northern College of Music	11	11
Royal Veterinary College	11	0
St. George's Hospital Medical School	11	9
College of St. Mark and St. John	11	15
St. Martin's College	18	17

Institution	Number of opportunity bursaries initially allocated 2001–02	Number of opportunity bursary holders attending each institution 2001–02[1]
The Surrey Inst of Art and Design University College	15	15
Trinity and All Saints	17	16
Trinity College of Music	11	9
Wimbledon School of Art	11	5
Writtle College	11	1
Total universities	6,370	5,900
Further education colleges		
Barnsley College	34	32
Birmingham College of Food	47	52
Bradford College	57	58
Newcastle College	32	33
Stockport College of FE and HE	23	23
St. Helens College	17	15
Total further education colleges	210	213
Other UK institutions	0	[2]16
Total (all institutions)	6,580	6,129

[1] Data as at December 2001

[2] 16 students were awarded a bursary by one of the institutions participating in the scheme
but subsequently took up a place in a non-participating institution. Arrangements allow these students
to continue to receive their bursary at the institution they are studying.

Relocation Expenses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her policy is on the payment of relocation expenses to staff in her Department. [41027]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Relocation expenses are paid to the Department's staff if the move is considered to be in the public interest.

Teacher Recruitment

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what impact the "Those who can, teach", advertising campaign has had on teacher recruitment. [41886]

Mr. Timms: Since it was launched in January 2001, the Teacher Training Agency's "Those who can, teach" campaign has had a positive impact on recruiting teachers. Last September, recruitment to initial teacher training courses rose for a second successive year, while the number of graduates who have applied to train as teachers so far this year is 22 per cent. higher than at the same point in 2001. Last year, the total number of inquiries about careers in teaching received by the agency's Teaching Information Line was 48 per cent. higher than in 1999–2000. Between September 2001 and March 2002, 10 per cent. more inquiries were received than in the corresponding period the previous year. The Teacher Training Agency will launch the next phase of the current advertising campaign later in the spring.

LEA Spending

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the spending is *(a)* per pupil and *(b)* per head of population in each local education authority in the south-west of England. [41964]

Mr. Timms: The following table contains information relating to expenditure per head of population based on total net current expenditure after recharges for 2000–01:

£

LEA name	*NCE per pupil rounded*	*NCE per person rounded*
Bath and North East Somerset	2,820	450
City of Bristol	3,110	430
North Somerset	2,790	420
South Gloucestershire	2,760	470
Cornwall	2,680	440
Isles of Scilly	4,990	700
Torbay	2,790	450
Plymouth	2,800	490
Devon	2,720	400
Bournemouth	2,770	400
Poole	2,530	360
Dorset	2,800	420
Gloucestershire	2,690	440
Somerset	2,790	430
Swindon	2,760	480
Wiltshire	2,790	440

Notes:

1. NCE data obtained from S52 outturn statements, table 3. These data are provisional and as such are subject
to change.

2. 2000–01 expenditure per pupil is based on NCE in primary, secondary and special schools after recharges per FTE pupil. Pupil numbers are obtained from Form 7 returns.

3. Total 2000–01 expenditure per head of population is based on total NCE after recharges ie covering all LEA education spend per head of population. Population estimates cover resident population as at mid-2000 based on the 1991 census.

Connexions

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether the Connexions Service has power to obtain information about individual young people from *(a)* the Benefits Agency, *(b)* youth services, *(c)* social services departments, *(d)* local education authorities, *(e)* youth offending teams and *(f)* the police. [42131]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* The Learning and Skills Act 2000 enables all these organisations to provide information to Connexions.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which information local provider databases within a Connexions partnership they are required to retain about 13 to 19-year-olds, which they are required to pass on to the partnership, regional databases and national database; and what right individual data subjects have to prevent information being passed on. [42135]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* Local providers are required to provide information to Connexions partnerships according to the terms of section 117 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000.

There is no current requirement for Connexions partnerships to pass any individual data to a regional or national database. Aggregated information is required to be provided for management information purposes.

The rights of individual subjects to prevent information being passed on are safeguarded by the Data Protection Act.

We are looking to improve the information that is available to Connexions partnerships and personal advisers, to support their service to young people while respecting the principles of the Data Protection Act. This will be done through the introduction of a new Connexions Customer Information System, which is currently being developed.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what information is collected by the Connexions service about children and young adults *(a)* with and *(b)* without the agreement of the data subject; from what sources; and whether data will be (i) retained and (ii) passed on to other agencies without the agreement of the data subject. [42145]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* Local Connexions partnerships are building the information systems needed to offer the most effective service to young people. Their activities take place within the framework of the Learning and Skills Act 2000, and partnerships also need to observe the principles of the Data Protection Act. Partnerships are data controllers in their own right; my Department supports them with advice and guidance.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills with which other Government operated databases the national Connexions database will be cross-matched; and if data subjects on those databases will *(a)* be informed and *(b)* have the right to opt out of such matching. [42332]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* We are examining what national approaches will be appropriate to support the work of local Connexions partnerships. Feasibility testing is at an early stage. In part this involves looking, in co-operation with the office of the Information Commissioner, at how to make best use of the Child Benefit Register and schools data sources.

Arson

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps the Government are taking to reduce malicious fires and arson in schools; and if she will make a statement. [42226]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Most arson attacks take place when schools are closed, but all of them have the potential to cause considerable damage and disruption. Buildings may be destroyed, and irreplaceable records, teaching notes and course work lost.

Officials from my Department sit on the Arson in Schools Working Group, a group of experts representing the insurance industry, the fire and police services, local authorities and Government Departments. One of its outputs has been the publication of the guide "How to Combat Arson in Schools", which is available free and has been well received by schools.

My Department has also published the guide "Fire Safety", which includes advice on how to reduce the risks of arson attacks. This complements our guidance on reducing crime in schools, such as the booklet "Improving Security in Schools" and the video "Can You See What They See?" A school security website has been established.

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether funds provided to schools for payment of the upper spine of teacher remuneration can be used for other purposes. [42239]

Mr. Timms: Schools will be able to use the new special grant for performance pay progression to pay for performance points awarded to teachers on the upper, leadership and advanced skills teacher pay scales and for double increments awarded to teachers on the main pay scale. The grant cannot be used for other purposes. The existing special grant for threshold payments (which take teachers to point 1 of the upper pay scale) can be used only for that purpose.

Knowledge Transfer

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the *(a)* purpose and *(b)* cost of knowledge transfer initiatives sponsored by her Department in (i) 2000–01 and (ii) 2001–02. [42596]

Margaret Hodge: The knowledge transfer initiatives supported by the Department for Education and Skills in 2000–01 and 2001–02 are listed in the following table. These initiatives are partnerships with the Department of Trade and Industry; funding is routed via the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). Only the cost to DfES is shown.

		(b) Cost to DfES (£)	
Initiative	*(a) Purpose*	*(i) 2000–01*	*(ii) 2001–02*
Higher Education Reach-out to Business and the Community Fund (HEROBC)[1]	To develop the capability of higher education institutions to respond to the needs of business of all sizes and sectors and a range of bodies within the wider community	18,600,000	20,000,000
Business Fellowships	To focus on recognising and developing creative activities carried out within HEIs to build their response to the needs of business, across the full range of their academic activity.	n/a	103,125

---

[1] From 2001–02 HEROBC was subsumed in the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) whose purpose is to build capacity of higher education institutions to work with business, in particular small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Public Appointments

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many appointments to public bodies have been made through his Department *(a)* from April 2000 to March 2001 and *(b)* since 31 March 2001; and how many of these were (i) men and (ii) women. [42153]

Mr. Leslie: The following appointments have been made to public bodies sponsored by my Department.

	1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001	*1 April 2001 to 28 February 2002*
Total public appointments	72	[1]32
of which:		
Men	43	10
Women	29	22

[1] Includes 13 appointments to the Women's National Commission all of whom are women

In addition, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has made the following appointments to the Advisory Committees on Justices of the Peace in Lancashire, Greater Manchester and Merseyside.

	1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001	*1 April 2001 to 28 February 2002*
Total public appointments	15	40
of which:		
Men	8	18
Women	7	22

Departmental Payments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the instances in which his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies failed to pay valid invoices within 30 days or after the agreed credit period in the financial year 2000–01. [32023]

Mr. Leslie: All Departments are committed to pay 100 per cent. of correctly presented invoices on time. My Department undertakes to pay all invoices within 30 days of receiving them. However, payment terms may vary between Departments.

In the financial year 2000–01 the Cabinet Office and its agencies paid 96.36 per cent. of invoices within 30 days. This shows an improvement over the previous year.

More detailed information on specific instances of failure to pay within 30 days is not readily available and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Civil Service Entrants

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what percentage of the senior civil service in each of the last four years has been *(a)* female, *(b)* members of ethnic minority groups and *(c)* former students of Oxford and Cambridge. [38315]

Mr. Leslie: The information is as follows:

(a) At 1 April each year, the percentage of the senior civil service who were female is shown.

	Percentage
1998	17.8
1999	19.7
2000	21.6
2001	24.2

(b) At 1 April each year, the percentage of those in senior civil service posts or equivalent who were known to be members of ethnic minority groups is shown:

	Percentage
1998	1.6
1999	1.7
2000	2.2
2001	2.4

This information is collected by Departments in a voluntary questionnaire and is known to be incomplete.

At 1 April each year, the percentage of those in senior civil service posts or equivalent whose ethnic origin is unknown were as follows:

	Percentage
1998	13.9
1999	10.3
2000	11.7
2001	12.5

Departments are currently re-surveying the ethnicity of their staff to bring the data into line with the Census 2001 categories.

This information relates to those in the senior civil service and other posts of equivalent responsibility (ie includes the diplomatic service and a number of other specialist posts).

(c) At 1 April each year, the percentages of the senior civil service who are known to have been to university and the percentages of those who are known to have been to Oxford or Cambridge are as follows:

			Percentage
	University status unknown	*Known to have been to University*	*Known to have been to Oxford or Cambridge as percentage of total*
1999	32.9	67.1	24.1
2000	38.7	61.3	21.1
2001	43.2	56.8	18.8

The information is not available for 1998.

Officials are working with Departments to improve both the quality and coverage of the data.

Gender Pay Gap

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the extent of the gender pay gap among staff in his Department. [40993]

Mr. Leslie: In response to the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) Task Force 'Just Pay' report, the Cabinet Office and its agencies and the Central Office of

Information are committed to reviewing their pay systems by April 2003 and preparing action plans to close any gender pay gaps.

Regions White Paper

Mrs. May: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the reason for the delay in the publication of the Regions White Paper. [42174]

Mr. Leslie: We have always stated that the Regions White Paper will be presented to Parliament as soon as it is ready. That remains the case.

WALES

Coal Communities (Regeneration)

Dr. Francis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales regarding the regeneration of former coal communities in Wales. [34843]

Mr. Touhig: I have regular discussions with the First Minister of the National Assembly for Wales on a range of issues.

In a relatively short space of time the Coalfields Regeneration Trust has established itself as a leading funder and partner in coalfield regeneration in Wales. All the £3.46 million available for Wales during the first three years has been committed to nearly 60 projects.

Consignia

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with Consignia concerning the future of the postal service in Wales. [35639]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have had discussions with ministerial colleagues about this issue.

Public Appointments

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many appointments to public bodies have been made through his Department *(a)* from April 2000 to March 2001 and *(b)* since 31 March 2001; and how many of these were (i) men and (ii) women. [42148]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Information about numbers of ministerial appointments to public bodies is included in the Cabinet Office's annual report "Public Bodies". Copies are placed in the Library of the House and the report is published on the Cabinet Office website.

My Department does not sponsor any public bodies; however, I am jointly responsible for some appointments made through other sponsoring Departments.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Industrial Action

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many interim payments have been issued to those whose benefit or tax credit awards have been delayed as a result of the recent PCS Union strike action. [30343]

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many benefit claimants have received interim payments at an amount equivalent to the full benefit rate as a result of industrial strike action undertaken by Jobcentre Plus staff; and under what terms and conditions such interim payments are being made. [32641]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* As at January 28, there are around 4,700 customers in receipt of weekly or fortnightly interim payments. The payments are made at a rate equivalent to the income support rates. Interim payments are recoverable and will be off set against any benefit that is due once the claim is reviewed and assessed using the normal benefit rules.

Tax credits, administrated by the Inland Revenue, have not been affected by industrial action in the Department for Work and Pensions.

Housing Benefit

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of private rented sector tenants have had their entitlement to housing benefit restricted as a result of *(a)* local reference rent determinations and *(b)* single room rent determinations in each rent service area in the past 12 months. [34551]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is not available.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on what basis a student loan is classed as income for students applying for housing benefit. [36060]

Malcolm Wicks: Support for full-time students is generally provided through the educational maintenance system which is designed for their needs. However some full-time students in vulnerable groups, such as lone parents or disabled people, are eligible to claim income-related benefits, including housing benefit, in recognition of their extra needs.

As with other people claiming income related benefits any income a student has is taken into account when assessing entitlement to benefit. Since a student loan is intended to help towards everyday living costs it is taken into account as income. However, before the weekly income is assessed £319 of the annual loan is disregarded towards the cost of travel and £260 towards the cost of books and equipment. In addition, any grants made specifically for these costs are disregarded in full. Once the weekly loan income has been calculated a further £10 a week is disregarded.

To treat student loans in any other way would put students in a better position than people who have no access to these resources.

Rent Service

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will list by Rent Service area the localities used by the Rent Service in *(a)* September 2001 and *(b)* January 2002 to determine the local reference rent and single room rent; [34552]

(2) what requirements the Rent Service has to consult on changes to the geographical extent of localities used to determine local reference rents and single room rents; [34553]

(3) if he will place in the Library a copy of the internal memorandum issued to officers of the Rent Service following the introduction of Statutory Instrument No. 3561; [34554]

(4) if he will place in the Library a copy of the Rent Service report on the impact on the number of localities of the introduction of Statutory Instrument No. 3561. [34555]

Malcolm Wicks: Our policy is that local reference rents should reflect the generality of the market and must therefore be based on an area large enough to take account of the bigger picture which reflects a more generalised choice of housing. Localities are intended to reflect the qualities (both good and bad) of an area. Details of Rent Service localities are not published because markets can change rapidly rendering such information out of date and meaningless. Localities are necessarily fluid in order to reflect the housing market. Current Rent Service guidance states that localities should be reviewed on a monthly basis.

Rent Officers determine localities by using their professional judgment, expertise and knowledge of the local housing market. There is no requirement for the Rent Service to consult formally about these arrangements.

The technical advice and guidance circular on valuation good practice, which is used by rent officers in England, is the responsibility of the Rent Service. A copy of the circular, which has also been shared with Rent Officers in Wales and Scotland, has been placed in the Library.

There has been no report from the Rent Service on the impact on the number of localities since the introduction of Statutory Instrument 3561. The amendments introduced by that instrument are designed to ensure that our policy is achieved and to restore certainty. They are not designed to change the way in which localities or local reference and single room rents are decided. The position for people claiming Housing Benefit is therefore unchanged.

Performance and Verification Frameworks

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will place in the Library the responses to the consultations on the performance framework and the verifications framework. [29484]

Malcolm Wicks: Local authority circular F25/2001 contains a summary of the responses to consultation on the Department's paper "Splitting the Verification Framework into Modules" issued in July 2001. A copy of this circular has been placed in the Library.

A copy of the summary of responses to consultation on the performance framework has also been placed in the Library.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what progress has been made in discussions with the European Commission about the extent of the UK's legal obligations under European regulations on winter fuel payments; and if he will make a statement; [39988]

(2) what plans his Department has to pay winter fuel allowance to British pensioners living abroad. [27598]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* Department officials met recently with officials from the European Commission, and as a result of that we expect to bring this matter to a close shortly.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much his Department plans to spend on *(a)* winter fuel payments and *(b)* Warm Front plus grants in (i) 2001–02 and (ii) 2002–03. [37640]

Mr. McCartney: The estimated cost of winter fuel payments for 2001–02 and 2002–03 is around £1.7 billion for each year.

Warm Front plus grants are a matter for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. However, I understand that the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES) is now marketed as the Warm Front Team and that for the period April 2001 to January 2002, over £73 million was spent on HEES plus grants. The expected HEES plus spend for the remainder of 2001–02 is almost £8 million. For the 2002–03 financial year, it is estimated that the spend on HEES plus will be in the region of £50 million.

Fraud

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1256W, in what format the information requested is available. [39869]

Malcolm Wicks: Information is available only on the total number of cases involving benefit fraud and claimant error. To produce a separate figure for the number of benefit fraud cases, and hence the proportion of these in which prosecutions were brought, each case would have to be re-examined individually.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his most recent estimate is of the level of benefit fraud in 2001–02. [39017]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sarwar) on 30 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 1166W.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what systems exist to enable members of the public to inform his Department of cases of benefit fraud. [38197]

Malcolm Wicks: Members of the public can inform the Department of cases of suspected benefit fraud by either telephoning the Benefit Fraud Hotline (0800 854 440); using the Targeting Fraud Website www.targetingfraud.gov.uk; or writing or calling in at their local Benefit Office or Jobcentre. All the information provided is strictly in confidence and members of the public do not have to give their name if they do not wish to do so.

Minimum Income Guarantee

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assumption he has made about the proportion of pensioners receiving the minimum income guarantee *(a)* with and *(b)* without setting the basic state pension at the same level for (i) all pensioners, (ii) those aged over 75 years and (iii) those aged over 80 years. [29722]

Mr. McCartney: In August 2001 there were just over 2 million pensioners receiving the minimum income guarantee. This represents just under 17 per cent. of the total population of Great Britain who are aged over 60, further information is in the table.

Total MIG caseload and the proportion of pensioners aged over 60 who would be on MIG if the basic state pension was set at the singles level of MIG for a) those over 60 b) those over 75 and c) those over 80.

	Total MIG caseload after uprating of BSP	*Remaining MIG caseload as a percentage of total 60+ population*
a) over 60	1.1	9
b) over 75	1.5	12
c) over 80	1.65	14

Note:

Numbers of pensioners rounded to the nearest 50,000 and given in millions of pensioners. Per cent. given to nearest 1 per cent.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners in Walthamstow are claiming the minimum income guarantee. [38470]

Maria Eagle: As at November 2001 there were 3,300 pensioners claiming the MIG in the Walthamstow constituency.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Power of Attorney

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will list the cost of obtaining power of attorney in each of the last five years. [40801]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Most people who make powers of attorney do so with help from legal advisers. We have no information about the cost to individuals as this is a private matter agreed between the individual and his or her legal advisers. Where the individual has made an enduring power of attorney, there is a fee to register the power of attorney if the individual becomes mentally incapacitated. The fee for registering an enduring power of attorney was £50 from 1997 and increased to £75 on 1 October 1999. The Public Guardianship Office (PGO) has recently conducted a review of the fees charged, including fees for registration of enduring powers of attorney, as the existing fees policy does not meet the full cost of the service delivered, as required by HM Treasury guidance. Fees charged by the PGO are set by the Lord Chancellor, in consultation with the consent of HM Treasury, and will be laid before Parliament shortly.

Job Sharing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make a statement on the extent of job sharing in her Department. [41051]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) on 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 844W.

City Status

Bob Russell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the announcement will be made as to which applicants have been granted the status of city to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Her Majesty The Queen's accession. [42146]

Mr. Burns: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when she expects an announcement on the bestowing of city status to celebrate the Golden Jubilee. [41439]

Ms Rosie Winterton: My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor hopes to announce the results of the Golden Jubilee city status competition shortly.

1901 Census

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when she expects to place details of the 1901 Census onto the internet; and if she will make a statement. [41925]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) on 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 55W.

Catering Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the cost was of *(a)* in-house canteen and *(b)* other catering services provided by his Department in each of the last four years. [38928]

Mr. Wills: The Lord Chancellor's Department also replies on behalf of its associated offices and the Court Service.

Catering services to meet the Department's requirements are provided through contractual arrangements with specialist suppliers.

(a) With reference to the first part of the question, the term "in-house canteen" is taken to mean facilities provided primarily for use by the Department's staff.

Staff canteens are provided at a number of key central locations where staff are concentrated. These facilities are used regularly by staff from other locations and visitors to the Department's premises.

Revenue from sales to staff and visitors is used to defray costs to the Department. However, it is necessary to support the service as outlined:

Lord Chancellor's Department and associated offices

	£
1998–99	140,763.74
1999–2000	141,564.00
2000–01	213,794.86
2001–02	[1]161,362.92

[1] To January.

(b) The majority of expenditure on catering services in the Department is required for facilities provided to jurors and other members of the public attending court buildings. Court staff, the legal profession and judges also use these facilities; use by these groups is around 10 per cent. of sales. Catering services are provided at 63 Crown and Combined Court Centres in England and Wales. Revenue from sales is used to defray cost to the Department. The remaining costs for each of the last four years is set out in the table:

Court Service

	£
1998–99	1,027,011.00
1999–2000	1,442,516.00
2000–01	1,323,969.00
2001–02	[1]948,603.00

[1] To December.

Accommodation Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the cost was of hotel accommodation for departmental staff working away from home in each of the last four years. [41062]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information requested is not immediately available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

The Department has authority to reimburse expenses incurred by LCD staff in connection with their employment subject to the conditions set out in section 8 of the Civil Service Management Code. However the Lord Chancellor's Department does not maintain separate data on the hotel element within the total of travel and subsistence costs.

Lord Chancellor's Department staff can claim reimbursement of actual expenditure (subject to provision of receipts) within an overall ceiling of £100 per night in London and £90 per night in major cities and £80 per night elsewhere. This ceiling covers hotel bed and breakfast, lunch and dinner and travel between hotel and place(s) visited on official business.

Personal Injury Cases

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he will publish a consultation paper on periodical payments for future loss and care costs in personal injury cases. [43088]

Mr. Wills: The Lord Chancellor has today published the consultation paper "Damages for Future Loss: Giving the Courts the Power to Order Periodical Payments for Future Loss and Care Costs in Personal Injury Cases". The consultation paper proposes that the courts should have the power to award damages for future loss and care costs in the form of periodical payments. Responses to the consultation are sought by 7 June 2002. Copies of the consultation paper have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Fatal Accidents (Bereavement Damages)

Linda Gilroy: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will change the level of bereavement damages awarded under section 1A of the Fatal Accidents Act 1976 and Article 3A(5) of the Fatal Accidents (Northern Ireland) Order 1977. [43087]

Mr. Wills: The Lord Chancellor laid before Parliament yesterday orders increasing the level of bereavement damages from £7,500 to £10,000 to reflect the increase in inflation since the figure was last revised in 1991. The orders will take effect from 1 April 2002.

Citizen's Advice Bureaux

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what funding the Government provide each year to the Citizen's Advice Bureaux; and if he will make a statement. [41220]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

Individual Citizen's Advice Bureaux are funded through a variety of sources, including lottery money, and by local authorities who decide on the level of funding in the light of their own assessment of local needs and the resources available to them. Central Government provide support for local authorities in this area through general grant. The Legal Services Commission, a non-departmental public body, also provides funding to some Citizens Advice Bureaux through the system of contracting, introduced as part of the arrangements for the community legal service.

TREASURY

Small Landlords

Margaret Moran: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with the British Federation of Landlords and Private Tenants associations on bringing small landlords within the same tax regime as other small businesses. [41668]

Dawn Primarolo: Ministers and civil servants have meetings with a wide range of organisations and individuals as part of the process of policy development and analysis. I refer to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 4 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 689W, stating that as with previous Administrations it is not this Government's practice to provide details of all such meetings. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the "Ministerial Code", the "Civil Service Code" and "Guidance for Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists".

Refurbishment

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer who provided, or is providing, the *(a)* windows and *(b)* doors for the refurbishment of the Treasury building. [41349]

Ruth Kelly: Oakmead have provided the new and replacement windows. Ruddy Joinery have provided the bulk of the new doors.

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what organisation provided the certification for the doors and windows for the refurbishment of the Treasury building to show that they were produced from sustainably managed sources; and if he will place a copy of these certificates in the Library. [41350]

Ruth Kelly: A number of companies have provided the necessary certification for this refurbishment. A copy of the certificates will be placed in the Library at the earliest suitable opportunity.

Inland Revenue

Bob Russell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which Minister has responsibility for ensuring that the rules laid down by the Civil Service Management Code are observed within the Inland Revenue. [42054]

Dawn Primarolo: The direct responsibility lies with the Chairman of the Board of Inland Revenue as the Head of the Non-Ministerial Department. He exercises his responsibilities under the general direction of Treasury Ministers.

ECOFIN

Mr. Hood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the outcome was of the ECOFIN Council held in Brussels on 5 March; what the Government's stance was on the issues discussed, including its voting record; and if he will make a statement. [42705]

Mr. Gordon Brown: The Paymaster General and I attended the ECOFIN Council.

ECOFIN agreed a Key Issues Paper on the 2002 Broad Economic Policy Guidelines, which will be submitted to the Barcelona European Council. Ministers also agreed reports on structural reform, increasing labour market participation and promoting active aging and healthcare and care for the elderly. They also adopted an ECOFIN report on the integration of environmental and sustainable development into economic policy making.

ECOFIN discussed the mid-term review of the Financial Services Action Plan and agreed that progress should be accelerated to meet the deadlines agreed at the Lisbon European Council.

ECOFIN endorsed the European Commission's study on globalisation and development and agreed a statement on it. Ministers also considered a Commission report on the preparation of the International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey. I called for European Union member states to lead the way on global social justice, to set out a strong EU position in support of the aims of the conference, and specifically to make a new commitment to increasing overseas development assistance as a proportion of Gross National Product. This issue was discussed further at the General Affairs Council on 11 March.

An opinion on the Danish Convergence Programme was agreed and the Commission's oral update on the transition to the euro was noted.

ECOFIN agreed Council priorities for the 2003 budget. Ministers also noted the implementation of initiatives to improve management and accounting in order to combat fraud and irregularity, and consequently agreed a recommendation that the European Parliament grant discharge of the 2000 budget. The Commission outlined its Green Paper on the European Public Prosecutor. There was widespread agreement to see how the new Eurojust fared before considering alternatives.

Ministers discussed a number of proposals for strengthening EU development assistance to the Mediterranean region. No agreement was reached at this stage on the potential role of a new financing institution, and ECOFIN will consider the matter further at its meeting on 14 March ahead of the Barcelona European Council.

The Presidency presented a paper on administrative cooperation on tax matters. The paper will be considered further by the Fiscal Questions Group and ECOFIN will then be asked to adopt a report to the Seville European Council in June. The Paymaster General, in her role as Chair of the Code of Conduct Group, delivered an oral report on the Group's progress and its work programme under the Spanish Presidency. There will be a further update on the Group's work at the ECOFIN in June. No votes were taken at the meeting.

Stamp Duty

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 28 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 815, on stamp duty, what the value was of property transactions of less than £150,000 in the three months immediately prior to the introduction of the stamp duty exemption in the 2,000 most deprived wards. [42621]

Dawn Primarolo: The information requested is not available.

Equitable Life

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the situation regarding Equitable Life. [42685]

Dawn Primarolo: Equitable Life's current situation is a matter for the society's board and for the members of the society.

Self-Assessment

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people completed self-assessment income tax forms in *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000 and *(c)* 2000–01. [42594]

Dawn Primarolo: No details are held of the number of people who completed self-assessment tax returns. The number of completed tax returns for each tax year received by the Inland Revenue in the following tax year is as follows:

1998–99: Number of 1997–98 returns received: 8,374,888

1999–2000: Number of 1998–99 returns received: 8,506,751

2000–01: Number of 1999–2000 returns received: 8,795,949.

Share Incentive Plans

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many share incentive plans have received Inland Revenue approval. [42001]

Dawn Primarolo: 292 share incentive plans have received Inland Revenue approval up to 6 March 2002 and a further 140 plans are in the final stages of the approval process.

Correspondence

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will reply to the letter dated 8 February from the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan regarding national insurance contributions. [42799]

Dawn Primarolo: I have done so.

Tax Referral

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much is owed by businesses in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the UK in respect of schemes to defer liability for (i) PAYE, (ii) VAT and (iii) corporation tax to mitigate the effects of foot and mouth disease. [42000]

Dawn Primarolo: Between 21 March 2001 and 3 March 2002, the total amounts deferred in respect of PAYE, VAT and Corporation Tax came to £65.236 million, £109.598 million and £11.954 million respectively. These are gross figures and take no account of amounts subsequently paid. Businesses seriously affected by the foot and mouth outbreak have not been required to recommence payments of deferred liability and we do not have full details of payments received. It is, therefore, not possible to state how much is still owed by businesses in Scotland and England. However, a sample review of these cases in December 2001 suggests that as much as £78.45 million has been paid voluntarily.

Aggregates Levy

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes he proposes to make to the aggregates levy legislation. [43215]

Mr. Boateng: The primary legislation for the aggregates levy was included in the Finance Act 2001. Since the Act received Royal Assent, Customs and Excise have continued to consult the aggregates industry on matters of details, with a view to finalising the secondary legislation, which will be laid shortly.

During those discussions a number of technical issues have been raised, and it is the Government's intention to make a number of small changes in this year's Finance Bill that will facilitate the smooth functioning of the levy. These are:

To amend the definition of aggregate to include rock that has not been subject to an industrial crushing process

To clarify the definition of dimension stone

To extend the exemption for processing waste arising from the extraction of coal to the processing waste of all industrial minerals

To clarify that for all mineral extraction, any aggregate contained in the overburden is taxable

To extend the exemption for aggregate won from forest or farm land and used in adjacent land, to its use in land occupied with that forest or farm

To extend the exemption for drill cuttings to include onshore drill cuttings

To extend the penalty regime to customers of aggregate suppliers in circumstances where the customers give false information concerning the use of aggregate

To introduce a number of minor technical amendments which clarify policy intention, close a potential loophole or bring the legislation into line with other taxes. These were detailed in Customs and Excise Business Brief No. 17/2001 issued on 28 November 2001.

The Government also announced in the pre-Budget report that it was minded to phase in the levy for aggregates used in processed products in Northern Ireland. Enabling legislation for this change will also be brought forward in this year's Finance Bill.

Public Service Agreements

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 27 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 1326w, on public service agreements, if he will place the record of the performance of each Government Department held by his Department for each public service agreement target in the Library for each year for which outturn data are available; and if he will make a statement. [41395]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Departments have reported, and will continue to report, their progress against PSA targets in their departmental reports, all of which are presented to Parliament.

HOME DEPARTMENT

"Safer Clubbing" Guide

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the "safer clubbing" guide. [42534]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The "safer clubbing" guide contains comprehensive new advice for club owners, dance event promoters and local authority licensing departments on how to ensure the health and safety of anyone attending dance events. It advises club owners on how to tackle drug dealing and recommends that clubs have police approved staff, searches and the use of metal detectors and regular patrols of all areas of the venue.

The clear message to young people remains that they should not take illegal drugs, and that they are harmful. The new guidelines should help reduce the availability of these drugs at venues. We must also take steps to reduce the harm that drugs cause individuals. The "safer clubbing" guide aims to do just that—it does not condone drug use.

Criminal Cases Review Commission

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases which had been dealt with by the Criminal Cases Review Commission have been examined by the European Court of Human Rights in the last five years. [40867]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. If applicants remain dissatisfied with the Commission's decisions on whether to refer their case to an appellate court, it is open to them to seek a domestic remedy by initiating judicial review proceedings. From the Commission's inception until 31 March 2001, four judicial review applications only have been granted leave: three were decided in the Commission's favour and one was settled on terms agreed by the Commission and the applicant.

Baton Guns

Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the use of baton guns by police forces in England and Wales; [40473]

(2) what guidelines are in place governing the use of baton guns by police forces in England and Wales. [40474]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* Baton rounds have been available to police forces in England and Wales since 1981, primarily for use in situations of public disorder.

In August 1999 the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) reissued operational guidelines for the use of baton rounds in situations of public disorder which were approved by my right hon. Friend the then Home Secretary (Mr. Straw).

ACPO also issued guidance on the use of baton rounds in situations where firearms would otherwise need to be used on 24 September 2001. This followed the then Home Secretary's announcement in April 2001 of the introduction of the L21A1 round which unlike its predecessor has a trajectory which is sufficiently predictable to be suitable for such use.

Currently 36 forces, maintained under the Police Act, possess the new baton round and I understand that three others will shortly be acquiring it.

EU Policy

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what co-operation exists between UK and French authorities in relation to asylum procedures; what plans there are to extend co-operation; and if he will make a statement. [29678]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* At the Franco-British summit in Cahors in February 2001 the United Kingdom and French authorities agreed to increase practical co-operation between our two countries through meetings on the Cross Channel Commission. This resulted in regular meetings throughout last year, to discuss practical measures on both asylum and migration issues of common interest to our two countries. The Cross Channel Commission will continue to meet in the coming year.

EU Asylum Policy

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress towards European Union agreements on common asylum policy; and if he will list agreements made to date and the areas of future work including timetables for *(a)* agreement and *(b)* implementation. [29679]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* The Treaty of Amsterdam committed member states to adopt by May 2004 a broad range of measures designed to establish minimum standards for asylum procedures and polices across the European Union. At the Tampere European Council in October 1999 member states agreed to look beyond the minimum standards established by 2004 towards the creation of a common European asylum system. After a slow start there is now increasing momentum on the first stage of the process to establish minimum standards. The United Kingdom has participated actively in this process and has opted in to all measures to date where the three-month time limit from formal presentation of the proposal has already expired.

The following measures have been adopted to date: Council Regulation establishing the EURODAC electronic fingerprinting database (adopted 11 December 2000); Council decision for an agreement between the European Community and the Republic of Iceland and the Kingdom of Norway concerning the criteria and mechanisms for establishing the state responsible for examining a request for asylum lodged in a member state or in Iceland or Norway (adopted 15 March 2001); Council decision establishing a European Refugee Fund (adopted 28 September 2000); and Council directive on minimum standards for giving temporary protection in event of mass influx (adopted 20 July 2001).

The following measures are under discussion but have not yet been agreed: Proposal for Council directive on minimum standards on procedures in member states for granting and withdrawing refugee status; Proposal for a Council directive laying down minimum standards on the reception of applicants for asylum in member states: Proposal for a Council regulation replacing the Dublin Convention; and a proposal for a Council directive on minimum standards for the qualification as refugees or as persons who otherwise need international protection.

The Laeken European Council in December 2001 called for the Commission to bring forward revised proposals for the measures setting minimum standards for asylum procedures and the regulation to replace the Dublin Convention by the end of April 2002.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate his Department has made of the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors who went missing in the UK in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001, broken down by (i) nationality, (ii) age at disappearance and (iii) gender. [29677]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* The Home Office does not centrally record information on the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors who have gone missing in the United Kingdom, and no estimate has been made on this number.

Information on the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors in 1999 and 2000, broken down by nationality, is published in the annual statistical bulletin "Asylum Statistics 2000", a copy of which is available in the Library, and from the Home Office

Research, Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html. Annual figures for 2001 are not yet available.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how notification of appellants' representatives will take place under the rules contained in SI, 2001, No. 4014; by whom; at what point after promulgation by the adjudicator or tribunal of their determination this will happen; if an appellant is detained at the same time as service of the determination on them, what instructions there are to notify representatives of the fact; and whose responsibility it will be to do so. [27511]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 16 January 2002]:* Appellants' legal representatives will be notified of determinations by Immigration and Nationality Directorate staff. For those served by post, a copy of the determination will be sent to the representative at the same time as the determination is sent to the appellant. In the case of determinations served in person, representatives will be notified by fax, normally on the same day, but in any case within 24 hours. It is for the appellants to advise their legal representatives that they have been detained, should they wish to do so.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the purpose is of the new asylum procedure rules in S.I., 2001, No. 4014 in regard to failed asylum appeals where *(a)* a certificate has been upheld and *(b)* leave has been refused to appeal to the IAT; which agency will be instructed to carry out service; what instructions have been given and are proposed to be given on (i) method of service, (ii) timing of service, (iii) entry/and search of premises, (iv) detention and (v) removal; and where those instructions will be published. [27510]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 16 January 2002]:* The rules provide for asylum appeal determinations in cases where the appellant has no further statutory right of appeal to be sent to the Home Office by the Immigration Appellate Authority for service on the appellant. The purpose of this is to reduce the opportunity for absconding at this stage by enabling the Home Office to serve the determination in person where appropriate.

Service is undertaken by the Home Office Immigration and Nationality Directorate either by post or in person. Almost all determinations will be served within 48 hours of receipt in the Home Office: the remainder will be served within a further six weeks, to be exceeded only in exceptional circumstances. No new powers relating to entry, search, detention or removal arise from these rules.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the expected time delay is between the date of the determination of the adjudicator or tribunal and the date of service of the decision on the failed appellant under the rules contained in S.I., 2001, No 4014; and what the usual period of delay is between the date of the determination in a successful appeal and the sending of full refugee status papers to a successful appellant. [27513]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 16 February 2002]:* We anticipate that almost all determinations received by the Home Office under these rules will be served within 48 hours. The remainder will be served within a further period which would exceed six weeks only in exceptional circumstances.

There have been delays in implementing allowed appeals but additional resources have now been provided and the majority of cases should now be being processed within 24 days of the date of determination.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy that no removals will take place following service of the determination without *(a)* prior and reasonable notice being given to the appellant's representative and *(b)* the appellant being given the opportunity to receive legal advice following the introduction of S.I., 2001, No. 4014. [27512]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 16 January 2002]:* Appellants' legal representatives will be notified of determinations at the same time as appellants for those served by post, and on the same day or within 24 hours for those served in person. The decision to obtain legal advice is a matter for the individual concerned but is open to appellants at that stage.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason a copy of the Procedure Rules relating to S.I., 2001, No. 4014 has not been placed on the HMSO website. [27515]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 16 January 2002]:* A copy of the rules was placed on Her Majesty's Stationery Office (HMSO) website on 4 January 2002.

Prisoners (Wrongful Convictions)

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many funding applications have been received to operate aftercare services for wrongfully convicted prisoners; and what procedures have been used to assess them. [39695]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* We have received one unsolicited application. No procurement exercise has been undertaken.

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress the working party considering aftercare for wrongfully convicted prisoners has made; and if he will make a statement. [39696]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* Proposals for a support and advice service are being finalised by officials. Ministers will be considering these proposals shortly.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the instances in which his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies failed to pay valid invoices within 30 days or after the agreed credit period in the financial year 2000–01. [32032]

Angela Eagle: Instances where the Home Office, its agencies or non-departmental public bodies failed to pay valid invoices within 30 days or paid after the agreed credit period in the 2000–01 financial year were:

	Percentage
Main Home Office	11.4
Agencies	6.9
Non-departmental public bodies	10.9

Arthur Andersen

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total cost to his Department has been of services provided by *(a)* Andersen and *(b)* Accenture, Anderson Consulting for (i) accountancy services, (ii) consultancy work and (iii) other work in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [32104]

Angela Eagle: My Department has not used the services provided by *(a)* Andersen *(b)* Accenture or Andersen Consulting for either accountancy or consultancy work since 1997.

Departmental Events

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the *(a)* conferences, *(b)* seminars, *(c)* workshops, *(d)* exhibitions and *(e)* press conferences which have been sponsored by his Department and which took place on non-departmental premises in each of the last four years, giving the title, purpose, date and cost of each. [34179]

Angela Eagle: Information is not held centrally on sponsored events run on behalf of the Department on non-departmental premises.

A breakdown of expenditure on this basis could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Prisoners (Wales)

Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many male prisoners from Wales are held in prison in England, broken down by offences for which they are held. [37119]

Beverley Hughes: Information can be provided only on the basis of a prisoner's court of first committal as home address is not consistently recorded on central records.

Offence	*Number of male prisoners committed in Wales currently in custody in England*
Violence against the person	402
Sex offences	245
Burglary	290
Robbery	155
Theft and handling	125
Fraud and forgery	13
Drug offences	191
Other offences	189
Offence not recorded	7

The information given is for 31 January 2002 when there were altogether 3,358 male prisoners in England and Wales who were committed in Wales. There were 63,814 male prisoners in total.

Advertising

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the expenditure was per campaign for the five most expensive media advertising campaigns his Department undertook in the past five parliamentary Sessions including the current parliamentary Session in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland; and for the last two parliamentary Sessions and the current Session, when each advertising campaign (i) began and (ii) ended in (A) Scotland, (B) England, (C) Wales and (D) Northern Ireland; [37396]

(2) what the cost was of media advertising in each of the past five parliamentary Sessions including the current Session, for his Department in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Northern Ireland; and for the last two parliamentary Sessions and the current parliamentary Session, what the media advertising expenditure was per month in (i) England, (ii) Wales and (iii) Northern Ireland. [37408]

Angela Eagle: For details of the Home Department's five largest campaigns I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) on 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 87W.

During the financial year 1999–2000 the timing of major campaigns was as follows:

Electoral Registration: August 1999

European Elections: May 1999

Fire Safety: Chip Pan Safety—September 1999; Pilot for Fire Escape Routes—March 2000

Police Recruitment: Special Constables—February 2000; Fast Stream—on-going.

During the financial year 2000–01 the timing of major campaigns was as follows:

Police Recruitment: August 2000—on-going

Fire Safety Escape Routes: September 2000

Vehicle Crime: September 2000—on-going

Electoral Registration: February 2001

Postal Voting: March 2001.

These campaigns cover England and Wales. The single exception to this was the campaign that ran to inform people about new voting procedures at the time of the European parliamentary elections in 1999, which also covered Scotland and Northern Ireland. All the Department's major campaigns deploy advertising on satellite TV and, for this medium, coverage is not restricted to England and Wales. Separate records of campaign expenditure in each country within the United Kingdom are not kept.

Work Permits

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his Department's policy is on issuing work permits to Lithuanian citizens; and if he will make a statement. [27830]

Angela Eagle: There is not a differential between nationalities when considering a work permit application. The decision is determined by whether the application meets the criteria of the work permit arrangements.

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many work permits were issued by the Government in each of the last three years to Lithuanian citizens; and if he will make a statement. [27831]

Angela Eagle: The number of work permits issued to Lithuanian citizens in each of the last three years is 101 for 1999, 124 for 2000 and 411 for 2001, the total being 636.

Global Crossing

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the dates of meetings that *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* Ministers in his Department have had since 1 January 1999 with representatives of Global Crossing; and if he will make a statement. [34057]

Mr. Blunkett: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by myself on 8 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1248W.

Reception Centres

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase the capacity of reception centre accommodation; and what financial provision he has made for this purpose. [22138]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced in his statement to the House on 29 October 2001 plans for establishing induction centres, accommodation centres and removal centres. The estimated capital cost of providing the necessary facilities is £250 million over the next two years. Decisions about the long-term mix of facilities will be taken in the light of the emerging evidence about what works.

Money Laundering

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what reports the National Criminal Intelligence Service received in respect of UK financial institutions being involved in money laundering activities relating to money transferred out of Serbia and the former Yugoslavia; and if he will make a statement. [39005]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The National Criminal Intelligence Service has received reports in which Serbia and the former Yugoslavia are referred to in financial disclosures made by United Kingdom financial institutions. However the contents of such reports are confidential.

Manslaughter

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the interdepartmental working group on the reform of manslaughter has met; how many further meetings of the group are expected; when he expects the group to finalise its report and proposals; when he expects to publish the digest of responses to the consultation paper; who is represented on the interdepartmental group; and if he will make a statement on progress. [37956]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* The interdepartmental working group was attended by representatives from: the Home Office, the Lord Chancellor's Department, the Attorney-General's Office, the Law Commission, the Cabinet Office, the Crown Prosecution Service, the Health and Safety Executive, the Department of Health, the National Health Service Executive Headquarters, the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Food Standards Agency. Since the end of the consultation period, September 2000, the group as a whole has met three times. There were also several formal and informal meetings to take forward specific issues attended by the relevant representatives. There will be no further meeting of the entire group and I hope to receive their report in the near future.

We will be publishing a digest of the responses to the consultation paper shortly.

Genetically Modified Animals

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what safeguards the Government have in place to ensure the well-being of genetically modified animals being produced and maintained for experiments; and if he will make a statement; [41983]

(2) what procedures are in place to regulate the transgenesis process used to create genetically modified animals; and if he will make a statement; [41982]

(3) what *(a)* percentage and *(b)* proportion of genetically modified animals, which were killed during experiments, were classed as failures in those experiments in each year since 1987; [41981]

(4) if he will amend the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 to provide greater protection for genetically modified animals. [41980]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* The production, maintenance and use of genetically modified animals for experimental and other scientific purposes, once they are beyond a specified stage in their foetal, larval or embryonic forms, are controlled under the terms of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986.

For a decision to be made on whether and on what terms a licence might be granted to produce, breed or use genetically modified animals, the 1986 Act requires the same considerations to be taken into account as for genetically normal animals. These are that the likely benefits of the programme are weighed against the likely adverse effects on the animals concerned (the cost/benefit assessment), and that there are no alternatives which either replace animal use entirely, reduce the number of animals needed or refine the procedures to minimise pain and suffering (3Rs). Licence applicants must also demonstrate that the procedures are for a permitted purpose and are likely to achieve the stated objectives.

It is not always possible to predict the likely welfare effects of novel genetic modifications. However, project licence authorities are framed to permit only apparently healthy genetically modified animals to be produced or maintained unless, and exceptionally, a specific scientific justification is made and accepted for the production of genetically modified animals whose welfare is expected to be compromised.

Detailed codes of practice, produced under authority of the 1986 Act and laid before Parliament, set the minimum standards of housing and care for all animals produced and used in regulated procedures. Compliance with these standards is a condition of project licences, and is monitored by the Animal (Scientific Procedures) Inspectorate.

The Government are satisfied that the 1986 Act, and related guidance and codes of practice, adequately caters for the welfare of transgenic/genetically modified animals used in scientific procedures, and that there is no need in that respect to amend it to provide for separate or additional controls.

Since 1988 annual statistics published by the Home Office have contained information on the overall use of genetically modified animals in scientific procedures. The detail provided has increased over the years, and the latest publication entitled "Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals Great Britain 2000" (Cm 5344) contains a great deal of related data (copies are available in the Library). The annual statistics do not record technical failures, and there is no other centrally held data on that. Information on the success rate of the techniques used is, however, widely published in scientific literature.

Police Pension Scheme

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) under the post-1978 police pension scheme, what percentage of the contributions is calculated to cover payments to widows of retired officers; and what the actuarial estimate is of the number of widows as a percentage of total claimants of the pension; [38418]

(2) what the average payment made to the widow of a retired police officer under the pre-1978 police pension scheme was in the last 12 months for which figures are available; [38407]

(3) under the pre-1978 police pension scheme, what percentage of the contributions was calculated to cover payments to widows of retired officers; and what the actuarial estimate of the number of widows was as a percentage of total claimants of the pension. [38408]

Mr. Denham: Figures for the average payment to the widow of a retired police officer or for the number of such widows are not available centrally. From a survey undertaken in 1996 the Government Actuary's Department has estimated that 7 per cent. of actual pensions expenditure at the time represented payments to widows and widowers of former officers. It is estimated that the present-day figure would be about 8 to 9 per cent.

As the changes to spouses' benefits over the final quarter of the last century feed through into payment, it is estimated that the proportion of pensions expenditure they represent will rise to over 15 per cent. over the next 30 years. The Government Actuary's Department estimates that the present cost of new-entrant benefits accruing to be 32 per cent. of pay of which about a third (11 per cent. of pay) is contributed by the officer in service. The total cost attributable to spouses' benefits is about 5 per cent. of pay.

It is not possible to identify all the earlier corresponding figures, but the employee contribution rate in 1978 for male officers was 7 per cent. This rate was set in 1972 for benefits which included accruing thereafter a widow's half-rate pension. Before 1972 male officers were paying contributions either at a rate of 5 per cent. for benefits which included a widow's flat-rate pension, if they had elected to stay on this pre-=1956 benefit, or at a rate of 6.25 per cent. for benefits including a widow's third-rate pension.

Prison Population

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the prison population was on the first day of each of the last 18 months. [38667]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Information is held centrally for the last day of each month.

Date	*Population*
31 January 2002	67,870
31 December 2001	66,049
30 November 2001	68,452
31 October 2001	67,053
30 September 2001	67,465
31 August 2001	67,056
31 July 2001	67,092
30 June 2001	66,403
31 May 2001	66,012
30 April 2001	65,604
31 March 2001	65,394
28 February 2001	64,631
31 January 2001	63,403
31 December 2000	61,617
30 November 2000	64,075
31 October 2000	64,218
30 September 2000	64,960
31 August 2000	65,666

Court Proceedings

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the circumstances in which a court can proceed without a jury. [41366]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* In England and Wales, some 95 per cent. of criminal cases are conducted in magistrates courts without a jury. Criminal trials in the Crown court are conducted with a jury. Pre-trial issues such as bail or preliminary rulings are heard by the judge alone. He or she can also order an acquittal before the jury is empanelled. Once a trial has started, a hearing to consider the admissibility of evidence or a point of law is invariably heard in the absence of a jury. Sentencing is a matter for the judge alone. In the Coroner's court, the majority of inquests are heard without a jury.

Empty Properties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total area in square feet of all empty properties owned by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which he has had responsibility was in each year since May 1997. [37814]

Angela Eagle: The total area in square feet of empty properties in the Home Department's estate and the estate of its agencies and non-departmental public bodies for each of the financial years requested is as follows:

	Area (square feet)
1997–98	225,829
1998–99	1,108,477
1999–2000	1,923,759
2000–01	1,514,727

Nearly all the vacant space is accounted for by buildings, which are held for refurbishment or redevelopment. This includes prisons or other secure facilities for which, town planning approval can be difficult to obtain. The 1999–2000 and 2000–01 figures also include Lunar house, Croydon, which is now reoccupied following a major refurbishment and 2 Marsham street which is being held for demolition and redevelopment. Figures on the floor area of empty residential homes are not kept and a meaningful estimate could be made only at disproportionate cost.

Official Visits

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the official visits to *(a)* Paris and *(b)* Brussels made by each Minister in his Department in 2001 and the mode of travel used; and what guidance is provided to Ministers in his Department on the choice of mode of travel for such visits. [38155]

Angela Eagle: Since 1999 this Government have published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government have also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. Details of travel undertaken since 1 March 2001 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the current financial year. Copies of the lists are available in the Library.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available.

Child Pornography

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been charged with distribution of child pornography on the internet as a result of investigations by the Obscene Publications and Internet Unit in each of the past 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [38138]

Mr. Keith Bradley: There is no separate offence of distributing child pornography on the internet.

The internet investigations team of the Metropolitan police Obscene Publication Unit was established in September 2000. Distribution of child pornography by means of the internet is a relatively recent phenomenon and figures for the full period requested are not available. Figures for 1995–2001 are as follows:

	Number
1995	1
1996	9
1997	4
1998	1
1999	2
2000	16
2001	21

These figures do not include offenders identified through investigations by the internet team of the Obscene Publications Unit who were outside the Metropolitan police area.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were convicted of distributing child pornography across the internet in each of the past 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [38139]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Convictions for distributing pornography are not directly identifiable on the Home Office Court Proceedings database. This is because all offences under section 1 of the Protection of Children Act 1978 are covered in a single group.

Obscene Publications and Internet Unit

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much money was spent on the Obscene Publications and Internet Unit of the Metropolitan police for *(a)* salaries, *(b)* technology equipment and *(c)* upkeep of facilities, in each of the past 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [38137]

Mr. Denham: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that the information for the period requested is not available. However, expenditure of the Obscene Publications and Internet Unit between April 2001 to February 2002 was £775,000 on salaries and £25,000 on technology equipment and upkeep of facilities.

Airguns

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the penalty is for carrying a loaded airgun in a public place. [38243]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Under section 19 of the Firearms Act 1968, it is an offence to carry a loaded airgun in a public place. This is a summary only offence for which the maximum penalty is six months imprisonment or a fine of the statutory maximum (£5,000) or both.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the British Association for Shooting and Conservation's campaign calling for the safe handling of airguns. [38241]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Government believe that much can be done to tackle the unacceptable misuse of air weapons through rigorous enforcement of the existing law coupled with a programme of education on the safe and responsible handling of these weapons. To this end, the British Association for Shooting Conservation (BASC) campaign is welcome and has received the full support of the police. It will help to ensure that people who use airguns do so safely and with full regard to firearm and wildlife legislation.

Policy Development Grant

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what press releases mentioning policy development grant his Department issued while it was responsible for electoral and political party regulation. [37876]

Mr. Blunkett: None.

Charing Cross Police Station

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether Charing Cross police station was accepting reports of minor crime over the telephone between 24 December 2001 and 11 January 2002. [35542]

Mr. Denham: The Commissioner of the Police of the Metropolis informs me that Charing Cross police station accepted reports of minor crime over the telephone between 24 December 2001 and 11 January 2002.

Policing (Newark)

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to improve policing in Newark and Retford. [39197]

Mr. Denham: The White Paper, "Policing a New Century" (Cm 5326), published last December, sets out the Government's plans for reforming the police service and improving policing throughout England and Wales, including Newark and Retford.

The proposals set out in the White Paper will lead to a more professional and effective police service. This will be achieved through reformed management systems; modernised terms and conditions; better use of forensic and technological tools to aid crime prevention, detection and conviction; as well as greater visibility and accessibility of policing services.

The Police Reform Bill, currently before Parliament, will provide the necessary statutory powers for these reforms.

DNA Proofing Techniques

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how a convicted person claiming innocence and seeking review or appeal can ascertain whether new DNA proofing techniques would have relevance in his or her case; how he or she can ensure that it is applied to the evidence and the results made known; and if he will make a statement. [38995]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Criminal Cases Review Commission has the statutory power to preserve any material, including forensic material, which it thinks necessary for a review of a case. The commission exercises this power as necessary in relation to applications made to it, where the process of normal appeal has been exhausted or where there are exceptional circumstances. It also maintains close contact with the Forensic Science Service so that the commission is aware of the latest developments in this field. The commission will determine whether DNA or other forensic tests are required in light of all the factors of a case and will authorise such tests as it believes necessary. The results of any tests would be disclosed in accordance with the provisions of the Criminal Appeal Act 1995 and the commission's policy on disclosure.

As for those who are seeking to overturn via the normal appeal process, any individual is free to commission the Forensic Science Service or other forensic science organisations to undertake further DNA profiling tests, providing there is a sufficient amount of retained material and provided payment can be met.

The Forensic Science Service can give guidance as to whether there is sufficient material left to undertake further tests; and if further DNA profiling tests would provide more information than is already available. It will also provide an estimate for the cost of carrying out any further tests. The Forensic Science Service requires that any requests of this nature are communicated through a solicitor, who will be in a position to advise the individual. Individual contracts and terms of business are agreed with any instructing solicitors or legal representatives.

Asylum Application (Southend)

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to come to a decision on the asylum application made by Mr. Naveem Ahmed of Southend who claimed asylum on 26 May 2000, references TA 338/99 and A/1031630. [36377]

Angela Eagle: I wrote to the hon. Member on 11 March 2002.

Child Entertainers

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to include child entertainers in the group of professionals working with children who are screened; and if he will make a statement. [38141]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The child protection provisions in Part 2 of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 (CJ) (CSA) provide a new definition of working with children. It includes positions whose normal duties involve caring for, training, supervising or being in sole charge of children, and positions whose normal duties involve unsupervised contact with children under arrangements made by a responsible person, for example a parent. Anyone whose paid or unpaid work entertaining children meets one of the definitions included in the legislation would already be covered by its provisions.

These provisions form part of an integrated system for the protection of children. They enable the courts to disqualify unsuitable people from working with children as part of their sentence or the disposal of their case. Those who breach such a disqualification order commit a criminal offence.

The relevant provisions in the CJ and CSA consolidate and strengthen the framework for protecting children. It is none the less important that parents remain vigilant about those circumstances under which they entrust their children to the care of an adult, particularly if they are not present to ensure their children are safe.

HEALTH

Postcode Prescribing

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on postcode prescribing. [2934]

Ms Blears: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The Government are determined to eradicate "post-code prescribing". We set up the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) to help to achieve this. NICE provides clear advice to the national health service about the clinical and cost effectiveness of drugs and treatments.

Prescription Charges

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the health impact on patients of having to pay for prescriptions; and if he will make a statement; [4630]

(2) what plans he has to extend the existing exemptions from prescription charges; and if he will make a statement. [4644]

Ms Blears: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer her to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

I have at present no plans to change the current exemption and remission arrangements which are intended to ensure that no-one need be deterred from obtaining any necessary medication on financial grounds. Around 85 per cent. of items are dispensed free of charge and around 50 per cent. of the population do not have to pay charges.

Food Supplements

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the (i) health benefits and (ii) safety of health and nutritional supplements. [3729]

Yvette Cooper: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Most people are able to meet their nutritional needs by eating a balanced, varied diet, and therefore do not need to take dietary supplements. Key exceptions are:

Women intending to become pregnant are advised to take supplements of folic acid before conception to the 12 week of pregnancy to help prevent neural tube defects.

As a safety net for children and women from low income groups, supplements of vitamins A, D and C are available on the welfare food scheme.

Asian mothers are routinely advised to take supplements of vitamin D as they are more prone to deficiency.

Iron supplements may be prescribed to women or children with iron-deficiency anaemia which was not found to improve with appropriate dietary advice.

Research commissioned by the Food Standards Agency in relation to health benefits of nutrient supplements:

fish oil on cardiovascular disease risk factors

calcium, vitamins D and K on bone health

antioxidant vitamins (e.g. vitamin E and C) on reducing cell damage from oxidative stress (thought to be involved in the initiation of many diseases, such as cancer and cardiovascular disease)

folic acid on risk factors for cardiovascular disease and colorectal cancer.

Some of these studies have finished while others are ongoing. Results from the finished studies have been published in peer-reviewed journals and placed in the public domain in the Agency library. The Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition may consider the conclusions reached by these and the other studies.

Evaluation of safety of nutrient supplements

The Expert Group on Vitamins and Minerals was established to review the safety of high dose vitamin and mineral supplements to ensure that the public is not put at risk.

The Group expects to complete the reviews of the relevant scientific information on the safety of individual vitamins and minerals shortly. Following this, the Group will complete risk assessments for the vitamins and minerals reviewed. Its conclusions will be issued by the Food Standards Agency for public consultation with a view to publishing its final report in 2002. A copy of the final report will be sent to the Scientific Committee on Food to inform deliberations by that committee on a draft proposal for a European Union Council Directive relating to the addition of nutrients to foods.

Evaluation of safety of health supplements

The safety of individual health supplements are considered on their merits on a case by case basis according to available evidence base and when safety of these supplements are raised as a cause of concern. Routine safety evaluation of health supplements is not undertaken.

Pancreatic Cancer

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will review pancreatic cancer services in the north-west of England; and if he will make a statement. [5454]

Yvette Cooper: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Following publication of the national guidance on the organisation of services for upper gastro-intestinal cancers in 2001, including pancreatic cancers, the three cancer networks in the north-west have been reviewing these services and are engaged in developing appropriate service plans as part of their overall Service Delivery Plans.

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the record and policy of the Royal Liverpool University Hospital, Liverpool on the treatment of pancreatic cancer. [5457]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 20 July 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 192W.

The Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospitals NHS Trust provides a specialist referral service for pancreatic surgery to hospitals in Merseyside and Cheshire and beyond. The service plays a major role in research and audits its clinical activities regularly through the trust's clinical governance arrangements. Over the last twelve months, since introducing a four-bedded post operative critical care facility, the trust has not had to cancel any pancreatic surgery and waiting times for surgery have improved. The service will be externally appraised as part of the next round of the regional cancer services appraisal programme which is due to commence in June 2002.

MMR

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of children aged *(a)* one to two, *(b)* two to three and *(c)* three to four years have been given MMR inoculations in Cumbria since May 1997. [5825]

Yvette Cooper: I apologise to the right hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 192W.

The information requested is shown in the table.

Percentage of children immunised against MMR

At 31 March	*By their 2nd birthday*	*By their 5th birthday*[1] *First dose*	*First and second dose*
North Cumbria			
1998	96	—	—
1999	93	—	—
2000	95	98	91
Morecambe Bay			
1998	91	—	—
1999	88	—	—
2000	90	95	83

[1] Information about uptake of MMR immunisation at age five was collected for the first time in 1999–2000.

Source:

Department of Health, Statistics Division SD2B

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter of 5 October from the hon. Member for West Derbyshire on the current position regarding single dose and MMR triple vaccinations. [21473]

Yvette Cooper: I refer the hon. Member to the reply sent to him on 10 December 2001.

Digital Hearing Aids

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason there is no centre for the provision of digital hearing aids in the south-east of England. [6058]

Ms Blears: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 192W.

There are currently three centres for the provision of digital hearing aids in the south-east region of the national health service. They are situated at East Berkshire Community Health NHS Trust, Royal Berkshire and Battle Hospitals NHS Trust and Winchester and Eastleigh Healthcare NHS Trust.

Care Homes

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who will assess the needs of care home service users; who will pay for such an assessment as required under care home standards; and if he will make a statement. [8059]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 192W.

The national minimum standards require that prior to a service user moving into a home an assessment of his or her needs should be undertaken. In most cases this will have been undertaken either by social workers or nurses depending on where the service user is prior to moving. Where a self funding service user has not had an assessment this should be undertaken by the provider prior to that person moving into the home. Either the provider or at least one other member of staff should be suitably trained in conducting assessments. Since in the majority of cases the cost of assessing service users before they enter a home falls to local authorities or the national health service the cost impact on providers would be marginal. The regular review of assessed needs should be a normal part of the conduct of care homes.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what investigations his Department has carried out into minimum data sets where care homes are concerned in the last five years. [8554]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 192W.

In October 2000 my Department published for consultation the Core Information Requirements for Children's Social Services, as part of the Quality Protects initiative. The resultant full set of children's services documents is available at http://www.doh.gov.uk/qualityprotects/info/publications/coreinforma tionreq.htm.

Version 1 of the Adults Aged 18 and Over Social Care Core Information Requirements was published in August 2001 for consultation and is available at http://www.doh.gov.uk/scg/adultcoreinfo/index.htm.

Revisions of both sets of documents are due to be published later this year. Although the information requirements documents are not specifically for care homes, there is mention of the current central statistical returns for care homes. The Department is also promulgating the Mental Health Minimum Data Set, covering information about patients who are subject to the Care Programmes Approach, some of whom may be resident in care homes. This is planned for implementation from April 2003.

Orthodontics

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what discussions are taking place between the Department of Health and representatives of the dental profession about orthodontic provision; and when he proposes to publish guidance on criteria for acceptance for orthodontic treatment under the NHS; [6360]

(2) if he intends to change the criteria for acceptance for orthodontic treatment under the NHS; and what changes to NHS orthodontic services he plans. [6361]

Ms Blears: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 192W.

Our national health service dental strategy "Modernising NHS Dentistry—Implementing the NHS Plan" set out our intention to reform orthodontic treatment to encourage the most appropriate treatment within the general dental service for patients, taking into account the approach being piloted using the index of treatment need which was already being widely used in the rest of the NHS. Officials have had very helpful discussions with the profession on changes to the current system to enable these valuable NHS resources to be targeted towards cases of greatest clinical need. We hope to reach agreement on charges, including any transitional arrangements, later this year.

Departmental Projects

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* building and *(b)* refurbishment projects are planned by his Department in (i) the current year and (ii) the next financial year; and what the costs will be of each project. [6585]

Ms Blears: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer her to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 192W.

There are two buildings where there are significant refurbishment projects being undertaken in this current year in relation to buildings occupied by or the direct responsibility of this Department or its agencies. The costs for both fall into this financial year. These are:

2001–02

	£ million
St. Nicholas Building, Newcastle	1.2
Goldings House, London	2.2

There are also a significant number of other buildings where there are works of a more minor nature and the fitting out of local offices in preparation for occupation by the National Care Standards Commission.

This reply does not include information about the national health service.

Devolved Administrations

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is with regard to *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in his Department giving evidence to (i) Scottish Parliament, (ii) Welsh Assembly and (iii) Northern Ireland Assembly Committees; and to what categories of document he gives (A) full access, (B) restricted access and (C) no access to (1) Scottish Parliament, (2) Welsh Assembly, (3) Northern Ireland Assembly and (4) House of Commons Select committees. [7048]

Yvette Cooper: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Devolution Guidance Note (DGN) 12—"Attendance of United Kingdom Ministers and Officials at Committees of the Devolved Legislatures" sets out general advice on attendance of UK Ministers and officials at committees of the devolved legislatures. The guidance applies equally to invitations from committees of the Scottish Parliament, National Assembly for Wales and Northern Ireland Assembly.

The Department would respond promptly [illegible] courteously to each request for information as it is received. The important principle is that each legislature exercises authority over its Ministers. Subject to criteria as set out in DGN12 it would be exceptional for Ministers from the Department to attend to give evidence to the Scottish Parliament, National Assembly of Wales and Northern Ireland committees.

Copies of DGN 12 are available at: www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/constitution/devolution/guidance/dgn12.htm.

Ambulance Services

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what extra funding he will provide to extend the fast response paramedics service in the Lancashire Ambulance Service. [8417]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The Lancashire Ambulance Service was among the first to achieve the 75 per cent. target for reaching category A calls within eight minutes. It did so by investing in fast response paramedic services. The Government provided funding towards this scheme as well as towards the purchase of defibrillators. The money was used to extend the fast response service.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will make an assessment of the re-organisation of ambulance services in Hampshire. [11975]

Ms Blears *[holding answer Friday 2 November 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

On 15 January 2002 I announced that proposals to merge ambulance trusts in the south-east would not go ahead.

This decision was made in light of two policy initiatives "Reforming Emergency Care" and "Shifting the Balance of Power" that will help to make ambulance services more responsive to local needs. Health authorities together with their primary care trusts will review the position of their local ambulance services by September 2002. They will make recommendations to the director of health and social care in the south about how ambulance services should be organised in the future.

Mental Health

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what work has been undertaken and how much money has been spent to address the issues raised in the NCI report into suicide and homicide by people with mental illness; and if he will make a statement. [9513]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The recommendations of the National Confidential Inquiry report are in line with the targets in the Mental Health National Service Framework and NHS Plan and implementation is taking place at local level.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many episodes of community psychiatric nursing care took place in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1999–2000. [14110]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 November 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

In 1996–97 there were 566,000 first contacts and 381,000 initial contacts and in 1999–2000 there were 586,000 first contacts and 348,000 initial contacts.

First contacts refer to the numbers of different individuals receiving care—these figures indicate an increase in the overall numbers of individuals seen by community psychiatric nurses (CPNs) over this period.

Initial contacts refer to the new episodes of care in any one year, and these figures indicate a reduction, suggesting the CPNs were seeing people for longer periods which would be compatible with the emphasis on providing services for the most vulnerable and those with enduring mental health problems.

Cash for Change Initiative

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what formula was used to determine the councils targeted for extra help under the Government's cash for change initiative. [9060]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

All councils received additional funding through the Building Care Capacity Grant. Of the £90 million distributed to councils in 2001–02, £43.5 million was distributed to 95 councils on the basis of Standard Spending Assessment, and £47 million was targeted on the 55 councils with the most severe problems associated with delayed discharge. The extra funding to these councils reflected the rate of delayed discharge in each council's area in summer 2001.

The same criteria were used to distribute the £190 million available for councils through this grant in 2002–03. £91 million was allocated to the 95 councils, and the balance (£99 million) to the remaining 55 councils targeted for extra help.

Residential Care

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds are available in residential care in south Tyneside. [9985]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

There are currently 1,256 beds available in residential care in south Tyneside.

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many elderly people are waiting for beds in residential care in south Tyneside. [9984]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

There are currently five people waiting for beds in residential care in south Tyneside. Funding is available for them all; however, there are no vacancies in the residential care home of their choice.

Heart Disease

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what further steps the Government plan to take to reduce the incidence of coronary heart disease in men. [11178]

Yvette Cooper: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The Government recognise that the death rate from coronary heart disease is significantly higher among men than women and have made it clear that tackling this disease is one of our top priorities. We are taking action through the NHS Plan, and the National Service Framework for Coronary Heart Disease to tackle the main modifiable risk factors that are more prevalent among men, such as smoking and poor diet.

A comprehensive smoking cessation service on the NHS is now available across England to support smokers who want to quit. We are also developing a five-a-day programme to increase availability and awareness of fruit and vegetables among groups with the lowest intakes, including men. In addition, we are developing work on exercise and working across Government to improve facilities to support active lifestyles, and the development of communities where it is easier for people to be active.

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will conduct a review into waiting times for heart bypass operations in the Morecambe Bay Health Authority area; and if he will make a statement. [7515]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 18 October 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

At present, most cardiac patients are referred to the Blackpool Victoria hospital where the maximum waiting time is between 15 and 18 months for routine surgery and up to nine months for urgent treatment. The Blackpool Victoria hospital NHS trust is on target to achieve a 15-month maximum waiting time by 31 March 2002.

Caesarean Sections

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of births were by caesarean section in each health authority in England in each of the past five years. [10016]

Yvette Cooper: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer her to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The statistics are available as national totals, by regions and national health service trusts but not by health authority.

The table shows national NHS hospital deliveries and percentage of caesarean section 1994–95 to 1999–2000.

NHS hospital deliveries

	Total number of deliveries (= 100%)	*Percentage of deliveries by caesarean section*
1994–95	604,300	15.5
1995–96	592,699	16.3
1996–97	594,500	17.0
1997–98	585,000	18.2
1998–99[1]		19.4
1999–2000[1]		20.4

[1] provisional

The last NHS maternity statistics including caesarean section rates was published on the 12 June 2001 showing data by trust. A copy was placed in the Library. It can also be found in Table 36 from the DH website at http://www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0114.htm.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what targets he has for the proportion of babies born by caesarean section. [12606]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The Department currently does not have any targets for the proportion of babies born by caesarean section. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) are producing guidelines on caesarean section. It is also an area we would expect the forthcoming Children's National Service Framework to address.

Casualty Waiting Times

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average waiting time at *(a)* Chorley and South Ribble NHS hospital casualty department and *(b)* Preston NHS Acute hospital casualty department in the last six months. [11546]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

This information is not collected centrally. However, in the week ending 24 February, 84 per cent. of patients attending at Chorley and 77 per cent. of patients at Preston departed from the accident and emergency departments in under four hours.

NHS Funding

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the annual real terms increase in NHS funding for each of the years *(a)* 1971–72, *(b)* 1972–73, *(c)* 1973–74, *(d)* 1974–75, *(e)* 1975–76, *(f)* 1976–77, *(g)* 1998–99, *(h)* 1999–2000, *(i)* 2000–01, *(j)* 2001–02, *(k)* 2002–03 and *(l)* 2003–04. [10747]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The information requested is set out in the tables.

NHS expenditure, 1972–72 to 1977–78

Outturn

	Net NHS expenditure (£ billion)	*Real terms increase (Percentage)*
1971–72	2.0	—
1972–73	2.3	5.5
1973–74	2.5	2.6
1974–75	3.4	11.1
1975–76	4.5	5.6
1976–77	5.1	0.4

NHS expenditure 1997–98 to 2003–04

	Net NHS expenditure (£ billion)	*Real terms increase (Percentage)*
1997–98	[1]35.0	—
1998–99	[1]36.9	2.7
1999–2000	[1]40.2	6.4
2000–01	[2]44.6	8.9
2001–02	[3]48.8	6.9
2002–03	[3]53.5	6.8
2003–04	[3]57.0	3.9

[1] Outturn

[2] Estimated outturn

[3] Plan

Ciprofloxacin

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with *(a)* British pharmaceutical companies and *(b)* his United States counterparts, regarding the patenting of Ciprofloxacin penicillin supplies; and if he will make a statement. [11161]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer her to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

I have not had discussions with pharmaceutical companies concerning the patent of Ciprofloxacin.

My officials have had general discussions with the manufacturer of Ciprofloxacin and several other manufacturers of key medical supplies as part of the medical countermeasures programme against the deliberate release of a biological agent.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has recently signed an agreement with his United States counterpart to explore opportunities for joint working across a range of issues concerning bio-terrorism.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government have to ensure supplies of the penicillin Ciprofloxacin are available in the United Kingdom. [11162]

Yvette Cooper: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer her to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

A substantial stockpile of Ciprofloxacin and other appropriate antibiotics has been secured, and stocks are being further augmented.

Furthermore, appropriate emergency supplies of Ciprofloxacin and other essential antibiotics have been strategically placed across the UK to facilitate rapid deployment in an emergency.

Nutrition

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the annual cost of under-nutrition to the NHS; and if he will make a statement. [12914]

Yvette Cooper: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The number of finished consultant episodes (FCEs) of in-patient care in national health service hospitals in England in 2000–01 for malnutrition was 306. These figures do not represent the number of patients as a person may have more than one FCE in the year.

This information is extracted from the Hospital Episodes Statistics (HES) system, which contains details of patients admitted to and treated in NHS hospitals in England. HES does not hold data on cost of treatment for malnutrition.

Figures for 2000–01 have not yet been adjusted for shortfalls (ie they are ungrossed).

Herceptin

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of the drug Herceptin in the treatment of breast cancer; and when the National Institute for Clinical Excellence is likely to make a decision on the licensing of Herceptin. [13380]

Ms Blears: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer her to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The Secretary of State and the National Assembly for Wales have asked the National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) to appraise Herceptin for breast cancer, and to provide guidance on its use for the national health service in England and Wales.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) is expected to give guidance on Herceptin by the end of this month, providing there are no appeals.

NICE is not responsible for the licensing of medicines. Herceptin is a European licensed product whose licence was granted by the European Medicines Evaluation Agency (EMEA). Medicines Control Agency licensing records the licence as granted on 28 August 2001.

Bed Shortages

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what research he has made into the *(a)* likelihood and *(b)* scale of bed shortages across London this winter; and if he will place a copy of such research in the Library; [13117]

(2) what action he has taken to minimise the effects of bed shortages in hospitals in *(a)* London and *(b)* elsewhere in the United Kingdom this winter; what guidelines he has issued; and if he will make a statement. [13115]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 7 November 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Health service circular 2001/014/local authority circular (2001)017 published in July 2001 gave guidance to the national health service in England on planning capacity. Under this guidance all health authorities established local capacity planning groups to plan capacity for winter 2001–02.

As a result the NHS went into winter with 1,225 more general and acute and 198 critical care beds than the same time in 2000–01. And in the same period, London went into winter with 351 more general and acute beds and 27 critical care beds.

The results of the bed census carried out at the end of November 2001 were published in "NHS Emergency Pressures—Making Progress" which was placed in the Library in December 2001.

Elective Surgery

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health at how many places elective surgery was available *(a)* in each health authority in England and *(b)* in total for England, in the last two years for which figures are available. [13613]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

In 1999–2000, 251 NHS trusts in England carried out elective operations. 245 NHS trusts carried out elective operations in 2000–01. The table shows the number of trusts in each health authority that carried out elective surgery in both of those years. Fourteen NHS trust mergers took place between these two years.

Health authority	*Number of NHS trusts* 1999–00	2000–01
Hillingdon	1	1
Kensington Chelsea and Westminster	3	4
Enfield and Haringey	1	1
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	2	2
Bedfordshire	2	2
Berkshire	4	4
Buckinghamshire	4	4
Bexley and Greenwich	2	2
Bromley	1	1
Croydon	1	1
East Kent	1	1
West Kent	5	5
Kingston and Richmond	1	1
Lambeth Southwark and Lewisham	3	3
Merton Sutton and Wandsworth	3	3
West Surrey	5	5
East Sussex Brighton and Hove	4	4
West Sussex	6	6
Barking and Havering	1	1
Barnet	2	2
Brent and Harrow	2	2
Camden and Islington	5	5
Ealing Hammersmith and Hounslow	3	3
East London and The City	5	5
North Essex	4	3
South Essex	2	2
South Lancashire	1	2
Liverpool	4	5
Manchester	4	4
Morecambe Bay	1	1
St. Helens and Knowsley	1	1
Salford and Trafford	3	3
Sefton	3	3
Stockport	2	1
West Pennine	3	3
Northamptonshire	3	3
Oxfordshire	2	2
Suffolk	3	3
Barnsley	2	2
North Derbyshire	2	2
South Derbyshire	2	2
Doncaster	1	2
Leicestershire	4	2
Lincolnshire	3	1
North Nottinghamshire	3	3
Nottingham	2	2
Rotherham	1	1
Sheffield	3	3
Bury and Rochdale	2	2
North Cheshire	2	2
South Cheshire	3	3
East Lancashire	2	2
North West Lancashire	3	3
North and Mid Hampshire	4	3
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	2	2
Southampton and South West Hampshire	2	2
Isle of Wight	2	2
Somerset	3	3
South and West Devon	3	3
Wiltshire	3	3
Avon	7	7
Birmingham	8	8
Wigan and Bolton	2	3
Wirral	2	2
Bradford	2	2
County Durham	2	2
East Riding	1	1
Gateshead and South Tyneside	2	2

Health authority	Number of NHS trusts 1999–00	2000–01
Leeds	2	2
Newcastle and North Tyneside	1	1
North Cumbria	2	2
South Humber	2	2
Northumberland	1	1
Sunderland	1	1
Tees	3	2
Wakefield	1	1
North Yorkshire	4	4
Calderdale and Kirklees	3	3
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	2	2
Dorset	5	6
North and East Devon	3	3
Gloucestershire	3	3
Coventry	1	1
Dudley	2	2
Herefordshire	2	2
Sandwell	1	1
Shropshire	4	4
North Staffordshire	1	1
South Staffordshire	3	3
Walsall	1	1
Warwickshire	2	2
Wolverhampton	1	1
Worcestershire	4	2
East and North Hertfordshire	2	1
West Hertfordshire	2	1
Cambridge	5	5
Norfolk	4	4
Total	251	245

Note:

The figures have been adjusted to take account of miscodings.

Atypical Medicines

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has received the provisional findings of NICE in respect of atypical medicines for the treatment of schizophrenia; and if he will publish them. [13780]

Ms Blears: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The Department has received the provisional and final appraisal determinations. We expect NICE to produce guidance on atypical anti-psychotics within the next few weeks providing there are no appeals.

Emergency Child Admissions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the public service agreement target to reduce the number of children admitted to hospitals as an emergency during their first year of life with *(a)* gastro-enteritis, *(b)* a respiratory infection and *(c)* a severe injury; [14018]

(2) if he will make a statement on the public service agreement target for reducing low birth-weight babies. [14017]

Yvette Cooper: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The public service agreement targets referred to are for Sure Start for the period 1998–99 to 2001–02. A statement on progress towards these targets will be published in the Department for Education and Skills' annual report in spring 2002.

Patient Expectation

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to improve quality of expectation among NHS patients; and if he will make a statement. [14043]

Ms Blears: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002 *Official Report*, column 192W.

The national health service plan set out a vision for creating a patient-centred NHS. The Government have already taken action to improve the quality of patients' experience through a range of initiatives: high quality standards of care through national service frameworks; better quality food and higher standards of cleanliness; measurement of performance from the patient's perspective, through a new system of local surveys and locally published patient prospectuses; new initiatives to strengthen the voice of patients and the public in the management and delivery of health services, as set out in "Involving Patients and the Public in Health Care: Response to the Listening Exercise".

ME/CFS

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the work of his Department's working party on ME/CFS; and when he expects that working party will publish a report. [14708]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The independent CFS/ME working group was set up to review the field of CFS/ME with the aim of providing best practice guidance for clinicians, managers, patients, and carers to improve the quality of care and treatment. Their independent report was published on 11 January 2002 and is available on http://www.doh.gov.uk/cmo/cfsmereport/index.htm.

The report has identified CFS/ME as a specific illness. The report makes a number of recommendations about recognition and definition of the illness: treatment and care; health service planning; education and awareness; and research. We shall be bringing this report to the attention of chief executives of health authorities, trusts and primary care trusts so that they can consider its implications when commissioning services.

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what process will be used to evaluate the best methods of treatment for ME/CFS. [36384]

Ms Blears: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Clinicians face problems when treating patients with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome/Myalgic Encephalomyelitis, as there are neither agreed diagnostic criteria nor one form of treatment to suit every patient. We need to develop a greater understanding in this area. A useful way forward at a local level could be for clinicians and patients to develop clinical learning networks that will allow them to develop expertise.

The Department has also asked the Medical Research Council to develop a broad strategy for advancing biomedical and health services research on CFS/ME.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which items of departmental expenditure fall within the category of miscellaneous services, referred to on page 30 of the 2001 Departmental report. [15251]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The category contains a wide range of activities including expenditure on certain public health functions such as environmental health, health promotion and support to the voluntary sector. The only common feature is that they receive funding direct from the Department of Health, and not via health authorities.

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the cost to public funds in 2001–02 of individual learning accounts to staff in the national health service. [15767]

Mr. Hutton: We are investing up to £10 million in 2001–02 to support the commitment in the "NHS Plan" (a copy of which is available in the Library) that national health service staff who do not have a professional qualification will have access to either a NHS learning account of £150 each or national vocational qualification training to level 2 or 3.

Doctors (Retirement)

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library the information he has received from the NHS pensions agency concerning the retirement of general practitioners, which he referred to during the Second Reading debate of the NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill. [17418]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 23 November 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 29 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 558W. I am advised that the data excluded those who take their pension before the pension scheme's normal retirement age of 60.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what statistics he has collated on the spread of ages at which doctors have retired in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000 and *(e)* 2001. [13853]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 12 November 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Data in the form requested are not readily available. The number of hospital and community doctors, including Principal and Assistant General Medical and Ophthalmic Practitioners, in England and Wales who have received a retirement pension before or after age 60 for each of the financial years 1997 to 2001 is in the table.

Financial year	*Before age 60*	*After age 60*	*Total*
1997	503	959	1,462
1998	547	957	1,504
1999	453	866	1,319
2000	403	694	1,097
2001	551	978	1,529

Compulsory Retirement

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he issues to NHS authorities and trusts on the practice of compulsory retirement based solely on age. [20486]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer her to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 92W.

Although there is no central guidance on compulsory retirement based solely on age, NHS organisations and their staff are encouraged to explore the available flexibilities and opportunities. The NHS pension scheme allows staff approaching retirement age and beyond to work more flexibly. This will enable the NHS to keep experienced staff, and their invaluable skills and knowledge.

In the case of general practitioners health authorities are required under regulation 7(11) of the National Health Service (General Medical Services) Regulations 1992 to remove from their medical list any doctor who has attained the age of 70 years.

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many, and what proportion of letters received by the

Department from hon. and Right hon. Members between 20 June and 20 July were replied to in *(a)* under 15, *(b)* under 20, *(c)* under 30, *(d)* under 40 and *(e)* over 40 working days. [22002]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The information is shown in the table.

Ministerial replies—20 June to 20 July

Replies sent within	*Number of replies*	*Percentage*
15 days	527	34
20 days	436	28
30 days	202	13
40 days	186	12
Over 40 days	202	13
Total	[1]1,553	100

[1] In addition 199 letters were transferred to other Government Departments

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the handling of the case of Mrs. Violet Christine Mitchell by the Royal Surrey County Hospital in September; and when he will reply to correspondence from *(a)* Jane Cole of 13 and 28 September and 15 November and *(b)* the right hon. Member for South West Surrey. [18888]

Ms Blears: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer her to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

I appreciate the considerable distress Mrs. Mitchell has suffered but I am assured that there was no negligence involved in the delay in diagnosing her injury. The nature of the injury could not be fully ascertained at the first examination and all necessary steps were subsequently taken to reach the correct diagnosis.

My officials wrote to Ms Cole on 29 November in response to her letters dated 28 October and 15 November. My Department has no record of receiving any letters sent in September.

My right hon. Friend, the Minister of State replied to the right hon. Member's letter on 4 December 2001.

Nursing Homes

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many residential and nursing homes have closed because an inspection highlighted inadequacies in their facilities. [23423]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

In the period 1 April 1999 to 31 March 2000 (the most recent for which information is available) there were 140 closures of residential care homes and nursing homes (including children's homes) through cancellation procedures under the Registered Homes Act 1984.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of the introduction of free nursing care on the level of charges to residents of nursing homes. [34856]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

We expect nursing homes to reduce fees in line with the Registered Nursing Care Contribution received. However, I am aware that a number of national providers have used the opportunity afforded by the introduction of free nursing care to increase fees levied on people funding the costs of their own care. I have written to those providers seeking clarification and justification for the level of increase that they propose. We will take further action if required.

UK Human Tissue Bank

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received on the work of the UK Human Tissue Bank; if he will make a statement on their work; what advice has been issued to NHS trusts about the collection by the UK Human Tissue Bank of non-transplantable human tissue from hospitals nationwide; what has been done to encourage the use of human tissue by scientists operating within the UK; and what evidence he has collated as to the efficacy of using human tissue rather than animal subjects in tests. [25444]

Ms Blears: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

All Tissue Banks in the public sector supplying human tissues for therapeutic purposes to the NHS are required to be accredited by the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) by 31 March 2003. An MCA inspection will determine whether the bank complies with the standards set out in—"A Code of Practice for Tissue Banks: providing tissues of human origin for therapeutic purposes."

The UK Human Tissue Bank (UK HTB) is a not for profit organisation based at De Montfort university, Leicester. They collect, process and distribute non-transplantable human tissue for research purposes to scientists working in universities, medical institutions and the pharmaceutical industry. UK HTB have had discussions with Department officials, the Medical Research Council (MRC), and the MCA seeking clarification of departmental policy. They have not written or met with Ministers.

The MRC supports the principle of human tissue banks for research, and actively encourages the deposition and use of human tissue samples, where appropriate. The MRC Guidelines 'Human tissue and biological samples for use in research' observes that

> "use of such [human] material can . . . reduce both the research demands on patients and the need to use animals".

In the light of Alder Hey and events elsewhere, we are committed to a fundamental review of the law concerning the taking, storage and use of human tissue from both the living and the dead, including organs and tissues for transplantation. The Chief Medical Officer made 17 specific recommendations regarding the removal, retention and use of human organs and tissue. An extensive programme of implementation is well under way, led by the Department of Health, which is working closely with other Government Departments and other agencies. This includes work to review the Human Tissue Act and the Human Organ Transplants Act and common law. A consultation document will be issued shortly.

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what recent discussions he has had with those pharmaceutical companies that have developed beta interferon and other disease-modifying drugs for MS, concerning the terms on which these drugs may be made available on the NHS in the future; [18079]

(2) what recent discussions he has had with pharmaceutical companies that manufacture disease-modifying drugs for MS on their willingness to supply those drugs to the NHS at a price which reflects their efficacy, and if he will make a statement. [24980]

Ms Blears: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) on 8 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1241W.

Neuroleptic Drugs

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in reducing the inappropriate over-use of neuroleptic drugs in homes for the elderly. [26030]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

A number of measures have been taken to ensure that there is no inappropriate or excessive use of antipsychotic drugs for older people. In particular, implementation of the National Service Framework for Older People will ensure effective prescribing and administration of medication for older people. The new national minimum standards for care homes, for implementation from April 2002, include standards to protect older people from inappropriate medication.

Latex Allergy

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures his Department is taking to protect health service staff and patients who are allergic to latex from exposure to it; and if he will refer the issue of latex allergy to the Medical Devices Agency Committee on Safety of Devices. [26124]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The Medical Devices Agency (MDA) regularly investigates the risks posed to patients and health care workers and, along with the Department, issues relevant guidance. Latex is recognised as a sensitiser or substance hazardous to health as defined by the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (COSHH 1994) and HSC 1999/186 instructed that individuals who are sensitised to latex should stop using latex medical gloves and be provided with gloves made from an alternative material.

It would be inappropriate to refer the issue of latex allergy to the MDA's Committee on Safety of Devices at the moment, because the MDA is actively involved in drafting European guidance for manufacturers on the regulations for medical devices containing latex. The European Commission group working on this document is expected to complete this work later this year.

Lauren Wright

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans the Government have to hold a public inquiry into the death of Lauren Wright; [27238]

(2) what measures have been put in place to ensure that there is no repetition of the events which led to the death of Lauren Wright. [27236]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

We have no plans to hold a public inquiry in this case. This does not ignore the tragedy that Lauren Wright's death represents, but we need to balance detailed investigation and inquiry with action that will ensure we minimise the possibility of such tragedies happening again.

In Lauren's case, the independent review into the actions of health staff and organisations, which is due to report in March 2002; the robust oversight by the Area Child Protection Committee of the implementation by local agencies of the action plan produced to take forward the recommendations of the serious case review; the follow-up inspection of Norfolk's children's services by the Social Services Inspectorate, which found substantial improvements in Norfolk's child care and child protection services; and the Social Services Inspectorate/Audit Commission Joint Review of Norfolk scheduled for March 2002, should together ensure that the lessons from this tragedy are learned and applied in practice in the future within Norfolk.

We have already established a statutory inquiry into the death of another little girl, Victoria Climbie. The Victoria Climbie inquiry, being chaired by Lord Laming, is a wide ranging inquiry that will closely examine the working of our child protection system. We anticipate that this inquiry will produce recommendations that will be relevant to child protection practice and procedure across the country, and which, as far as possible, will prevent further tragedies of this kind. We look forward to Lord Laming's report and his recommendations with interest.

Accident and Emergency Departments

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures of performance he uses to judge the quality of care in accident and emergency departments. [27716]

Ms Blears: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The Commission for Health Improvement (CHI) review teams follow patients' pathways of care when undertaking clinical governance reviews of national health service trusts. Accident and emergency (A&E) departments are frequently included as a key element of a pathway of care.

The review teams both interview A&E staff and observe A&E departments in order to examine how patients are cared for during their stay. Elements frequently reported on are issues about the quality of the environment, the maintenance of confidentiality, the provision of privacy which promotes dignity, the flow of care, including waiting times and how the department relates to other services.

All CHI reports highlight both notable practice and issues that require the organisation's action. All action issues are followed up utilising the trust's own action plan, which like the report is published.

In addition, the Government measure waiting times in A&E. Data on waits for admission post decision to admit are published quarterly. The NHS Plan set a new target for A&E, to reduce the maximum wait in A&E from arrival to admission, transfer or discharge to four hours by 2004. In line with this target, from August 2001, data on total time in A&E from arrival to admission, transfer or discharge have been collected. These data show that the NHS is currently on track to meet this target with 77 per cent. of A&E attenders spending four hours or less in A&E.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff were required to work on Sundays in accident and emergency departments in each year between 1990 and 2000. [30938]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Staffing of accident and emergency departments is a matter for the national health service locally.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average number of trolley bays is per thousand patients seen in accident and emergency departments in England. [36891]

Ms Blears: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Information on the number of trolley bays in accident and emergency departments is not collected centrally. In the year 2000–01 there were 12,953,000 attendances at accident and emergency departments in England.

Ministerial Transport

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the cost of *(a)* ministerial cars and drivers and *(b)* taxis for his Department in each of the last four years. [27907]

Ms Blears: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 30 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 406W.

The table gives a summary of costs of taxis.

Cost of taxis

Year (April to March)	£
1998–99	189,730.78
1999–2000	220,603.24
2000–01	250,321.97
2001–02	236,944.18

Head Injuries

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will create a new social services user category for neurological conditions including acquired brain injury. [30838]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

It is not usual practice to instruct councils with social services responsibilities to provide services within specific categories and I do not at present intend to create a new user category for neurological conditions. However I recognise the importance of the provision of the right sort of services to meet the needs of people with acquired brain injury. The National Service Framework (NSF) for long-term conditions will set standards for the care and treatment of various long-term conditions, including for acquired brain injury. This NSF will look at services and set standards in both health and social care.

NHS Professionals

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he will take against those trusts which choose not to use NHS professionals to provide their temporary nursing staff. [30769]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Current advice to trusts about the use of NHS professionals is contained in HCS 2001–02.

Private Hospitals

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will require private sector hospitals to publish performance indicators on standards of patient care. [30856]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, at column 192W.

National Care Standards Commission inspection teams will collect data on the performance indicators for the sector as laid out in regulation 28 of the Private and Voluntary Health Care Regulations. This data will be analysed and form part of the report from the Commission to the Secretary of State.

The Commission is also examining other key clinical indicators that may be perceived to be a reflection on the quality of care received by a patient, and inspection teams will collect data on these issues in the first year of inspection experience. They will test the approaches to data collection to ensure that it is robust before publishing the results.

Patient Treatment Statistics

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were treated in the *(a)* NHS and *(b)* private sector (i) in total and (ii) as a percentage, in each of the last 10 years. [30565]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, at column 192W.

This information is not available in the form requested.

Information on the numbers of NHS patients treated by hospitals in England is available from Hospital Episodes Statistics, published by the Department of Health. The Department of Health does not collect information on the overall number of patients treated in private hospitals.

Food Products

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with the Food Standards Agency concerning manufacturers of food products who will not disclose when they use mechanically recovered meat. [32797]

Yvette Cooper: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, at column 192W.

I have been advised by the Food Standards Agency that a research project, to establish whether bovine mechanically recovered meat (MRM) was a significant source of human exposure to material infected with Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy between 1980 and 1995, is currently being finalised with potential contractors. The agency has had preliminary discussions with the main meat trade associations who have said that they will help gather as much information as possible. The results of the study will be reported to the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee, which advises the Government on matters concerning BSE and variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease, and will be made publicly available.

NHS Direct

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many calls to NHS Direct are initially dealt with by a call handler who is not a qualified nurse. [33757]

Ms Blears: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

It is general practice for calls made to NHS Direct to be handled by call handlers before being passed on to a qualified nurse. Between 20 and 30 per cent. of NHS Direct's calls are health information calls and can be handled without any form of consultation with a nurse.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average length of time was for a caller to NHS Direct to speak to a qualified nurse in the last 12 months. [33758]

Ms Blears: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

For the calendar year of 2001, NHS Direct handled around five million calls. The average length of time for a caller to NHS Direct to speak to a nurse is not currently available. However, 59.23 per cent. of all callers spoke to a nurse within five minutes, and 82.35 per cent. of all callers spoke to a nurse within 30 minutes.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many calls were made to the NHS Direct service during the year to 31 December 2001; and what the costs were of administering the service for that period. [30313]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

For the calendar year of 2001, NHS Direct handled around five million calls, averaging 96,000 calls a week. The cost of running NHS Direct in 2000–01 was £80 million.

Consultation Documents

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 9 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 476–77W, on consultation documents, how many of the consultation documents issued by his Department in 2000 defined a preferred option; and in how many of these the preferred option was adopted. [33536]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Of the 31 consultation exercises that the Department conducted during 2000, six defined a preferred option and in five cases the preferred option was adopted.

Accountancy Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total cost to his Department was for accountancy services in each of the last four years. [34163]

Ms Blears: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The Department's accounting system does not collect information in the form requested.

Departmental Policies (Bristol, East)

Jean Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Bristol, East constituency, the effects on Bristol of his Department's policies and actions *(a)* from 5 May 1994 to 2 May 1997, *(b)* from 2 May 1997 to 7 May 1998, and *(c)* since 7 May 1998. [35605]

Ms Blears: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer her to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to her by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office on 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 80W.

Further information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the provision of milk tokens to mothers who are asylum seekers. [35007]

Yvette Cooper: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply he received on 10 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1024W.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the statutory instruments issued by his Department in the last 12 months, indicating *(a)* the purpose of each and *(b)* the cost of each to (i) public funds, (ii) businesses and (iii) individuals. [36234]

Ms Blears: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

A list of all statutory instruments made by the Department of Health in 2001 and to date in 2002 has been placed in the Library. Information relating to the purpose and cost of each instrument can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

From March 2002, explanatory memoranda will be provided for all affirmative statutory instruments as announced by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House on 1 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 584W. Much of the information requested will be provided in this memoranda.

Bed Blocking

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received concerning bed blocking of old age psychiatry beds *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* in North Yorkshire. [36917]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer her to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Discharges from old age psychiatry beds can be delayed because of difficulties in finding suitable ongoing care for these patients. Standard 7 of the national service framework for older people requires that older people who have mental health problems should have access to integrated mental health services provided by the national health service and councils to ensure effective diagnosis, treatment and support, for them and their carers. Implementing the requirements of Standard 7 will minimise the problems of delayed discharges from old age psychiatry beds. In addition, we are planning to encourage the provision of intermediate care services which meet the needs of people suffering from dementia.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate his Department has made of the extent of bed blocking in the south-east; and what action he is taking to reduce it. [6257]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Tackling delayed transfers of care is a high priority throughout the south-east region. Addressing delayed transfers of care features strongly in both performance improvement plans and local modernisation reviews in the south-east. To support this work, over £14 million of additional funding was allocated to local authorities within the south-east this year and over £36 million allocated next year to tackle bed blocking.

A joint social care/national health service regional strategic group has been established to identify specific actions that can be taken to improve availability within the residential and nursing home market. It will also produce a planning model for intermediate care in the south-east.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of acute beds are blocked in each health authority in England. [37480]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Long-term Care Beds

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of the need for long-term care beds in the *(a)* private, *(b)* voluntary and *(c)* public sectors. [35526]

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of the need for long-term care beds in the *(a)* private, *(b)* voluntary and *(c)* public sectors. [36518]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 26 February 2002]:* I apologise to the hon. Members for the delay in responding to this question. I refer them to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

I refer them to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) on 1 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 626–27W.

All types of providers have a role to play in supplying services and we have not made separate assessments for different sectors.

Strokes

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many stroke cases have occurred in each health authority in England in the last three years *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a per capita figure; and how many stroke cases there were per consultant in each national health service region in the last three years. [37831]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested for consultants is not currently available centrally while essential validation work on data at consultant level is being carried out both centrally and locally at Trust level. It is planned that consultant level information will begin to become available in the summer of 2003.

The information requested for stroke cases for the last three years has been placed in the Library.

Pregnant Women (Exposure to Chemicals)

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action his Department is taking to minimise exposure of pregnant women to chemicals, including pesticides, that have the potential to disrupt endocrine systems. [38131]

Yvette Cooper: The Department contributes to Government procedures for risk assessment and setting exposure limits for chemicals used in various areas. These procedures aim to protect the public, including pregnant women and the foetus. They include the approval of pesticide products following consideration of the advice from the independent Advisory Committee on Pesticides.

The Department, together with the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Health and Safety Executive, and the European Chemical Industries Council, the Department is funding a £1.7 million research programme of epidemiological studies to investigate trends in male reproductive health, and the possible influences of occupational or environmental (or other) exposure to chemicals. The programme includes evaluation of effects of maternal exposures on the male foetus. Results from the four studies in the programme are expected to be available by the end of this year.

The Department also participates in European risk assessments of chemicals; has contributed to the development of the European Commission Community Strategy for Endocrine Disrupters; and is contributing to a comprehensive assessment (through the World Health Organisation's International Programme on Chemical Safety) of the state of the science on endocrine disruption. In addition it supports the leading role which the United Kingdom plays in the test guidelines programme of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which aims to ensure that the harmonised test methods used internationally reflect best practical approaches for assessing the health effects of chemicals. This includes an active role in the work of the OECD Endocrine Disrupter Testing and Assessment Group which is taking forward the validation of new methods for detecting compounds with such properties.

Further information on this issue, and on Government action, is in the note "Hormone (Endocrine) Disrupting Substances in the Environment" at http://www.defra.gov.uk/nvironment/hormone/index.htm

As the assessments progress and further scientific evidence becomes available, the Government, together with our European partners, will evaluate whether further action to limit exposure to chemicals is required.

Hospital Admissions

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the rate of admissions to hospital of children per 1,000 children under 16 that were the result of an unintentional injury resulting in a hospital stay of longer than three days was in 1999–2000. [5237]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 19 July 2001]:* I apologise to my right hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs, Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The rate at which children under 16 are admitted into hospital as the result of an unintentional injury resulting in a hospital stay of longer than three days was 1.02 per 1,000 children under 16 in 1999–2000.

National Alcohol Strategy

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on plans for a national alcohol strategy. [5565]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 20 July 2001]:* I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The NHS Plan says that the Department will be implementing the national strategy to tackle alcohol misuse by 2004. The Department is on course to achieve this target and we expect to publish a consultation paper for the strategy this summer.

Transplants

Ms Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions there have been between the NSCAG and their Scottish colleagues on the new transplant centre in Glasgow. [4379]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 20 February 2002]:* I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer her to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Discussions have taken place with Scotland and they are participating in the work to develop national standards for the service.

Specific decisions on the restart of the adult heart transplant surgery service at North Glasgow University Hospital NHS Trust are however a matter for the Scottish Executive Minister for Health and Community Care.

Hinchingbrooke Hospital

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* hospital medical staff, *(b)* consultants and *(c)* nursing and midwifery staff were employed at Hinchingbrooke hospital on (i) 31 March and (ii) in each year since 1996. [6174]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The information requested is shown in the table.

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): hospital medical staff, consultants and qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff employed at Hinchingbrooke Health Care NHS Trust as at 30 September each year

Whole-time equivalents

	All hospital medical staff	*of which Consultants*	*Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff*
1996	110	50	490
1997	120	50	510
1998	120	50	540
1999	130	50	540
2000	140	60	530
2001	140	60	490

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest ten.
2. Figures exclude learners and agency staff.

Source:

Department of Health non-medical workforce census
Department of Health medical and dental workforce cenus

Huntingdonshire PCT was established on 1 April 2001 and some qualified nursing and health visiting community staff have transferred from the acute hospital which accounts for the apparent fall in the 2001 whole-time equivalents figure.

Nursing Care (Financial Support)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of eligible residents in nursing homes have been assessed for the level of need for financial support for their nursing care. [32964]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) on 27 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1398–99W.

National Service Framework

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much of the *(a)* revenue and *(b)* capital additional funding in 2001–02 to fast-forward the National Service Framework has been (i) allocated and (ii) spent. [35492]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Announced with the national health service plan was additional funding to fast forward the national service framework. In 2001–02 £12.35 million revenue and £68 million capital was originally allocated. £4 million capital has been reallocated to 2002–03. The revised allocations for 2001–02 are therefore £12.35 million revenue and £64 million capital.

BCG Vaccination

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the level of vaccination coverage is among children who should have received the BCG vaccination in the last academic year. [38682]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Information about the numbers of children receiving BCG vaccinations is contained in tables 4 and 5 of the Statistical Bulletin "NHS Immunisation Statistics, England: 2000–01". A copy of the bulletin is available in the Library and can also be found on the Department of Health website www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0121.htm.

Since the resumption of the schools routine BCG programme in March 2001, up to the end of January 2002, over 2.2 million more doses of vaccine have been distributed to co-ordinators around the United Kingdom compared with the previous year.

Smoking

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the effect of rates of tobacco tax on levels of smoking. [40516]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

Research has consistently shown that the demand for cigarettes is affected by their price. So it follows that tax levels can play an important role in determining levels of overall tobacco consumption.

Asbestos

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from *(a)* Eternit of Belgium and *(b)* Saint-Gobain SA of France concerning the provision of asbestos substitutes. [39295]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) was in regular correspondence with Eternit UK, as a manufacturer of asbestos cement products, when it was planning legislation to prohibit the importation, supply and use of all forms of asbestos. Officials from HSE also met representatives from the company in February 1997, when the availability of asbestos substitute materials was discussed.

When the Health and Safety Commission consulted on draft Regulations in autumn 1998, Eternit UK commented on the proposals, giving their full support.

I am not aware of any similar contacts with Saint-Gobain.

Vaccinated Meat

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information the Government have received regarding the health implications of vaccinated meat entering the food chain. [2577]

Yvette Cooper: I apologise to the right hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

I assume the hon. Member is referring to foot and mouth disease vaccines.

The foot and mouth disease vaccines for use in any vaccination programme contain inactivated foot and mouth disease virus as their active ingredient. The FSA advise that there are no appreciable health implications of eating meat from animals vaccinated with the inactivated virus and there are no chemical safety concerns for human consumers associated with the use of the vaccines in food producing animals.

National Cardiothoracic Transplant Service

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 3 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 149W, on the transplant service, what funds will be available to meet the costs of implementation of the Government's proposals for reorganisation of the National Cardiothoracic Transplant Service. [2840]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 9 July 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The discussion document on the National Adult Heart and Lung Transplant Scheme was issued on 21 September 2001. From 1 April 2002 the Service will be commissioned by the National Specialist Commissioning Advisory Group who will be responsible for managing the service within funds allocated centrally.

Accident and Emergency Centres

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria are used to judge whether accident and emergency centres remain functional. [2936]

Ms Blears: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon.

Friend the member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

It is up to local health communities to determine the provision of services in line with clinical advice. The Government are keen to see that patients have access to services at as local a level as possible but against this desire must be balanced the need to ensure that patients receive the highest levels of clinical care, where ever that care is provided.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what critical mass is required to maintain an accident and emergency unit. [8416]

Ms Blears: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

It is up to local health communities to determine the provision of services in line with clinical advice. The Government are keen to see that patients have access to services at as local a level as possible but against this desire must be balanced the need to ensure that patients receive the highest levels of clinical care, where ever that care is provided.

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to improve the efficiency with which patient records are handled in accident and emergency departments. [12860]

Ms Blears: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The NHS Plan, "Information for Health" and "Building the Information Core", made a clear commitment to providing electronic records to everyone in England. The objective is eventually to provide on-line access to the patient record for all members of the national health service family including family doctors, hospitals, NHS Direct, ambulance services and mental health trusts, etc.

One of the key targets in "Information for Health" requires all hospitals to have fully integrated systems meeting Electronic Patient Records (EPR) level 3 requirements, in place by March 2005 to support clinical activity.

The successful implementation of EPR in acute, primary care and community social care environments are a pre-requisite to successful implementation of the first generation of Electronic Health Records (EHR) to support 24-hour emergency care. The EHR will be a summary of the data contained in the numerous organisational-based EPRs (hospitals, primary care, community, etc.) about an individual and will initially be used to support 24-hour emergency care. The ultimate aim is to make it available to all health care professionals to support routine care. The target in "Information for Health" called for the first generation EHR to support 24-hour emergency care to be in place by March 2005.

Hospital Trusts

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consultation will take place in relation to the future of hospital trusts. [2933]

Ms Blears: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

We are committed to ensuring that there are comprehensive mechanisms in place to ensure full and effective consultation on matters relating to the national health service.

Currently the NHS has a duty to consult with community health councils on changes to the NHS. The NHS Reform and Healthcare Professions Bill, currently before Parliament, provides for the abolition of community health councils, which are to be replaced by a wider and more comprehensive patient and public involvement system.

In the future the NHS will be placed under a duty to consult local authority overview and scrutiny committees on plans substantially to develop or vary health services, including hospital trusts. This duty is provided for in the Health and Social Care Act 2001.

Additionally, section 12 of the Health and Social Care Act 2001 places a duty on the NHS to involve and consult the public and its representatives on the planning and development of services, and to involve them in decisions affecting services.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the number of board meetings held without minutes being taken by the Chorley and South Ribble Hospital; [2932]

(2) if he will make a statement on the emergency board meeting of the Chorley and South Ribble and Preston acute hospital trusts regarding merger, with particular reference to the notice given to board members. [2924]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

All formal meetings of the Chorley and South Ribble NHS Trust Board have been properly minuted. The Chairs of Chorley and South Ribble NHS Trust and Preston Acute Hospitals NHS Trust called an extraordinary joint meeting of Non-Executive, Executive Directors and senior officers who report directly to the Chief Executive, on 2 July 2001. The agenda was issued on 28 June 2001. The purpose of that meeting was to discuss the appointment of a new Chief Executive, but the question of a possible merger was then raised. The subject was formally debated at the next meeting of the Chorley and South Ribble NHS Trust Board which took place on 30 July 2001.

Consultation on the proposed merger of the Chorley and South Ribble NHS Trust and the Preston Acute Hospitals NHS Trust is due to conclude on 10 March. A submission will then be put to Ministers in due course.

National Institute for Clinical Excellence

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the number of people with advanced colorectal cancer that are being denied irinotecan, oxaliplatin and raltitrexed for the treatment of their disease. [3288]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 11 July 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 129W.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) recently published guidance on the use of irinotecan, oxaliplatin and raltitrexed for the treatment of advanced colorectal cancer.

Directions have been issued obliging health authorities and primary care trusts to provide appropriate funding for treatments recommended by NICE. From 1 January this year, the NHS will have three months from the date of publication of each technology appraisal guidance to provide funding, so that clinical decisions made by doctors involving NICE recommended treatments or drugs can be funded.

Mental Health

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the new antipsychotic drugs for schizophrenia have been tested for side effects; and what conclusions were made. [3453]

Ms Blears: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2000, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Companies applying for a licence to market a new drug are required to submit the result of clinical trials. These trials will include data on the side effect profile of the products under investigation.

All recently introduced antipsychotics, which include clozapine, risperidone, olanzapine and quetiapine, have been tested in clinical trials on large numbers of patients in order to adequately characterise their side effect profiles.

These drugs are recognised to produce side effects in some patients, most frequently extrapyramidal symptons, dizziness, postural hypotension, and weight gain. More rarely these drugs may produce more serious adverse effects including blood disorders or neuroleptic malignant syndrome, or serious movement disorders (tardive dyskinesia) with prolonged use. These side effects are described in the summary of product characteristics for the individual products.

The clinical data collected in the trials of these drugs indicate that these new antipsychotics are generally better tolerated by patients than the older drugs in that some side effects occur less frequently or with reduced severity.

In all cases the information on adverse events related to use of the drug (side effect profile) must be considered in relation to the clinical benefit produced by the drug. The potential for harm from possible side effects must be weighed against the likely benefit to patients from the drug. Such a judgment is termed an overall risk to benefit assessment. For all new antipsychotic drugs which have been granted a licence, this overall risk to benefit assessment was considered to be positive.

Rocky Bennett

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what response the Government have made to the recommendations of Coroner William Armstrong at the inquest into the death of Rocky Bennett; and if he will make a statement. [5312]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The Government's response to the issues raised in the Coroner's inquest following the death of Mr. David (Rocky) Bennett has been placed in the Library.

North Cumbria Health Authority

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what representations he received *(a)* before and *(b)* after the decision was made to move the headquarters of North Cumbria health authority; [5269]

(2) what discussions he had with representatives of North Cumbria health authority *(a)* prior to and *(b)* after the decision was taken to move the headquarters to West Cumbria; [5268]

(3) if he will reverse the decision by the Chairman of the North Cumbria health authority to move the headquarters to West Cumbria; [5266]

(4) what the cost is of moving the headquarters of the North Cumbria health authority from Carlisle to West Cumbria. [5267]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 19 July 2001]:* I apologise to the right hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The North Cumbria health authority has not moved its headquarters.

I am aware that the North Cumbria Acute Hospitals National Health Service Trust, which was established on 1 April 2001, has based its headquarters at the West Cumberland hospital.

I understand that the Department has received representations at a local level. The decision as to the location of the trust headquarters was taken by the trust board and was taken in the interest of the whole organisation. No costs were incurred by the trust.

Transplants

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether the national specialist commissioning advisory group studied comparisons of success rates between transplant centres, contrasting percentage survival rates with the number of transplants performed in each centre each year; [4512]

(2) whether the national specialist commissioning advisory group compared waiting times for pre-transplant assessment between transplant centres with the number of transplants performed in each centre each year; [4513]

(3) whether the national specialist commissioning advisory group assessed existing figures on after-care services provided by centres in relation to the number of transplants performed in each centre each year; [4514]

(4) whether the national specialist commissioning advisory group examined best practice in other countries with regard to transplants. [4515]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 19 July 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Our long-term goal for the cardiothoracic service is to increase the number of patients who receive successful heart and lung transplants, to ensure that today's high quality service is sustained in the future and to improve the working lives of the professionals who provide this crucial service.

To meet this goal, we issued a discussion document on 21 September 2001. It announces that all six cardiothoracic transplant units will continue to provide a service to NHS patients. To do so, they will need to meet the clear and explicit requirements set out in the new monitoring framework proposed in the discussion document. These requirements include staffing levels and qualifications, arrangements for retrieval of organs, the number of transplants carried out or the number of patients seen in follow-up clinics and survival and rejection rates. All six units will be inspected against these requirements.

The new service standards and effective monitoring will help ensure continued improvement to the quality of cardiothoracic transplant services, and provide patients with a national service of the highest possible quality. A copy of the discussion document, which invites comments on the standards and specification for the service, is in the Library.

Ms Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what factors underlay the recommendations by NSCAG about transplant centres in England and Wales. [4380]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 20 July 2001]:* I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer her to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The key factor, which underlay the recommendations, was to ensure high quality clinical skills are maintained within our cardiothoracic transplant teams so as to ensure patients continue to receive the highest care possible.

Ms Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health upon what evidence NSCAG based its recommendation concerning the number of transplants individual surgeons should perform each year. [4381]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 20 July 2001]:* I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer her to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The recommendation as to the number of transplants individual surgeons should perform comes from the Royal College of Surgeons Expert Working Party chaired by Professor Sir Peter Morris which reported in January 1999.

Ms Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate NSCAG has made of patient outcome if a transplant unit performs *(a)* 40 and *(b)* 50 transplants per annum. [4382]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 20 July 2001]:* I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer her to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

In considering outcome data provided by United Kingdom Transplant Authority, NSCAG found that there is no statistically significant difference in the available outcome data between centres.

Ms Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment NSCAG and the Royal College of Surgeons has made of the levels of skills required to perform *(a)* heart transplant operations, *(b)* heart valve operations and *(c)* lung transplants. [4383]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 20 July 2001]:* I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer her to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

It is the responsibility of the Royal College of Surgeons to accredit those who seek to perform *(a)*, *(b)* and *(c)* as with other forms of surgery.

The responsibility of NSCAG is to offer advice to the Secretary of State in commissioning designated national specialist services.

Ms Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate has been made of the number of heart and lung transplants that could be undertaken per annum by five national centres. [4385]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 20 July 2001]:* I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer her to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The number of heart and lung transplants that could be undertaken in any given number of centres depends on the availability of organs and the capacity within the centres. Over time capacity can be adjusted depending on the resources available.

Ms Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration the National Specialist Commissioning Advisory Group has given to the travel and transportation needs of patients following heart transplantation for follow-up care in the first 12 months following surgery. [4377]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 20 July 2001]:* I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer her to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

As part of the review of cardiothoracic transplant services, population access to centres for transplant services was one of the factors considered.

Our proposals for new national standards are set out in the discussion document "National Adult Heart and Lung Transplant Service" and will be reviewed in the light of the comments received.

Ms Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment NSCAG has made of the number of people in a unit needed to perform a given number of operations; and what factors underlay the assumptions involved. [4384]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 20 July 2001]:* I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer her to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The responsibility of NSCAG is to offer advice to the Secretary of State in commissioning designated national specialist services.

The work force in each unit is determined not by NSCAG but by the service agreement between the unit and the Department of Health through negotiations.

Ms Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will undertake a review of organ retrieval boundaries to reflect population size and ensure equal access. [4386]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 20 July 2001]:* I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer her to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Organ retrieval boundaries are continuously reviewed by the Cardiac Transplant Advisory Group, a subcommittee of the United Kingdom Transplant Authority. The directors of all the National Cardiothoracic Transplant centres comprise the membership of the Cardiac Transplant Advisory Group.

Home Care

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give the latest data on the number of households receiving more than 10 contact hours of intensive home care and over five visits during a survey week per thousand head of population aged 65 and over. [5852]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 20 July 2001]:* I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

In the autumn of 2000 survey week (the latest date for which data are available), 9.2 households per 1,000 population aged 65 or over in England were receiving intensive home care (more than ten contact hours and over five visits).

Arthritis (Wales)

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussion he has had with his counterpart at the National Assembly for Wales, concerning the development of a national strategy to deal with arthritis in Wales. [6430]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The National Assembly for Wales is responsible for health matters in Wales. Department of Health officials continue to work with officials in the National Assembly for Wales generally on the development of health strategies.

Family Doctor Practices

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his policy towards family doctor practices that wish to replace a full-time partner with two half-time doctors. [6761]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

As set out in the NHS Plan (paragraph 13.11) the Medical Practices Committee will be abolished on 31 March 2002 and its functions devolved to Primary Care Trusts (PCTs). In future therefore PCTs will be responsible for determining these matters in line with our policy of devolving power and responsibility to the local level.

Departmental Spending

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total amount of spending by his Department was in each nation and region of the United Kingdom, in the last year for which figures are available; what proportion of his Department's total spending this constitutes; and if he will make a statement. [6869]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The information is not available in the form requested.

The total spend by the Department of Health is shown in the tables.

(i) Direct expenditure on health service provision via health authorities.

Total expenditure—health authorities by regional office for 1999–2000

England	*£000*
Trent and Yorkshire	4,955,804
Trent	3,918,218
Eastern	3,721,362
London	6,458,945
South East	6,082,384
South West	3,527,739
West Midlands	3,933,614
North West	5,271,048
Total	37,869,114

Notes:

1. This information is provided on a resource basis.

The majority of general dental services is not included in health authority accounts and is separately accounted for by the Dental Practice Board. Pharmaceutical services accounted for by the Prescription Pricing Authority are also excluded. Total expenditure for England in respect of these two services for 1999–2000 was £2,233,288,000.

2. There has been a change of accounting policy agreed after the submission of the 1999–2000 summarisation forms, relating to the treatment of fixed asset impairments. This would have resulted in lower expenditure figures for health authorities than that shown in the table. The amount involved on average is approximately £7 million per health authority.

Source:

Health Authority Summarisation Forms 1999–2000.

(ii) Department of Health central expenditure on hospital, community health, family health, miscellaneous health and related services and on personal social services.

Expenditure administered by the Department, by its regional office and by other related bodies for 1999–2000

	£000
Central Department	1,457,154
Executive agencies	304
Non-departmental public bodies	180,784
Special health authorities	227,941
Other statutory bodies	195,720
Northern and Yorkshire regional office	161,742
Trent regional office	156,734
Eastern regional office	94,815
London regional office	572,709
South East regional office	218,770
South West regional office	153,920
West Midlands regional 0ffice	108,226
North West regional office	185,279
Total	3,714,098

Notes:

1. This information is provided on a cash basis.

2. Expenditure shown is by administering and managing body.

3. Expenditure of the Department and its executive agencies, non-departmental public bodies and special health authorities is generally on an England-wide basis. Certain services are, however, provided to or on behalf of the Scottish Executive, the National Assembly for Wales and Northern Ireland. The proportion of expenditure on such UK-wide services is negligible in comparison to the overall quantum of expenditure.

Source:

The Appropriation Accounts for Class II, Votes 1 and 2 and the central accounting records of the Department of Health 1999–2000.

(iii) Department of Health expenditure on the administration of services.

Administrative expenditure of the Department, its regional offices and its executive agencies for 1999–2000

	£000
Central Department	207,457
Executive agencies	31,615
Northern and Yorkshire regional office	6,984
Trent regional office	7,151
Eastern regional office	6,888
London regional office	9,964
South East regional office	9,428
South West regional office	7,047
West Midlands regional office	7,057
North West regional office	7,443
Total	301,034

Notes:

1. This information is provided on a cash basis.

2. Expenditure is utilised wholly within England.

Source:

The Appropriation Accounts for Class II, Votes 1 and 2 and the central accounting records of the Department of Health 1999–2000.

Nursing Care (Elderly People)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many residents of nursing homes are receiving payments under the Government's new scheme for funding part of nursing care for the elderly. [8832]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The survey of health authorities carried out in June 2001 identified 42,700 people in nursing homes responsible for paying all their care costs from their own resources.

By the end of February 2002, 95 per cent. had had their needs determined by a national health service nurse and the remainder should be completed by the end of March.

All payments will be effective from 1 October 2001 or whenever the person became eligible for NHS funded care.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospitals are in operation which were financed by use of the Private Finance Initiative; what his estimate is of the number of beds in each hospital; and if he will make a statement. [10746]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Eight hospitals, financed by the use of the private finance initiative (PFI), are now fully operational. Listed are the details of the number of beds in each of these hospitals. The overall number of beds provided under the PFI is virtually identical to the number which would have been provided had they been built using public capital.

Scheme	*Total number of beds under previous provision*[1]	*Total number of beds as proposed in the OBC*	*Total number of beds provided by PFI solution*
Dartford			
Total G&A beds	416	360	362
Maternity	37	40	40
Total beds	453	400	402
Carlisle			
Medicine	—	225	216
Total G&A beds	452	—	—
Surgical	—	155	144
Day case beds	15	—	—
ITU/HDU	—	10	9
Paediatrics/SCBU	—	37	37
Total G&A beds	—	426	406
Maternity	—	48	38
Total beds	467	474	444
South Bucks			
Acute	304	331	331
General	193	153	158
Total G&A beds	497	484	489
Maternity	53	53	53
Total beds	550	537	542
Norfolk and Norwich			
Intensive	44	53	33
General and acute	855	689	833
Total G&A beds	899	742	866
Maternity	56	67	67
Total beds	955	809	953
North Durham			
Total G&A beds	464	[2]533	443
Maternity	[2]63		33
Day case	24	32	48
Total beds	551	565	524
Greenwich			
Total G&A beds	474	504	447
Maternity	37	40	37
Mental health	77	77	87
Total beds	588	621	571
Calderdale			
Surgical	127	116	116
Medical	142	122	122
Elderly	177	149	149
SCBU	18	14	14
ITU/HDU	5	16	16
Total G&A beds	469	417	417
Mental health	135	78	78
Women/children	100	74	74
Day case	46	35	35
Private patient beds	—	10	10
Total beds	750	614	614
South Manchester			
Adult medical	363	313	213
Surgery	363	286	286
Paediatric	68	60	60
Total G&A beds	794	659	659
Additional surgical	—	—	60
Maternity	39	33	37
Medical rehabilitation	82	50	33
Mental health	143	77	77
Unallocated	38	63	91
Day case	66	66	74
Total beds	1,162	948	1,031

[1] As of June 2000

[2] Includes day case

Biological Agents

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he has taken to prepare hospitals to deal with civilian casualties from an attack with biological agents. [12858]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Plans to deal with civilian casualties from a deliberate release of a biological agent have built upon guidance issued to the national health service and regional directors of public health, in 1998, entitled "Planning for major incidents". Specific guidance to help plan the NHS response "Deliberate release of Biological and Chemical agents" was sent out to regional directors of public Health in March 2000. Since 11 September, additional guidance has been sent to regional directors of public health and all health authorities to plan for mass casualty incidents and responses to chemical/biological incidents.

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has sufficient stockpiles of vaccines, anti-toxin and antibiotics to protect the civilian population in the event of attack by susceptible biological agents; and if he would make a statement. [12859]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The Department of Health has extensive contingency planning in place. This includes arrangements to mitigate the effects of a terrorist act and to ensure response and recovery in conjunction with other Government Departments, the NHS and key public health agencies. Strategic stocks of vaccine and antibiotics are in place. We are securing stockpiles of anti-toxin, subject to limited availability worldwide. For security reasons, details of stocks will not be revealed.

Infectious Diseases

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make funds available to the High Security Infectious Diseases Unit in addition to those specified under the Centrally Funded Initiatives and Special Allocations allocations. [12715]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 192W.

We already provide funding, based on past and current usage, to enable the high security Infectious Disease Units in London and Newcastle to remain in a state of readiness to receive and care for patients who may be suffering from highly infectious diseases.

MS Treatment (Cannabis Derivatives)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the results of the trials of cannabis derivatives in the treatment of MS sufferers. [14800]

Ms Blears: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 192W.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) on 18 October 2001, *Official Report,* columns 1345–6W.

NHS Magazine

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which officials in his Department are responsible for approving the content of NHS Magazine. [15323]

Ms Blears: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 192W.

A wide range of officials approve the content of the NHS magazine depending on the particular areas the articles cover. Ministers do not see the content of the magazine prior to publication.

Pneumococcal Vaccinations

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the number of older people *(a)* in England and *(b)* in Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East who have benefited from (i) subsidised and (ii) free pneumococcal and flu vaccinations. [16211]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 19 November 2001]:* I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 192W.

Final monitoring figures received from flu co-ordinators nationally report that, at 31 December 2001, 5,113,556—68 per cent. of those aged 65 years and over—received their flu immunisation. For the same period, Tees health authority report that 58,202 (67.8 per cent.) received their flu immunisation.

Pneumococcal vaccine is recommended to those based on underlying ill health rather than age. The Department does not therefore hold data on the number of immunisations given by age group. Figures obtained from the Prescribing Analysis and Cost (PACT) system for the period December 2000 to November 2001 show that 486,000 prescriptions for pneumococcal vaccine were dispensed nationally and 4,800 for Tees health authority.

CT Scanners

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many CT scanners there are per million of the population for *(a)* Merseyside and Cheshire, *(b)* Greater Manchester, *(c)* Lancashire and south Cumbria and *(d)* the north-west region. [19908]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 192W.

The information requested can be found in the following table:

Area	*Number of CT scanners*	*Resident population[1] (Million)*	*Number of CT scanners per million population[1]*
Greater Manchester and Cheshire	21	2.7	7.7
Lancashire and south Cumbria	8	1.6	5.0
Merseyside and Cheshire	16	2.3	7.0
North west region	45	6.6	6.8
England	285	50	5.7

[1] Approximate

Correspondence

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter of 17 October from the hon. Member for Aylesbury (reference POH(4)5009/19). [23276]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

A reply was sent on 20 December 2001.

National Clinical Directors

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the identity and sphere of competence of each tsar working on behalf of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the NHS. [24600]

Ms Blears: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The seven national clinical directors and their spheres of competence are:

Professor Ian Ph[illegible] the National Director for Older People's Services, is [illegible]onsible for leading the implementation of the national service framework for older people which sets the Government standards for the health and social care for older people in England. Professor Philp is Honorary Consultant Physician, Northern General Hospital, with responsibility for the rehabilitation of frail older people. His team won the UK Hospital Doctor of the Year Award (Older People's category) in 1998. He continues to see patients at the Northern General Hospital one day per week. His research activity is on assessing the needs of older people and their family carers. He was Scientist-in-Charge of several large European Community-funded programmes and has published widely on this topic.

Professor Mike Richards, is responsible for spearheading the development and implementation of cancer policy for the Department/NHS. Professor Richards has extensive experience in both medical oncology and palliative medicine. He was a senior lecturer and Reader in Medical Oncology before taking up the post of Professor of Palliative Medicine at Guy's and St. Thomas' in 1995.

Dr. David Colin-Thome, is responsible for primary care. Dr. Colin-Thome's key role is to aid the development of primary care within the Department and in the national health service and to contribute to implementing the primary care elements of the NHS plan. Particular areas of work within the Department are: ensuring that the policy on general practitioners who have special clinical interests is implemented, as is the delivery of national service frameworks in primary care. He was a Fellow and proposed visiting professor at Manchester University and a former director of primary care at both north-west and London regional offices. Dr. Colin-Thome continues his GP work on a part-time basis.

Professor Al Aynsley-Green, the National Clinical Director for Children is leading the work of the children's task force and the development of the children's national service framework (NSF). Professor Aynsley-Green is the Nuffield Professor of Child Health at the Institute of Child Health, University College London and a practising paediatrician at Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children NHS Trust. He is a member of the team whose submission led to the Queen's Anniversary Prize being awarded in 2001 to the Institute of Child Health. He is also president of the Association of Professors in Paediatrics and an elected member of the Council of The Academy of Medical Sciences. He holds prestigious grants for his research in child life and health.

Professor Aidan Halligan, has a dual role as National Director of Clinical Governance for the NHS and Director of the NHS Clinical Governance Support Team, now part of the Modernisation Agency. Professor Halligan was appointed in September 1999, and led the creation of a multi-disciplinary team to work with the NHS, to support the implementation of clinical governance. Professor Halligan has valuable experience of service redesign and patient centred quality improvement from his work at the Leicester Royal Infirmary. Professor Halligan is Professor of Fetal-Maternal Medicine at the University of Leicester and prior to appointment was Head of Obstetrics at Leicester Royal Infirmary. He retains a clinical and research commitment and sees patients one day a week.

Professor Louis Appleby, is Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Manchester where he leads major research units on suicide and on post-natal mental illness. Since 1996, he has been Director of the National Confidential Inquiry into Suicide and Homicide by People with Mental Illness, whose recommendations formed the basis of standard 7 of the NSF on mental health—this standard is about suicide prevention. He has been a consultant psychiatrist since 1991, working in Manchester.

Dr. Roger Boyle, is responsible for implementing the national service framework for coronary heart disease (CHD). Qualified from the London Hospital Medical College in 1972, Dr. Boyle has been a consultant cardiologist in York since 1983. He is a member of the Council of the British Cardiac Society and is a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians and the European Society of Cardiology. Dr. Boyle is a member of the external reference group that drew up the national service framework for CHD and chairman of the focus group on acute presentations as well as chairing the national task force for coronary heart disease.

MMR Vaccination

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to study the incidence of autism in *(a)* children immunised with MMR and *(b)* children who have not been given MMR jabs. [24277]

Yvette Cooper: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The cause of autism is not yet known and many factors may play a role. The recently completed Medical Research Council (MRC) review of the epidemiology and causes of autism concludes that the strongest evidence to date is for a major genetic component. It says that methodological differences between studies, changes in diagnostic practice, and increased public and professional awareness are likely causes of apparent increases in prevalence but notes that it is not yet clear whether these factors account for it all.

A number of studies, including one commissioned by the Medicines Control Agency have examined the postulated link between measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) and autism and have found no association. Two of these studies (Fombonne et al, Paediatrics, 2001 and Hiejbel and Gillberg, Autism, 1998) have specifically looked at rates of autism in populations who have had MMR and populations who have not had MMR using consistent definitions of autism. These studies did not find an increased reported rate of autism in MMR immunised children when compared with children who had not had MMR. Taylor et al, Lancet 1999, looked at the rate of MMR immunisation in autistic children in north Thames and found no significant difference when compared with the rate of MMR immunisation among all children in north Thames. A follow-up study (Vaccine 2001) showed no temporal association between MMR and onset of autism at any time. In February 2002, the Public Health Laboratory Service published a further study investigating MMR, regressive autism and bowel symptoms. This study compared the proportion of autistic children with bowel or developmental regression over a 20-year period from 1979, a period when MMR vaccine was introduced in the United Kingdom. They showed that there was no change in the proportion of children with regression or bowel symptoms during this time, irrespective of whether they had had MMR or not (Taylor et al, BMJ 2002, 324; 393–6).

In addition to the above, an ongoing study funded by the MRC and led by Professor Andrew Hall, is investigating possible causes of autism. This study will examine whether autistic children have a history of other conditions or medical problems, for example, problems during birth. This study, which examines a representative sample of health records drawn from over two million people registered with 300 general practices across the UK, will also look at autism and the MMR vaccine.

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on what guidance he gives to GPs seeking to expel patients from their list because of a refusal to accept the MMR vaccination. [35424]

Yvette Cooper: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The registration/de-registration of patients with a general practitioner is governed by the Doctor's Terms of Service. We strongly endorse the General Medical Council guidance "Duties of A Doctor" which says that it is unacceptable to discriminate against patients on grounds of lifestyle, culture, beliefs, race, colour, sex, sexuality, age, social status or perceived economic worth. Refusal to accept the measles, mumps and rubella vaccination should not therefore be regarded by a general practitioner as a reason for removing somebody from his or her patient list.

Contingency Fund

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what criteria relating to bed availability are used to assess eligibility for funding from the Department's contingency fund; [27016]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 January 2002]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Officials within the Department have control over a small fund to deal with particular pressures on local health services. Money is allocated in discussion with regional offices based on well established procedures for monitoring local health services. This monitoring includes information on bed availability.

NHS Professionals

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what measures are in place to monitor the performance of NHS professionals; [30768]

(2) if he will list the performance targets that have been set for NHS professionals; [30770]

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) by what means he intends to *(a)* monitor and *(b)* improve the efficiency of NHS professionals; [37374]

(2) whether the Commission for Health Improvement will be able to inspect and report on the work of NHS professionals. [37373]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Members for the delay in responding to these questions. I refer the hon. Members to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

A national project board with representatives from the NHS and Department of Health is responsible for the extension and development of NHS professionals, including national monitoring and performance of NHS professionals providers. Regional project boards closely manage the development across regions. Also each site has its own project structure to manage and monitor implementation.

A Code of Practice is being developed to provide a framework for the management of temporary staff to the NHS, including NHS professionals.

The functions of the Commission for Health Improvement will cover NHS professionals.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what protections are contained within NHS Professionals to ensure nurses do not exceed the 48 hour work week. [30766]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, column 192W.

Health service circular 2001–002 and the guidance NHS Professionals—"A co-ordinated, NHS-led approach to temporary staffing" sets out national standards for good employment practice in the management of temporary staffing. This includes using the best of modern information technology and call centre technology within agreed national frameworks for terms and conditions of service, delivering high quality patient care through clinical governance.

NHS Professionals uses software that automatically flags up any shift in which an individual could exceed a 48-hour working week, and this is then raised with the individual.

Details of any current existing working arrangements are discussed during recruitment and the individual has a responsibility to inform NHS Professionals of any changes to these working hours.

Also, nurses working periods between rest periods are monitored to ensure that they are getting enough rest between shifts and that their total hours worked are satisfactory. These measures safeguard both the staff and their patients.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses working through NHS Professionals in the week ending 19 January were in receipt of premium payments. [30773]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W).

The information requested is not held centrally.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that the costs of *(a)* timesheet processing and *(b)* payroll functions of NHS Professionals are identified and reported. [41728]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

HSC 2001–002 and guidance NHS Professionals—"A co-ordinated, NHS-led approach to temporary staffing" sets out national NHS Professionals standards for good employment practice, including provision for weekly payment upon submission of completed and authorised timesheets.

Local, regional and national project boards are in place to monitor the implementation of NHS Professionals to meet the required standards.

Osteoporosis

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the clinical guidelines on the assessment and prevention of falls in older people will include information on osteoporosis; and if he will make a statement. [31464]

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason osteoporosis has been left out of NICE's scope for the development of a clinical guideline on the assessment and prevention of falls in older people. [32856]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 4 November 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Members for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Members to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Following its consultation on the scope of the guideline I understand that NICE decided that osteoporosis could not be given proper consideration as part of a guideline on falls prevention. However, we are considering a proposal for a separate clinical guideline on osteoporosis.

"The Bulletin"

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the respondents that have expressed concerns over the capacity and capability of primary care trusts to handle the functions to be devolved from the existing health authorities after April, according to Issue 7 of The Bulletin dated January 2002. [34139]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

In the "Shifting the Balance of Power" discussion period, over 400 responses were received from existing primary care trusts (PCTs), health authorities, national health service trusts, local representative committees, voluntary organisations, community health councils, local authorities, universities, royal colleges, major national representative bodies and numerous individuals. Several of these respondents were concerned to some extent that PCTs would not have the capacity or capability come April to undertake their new functions effectively. However, these concerns were raised in the summer of 2001, since then much progress has been made in the development and implementation of PCT policy.

It would be wrong to expect PCTs to manage their enhanced role and new functions without support. That is why a number of central initiatives, for example the national primary and care trust development programme, have been established to help PCTs develop the expertise and the capacity they will need to take on these functions.

At a local level PCTs are being encouraged to develop collaborative working arrangements with each other to pool knowledge, and share capacity and expertise.

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made under the comprehensive development programme referred to in Issue 7 of "The Bulletin" dated January 2002 in ensuring that primary care trusts are able to handle functions devolved from health authorities. [34138]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

To ensure that primary care trusts are able to handle functions devolved from health authorities in April 2002, a number of central support and development initiatives were established through the primary care trust development programme, the leadership centre, the National Health Service appointments commission and the Modernisation Agency.

A framework of organisational and person competencies for PCTs and their staff has since been identified after an extensive listening exercise with PCTs and other key stakeholders. This will shortly be available to all PCTs to use as self-assessment tool to help determine the organisation's competence and enable PCTs to build and develop the capability and capacity to deliver on their enhanced role. A series of events have also been held for PCT chief executives and some other senior staff to develop the ideas of PCTs collaborating on areas where self sufficiency is not possible. As a result network arrangements are being put in place over the country.

Appropriate induction and development programmes have also been developed for PCT non executive directors and similar programmes for other leaders are in progress. A number of specialist groups have been established to look in more detail at PCTs' competence on issues such as dentistry and nursing while teams of PCT leaders have also been recruited to look at the major PCT competencies in more detail.

As more staff are in place and PCTs take on their new functions, development programmes will continue apace. Indeed, the primary care trust development programme has a three year future already planned out. PCT development will be linked increasingly to development initiatives for the new health authorities to ensure that changes across the NHS are delivered in a whole systems way.

Intermediate Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the intermediate care joint investment plans have been agreed as set out on page 172 of the National Service Framework for Older People milestones. [34024]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 7 February 2002]:*I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 192W.

In the light of Shifting the Balance of Power and a government wide drive to reduce levels of bureaucracy, a new approach to planning in the national health service NHS) is being developed.

Chief executives of the new strategic health authorities (StHAs) will be accountable for delivery of national priorities as part of three-year franchise agreements with the Department. Franchise agreements will be underpinned by an annual delivery agreement (ADA) that outlines the actions and investments required to deliver on the commitments outlined in the *Planning and Priorities Framework (2002–03),* of which the development of intermediate care services is a key deliverable. Taken together, the components of StHA franchise agreements, including the ADA, will form the key instrument of accountability between the NHS and the Department.

In the light of these changes and the commitment by Departmental boards to reduce the health and social care planning burden, the NHS will no longer be required to produce either older people's or intermediate care joint investment plans. Any local planning of intermediate care services for 2002–03 that has already taken place will feed in to the new planning arrangements.

This does not mean that the NHS will cease to plan or invest jointly-it will. Crucially though the quality and effectiveness of that planning will now become the responsibility of the StHAs, who will be responsible for ensuring that adequate mechanisms are set in place at a PCT and trust level to ensure effective joint investment and planning.

NHS Employment Costs

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the estimated additional cost to the NHS in England and Wales of the changes to employers' national insurance contributions for 2002–03. [34436]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 7 February 2002]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

We are not aware of any changes to employer's national insurance contributions which will give rise to additional costs to the NHS in 2002–03.

NHS Organisation

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to merge *(a)* existing and *(b)* proposed NHS (i) national directors posts, (ii) commissions, (iii) offices, (iv) types of trust, (v) types of authority, (vi) groups, (vii) boards, (viii) committees, (ix) forums, (x) councils and (xi) bodies. [35493]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Proposals for changes to existing NHS bodies were set out in "Shifting the Balance of Power—Securing Delivery", published in July 2002 and "Shifting the Balance of Power—The Next Steps" published in January 2002, copies of which are available in the Library.

GP Targets

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what targets he has set for general practitioners to achieve *(a)* now and *(b)* by 2004. [36894]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The general practitioner (GP) pay system includes incentives for GPs to deliver targets on childhood immunisation and cervical cytology. These have been a feature of the pay system since 1990. The NHS plan sets targets for modernising primary care services where GPs are expected to contribute to their achievement, including in particular, the access target that by 2004 patients should be able to see a GP within 48 hours or another health professional within 24 hours. None of these targets are, however, for GPs to achieve on their own. It is for primary care trusts locally to lead, organise, support and resource delivery of the NHS plan targets for primary care.

National Care Standards

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the Regulatory Impact Assessment for the National Care Standards Regulations. [37135]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 26 February 2002]:* The Regulatory Impact Assessment for the Care Homes Regulations and National Minimum Standards for Older People and for Younger Adults was placed in the Library on 21 January 2002. We will be placing the Regulatory Impact Assessments for Care Homes and for other service areas on the Department of Health's NCSC website shortly.

Advertising

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the expenditure of his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies on newspaper advertising by title in each year since 1997. [26986]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, at column 192W.

The table shows figures on total spend on advertising including promotional campaigns for the Department for the financial years 1996–97 to 2000–01.

£ million

Financial year	*Advertising expenditure*
1996–97	2.50
1997–98	2.04
1998–99	8.53
1999–2000	15.31
2000–01	21.97

National, regional and local media, including newspapers, are considered for all of the Department's advertising campaigns. The selection of media will depend on a number of factors including the nature and complexity of the message and on the target audience.

For national campaigns a mix of broad sheets and tabloids is frequently used. For regional advertising, space has been taken in many prominent regional newspapers and a number of local ones.A breakdown of expenditure on newspaper advertising by title could only be supplied at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the expenditure was per campaign for the five most expensive media advertising campaigns his Department undertook in the past five parliamentary sessions including the current parliamentary session in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Northern Ireland; and, for the last two parliamentary sessions and the current session, when each advertising campaign (i) began and (ii) ended in (A) England, (B) Wales and (C) Northern Ireland; [37417]

(2) what the cost was of media advertising in each of the past five parliamentary Sessions including the current Session, for his Department in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Northern Ireland; and for the last two Parliamentary Sessions and the current parliamentary Session, what the media advertising expenditure was per month in (i) England, (ii) Wales and (iii) Northern Ireland. [37403]

Ms Blears: Major advertising campaigns commissioned by the Communications Directorate are tabled as follows (in £ millions).

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*[1]
Antibiotics	—	—	0.91	—	0.44
Blood donation	0.60	1.70	[2]0.22	—	—
CALM	—	—	—	—	0.05
Drugs	—	—	0.53	0.5	—
Flu	—	—	—	2.01	1.45
Mind out	—	—	—	—	0.13
National health service including nurse recruitment	1.30	4.90	4.21	4.90	5.0
NHS direct	0.12	0.78	1.24	0.28	1.25
Organ donation	0.02	0.77	0.47	0.43	0.18
Prescription fraud	—	0.38	—	0.18	nil
Sexwise/teenage pregnancy	—	—	0.39	1.5	2.0
Sexual health	—	—	—	—	0.3
Social worker recruitment	—	—	—	—	1.0
Smoking	—	—	[3]6.18	8.97	[4]7.79
Walk in centres	—	—	—	0.17	0.02
Winter	—	—	1.16	2.03	0.2
Total	2.04	8.53	15.31	20.97	19.81

[1] Planned (to be updated)

[2] The Department's spend on blood donation advertising reduced in 1999–2000 because most of this activity was funded directly by the national blood authority, who took over full responsibility for this expenditure on 1 April 2000.

[3] Prior to 1999–2000 advertising on smoking was undertaken by the health education Authority (HEA).

[4] Including Asian specialist press.

All of the above campaigns relate to England only

A breakdown of expenditure by campaign by month can only be provided at disproportionate costs.

Medical Staff Numbers

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* nurses, *(b)* doctors and *(c)* consultants were employed by NHS trusts in Worcesteshire in (i) 1998, (ii) 1999, (iii) 2000 and (iv) 2001; and if he will make a statement. [28357]

Yvette Cooper: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2000, *Official Report*, column 192W.

National health service hospital and community health services (HCHS) nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff and hospital medical staff by NHS Trusts in Worcestershire Health Authority as at 30 September each year from 1998 to 2001.

	1998	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff				
Whole time equivalent	2,880	2,790	2,770	3,020
Headcount	3,950	3,620	3,540	4,020
Hospital medical staff				
Whole time equivalent	420	410	420	440
Headcount	540	530	520	540
Medical consultants				
Whole time equivalent	160	160	160	170
Headcount	180	180	170	180

Notes:

1. In 1999 and 1998, the HA was made up of the following trusts:
Alexandra Healthcare NHS Trust
Kidderminster Healthcare NHS Trust
Worcester Royal Infirmary NHS Trust
Worcestershire Community Healthcare NHS Trust

2. In 2000 the HA was made up of the following trusts which had merged:
Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust which included the former:
Alexandra Healthcare NHS Trust
Kidderminster Healthcare NHS Trust (part)
Worcester Royal Infirmary NHS Trust

3. Worcestershire Community and Mental Health NHS Trust which included the former:
Kidderminster Healthcare NHS Trust (part)
Worcestershire Community Healthcare NHS Trust

Source:
Department of Health non-medical work force census
Department of Health medical and dental census

The drop in nurse numbers observed between 1998 and 1999 are those for the total number of nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff, whereas there was little change in the numbers of qualified staff. The figures also reflect that during this period three acute NHS trusts merged into one. In addition, the community and mental health services across Worcestershire merged into one trust.

The implementation of recruitment and retention initiatives has increased the number of NHS nurses now working Worcestershire. The NHS vacancy survey shows that between 2000–01 the vacancy rate for qualified nurses in Worcestershire reduced from 1.3 per cent. to 0.8 per cent. The equivalent vacancy rate for consultants between 2000–01 reduced from 4.1 per cent. to 2.9 per cent.

The Government's comprehensive spending review delivered massive additional investment for the NHS. As part of this, we will see 20,000 additional nurses by 2004, 7,500 more consultants, 2,000 more general practitioners and 6,500 more therapists and other health professionals.

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were employed in each NHS hospital within the London Borough of Hillingdon in each year since 1997 as *(a)* surgeons, *(b)* doctors, *(c)* nurses, *(d)* other supportive medical staff, *(e)* administrative staff and *(f)* ancillary staff. [28536]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The Department does not collect this information by borough. Information available is shown in the table.

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): Surgical consultants, nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff, support staff and administrative staff employed within Hillingdon HA as at 30 September each year

Headcount

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
All Hillingdon HA					
Nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff	1,250	940	700	1,180	1,390
of which:					
Qualified	1,180	800	700	1,150	1,360
Unqualified	80	140	[1]—	30	30
Support staff	100	70	80	80	70
Administrative staff	500	340	410	580	690
All medical and dental staff	590	530	550	250	280
of which:					
Surgical group consultants	40	40	30	10	20
Hillingdon Hospital NHS Trust					
Nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff	910	940	700	950	1,040
of which:					
Qualified	910	800	700	950	1,040
Unqualified	[1]—	140	[1]—	[1]—	[2]—
Support staff	80	70	80	80	70
Administrative staff	340	340	410	420	500

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): Surgical consultants, nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff, support staff and administrative staff employed within Hillingdon HA as at 30 September each year

Headcount

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
All medical and dental staff	180	200	220	240	250
of which:					
Surgical group consultants	10	10	10	10	20
Harefield Hospital NHS Trust					
Nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff	340	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
of which:					
Qualified	270	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Unqualified	80	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Support staff	30	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Administrative staff	160	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
All medical and dental staff	90	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
of which:					
Surgical group consultants	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Hillingdon PCT					
Nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	230	350
of which:					
Qualified	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	200	320
Unqualified	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	30	30
Support staff	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[2]—	[2]—
Administrative staff	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	160	190
All medical and dental staff	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[2]—	10
Surgical group consultants	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[2]—	[2]—

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): Surgical consultants, nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff, support staff and administrative staff employed within West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust and its predecessors as at 30 September each year

Headcount

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Mount Vernon and Watford Hospitals NHS Trust					
Nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff	960	1,050	950	[1]—	[1]—
of which:					
Qualified	940	920	880	[1]—	[1]—
Unqualified	20	130	70	[1]—	[1]—
Support staff	120	110	30	[1]—	[1]—
Administrative staff	630	580	500	[1]—	[1]—
All medical and dental staff	300	320	320	[1]—	[1]—
of which:					
Surgical group consultants	20	20	20	[1]—	[1]—
St. Albans and Hemel Hempstead NHS Trust					
Nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff	780	670	840	[1]—	[1]—
of which:					
Qualified	760	630	770	[1]—	[1]—
Unqualified	20	50	80	[1]—	[1]—
Support staff	80	70	50	[1]—	[1]—
Administrative staff	300	350	370	[1]—	[1]—
All medical and dental staff	190	170	170	[1]—	[1]—
of which:					
Surgical group consultants	10	10	10	[1]—	[1]—
West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust					
Nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	1,670	2,020
of which:					
Qualified	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	1,500	1,660
Unqualified	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	170	360
Support staff	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	60	70
Administrative staff	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	850	1,000
All medical and dental staff	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	480	500
Surgical group consultants	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	40	40

HEALTH

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the questions from the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole tabled on 14 November, (ref 15786 and 15787). [20745]

Ms Blears: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave on 18 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 532W.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to answer the questions tabled by the hon. Member for Aylesbury on 26 November, Refs. 19317 and 19322. [25502]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 9 January 2002]*: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Replies were sent on Monday 14 January and Tuesday 5 February.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to reply to the question of 5 December, ref. 21340, from the hon. Member for Buckingham on sickness absence. [24751]

Ms Blears: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 623W.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will answer the written question tabled by the hon. Member for Yeovil on 19 December 2001, Ref. 24038. [30316]

Mr. Hutton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 30 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 425W.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to reply to the written question tabled by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak on 9 January regarding roaccutane. [32725]

Jacqui Smith: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears), gave on 30 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 425W.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to reply to the question tabled by the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead for answer on 18 January (ref 29229), on the Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service. [35243]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

I replied to my hon. Friend on 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1063W.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what target his Department has set for the time taken to answer written parliamentary questions; what the average time taken to answer all parliamentary questions has been in the last year; what assessment he has made of performance against the target for answering written parliamentary questions; and how he monitors the target. [42588]

Mr. Milburn: The Department aims to answer named day written questions by the date specified, and ordinary written questions within one week, wherever possible. Performance is monitored using a record management database.

I regret that the other information is not readily available in the form requested because the record management database from which it is drawn is currently not reliable, for the reasons set out in the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend, the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble), of 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W, on parliamentary questions, how many *(a)* written and *(b)*, pursuant written parliamentary questions have been asked by hon. Members since the start of Session 2001–02. [42618]

Mr. Milburn: I estimate that to date in this session, some 5,500 written parliamentary questions have been tabled for the Department, around 170 of which were tabled to follow up points made in previous answers.

I regret that exact data are not readily available in the form requested because the record management database from which it is drawn is currently not reliable, for the reasons set out in the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Hospital Activity

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health apart from Derriford hospital, how many hospitals in England have activity levels at three times the national average and resources at less than twice the national average. [30709]

Mr. Hutton: This information could be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

HIV/AIDS

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the budget was for HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns in each of the last 10 years. [25115]

Yvette Cooper: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Budgets for the last 10 years are shown in the table:

	£ million
1991–92	11.00
1992–93	11.23
1993–94	9.41
1994–95	9.87
1995–96	8.06
1996–97	5.20
1997–98	5.20
1998–99	4.80
1999–2000	5.90
2000–01	4.70
2001–02	5.05

The figures provided are not on a consistent basis and for some years also include expenditure on contraceptive education. Prior to 1996–97 figures are based on health education of AIDS/HIV and sexual health plus some contraceptive education, and include a proportion of the health education authority's (as was) overhead costs.

In addition, funding has been allocated to the NHS annually to carry out HIV prevention activities at local level, including local awareness campaigns. In 2000–01 £55 million was provided for this work.

This year, further funding of £47.5 million was announced to implement the national sexual health and HIV strategy. This includes a commitment to a national safer sex awareness campaign which we aim to launch this autumn.

Hepatitis C

Mr. Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to compensate victims of the hepatitis C, who became infected as a result of NHS treatment. [5867]

Yvette Cooper: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

There are no plans to provide financial support for haemophilia patients who became infected with hepatitis C through NHS blood products.

Correspondence

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to answer parliamentary question ref. 24038, tabled for answer on 19 December 2001. [26811]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

A reply was sent on 21 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 424W.

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the questions tabled by the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole for answer on 21 November 2001, ref. 15786 and 15787, on NHS dentists. [26894]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

A reply was sent on 18 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 531W.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was, for each year since 1995, the total number of *(a)* letters from hon. Members, *(b)* letters from members of the public and *(c)* parliamentary questions from (i) hon. Members and (ii) Lords dealt with by his Department; what percentage took (A) more than one month and (B) more than three months to provide a substantive answer; and if he will make a statement. [7047]

Ms Blears: The available information is in the table.

	Total number of letters received	*Percentage of cases that took more than a month to reply*
Ministerial correspondence		
1995	16,121	21
1996	11,376	13
1997	14,547	24
1998	10,648	39
1999	18,346	53
2000	18,621	50
2001	19,655	40
Correspondence from members of the public		
1995	—	—
1996	23,028	—
1997	19,738	96
1998	52,656	37
1999	29,528	44.3
2000	39,894	19.4
2001	37,928	12.5

I regret that, for parliamentary questions, exact data are not readily available in the form requested because the record management database from which it is drawn is currently not reliable, for the reasons set out in the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 24 January from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Mr. S. Haslett. [42795]

Ms Blears: A reply was sent to my right hon. Friend on 12 March.

Departmental Performance Targets

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each Minister in his Department the performance against target for *(a)* answering written parliamentary questions and *(b)* answering letters from hon. Members for each of the last 12 months. [30967]

Ms Blears: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The available information in relation to correspondence is in the table. The table shows the figures in percentage form.

Month (2001)	*SOFS*	*MS(H)*	*MS(C)*	*PS(L)*	*PS(PH)*	*PS(H)*
January	11	8	42	42	9	32
February	9	23	64	63	12	31
March	7	28	68	33	7	30
April	40	32	82	45	39	59
May	28	44	72	58	45	66
June	43	64	78	82	85	97
July	96	97	90	86	76	83
August	51	65	44	71	64	64
September	65	35	39	69	29	33
October	68	68	76	77	23	9
November	56	48	80	65	5	16
December	44	54	32	38	12	18

I regret that the information relating to parliamentary questions cannot be provided because the record management database from which it would be drawn is not now reliable for the reasons set out in the reply that my right hon. friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Mr. Shiblu Rahman

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the reasons for the delay were in the emergency services provision in respect of the death of Mr. Shiblu Rahman on 1 April in Bow; and if he will make a statement. [2720]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The first call received by the London Ambulance Service (LAS) from Mr. Rahman's family was categorised as amber two—serious but not immediately life threatening. The target for the LAS is to reach these calls within 19 minutes, which it did by dispatching a fast response unit to the scene.

A second call to the LAS provided new information on Mr. Rahman's condition, at which point it would have been more appropriate to upgrade the call to red—immediately life threatening. However, the call was still allocated an amber response. This was an error for which the LAS has apologised. An incident debrief was arranged to establish the circumstances surrounding the call categorisation and ambulance despatch.

The Rahman family have been kept updated on the investigation carried out by the LAS.

Cancelled Operations

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list health authorities in England in order of the highest number of *(a)* cancelled operations and *(b)* patients not readmitted within one month following the cancellation of an operation. [5882]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The information requested is in the tables that follow. The information is for the latest quarter available, quarter 2, 2001–02.

Operations should not be cancelled (for non-medical reasons) on the day patients are due to arrive or after arrival in hospital, and if this happens, patients should be admitted to hospital within one month of the first operation date.

Cancelled operations for non-clinical reasons, health authorities in England, 2001–02, quarter 2

	Number of last minute cancellations for non-clinical reasons in the quarter
England	20,901
West Surrey Health Commission	2,290
Birmingham HA	1,214
Avon Health	951
Barking and Havering HA	695
Oxfordshire HA	624
Manchester Health	523
Sheffield Health	509
South and West Devon HA	479
Cambridgeshire HA	475
Buckinghamshire HA	449
Camden and Islington HA	420
Leicester HA	409
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire HA	320
North Essex HA	307
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey HA	292
Newcastle and North Tyneside HA	292
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove HA	279

Cancelled operations for non-clinical reasons, health authorities in England, 2001–02, quarter 2

	Number of last minute cancellations for non-clinical reasons in the quarter
South Cheshire HA	273
St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	268
Wigan and Bolton HA	268
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth HA	268
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster HA	262
Berkshire HA	257
Redbridge and Waltham Forest HA	252
Tees HA	242
Norfolk HA	238
North Yorkshire HA	237
Northamptonshire HA	235
Wiltshire HA	227
Brent and Harrow HA	219
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham HA	219
Dorset HA	218
South Essex HA	212
West Pennine HA	201
Bedfordshire HA	201
North Cumbria HA	196
South Staffordshire HA	191
Worcestershire HA	191
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow HA	179
West Kent HA	179
North West Lancashire HA	178
Leeds HA	174
Wakefield HA	171
Hertfordshire HA	171
North and East Devon HA	170
East Lancashire HA	166
West Sussex HA	164
Morecambe Bay HA	162
Shropshire HA	160
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich HA	149
Bradford HA	144
Sefton HA	143
Southampton and South West Hampshire HA	142
Nottingham HA	141
Suffolk Health	134
East Riding HA	132
Croydon HA	127
Lincolnshire Health	127
East Surrey HA	120
North Staffordshire HA	118
Liverpool HA	118
Somerset HA	118
Gloucestershire Health	114
North Cheshire Health	106
North and Mid-Hampshire HA	101
Doncaster HA	101
Southern Derbyshire Health	98
Calderdale and Kirklees HA	97
Coventry Health	89
South Lancashire HA	89
North Derbyshire Health	82
Cornwall and Isles Of Scilly HA	81
South Humber HA	74
Hillingdon HA	73
Herefordshire HA	70
Salford and Trafford HA	67
County Durham HA	65
Dudley HA	61
Sandwell HA	55
Wirral Health	55
East London and The City HA	54
Rotherham HA	53
Warwickshire HA	53
Sunderland HA	44
North Nottinghamshire Health	42
Gateshead and South Tyneside HA	40
East Kent HA	38
Walsall HA	37
Stockport HA	29
Barnsley HA	12
Kingston and Richmond HA	11
Wolverhampton HA	9
Northumberland HA	8
Bury and Rochdale HA	3
Solihull HA	—

Source:

Department of health form QMNG

Patients not admitted within one month of cancellation for non-clinical reasons, health authorities in England, 2001–02, quarter 2

	Number of patients not admitted within one month of last minute cancellation
England	4,684
Oxfordshire HA	419
Avon Health	339
Manchester Health	256
St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	233
West Surrey Health Commission	229
Barking and Havering HA	197
Birmingham HA	170
Buckinghamshire HA	115
Redbridge and Waltham Forest HA	100
Wiltshire HA	92
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow HA	92
South Staffordshire HA	90
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire HA	84
Wakefield HA	83
Leeds HA	82
South Cheshire HA	78
Cambridgeshire HA	78
Brent and Harrow HA	76
West Pennine HA	74
Northamptonshire HA	73
Camden and Islington HA	71
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey HA	70
Newcastle and North Tyneside HA	70
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster HA	66
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove HA	65
Suffolk Health	63
South Essex HA	59
Norfolk HA	59
Berkshire HA	58
West Sussex HA	57
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham HA	53
South and West Devon HA	52
North and East Devon HA	52
North Yorkshire HA	49
Shropshire HA	45
Morecambe Bay HA	43
Croydon HA	42
Wigan and Bolton HA	41
Tees HA	39
East London and The City HA	38
North Cumbria HA	35
Sheffield Health	35
Southampton and South West Hampshire HA	34
Bedfordshire HA	33
Dorset HA	32
Worcestershire HA	31
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich HA	27
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth HA	27
North Staffordshire HA	23
Coventry Health	23
North Cheshire Health	22
Sandwell HA	21
East Kent HA	20
Calderdale and Kirklees HA	19
County Durham HA	19
East Riding HA	18

Patients not admitted within one month of cancellation for non-clinical reasons, health authorities in England, 2001–02, quarter 2

	Number of patients not admitted within one month of last minute cancellation
North and Mid Hampshire HA	18
North Essex HA	17
East Lancashire HA	16
Cornwall and Isles Of Scilly HA	14
Rotherham HA	13
Warwickshire HA	13
Liverpool HA	13
Doncaster HA	12
Lincolnshire Health	12
Salford and Trafford HA	11
Herefordshire HA	10
Wirral Health	10
Gloucestershire Health	9
West Kent HA	9
Hertfordshire HA	8
Nottingham HA	8
Stockport HA	7
Gateshead and South Tyneside HA	4
Northumberland HA	4
Somerset HA	2
Sefton HA	2
Kingston and Richmond HA	1
East Surrey HA	—
Southern Derbyshire Health	—
South Lancashire HA	—
North West Lancashire HA	—
North Derbyshire Health	—
South Humber HA	—
Hillingdon HA	—
Dudley HA	—
Sunderland HA	—
North Nottinghamshire Health	—
Walsall HA	—
Barnsley HA	—
Wolverhampton HA	—
Bury and Rochdale HA	—
Leicester HA	—
Bradford HA	—
Solihull HA	—

Source:
Department of health form QMNG

Transplant Centres

Ms Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what international models relating to the population size were considered by the National Specialist Commissioning Advisory Group in reaching their recommendations on transplant centres in England and Wales. [4378]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood ((Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The configuration and arrangements for cardiothoracic transplantation in United Kingdom are unique. NSCAG considered the research data available internationally and found that there was no comparator that gave useful evidence to determine the configuration.

Information for Health

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 13 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 664W, on Information for Health, what external appraisal has been completed of *(a)* the scale of investment required and *(b)* the feasibility of Information for Health being completed within the resources allocated. [6743]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

There has been no external appraisal of the scale of investment required for the completion of the strategy. There are Outline Business Cases and Full Business Cases for the larger elements of the strategy; these are subject to external approval. Other elements of strategic implementation are subject to local choice and individual local health communities decide on the levels of local investment which match local priority. These decisions are subject to local standing financial controls.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the number of staff employed by his Department by region and nation of the UK; and if he will make a statement. [6864]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The information requested can be found in the table.

Government office region (GORs)[1]	*Total*
London	3,108
South East	182
South West	231
West Midlands	160
North West	810
North East	158
Merseyside	15
Yorkshire and Humberside	1,301
East Midlands	64
Eastern	131
Grand total	6,160

[1] Government Office Regions (GORs) as defined by Cabinet Office for official statistical returns. It excludes data where GOR information is not held.

Figures relate to England only. The Department has no staff in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland.

Source:
Department of Health August 2001 payroll data

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total expenditure was on *(a)* advertising, *(b)* polling, *(c)* focus groups, *(d)* design consultants, *(e)* caterers, *(f)* production of departmental publications and *(g)* photographs/photographers by his Department for each year since 1995 in (i) cash and (ii) real terms; what was (A) the annual percentage increase in spending on each category and (B) spending on each category as a percentage of the total departmental running costs; and if he will make a statement. [6898]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The table shows figures on total spend on advertising including promotional campaigns for the Department for the financial years 1996–97 to 2000/01.

£ million

Financial year	*Advertising expenditure*
1996–97	2.50
1997–98	2.27
1998–99	8.63
1999–2000	14.83
2000–01	21.12

The information requested at (b) to (g) above is not collected centrally and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much he forecasts will be spent in the current financial year by his Department as a direct result of measures associated with terrorism. [10234]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 26 October 2001]*:I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The measures we have taken are an essential part of the ongoing planning process, and are closely integrated into the general preparedness of the NHS to deal with a broad range of potential emergencies.

The Department has also committed considerable staff time and effort into dealing with the consequences of the events of 11 September to which it would be difficult to attribute a specific financial value.

The Department's annual report will be available later in the year.

Departmental Promotions

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much his Department spent on information literature, advertising and campaign material in the financial years *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1998–99, *(e)* 1999–2000 and *(f)* 2000–01; and if he will make a statement. [12270]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The information is not readily available in the form requested. Details of expenditure on advertising for the years 1996–97 to 2000–01 were provided in an answer to the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir) today.

Market Research

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what expenditure has been incurred by his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years on (i) opinion polling, (ii) focus groups and (iii) other forms of market research; and if he will list the surveys commissioned and the purpose of each. [27942]

Ms Blears: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Copies of research reports are not routinely placed in the Library although a list giving details of market and opinion research undertaken by the Department is made available. A list of research projects carried out by the Department in the financial year 1999–2000 was placed in the Library in May 2000. A list of research projects undertaken by the Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies in 2000–01 and 2001–02 is being compiled and will be placed in the Library. These lists may not include all research projects, as some information is not centrally available.

A list of the Department's expenditure incurred on (i) opinion polling, (ii) focus groups and (iii) other forms of market research for the last four years could only be provided at disproportionate costs.

We are committed to consulting and involving the public to help inform both policy formulation and the delivery of better quality public service. Responsive public services are an important part of the Modernising Government initiative.

We only conduct or commission market or opinion research when it is justified by the needs of the policy or programme and is the most economical, efficient and effective way to achieve the purpose.

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on how many occasions each Minister in his Department has refused to meet an hon. Member in each of the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement about the criteria used to make such decisions. [30966]

Ms Blears: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the whole ministerial team are happy to meet parliamentary colleagues who wish to see them and do so frequently in a variety of settings.

Mental Health

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to extend to patients who are not formally detained under the Mental Health Act 1983 the right to review their admission; [32752]

(2) if he will take steps to amend the Mental Health Act 1983 to ensure that patients who are formally detained in hospital benefit from the same rights as formally detained patients; [32749]

(3) if he will make it his policy that disputed informal admissions to hospitals should be processed as though they were formal admissions. [32755]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer her to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

There are two groups of patients who may be treated for a mental disorder without being formally detained under the Mental Health Act 1983: those who have consented and are being treated voluntarily and those who are unable to consent and do not resist treatment.

The Government are committed to reforming the Mental Health Act 1983 and a Bill will be introduced as soon as parliamentary time allows.

The Government do not plan to introduce any new rights for patients who are capable of giving consent to treatment and who do so, as they can stop consenting at any time. Neither detention in hospital nor treatment can lawfully continue if a capable patient withdraws consent, except where formal powers under the legislation are used. Once formal powers are invoked, patients have the benefit of the statutory safeguards which accompany the use of those powers.

There has been concern about the position of patients who are not formally detained but who have not consented to their treatment. These are patients with long-term incapacity who are therefore unable to consent and young people under 18 who may be treated against their wishes if their parents consent.

New legislation will bring in measures to protect adult patients who have a long-term incapacity to consent, who are in a hospital or nursing home receiving treatment for a serious mental disorder and who do not resist treatment. These safeguards will include, among other things, the right to challenge admission and treatment before a mental health tribunal. As, in practice, it is unlikely that such patients will be able to take advantage of safeguards for themselves, the legislation will also provide for a nominated person to act on the patient's behalf. Where such patients demonstrate resistance to detention or treatment, they will only be lawfully detained or treated under formal powers. New rights will also be introduced for young people with serious mental disorders who are, nevertheless, able to give a view about their own treatment.

Surgical Instruments

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the excess *(a)* mortality and *(b)* morbidity figures associated with single-use instruments for tonsillectomy in 2001. [32780]

Yvette Cooper: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) does not collect details of instruments used during tonsil and adenoid surgery or the cause of death. The HES database does show that there were 41,483 finished consultant episodes in tonsil and adenoid surgery in 2000. From January to September 2001 figures show over 20,700 finished consultant episodes reported, but these figures are not complete.

HES does not record deaths in hospital, but can give no information on cause of death or morbidity measures. As the number of deaths following tonsillectomy is so small (fewer than six), the Department is unable to publish these mortality figures for patient confidentiality reasons.

Publicity Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the total real terms expenditure of his Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies on publicity in each of the years *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01 and *(e)* 2001–02 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole of the present year; and if he will break these figures down to indicate expenditure on (A) advertising and (B) press and public relations. [36170]

Ms Blears: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Efficiency Taskforce

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 21 January 2002 to the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), *Official Report*, column 673W, for what reason it is not possible to ascribe specific financial savings to the work of the NHS efficiency taskforce. [37431]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The taskforce and its members provided general advice on a range of issues relating to performance improvements. It would not be possible without disproportionate cost to quantify the contribution of specific initiatives that the taskforce made to overall efficiency savings.

Rehabilitation

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to improve awareness of rehabilitation issues among trainee doctors. [11311]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 31 October 2002]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The content and standard of postgraduate medical training is the responsibility of the UK competent authorities, the Specialist Training Authority (STA) for specialist medicine and, for general practice, the Joint Committee on Postgraduate Training for General Practice (JCPTGP). They are responsible for setting quality standards in postgraduate medical education and practice. They are independent of the Department of Health.

In addition, the General Medical Council's Education Committee has the general function of promoting high standards of medical education. The committee also co-ordinates all stages of medical education, to ensure that students and newly qualified doctors are equipped with the knowledge, skills and attitudes essential for professional practice.

NHS Budget

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the annual increase in the NHS budget needed to meet the higher costs associated with *(a)* an aging population and *(b)* improved healthcare technology; and if he will make a statement. [10818]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Since there is no single agreed methodology for estimating the impact of aging and improving healthcare technology on the cost of health care, the Department takes an alternative approach to estimating the underlying pressures on health care expenditure. The Department uses the trend increase in activity and expenditure for individual services as an indicator of likely future increases in costs. For example, the Department uses trend growth in the following categories of services:

Expenditure on FHS drugs;

Non-elective (emergency) hospital activity; and

The number of patient visits by community staff.

These trend increases include the impact of aging population and health care technology. They also capture the effect of other factors, such as changes in public expectations and changes in the underlying health status of the population.

Treatment Abroad

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS patients have been sent abroad for operations over the last three months; in which countries they have been treated; what has been the cost saving to the NHS; and if he will make a statement. [11474]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Under the pilot scheme to send national health service patients abroad, currently under way in south-east England, 18 patients travelled for treatment in January and 41 in February. 11 patients travelled for treatment on Friday 1 March and a further 20 are due to travel in the week commencing 4 March. The patients are being treated in France and Germany. We expect up to 200 patients to travel overseas for treatment as part of the pilot.

The prices for these procedures are commercially confidential. However, they are comparable to the prices charged for individual operations in the United Kingdom private sector.

The Department has authorised a total of 252 E112 applications since the beginning of December 2001, permitting patients to receive treatment, maternity care or continuing care in other countries of the European Economic Area, funded by the NHS. 72 in December, 94 in January and 86 in February. (These figures are GB figures, as the Department administers this scheme on behalf of Scotland and Wales.) However, the fact that a given number of forms were authorised in a given period does not necessarily mean that the same number of patients actually travelled overseas in that period. The countries involved were Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Norway, Portugal and Spain.

No information on costs can be provided as invoices are submitted retrospectively.

Residential Care Homes

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 159W, how many individuals (i) of pensionable age and (ii) 75 years or older in each year since 1 May 1997 to the latest available date have been living in *(a)* residential care homes and *(b)* residential nursing care homes; and in each category how many were (i) self-funding the fees, (ii) partially funding the fees and (iii) being funded wholly by the state in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. [11945]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 2 November 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The information available centrally for people aged 65 and over in England is in the table. The number of people who are resident in residential care homes and paying for their own care is not collected centrally. A survey conducted in June 2001 estimated the number of people in nursing homes who were paying wholly for their own care, but no information was collected on age.

Information on the number of homes and beds in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for the devolved Administrations.

Number of places/registered beds in residential and nursing homes for older people (aged 65 and over)[1] *with Local Authority Supported residents in these homes, 1997 to 2001, England*

Rounded numbers

As at 31 March	*1997*[2]	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Number of places in residential care homes[3]	261,600	268,600	265,100	263,400	260,100
Number of LA supported residents in residential care homes[4]	129,400	135,300	137,800	140,100	138,100
Number of registered beds in nursing homes[5]	154,200	160,000	153,500	149,600	142,500
Number of LA supported residents in nursing homes	60,800	67,500	67,500	67,600	65,500

[1] Includes older people who are mentally infirm.

[2] Refers to the period 1 October 1996 to 31 March 1997 for number of registered beds in nursing homes

[3] Residential places in local authority staffed, voluntary, private, small (homes with less than four places) and dual registered homes

[4] Local authority supported residents in local authority staffed and independent residential care homes. A local authority supported resident is a resident whose fees are paid in part or in full by the local authority. This does not include the number of people who are supported by the NHS or the Department for Work and Pensions.

[5] General and mental nursing homes including private hospitals and clinics.

Source: Department of Health returns.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what meetings he has had with representatives of the private residential care homes since April 2001. [24341]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

I have met with: Coalition on Charging on 4 September 2001; Rescare on 26 September 2001; and numerous individual care home owners.

The Under-Secretary, Lord Hunt of Kings Heath met with Lord Haskel and Rosalind Preston, Chair of the Residential Nursing Home for the Jewish Community on Monday 30 April 2001.

Influenza

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to minimise the effects of a flu epidemic on hospital resources; and if he will make a statement. [13116]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 7 November 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

As with winter 2000–01, we ran a high media profile publicity campaign targeting all those aged 65 years and over as well as those in at risk groups. These are people of all ages with: chronic respiratory disease, including asthma; chronic heart disease; chronic renal disease; diabetes; immunosuppression due to disease or treatment; and those living in long-stay residential and nursing homes or other long-stay facilities. These people would be most at risk of high morbidity, and would be the people most likely to need hospitalisation if they caught flu.

We ran a national television advertising campaign, again featuring Sir Henry Cooper, following market research on last year's successful media programme. In addition, there were many other media adverts targeting people aged 65 years and over as well as people in the various clinical risk groups, encouraging them to be immunised.

This year, 12.2 million doses of influenza vaccine were available for the United Kingdom, some 1.3 million doses more than last year, and enough to achieve our increased minimum target in England of immunising at least 65 per cent. of people aged 65 years and over.

Final monitoring figures received at the end of December 2001 showed that 68 per cent. of those aged 65 years and over received their flu immunisation. This is three percentage points higher than the target set at the start of the campaign.

Press Officers and Special Advisers

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* press officers and *(b)* special advisers are employed by his Department; what the numbers were in each of the last five years; and what the cost was in each case. [24676]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The information requested is shown in the tables.

Year	*Numbers*	*Cost (£)*
Press officers		
1996–97	15	[1]—
1997–98	16	1,061,664

Year	Numbers	Cost (£)
1998–99	18	1,122,393
1999–2000	21	1,252,509
2000–01	22	1,232,937
Special advisers		
1996–97	2	[2]—
1997–98	2	[2]—
1998–99	2	[2]—
1999–2000	2	[2]—
2000–01	2	[2]—

[1] Details of the costs for press offices are given for the periods 1997–98, 1998–99, 1999–2000 and 2000–01. For the period of 1996–97, could be provided only at disproportionate costs.

[2] Details of costs for Special Advisers within the individual Departments are not given, in order to protect the privacy of the individuals concerned.

Older People (Social Services)

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the methodology used to derive the 2002–03 allocation as indicated in the document entitled "Improving Social Services for Older People". [28289]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 192W.

All councils received additional funding through the Building Care Capacity Grant. The 55 councils with the highest rates, and the most severe problems, with delayed discharge received extra funding. The extra funding to these councils reflected the rate of delayed discharge in that council's area in summer 2001.

The same criteria were used to distribute the £190 million available for councils through this Grant in 2002–3.

Golden Jubilee

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what events *(a)* he is and *(b)* other Ministers in his Department are planning to attend as part of the golden jubilee celebrations; and what events his Department is planning to arrange to celebrate the golden jubilee. [33251]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 192W.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on 11 February 2002, *Official Report,* columns 58–59W.

General Practitioner (Child Registration)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children aged *(a)* under five and *(b)* five to 18 were known not to be registered with a general practitioner (i) in 2002 and (ii) five years ago; and what proportion they represent of the cohort. [35211]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 192W.

The Department does not have any data on "non-registered patients".

BCG Vaccine

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the availability of the BCG vaccine in schools in Buckingham. [5649]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 20 July 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 192W.

The Government's policy is that all school children should be immunised with BCG between the ages of 10 and 14 if they have not previously been immunised. Initially, in Buckinghamshire, this vaccine was offered to those students who were due to leave school in summer 2001. Where there has been sufficient vaccine and resources, year 10 pupils were also offered testing and immunisation. Any current year 10 and year 11 pupils who have not been offered the vaccine will be offered testing and immunisation during this academic year.

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will discuss with the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs the research of Professor Alan Ebringer of Kings College, associated with BSE, and its implications for multiple sclerosis. [27036]

Yvette Cooper: The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (SEAC) provides scientifically based advice to the Department of Health, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Food Standards Agency and the devolved Administrations on matters relating to spongiform encelopathies, taking into account the remits of other bodies with related responsibilities. At SEAC's meeting on 6 February 2002, Professor Ebringer and his colleagues gave a presentation outlining both the autoimmune hypothesis for the cause of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) and the diagnostic test that had been developed on the basis of the proposed aetiology. Following a lengthy discussion, SEAC considered that Professor Ebringer supported his theory by using a limited choice of publications, and that he had disregarded much of the published literature.

SEAC concluded that, on the basis of the results presented, there was little justification at this time for carrying out additional work. The minutes of SEAC's discussions can be found at http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/bse/bse-publications/seac/mins06–02–02.pdf

STI-571

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will ensure that patients participating in the UK trials for the drug STI-571, who receive proven benefits from the drug during the trial, will continue to have STI-571 made available to them, pending the appraisal of the drug by the National Institute of Clinical Excellence; [5667]

(2) when he will answer the question tabled by the hon. Member for Taunton on 17 July 2001 (ref: 5667) on STI-571. [19484]

Ms Blears: *[pursuant to his reply, 30 November 2001, c.1200W]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

A letter about the future provision of Glivec (STI-571), agreed by Ministers and signed by both Neil McKay, the Chief Operating Officer, and Professor Mike Richards, the National Cancer Director, was sent on 24 October to all NHS Regional Directors.

Novartis, the manufacturers of Glivec, made a limited free supply available for those patients on the Extended Access Programme (EAP) after which it was for health authorities and trusts to discuss the funding of the treatment. However, as the letter of the 24 October makes clear, there is no question of treatment being withdrawn from patients on funding grounds once EAP supplies ends. Treatment should cease only on clinical grounds.

Those patients involved in trials of Glivec will continue to have their treatments funded by Novartis.

Herceptin

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if Herceptin has received approval from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence; what plans he has to increase its availability to NHS patients; and if he will make a statement. [1416]

Yvette Cooper: An announcement will be made shortly.

Hospital Trust Chief Executives

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the salaries of the hospital trust chief executives in England, including bonus payments; and what are the terms of their bonus/incentive schemes. [7597]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Information on the salaries of individual hospital trust chief executives is confidential. National health service trust summarisation schedules for 2000–01 contain information for total remuneration of NHS trust chief executives, which includes basic salary, benefits and performance related bonuses. The basic salary may include compensation for loss of office. The table showing the breakdown of total remuneration by band has been placed in the Library.

PRIME MINISTER

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Chope: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 6 March 2002, refs 40634–7, *Official Report*, column 343W, what consideration he gives to the application of the Ministerial Code of July 2001 paragraph 1(iv), when answering written parliamentary questions. [42401]

The Prime Minister: Paragraph 1 of the Ministerial Code sets out Ministers' responsibilities in relation to Parliament and the public.

LNM Holdings

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral answer of 13 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 198, by what means he was first informed of the donation by Mr. Mittal to the Labour Party registered on 20 June 2001. [41841]

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to my previous answer.

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to the statement of 5 March 2002, of the Secretary of State for Wales, *Official Report*, column 169, who, within his office, amended the draft of his letter to the Prime Minister of Romania concerning LNM steel. [41845]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 610–11W.

Ministerial Code

Mr. Chope: To ask the Prime Minister if he will extend the principles of ministerial conduct set out in the Ministerial Code to the giving of accurate and truthful information outside Parliament. [42839]

The Prime Minister: Paragraph 1 of the Ministerial Code sets out Ministers' responsibilities in relation to Parliament and the public.

Iraq

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his statement to the House of 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 297, in what form he plans to consult the House *(a)* before and *(b)* after commitment of British forces to action in Iraq. [42409]

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to my statement, and the answer I gave the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) on 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 217.

UK European Commissioner

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Prime Minister what the procedure and timescale will be for the appointment of the UK's Commissioner to the EU in 2005; and if he will submit the role to his candidate for scrutiny by select committees. [42619]

The Prime Minister: The procedure for selecting, in mid-2004, the President and members of the next European Commission are as set out in the EU Treaty. The role of national parliaments (and their Scrutiny Committees) in the EU generally will be considered in the 'European Convention' that has just started.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 13 March 2002

PRIME MINISTER

Ministerial Replies

Mr. Forth: To ask the Prime Minister what recent changes he has made to the practice and conventions relating to ministerial responsibility for replying to questions and adjournment debates in the House; and if he will make a statement. [42910]

The Prime Minister: I have made no such changes. Paragraph 1 of the Ministerial Code sets out Ministers' responsibilities in relation to Parliament and the public.

Job Sharing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the extent of job sharing in his Office. [41012]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on Monday 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 780W.

Air Conditioning

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what measures were taken to ensure that the consultant advising on the installation of air conditioning in No. 10 Downing street, was aware of the Government's policy on the use of hydrofluorocarbon refrigerants in air conditioning; and if he will make a statement on the measures taken by the consultant to source practical and safe alternatives to hydrofluorocarbon-based air conditioning; [41168]

(2) whether an installer capable of installing not-in-kind air conditioning was invited to quote for the recent refurbishment contract for No. 10 Downing street; and if he will make a statement; [41170]

(3) which consultant was used to advise on the installation of air conditioning in No. 10 Downing Street. [41169]

The Prime Minister: A comfort cooling system was installed in parts of No. 10 during 2001. The Cabinet Office sought expert advice through its managing agent and appropriate appraisals were made including taking account of Government policy on the use of HFCs. The installed systems comply with all current relevant European standards on the use of HFCs and safety in the workplace.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Transport

10. **Chris Grayling:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the work being done by the social exclusion unit on transport. [40127]

Mrs. Roche: The social exclusion unit's project is looking at how poor transport can prevent people from getting to jobs or key services such as health and education.

A report will be published later this year.

12. **Mr. Blizzard:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the social exclusion unit's study into the role of transport in welfare to work policy and access to services. [40130]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The social exclusion unit was asked by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to look at the relationships between poor transport and social exclusion in April last year.

The SEU project is looking at how poor transport can prevent people from getting to jobs or key services such as health and education.

A report will be published later this year, with policies for improving access and preventing social exclusion.

Codes of Conduct

11. **Mr. Tyler:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what role he and his office is playing in the review of the ministerial code of conduct and the code of conduct for special advisers. [40129]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: A revised ministerial code was issued in July 2001. Since then, in response to a recommendation from the Public Administration Committee, the Government have agreed to amend paragraph 27 of the code. A revised model contract for special advisers incorporating a new code of conduct for special advisers was introduced for all appointments made after the election in June 2001.

Duchy of Lancaster Benevolent Fund

13. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what resources have been distributed by the Duchy of Lancaster benevolent fund during the past 12 months. [40131]

Mr. Leslie: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has asked me to reply.

Lord Macdonald is not a trustee of the Duchy benevolent fund. The Secretary of the fund has provided the following information. During the 12-month period 1 March 2001 to 28 February 2002 the Duchy of Lancaster benevolent fund has distributed approximately £285,000. The fund's annual report and accounts will be produced at the end of the financial year on 31 March 2002.

British-Irish Council

14. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he next expects to meet members of the British-Irish Council to discuss investment in the border areas of Northern Ireland. [40132]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The British-Irish Council has agreed to take forward work in the following priority areas: drugs, the environment, the knowledge economy, social inclusion, transport, tourism and tele-medicine. There are no current plans to discuss the issue of investment. Responsibility for investment in the border areas of Northern Ireland lies with the Northern Ireland Executive.

Ministerial Code of Conduct

15. **Mr. Cameron:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to amend the ministerial code of conduct; and if he will make a statement. [40133]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend earlier today to the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner), *Official Report*, column .

Public Appointments

16. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the proportion of ethnic minorities and women that have been appointed to public bodies in the past 12 months. [40134]

Mr. Leslie: Information contained in Public Bodies 2001 which was published on 14 February 2002, shows that as at 31 March 2001, women held 34 per cent. of appointments made to the boards of public bodies, and people from ethnic minority backgrounds held 4.8 per cent. of appointments. This is an increase of one per cent. and 0.4 per cent. respectively on the previous year.

In addition, also published on 14 February 2002 was "Public Bodies: Opening up Public Appointments 2002–05". This publication contains individual departmental plans to increase diversity in public appointments.

Neighbourhood Renewal

17. **Siobhain McDonagh:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what progress have been made by the social exclusion unit in research into neighbourhood renewal. [40135]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: Since the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy was published in January 2001, the Social Exclusion Unit jointly with Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions, have published one further report related to neighbourhood renewal in July 2001: "Changing Fortunes: geographic patterns of Income Deprivation in the late 1990s". This sets out baseline information on income deprivation and recent social trends at the local level. It will be used in monitoring progress of the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy.

Responsibility for implementing the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy moved to the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit in April 2001.

Departmental Employees (Hearing-Impaired)

18. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he intends to meet the Royal National Institute for Deaf People to discuss the employment in Government Departments of people with hearing impairments. [40136]

Mr. Leslie: The Deputy Prime Minister has no plans to meet the Royal National Institute for Deaf People.

The Government are committed to employing disabled people including those with hearing impairments and all Departments have targets to increase the number of disabled people they employ. 3.6 per cent. of staff in the civil service have declared themselves to have a disability. This includes 1.7 per cent. in the senior civil service.

Action to support this commitment includes participation in the two-ticks disability scheme and sponsorship of Ready, Willing and Able which advertises a range of civil service vacancies.

Government Services

19. **Andrew George:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent assessment he has made of the proportion of Government services delivered by Government agencies and other bodies operating at a regional level. [40137]

Mrs. Roche: No such assessment has been made but Government policy stresses the importance of providing public services that respond to users' needs, including area-based programmes that tackle the problems of particular localities.

There are currently 126 executive agencies providing a wide range of public services.

In addition, a wide range of public bodies also have responsibilities for the delivery of particular services at a local, regional or national levels.

The forthcoming White Paper on English Regional Governance will look at the relationships between some of these bodies and elected regional assemblies.

Civil Service Bill

20. **Richard Ottaway:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when his Department expects to publish a draft civil service Bill. [40139]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the hon. Member to my earlier answer given to the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker), *Official Report*, column .

Child Care Services

21. **Caroline Flint:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the contribution of regional Government offices to the development of child care services as part of social and economic regeneration. [40140]

Mrs. Roche: This Government recognise that child care programmes can make an important contribution to social and economic regeneration. The Government offices for the regions are helping to improve the delivery of front-line services, for example sure start and other child care and nursery initiatives, by making effective connections between such programmes and the other programmes that they support.

Poverty

22. **Paul Goggins:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what action he is taking to reduce poverty in the north-west. [40141]

Mrs. Roche: In the north-west, around 230,000 people have gained from the national minimum wage; the working families tax credit makes work pay for nearly 180,000 families. The minimum income guarantee ensures single pensioners will receive £100 a week by 2003 and more than 1.4 million pensioners have seen the biggest rise in basic state pension for a generation.

Following the Social Exclusion Unit's reports, local partnerships are harnessing the power of all the sectors to tackle the problems of deprived neighbourhoods supported by new minimum standards for mainstream services.

The Government Offices for the Regions administer programmes to tackle deprivation and poverty. For example, the north-west receives £243 million through the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund.

23. **Linda Gilroy:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the role of his Department is in tackling urban poverty. [40144]

Mrs. Roche: The National Strategy for neighbourhood renewal action plan was published by the Social Exclusion Unit in 2001. Its goal is to ensure that no one is seriously disadvantaged by where they live within 10–20 years and to narrow the gap between the most deprived neighbourhoods and the rest. Many of the most deprived neighbourhoods are in urban areas.

The strategy addresses the wider causes of poverty and social exclusion with targets to improve employment levels, educational attainment, health and housing and to reduce crime in the most deprived neighbourhoods. This is backed up by substantial investment. The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, based in Department for Transport Local Government and the Regions, is responsible for taking this forward. The Government Offices for the Regions work with the NRU and other Departments to administer specific programmes like the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund.

The SEU continues to work with all Government departments to ensure that social exclusion issues are addressed.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Chope: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many staff left the service of his Department and its agencies in the year ended 31 March 2001; how many left before attaining the formal retirement age of 60 years; and in respect of how many his Department and its agencies assumed responsibilities for making payments until retirement age. [37557]

Mr. Leslie: Figures for *(a)* and *(b)* are in the table, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House.

The figures show the number of permanent staff in each Department reported to the Mandate database from 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001.

They are also based on the Departments as they were before structural changes were made after the election in 2001.

For part *(c)* in the year ended 31 March 2001 the Cabinet Office and its agencies assumed responsibility for making payments until retirement age (60) for 13 of these staff.

Civil Servants

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will set out for each civil service grade within his *(a)* Department and *(b)* Department's executive agencies the (i) total number of staff employed, (ii) number aged (A) 16 to 25, (B) 26 to 35, (C) 36 to 45, (D) 46 to 60 and (E) over the age of 60 years, (iii) number of registered disabled and (iv) number of ethnic minorities. [39152]

Mr. Leslie: The figures are in tables and represent the data reported to the Mandate database and supplied in manual returns as at 1 October 2001, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House. Mandate is a central computer based record of information for almost all civil servants in the home civil service. For some Departments and agencies, summary figures are provided in a manual return, which may not always be fully consistent with Mandate information, for example, because of minor differences in timing. Breakdowns by age are purely figures reported to Mandate. Departments and agencies are responsible for their own grading structures, but these have been allocated to broad responsibility levels to give a common basis for tabulation.

Figures are on a head count basis, for the number of permanent staff in each Department. The figures are based on the Departments following the structural changes made as a result of the 2001 election. Figures for total staff in each Department are rounded to the nearest 10 and figures by grade level are suppressed if less than five.

Advertising

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the expenditure was per campaign for the five most expensive media advertising campaigns his Department undertook in the past five parliamentary Sessions including the current parliamentary Session in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland; and for the last two parliamentary Sessions and the current Session, when each advertising campaign (i) began and (ii) ended in (A) Scotland, (B) England, (C) Wales and (D) Northern Ireland. [37392]

Mr. Leslie: Expenditure on media advertising campaigns by parliamentary Session and country is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the cost was of media advertising in each of the past five parliamentary Sessions including the current Session, for his Department in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Northern Ireland; and for the last two parliamentary Sessions and the current parliamentary Session, what the media advertising expenditure was per month in (i) England, (ii) Wales and (iii) Northern Ireland. [37405]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) on 12 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 939W.

Expenditure per month is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

WALES

Comprehensive Spending Review

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received in the last 12 months from the National Assembly for Wales regarding the Comprehensive Spending Review. [43225]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 24 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1004W.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* press releases, *(b)* guidance notes and *(c)* publications his Department issued in each month since July 1999. [43227]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The information is as follows:

Press releases issued

	1999	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
January	n/a	5	5	11
February	n/a	5	5	9
March	n/a	13	12	—
April	n/a	9	8	—
May	n/a	10	3	—
June	n/a	10	6	—
July	0	12	6	—
August	1	5	3	—
September	7	6	9	—
October	8	10	8	—
November	4	8	15	—
December	10	7	6	—

Note:

The figures for press releases do not include operational notes.

The Wales Office has issued four publications—in February, May, November 2000 and April 2001 respectively.

The Wales Office does not issue guidance notes.

Secretary of State's Office

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the job title of each member of staff in the Office of the Secretary of State for Wales. [43230]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer the hon. Member to figure seven on page 17 of the Departmental Report 2001 (Cm 5121) which is available in the Library.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the Public Service Agreement targets which have been revised and those which have been introduced since the publication of the 2001 departmental report. [43254]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My Department does not have a Public Service Agreement.

Special Advisers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number and expected cost to his Department of special advisers in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [43274]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer the hon. Member to answers I gave the hon. Members for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) and for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) on 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 856–57W.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he intends to answer the question of 13 February from the hon. Member for Buckingham regarding staff involvement in union duties. [41574]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have answered today, at columns 1074–75 below.

School Children

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales on measures being taken to encourage school children in coalfield areas to stay on in full-time education beyond age 16. [40541]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have regular discussion with the First Secretary and his Cabinet Colleagues on a range of issues affecting Wales.

The Assembly is committed to widening access to education for all those who have the ability to benefit from it. Their 10-year plan, "The Learning Country" which was published in September, includes specific targets to increase the participants in post-16 education and training and to attract larger numbers of students into higher and further education, helped by substantial new provision for access funds.

Official Visits

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list the official visits within the UK outside London made by each Minister in his Department in 2001, giving for each *(a)* the origin and destination and *(b)* the mode of travel used; and what guidance is provided to Ministers in his Department on choice of mode of travel for official visits; [38184]

(2) if he will list the official visits to *(a)* Paris and *(b)* Brussels made by each Minister in his Department in 2001 and the mode of travel used; and what guidance is provided to Ministers in his Department on the choice of mode of travel for such visits. [38148]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 421W.

Union Duties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many staff in his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies receive paid leave to undertake union duties; how many days they are allocated; and what has been the cost to public funds in each of the last four years. [36209]

Mr. Paul Murphy: There has been one staff member elected as union representative with an allocation of eight days per annum to undertake union duties since the creation of the Wales Office in July 1999. The Department has no agencies or NDPBs.

Information for the former Welsh Office is not held centrally.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Supermarket/Supplier Relations

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) when she intends to review the operation of the Retailer Code of Practice; [42167]

(2) what measures are in place to monitor the operation and impact of the Retailer Code of Practice. [42166]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* The Code of Practice on supermarket/supplier relations comes into force on 17 March.

The Director General of Fair Trading is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the operation of Fair Trading Act orders and undertakings. His office has been in contact with relevant trade associations to ensure that the code operates effectively. In addition, the code provides for the independent dispute mediator to supply the Director General with an annual return of his work.

Internal Market, Consumer and Tourism Council

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the outcome was of the Internal Market, Consumer and Tourism Council on 1 March; what the Government's stance was on the issues discussed, including its voting record; and if she will make a statement. [40765]

Miss Melanie Johnson: There was a presentation from the Commission on its Cardiff report on economic reform, followed by a debate. Conclusions were adopted on the outcome of this year's Cardiff process, which are to be submitted to the Barcelona spring council. The council also adopted conclusions on the Commission's proposal to set up a computerised system (SOLVIT) to help improve the handling of complaints from citizens and businesses facing problems caused by the misapplication of internal market rules. The Council also adopted a resolution on the labelling of video and computer games.

There was a Presidency briefing on the Community Patent followed by a lunchtime discussion. There was a Commission presentation on its newly published proposal on computer implemented inventions (software patents), which aims to clarify the law in this area.

The Presidency initiated an exchange of views on the changeover to the euro from a consumer perspective and there was also a Presidency progress report on work during its term so far of simplifying, clarifying and updating the EC procurement directives.

There was a Commission briefing on the Green Paper on EU consumer protection and a progress report on amended proposals for a Council regulation on the statute for a European Co-operative Society, which would provide co-operatives with a legal framework to enable them to operate freely across borders on equal terms of competition with companies.

There were no legislative items on the agenda for agreement. However, Council conclusions on the Cardiff process, the SOLVIT problem solving database and standardisation were all adopted, with the UK in favour. The Council resolution on the labelling of video and computer games was also adopted with the UK in favour.

Business Links

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much has been spent advertising Business Link services in the past five years; what the nature of this advertising has been; and what the assessed outcome of each campaign has been. [41461]

Nigel Griffiths: Information on advertising spend prior to the set-up of the Small Business Service in April 2000 is not available.

Since April 2000, £4.2 million has been spent advertising the Business Link services at a national level. This includes two years of publicity activities.

> In March 2001, there was national newspaper, radio, and directory advertising (this covers insertions for a year in directories such as Yellow Pages) at a cost of £1.3 million. At this stage, no baseline awareness figures were held. 10 per cent. unprompted awareness and 55 per cent. prompted awareness of Business Link were findings from the National Omnibus Survey of Small Businesses, August 2001.
>
> In October 2001, there was national newspaper, TV, online, direct mail and directory advertising at a cost of £2.3 million, with follow up national newspaper and online advertising in February 2002 at a cost of £0.6 million.

Evaluation and tracking of this advertising was carried out and the effectiveness of the campaign was also measured by the results of the National Omnibus Survey of Small Businesses, November 2001.

> The advertising exceeded its response targets and there was a 55 per cent. increase in calls to the contact centre and a 96 per cent. increase in user sessions on the website over the two-month campaign period compared to the two months prior to advertising.
>
> Levels of unprompted awareness of Business Link increased from 10 per cent. to 14 per cent., and levels of prompted awareness increased from 55 per cent. to 58 per cent. There were significant increases in awareness among female entrepreneurs, with unprompted increasing from 5 per cent. to 14 per cent. and prompted from 23 per cent. to 63 per cent.

Spring 2002 advertising activities are still running and so no assessment of outcome is possible.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which advertising agency was consulted with regard to the Business Links advertising campaign in October 2001; what the remuneration of the company was; and what the assessed outcome of the campaign has been. [41458]

Nigel Griffiths: The advertising agency used was Ogilvy and Mather. Ogilvy and Mather were paid £170,538 for the October campaign, which represents 8 per cent. of the £2.1 million total spend on national newspaper, television, and online advertising at this time.

Evaluation and tracking is carried out for the campaign, and the effectiveness of the campaign is also measured by the results of the National Omnibus Survey of Small Businesses, which showed significant increases in both prompted and unprompted awareness of Business Link:

Levels of prompted awareness increased from 55 per cent. to 58 per cent.

Levels of unprompted awareness increased from 10 per cent. to 14 per cent.

Levels of awareness among female entrepreneurs also increased from 5 per cent. unprompted to 14 per cent. and from 23 per cent. prompted to 63 per cent.

The advertising exceeded its target of 53,000 responses to the web and contact centre by achieving 81,937 responses during the advertising period.

There was a 55–60 per cent. increase in calls to the contact centre during the campaign period and a 77 per cent. increase in website hits. Web user sessions increased 96 per cent. from an average of 39,000 hits in the two months prior to advertising to an average of 76,500 in the two months campaign period.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many staff have been employed by Business Links in each region in each of the past five years. [41459]

Nigel Griffiths: Business Links are independent autonomous organisations and figures on the number of staff they employ are not held centrally.

Disaster Planning

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assistance with disaster planning she provides to small businesses. [40115]

Nigel Griffiths: The Government have established the Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS) to improve the UK's resilience to disruptive challenges at every level through improved anticipation, preparation, prevention and resolution.

The SBS and its business link network can also advise companies on a number of disaster management issues. Companies should contact their local business link operator. The business link website: http://www.businesslink.org will put small firms in touch with their local provider.

Regional Development Agencies

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if she will make a statement on measures to improve public awareness of the roles of regional development agencies; [41903]

(2) if she will make a statement on the costs of measures to raise public awareness of the roles of regional development agencies over the next three years. [41904]

Alan Johnson: Significant developments in the role of the regional development agencies have been and will continue to be publicised through departmental Press Notices. In addition the DTI maintains information on the RDAs on its website. Ministers will continue to raise public awareness of the role of RDAs through speeches and in other ways. There are no specific plans to hold additional events to raise public awareness.

It is for the RDAs to ensure that they maintain a sufficient public profile in their regions to fulfil their role as the champions of regional economic development, and to ensure public awareness of their activities. Press Notices, publication of their various strategies, their corporate plans and their annual reports, and maintaining websites are some of the ways in which they do this.

Debt Management Companies

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will take steps to improve the capacity of clients of debt management companies to obtain compensation after receiving bad advice from such companies. [35796]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Director General of Fair Trading issued guidelines for debt management companies last December to ensure they deal fairly and openly with their customers. The guidelines require debt management companies to respond promptly and fairly to complaints about their services. They also require that a contract should set out the circumstances in which a consumer may withdraw and receive a refund and should not include any term which says or implies that there are no circumstances in which a consumer is entitled to a refund.

South West Regional Development Agency

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the administrative costs of each of the organisations which were merged into the South West Regional Development Agency in each of the final three years of their independent life. [41878]

Alan Johnson: These costs are not held centrally and it would incur disproportionate costs to assemble the information requested. The administrative budget of the South West Regional Development Agency in 1999–2000 was £7.086 million, but this reflected the total administration of the agency, not just the costs of the legacy organisations.

UK Coal Plc

Jon Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what state aid has been received by UK Coal plc in the last two years in the aggregate; and how this was apportioned to each colliery. [42221]

Mr. Wilson: UK Coal plc has received £75 million under the UK Coal Operating Aid Scheme in the last two years. These sums have been awarded in respect of four collieries, apportioned as follows:

	£
Harworth colliery	14,722,100
Maltby colliery	13,559,700
Rossington colliery	3,207,200
Selby complex	43,511,000
Total	75,000,000

Jon Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what communications she has had with UK Coal plc in relation to their decisions on shareholder dividends over the last two years. [42222]

Mr. Wilson: There have been no communications between my Department and UK Coal plc in relation to their decisions on shareholder dividends over the last two years.

Jon Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what approaches have been made to her Department by UK Coal plc with a view to extending the state aid scheme of deep-mined coal subsidy beyond its present expiry date. [42220]

Mr. Wilson: I have received no formal request from UK Coal plc for an extension of the UK Coal Operating Aid Scheme, although the matter has been raised informally in meetings with officials.

Prince of Wales Colliery

Jon Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what communications she has had with UK Coal plc relating to the possibility of continued state aid for the Prince of Wales Colliery beyond the present expiry date for state aid; and what her estimate is of *(a)* accessible coal reserves at the Prince of Wales colliery and *(b)* the cost of accessing these reserves. [42223]

Mr. Wilson: No state aid has been paid in respect of the Prince of Wales Colliery, and I have received no request for such aid.

IMC Group Consulting Ltd undertook a detailed review of the Prince of Wales Colliery on behalf of the DTI in January. This examined the extent of reserves and the costs of their access in a number of possible development scenarios. It concluded that there were no areas that would sustain long-term viable production. The report is available on the DTI website on http://www2.dti.gov.uk/energy/pow/pdf.

Company Law Review

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what conclusions she has drawn from the results of the company law review; and if she will make a statement. [42065]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Weston-Super-Mare (Brian Cotter) on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 982W.

Development Planning

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the role of councils in the planning process in the next five years. [41906]

Ms Keeble: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have set out in the Planning Green Paper "Planning: delivering a fundamental change" proposals to significantly simplify the arrangements under which County, District and Unitary councils are responsible for preparing and adopting development plans. We will put forward firm proposals once we have considered the responses to consultation, which finishes on 18 March. Thereafter implementation will depend on the making of necessary changes to primary legislation.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Mersey Basin Trust

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the future of the Mersey Basin Trust. [37115]

Ms Keeble: The Mersey Basin Trust is a registered charity and as such its future is a matter for its Trustees to determine in the first instance.

London Underground

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether *(a)* the conditions precedent, as referred to at http://www.railways.dtlr.gov.uk/lunderground/factsheets/safety/index.htm and as published by his Department on 11 February, are signed and *(b)* other conditions, which must be satisfied before the final contracts on the London Underground PPP, include the contractual safety cases for each infrastructure company. [40340]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave him on 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 88W and 11 March 2002 *Official Report*, columns 735-36W.

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what percentage of deep sub-surface line mileage on Britain's roads is subject to speed restrictions; and by how much this has changed in the last five years. [41608]

Mr. Jamieson: I understand that the hon. Member is referring to deep and sub-surface lines on London Underground. This is an operational matter for London Underground who have provided the information in the table.

Percentage of London Underground Network subject to speed restrictions

	Deep tube lines	*Sub-surface lines*
Percentage of Network subject to speed restrictions at 1996–97 year end	0.1	6.2
Percentage of Network subject to speed restrictions at 2001–02 year end	0.3	3.5

Local Authority Boundary Fees (Shipment of Dead Bodies)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the charging of boundary fees by local authorities for the shipment of dead bodies. [40291]

Dr. Whitehead: Local authorities do not charge boundary fees for the transport of dead bodies between local authority areas. However some authorities charge higher fees for the burial of those from outside their area. This is in accordance with the Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977.

Martin Sixsmith

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether he was informed on 15 February of the conditions mentioned in Sir Richard Mottram's statement of 25 February upon which Mr. Martin Sixsmith had agreed to resign. [40404]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by Sir Richard Mottram, the Permanent Secretary of my Department, on Monday 25 February 2002. A copy of this is available in the Libraries of the House.

European Road Link

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reason the road link to North Wales envisaged in the Essen agreement did not follow existing routes via the M6 and the dual carriageway along the North Wales Coast. [41736]

Mr. Jamieson: The M6 and the North Wales coast road (A55) are part of the Ireland/United Kingdom/Benelux road link. The decision to include the A5 and A483 in that link was taken by the previous administration and approved by the European Council on 23 July 1996. I will write to the hon. Member on that aspect.

Local Government Finance

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of local authorities received grant increases of retail prices index for 2002–03. [41676]

Dr. Whitehead: All English local authorities received grant increases at least as large as the annual increase in the RPI.

Planning Appeals

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to bring in a third party right of appeal against planning decisions. [41902]

Ms Keeble: As indicated in our Planning Green Paper, published on 12 December, a third party right of appeal against the grant of planning permission could add to the costs and uncertainties of planning. We cannot accept that prospect. We believe that the right way forward is to make the planning system more accessible and transparent and to strengthen the opportunities for community involvement throughout this process. Proposals to achieve this were set out in the Green Paper.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the costs of introducing new planning obligations set out in the Planning Green Paper. [41905]

Ms Keeble: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) on 11 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 31W.

Housing (West Midlands)

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assumptions have been made about building cost inflations in his Department's assessment of business plans for stock transfers in Coventry, Walsall and Birmingham. [41952]

Ms Keeble: The business plans for housing transfers are commercially sensitive documents that are considered by the Housing Corporation as part of the transfer process. Each housing transfer will make its own assumptions for building cost inflation over future years.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with Birmingham City Council about the impact of the proposed demolitions over the next five years on homelessness in the city; and if he will make a statement. [41951]

Ms Keeble: The Government's priority is that all social housing should be made decent by 2010. Birmingham has a plan to achieve this through a housing transfer. Where the appropriate course of action involves demolition of properties this should be based on an assessment of likely future demand, the rate at which properties will be relet and where necessary proposals for new build.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what contribution the Government are making for stock transfer purposes towards the payment of *(a)* Walsall's housing attributable debt and *(b)* Walsall's debt breakage costs; and what is the contribution to each from (i) Walsall MBC and (ii) Walsall Housing Group. [41949]

Ms Keeble: The contributions from the Department, Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council and Walsall Housing Group towards the repayment of Walsall's housing attributable debt will not be known until a final valuation is agreed for Walsall's housing stock.

The Department does not contribute to a local authority's debt breakage costs. The local authority redeeming the debt usually meets this cost.

Railtrack

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what basis he expects the successor body to Railtrack to raise funds on commercial markets. [41950]

Mr. Jamieson: Railtrack's successor needs to be financially sound with a strong investment grade credit rating sufficient to finance the required expenditure efficiently. It is for bidders for Railtrack to propose to the Administrator how they will raise funds in commercial markets.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the successor company to Railtrack in administration will be in the private sector. [42816]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* It is for the Administrator to consider all proposals for the transfer of Railtrack plc's property rights and liabilities put to him, and for me to approve any transfer scheme put to me by the Administrator under Schedule 7 of the Railways Act 1993.

English Partnerships

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what consultation with hon. Members is planned over the future of English Partnerships. [41793]

Ms Keeble: The review of English Partnerships was announced to both Houses on 16 October 2001. During stage one of the review, a number of hon. Members have taken the opportunity to write to Ministers and to the review team on issues of concern. These letters have been taken into account in coming to a conclusion on stage one of the review.

Stage two of the review, the remit for which will be published as part of the stage one outcome, will offer hon. Members further opportunities to make their views known.

Coalfield Programme

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what criteria are being used to determine whether the coalfield programme be maintained by English Partnerships or the regional development agencies. [41791]

Ms Keeble: In determining whether the coalfield programme should continue to be maintained by English Partnerships or the regional development agencies, a judgment will be made as to which approach offers the most efficient and effective method of delivering the national coalfield programme.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) within what time scale an agreement will be reached between English Partnerships and the East Midlands Regional Development Agency over the infrastructure works and marketing of the former Manton pit site; [41790]

(2) what the budget is for English Partnerships to bring the former Manton pit site to the market. [41792]

Ms Keeble: To date £4.35 million has been committed by English Partnerships to allow the reclamation and marketing of the Manton pit site by the East Midlands Regional Development Agency. Reclamation and agreed infrastructure work has been completed and the site is currently on the market.

Local Government

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what his estimate is of the cost to the taxpayer so far of running mayoral referendums in local authorities in England; [42233]

(2) what his estimate is of the cost to the taxpayer of introducing new executive structures on local authorities. [42232]

Mr. Byers: Information to estimate the costs and savings of introducing new executive arrangements, including the holding of mayoral referendums, is not currently available centrally.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the administrative costs were of local government reorganisation in each local authority that has been restructured since 1990 in *(a)* cash and *(b)* real terms, expressed in 2002 prices. [42231]

Mr. Byers: This information is not available.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to introduce annual elections for local government in England. [42230]

Mr. Byers: We have no plans to introduce annual local government elections in England. As stated in our White Paper 'Strong Local Leadership—Quality Public Services' we will be inviting the Electoral Commission to propose options to simplify the current cycle of local elections.

Empty Council Houses

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish figures for the number of empty council houses, broken down by region, in England, for each year since 1997. [42227]

Mr. Byers: The number of council houses reported as being empty in each year since 1997 by region in England is as follows:

Local authority vacant dwellings on 1 April

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
North east	8,300	9,000	9,400	10,000	9,300
North west	16,300	18,700	18,800	19,600	19,500
Yorkshire and the Humber	12,200	12,800	14,000	15,400	14,600
East Midlands	5,600	5,100	5,400	6,100	6,100
West Midlands	9,200	10,000	11,200	12,800	10,600
Eastern	4,200	3,900	3,900	4,000	3,900
London	18,500	15,700	14,700	12,900	11,100
South east	4,100	3,700	3,700	3,600	3,000
South west	2,800	2,800	2,800	2,800	2,200
England	81,200	81,700	83,900	87,200	80,300

Note:

A level of vacancy is a usual feature of housing management, reflecting turnover and movement within the stock. There is likely to be some variation in the proportion of dwellings vacant in a local authority from one date to another during the year.

Source:

Housing Investment Programme (HIP) returns.

Non-Governmental Organisations

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer on 5 March 2002, Ref: 39179, what information he collates on the funding of non-Governmental organisations by his Department, with particular reference to those operating on a regional level; and if he will make a statement. [41829]

Dr. Whitehead: The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions does not hold information centrally on the proportion of its various budgets which go to organisations operating in the charity/voluntary sector.

A6 Rothwell/Desborough Bypass

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what provisions have been made to maintain access to public footpaths after the construction of the A6 Rothwell/Desborough bypass; [41966]

(2) what provisions have been made to reduce the noise impact of the A6 Rothwell/Desborough bypass. [41967]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Mr. Tim Matthews, to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Phil Sawford, dated 13 March 2002:

I have been asked by the Transport Minister, David Jamieson to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about the A6 Rothwell/Desborough Bypass.

The bypass affects five public footpaths. Two will continue on their present route with suitable crossings where they meet the bypass. Two will be subject to minor diversions with new crossing arrangements to provide safer crossing points. Stiles will be placed in any boundary fences at all of the crossing points. The other footpath will be diverted to cross the A14 at an existing road bridge. Access for footpath users will be maintained across the line of the by-pass during its construction.

In line with the Government's commitment to using quieter road surfaces for all new roads, the new bypass will have a low-noise road surface.

Social Services SSA (Stoke-on-Trent)

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the elderly personal social services standard spending assessment per person aged 65 and over for Stoke-on-Trent adjusted for inflation each year since 1998–99. [41909]

Dr. Whitehead: The table shows the data requested, together with a year-on-year percentage change after adjusting for changes in the function and funding of services:

	Elderly, personal social services SSA per person aged 65 and over[1]	*Year-on-year percentage change*
1998–99	671.56	—
1999–2000	777.17	15.7
2000–01	810.46	4.3
2001–02	812.32	2.8
2002–03	813.38	2.6

[1] At 2002–03 prices: £ per person

British Transport Police

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in how many cases the British Transport police have acted on the basis of out-of-date arrest warrants since 1999; and if he will make a statement. [41883]

Mr. Jamieson: The British Transport police have advised that no record is kept of when an arrest is made using an invalid warrant, but since 1999 three civil claims have been made against the force for unlawful arrest regarding the arrest warrant used.

Channel Tunnel Freight Services

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many rail freight services have been cancelled as a result of the SNCF channel tunnel restrictions. [42739]

Mr. Jamieson: EWS advise that over 1,700 rail freight services have been cancelled since November.

Flexible Working

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many and what proportion of the staff of his Department are *(a)* job sharing, *(b)* term working and *(c)* engaged in another form of flexible working. [42423]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Member to my answer given on 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 742W. Information specifically on job sharers, term working and other forms of flexible working is not held centrally and can be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Energy Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on energy costs incurred by his Department in each of the last 10 years. [42441]

Dr. Whitehead: The annual energy cost for DTLR's predecessors is as follows:

£

	Department(s)	*Expenditure*
1991–92	DOT and DOE	6,020,891
1992–93	DOT and DOE	5,883,013
1993–94	DOT and DOE	5,074,426
1994–95	DOT and DOE	4,519,596
1995–96	DOT and DOE	4,316,044
1996–97	DOT and DOE	4,095,629
1997–98	DETR	4,099,099
1998–99	DETR	3,993,520
1999–2000	DETR	3,473,024
2000–01	DETR	2,584,778

Concessionary Coach Fares

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress he has made in introducing the national minimum half-fare scheme for pensioners with respect to coach travel; and if he will make a statement. [42719]

Ms Keeble: We are currently considering next steps in the light of our discussions so far with the industry on the introduction of this scheme.

Gazumping

Mr. David: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans the Government have to stop the practice of gazumping. [42612]

Ms Keeble: We believe the answer to the problems caused by gazumping lie in increasing transparency and speeding up the home buying and selling process. That is what our proposals for sellers' packs will achieve. Sellers' packs will bring about earlier certainty and reduce the period of time during which gazumping can occur. The necessary legislation for this will be introduced as soon as parliamentary time allows.

New Deal for Communities (Kings Norton)

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the total expenditure to date has been from the budget of the new deal for communities in Kings Norton; and what have been the main achievements. [42682]

Ms Keeble: Kings Norton NDC has been awarded £54 million for its 10-year life of which £4,293,399 has been so far spent.

Main Achievements

The west midlands police have seconded an officer to the NDC team. Beats have been redrawn to better reflect the needs of the area, and an additional eight officers are employed on the estates at no cost to the NDC.

Cadbury college has significantly increased the numbers of residents participating in adult education from 30 to over 300 through outreach courses. It has successfully bid for DfES funding for a UK on-line centre, which will come on stream during 2002.

Primrose hill community project, funded by the NDC, is the main provider of nursery care. It provides 80 day places, 20 after school places and employs five residents as early learning assistants. Fifteen residents have NVQ qualifications in child care.

The Befriend project, led by the family service unit and funded by NDC, offers support to new tenants moving to the three estates. A domestic violence worker is also funded through NDC.

A residents' resource room provides a centre for producing a monthly newsletter, organising community events, and giving information on services and volunteering opportunities.

The NDC has brokered better inter-agency working between local service providers and has a place on Birmingham city council's Best Value Review panel.

A community development trust was established in 2001 and board members have been appointed.

Unlicensed Vehicles

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the results have been of the pilot schemes for local authorities to assume responsibility for the clamping and removal of untaxed vehicles; and if he will make a statement. [42555]

Mr. Jamieson: Pilot schemes for local authorities to act as DVLA contractors to clamp and remove unlicensed vehicles have been conducted in Newham and, on a much smaller scale, in Lewisham. Between 9 April 2001 and 28 February 2002 Newham clamped 1,682 vehicles of which 610 were declamped after payment, 160 released from the pound after removal and payment, and 589 were crushed. The number of vehicles reported as abandoned in Newham fell by 10 per cent. between November 2001 and February 2002.

In Lewisham 51 vehicles were clamped between August 2001 and January 2002, with 21 crushed.

A number of other authorities are now in discussion with DVLA with a view to acting as contractors to clamp and remove vehicles.

End of Life Vehicles Directive

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the results were of the consultation on the removal and disposal of vehicles regulations; and if he will make a statement. [42563]

Mr. Jamieson: My right hon. Friend expects to make an announcement shortly.

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action he is proposing to implement the European end of life vehicles directive; and if he will make a statement. [42554]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

The responses to our consultation paper on options for implementing the Directive are being assessed, along with the recommendations of the Trade and Industry Committee, with a view to adopting the approach which best suits the UK's circumstances. Our policy is to achieve the environmental objectives of the Directive using a light regulatory touch and without putting UK business at a competitive disadvantage. We also aim to ensure that there is an adequate network of treatment facilities to deal with all end-of-life vehicles properly.

Electoral Reform

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what other nation states use the supplementary vote electoral system used for electing directly-elected mayors. [42779]

Mr. Byers: The information requested is not held by my Department.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans the Government have to review the electoral system used for electing directly-elected mayors in England and Wales. [42778]

Mr. Byers: We have no plans to review the electoral system used for electing directly-elected mayors in England and Wales.

Fire Service

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which fire authorities are involved in local strategic partnerships in their area; and what their role is in regard to such local strategic partnerships. [42923]

Dr. Whitehead: Fire authorities have a valuable role to play as members of local strategic partnerships. As with other public sector organisations fire authorities' participation in LSPs allow the development of an integrated approach to local service delivery in consultation with the local community. We do not have specific information as to the number of fire authorities on LSPs. It is for each LSP to consider its membership in view of local circumstances and priorities.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many rescues from *(a)* road traffic accidents, *(b)* underground, *(c)* collapsed structures and *(d)* floods were undertaken by the fire service in the last year for which records are available; and what the cost of each of these operations was. [42927]

Dr. Whitehead: The information is not held centrally. However, information is available on the number of incidents where persons were extricated from vehicles. For last year this was 9,638. Other rescues involved the release of 8,531 individuals.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many unfilled posts there are within the fire service, broken down into *(a)* civilian and *(b)* fire fighting positions. [42930]

Dr. Whitehead: Based on annual returns submitted to HM Fire Service Inspectorate, the figures for the establishment and strength of the fire service in England and Wales, as at 31 March 2001, were as follows:

	Establishment	*Actual strength*
Whole-time firefighters	33,640	[1]33,376
Retained firefighters	14,940	[2]12,028
Control room staff	1,454	[1]1,474
Non-uniformed staff	6,413	[1]6,074

[1] In full time equivalents.

[2] In twenty-four hour units of cover.

Shoreham Harbour

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the members of the Maritime Vision for Shoreham steering group and their attendance record at meetings. [42909]

Ms Keeble: The members of the Maritime Vision for Shoreham steering group consist of Adur district council, Brighton and Hove city council, the Government Office for the South East, Shoreham Port Authority, the South East England Development Agency, Sussex Enterprise and West Sussex county council. Although the Government Office for the South East is a partner of the steering group, it is not within the remit of the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to publish details of the members' attendance at the meetings.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 373W, on Shoreham Port Authority, for what period he is able to provide information about declined reappointments. [42965]

Mr. Jamieson: Information is readily available for the past seven years. In this period we have declined to reappoint just one member of the Shoreham Port Authority board. This was an appointment arising in January 2002 and I would refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 24W. There have been no occasions when we have declined to confirm the appointment of nominated candidates.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the progress of the Maritime Vision for Shoreham Harbour. [42967]

Ms Keeble: The Shoreham Maritime Steering Group was set up in 1997 and the Maritime Vision for Shoreham Harbour was published in December 1999. Since then, the Steering Group have been meeting regularly in order to implement this vision.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the dates on which vacancies on the board of Shoreham Port Authority were advertised in the local media. [42966]

Mr. Jamieson: These vacancies were advertised on the 8, 9, 14 and 15 of November 2001.

Deprivation Indices

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he has taken to co-ordinate policies in departments to ensure that electoral boundary changes do not debar areas from eligibility for deprivation-related funds. [40138]

Ms Keeble: When individual departments contact us for advice on using the Indices of Deprivation 2000 we explain that it is based on 1998 ward boundaries. Our advice is that if departments wish to target resources using the ward based element of the ID 2000 then this should be based on the wards as they were constituted in 1998.

Multi-modal Studies

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what predicted traffic rates over the next *(a)* five, *(b)* 10 and *(c)* 20 years the multi-modal studies are using. [39841]

Mr. Jamieson: The multi-modal studies do not use a pre-determined rate of traffic growth. Each study makes its own estimate of how traffic will grow in its study area over the study period. In each case, account is taken of study-specific factors such as changes in the numbers and location of households and workers, the level of current and future congestion, the availability of alternative modes of transport and the implementation of local demand restraint measures.

Reports

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions under what rules his Department must operate when *(a)* tendering, *(b)* awarding contracts and *(c)* commissioning (i) work, (ii) research and (iii) advice to ensure (A) that any (1) advice and (2) reports published remain independent of the Department's own views and (B) that reports published remain unaltered from the original. [42119]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* When the Department commissions work for research and advice the standard terms and conditions are used. Included within these is a condition that deals with the ownership of the material produced.

In answer to part (A), when the DTLR commission work contractors respond to a specification that would be independent of my Department's view.

In answer to part (B), reports may be published by my Department. In other cases where the research contractor undertakes publication, the Department will have prior sight only.

Homelessness

Mr. Neil Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will make a statement on how the Government plans to tackle homelessness. [43232]

Mr. Byers: I have today placed in the Libraries of both Houses a report to me on homelessness entitled "More than a Roof" together with my response to it.

The serious and growing problem of homelessness needs to be addressed if this Government is to achieve our aim to ensure that everyone has access to a decent home.

Although many members of the public think homeless people are only those they see on the streets, homelessness is more complicated. As this new report makes clear, it is more than simply being without a roof.

There are still some people sleeping on the street but there are even more people living in night shelters and hostels, and there are thousands of families living in temporary accommodation.

Over 6,000 families are bringing up their children in bed and breakfast hotels. The damage caused to those children may live with them into adult life. But certainly living in a cramped room without anywhere to do their homework or to play does not give them the start in life they deserve.

To tackle this we need a new approach. One that concentrates as much on the people as on the places that they live. That is what "More than a roof" proposes. We accept it. There are six key objectives that underpin our new approach.

1. To strengthen help to people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness.
2. To develop more strategic approaches to tackling homelessness.
3. To encourage new responses to tackling homelessness.
4. To reduce the use of B&B hotels for homeless families with children.
5. To sustain the two-thirds reduction in rough sleeping.
6. To ensure the opportunity of a decent home for all.

While plans and objectives are critical, they can only work if underpinned with resources. Over the next year, we will spend a total of £125 million on tackling homelessness.

I have established a new Homelessness Directorate that will comprise the Bed and Breakfast Unit, currently in the Government Office for London, the former Rough Sleepers Unit, and a new unit to assist local authorities in tackling homelessness.

The Homelessness Directorate will join-up policy at a national level. The Rough Sleepers Unit had a cross-cutting brief to work with other Government Departments with champion Ministers and a ministerial committee to support their work. I have asked Lord Falconer to chair a new ministerial committee on homelessness to oversee the new approach.

The new Homelessness Act will bring about radical change in the way that central and local government, and all other partners, work together to tackle homelessness. For the first time ever, local authorities will be required to carry out a review and develop a strategy for their area that prevents homelessness and provides solutions for people who are, or who may become, homeless.

In addition to the help provided to local authorities by the new Homelessness Directorate, a range of measures are being established to help local authorities respond to this new duty.

I have published today "Homelessness Strategies—a good practice handbook", a document which provides a framework for local authorities, and all key local agencies, to work together.

Also, my Department will contribute to a series of seminars to help organisations prepare for the new Homelessness Act. Organised in partnership with the Chartered Institute of Housing, the Local Government Association, Shelter and others, they will focus on practical implementation.

We are determined to ensure that vulnerable people leaving institutions, young people including those coming out of care, and people fleeing domestic, racial and other forms of violence, are helped effectively. Although this may mean that the number of people who local authorities accept as homeless increases, I am more concerned to ensure vulnerable people get the help they need.

Therefore we will be issuing a revised statutory Code of Guidance on Allocations and Homelessness, reflecting changes brought about by the new Homelessness Act and our proposed Priority Needs Order.

I will allocate additional resources in order to help local authorities deliver the new Priority Needs Order. I am also considering making "tackling homelessness" a future Beacon council theme.

But we also need to understand more about the most effective ways to tackle homelessness.

In order to do this, the Homelessness Directorate will investigate the underlying causes and trends of homelessness, collect information more effectively and test new and innovative approaches which can be taken to reduce and prevent homelessness. I have asked for a progress report on this work in the autumn outlining what future action can be taken.

An important part of the Homelessness Directorate's work will be to encourage best practice. Where public resources fund services, it is vital that the taxpayer gets value for money. The use of local targets and protocols, such as reducing the number of tenancy breakdowns or ensuring appropriate numbers of lettings to homeless households, will be important.

There are many people living in very different sorts of hostels across the country, and with the onset of "Supporting People", it will be important to ensure that best practice is established across all publicly funded hostels. I am keen, therefore, to ensure that hostels are inspected in a structured way by either the voluntary or statutory sector.

Although many former rough sleepers have now moved into shelters, hostels, or their own homes, they still need help to rebuild their lives away from the streets. We must also continue to do everything we can to help those people who sleep rough, while at the same time prevent new people from ending up on the streets.

This is why we will allocate over £30 million during 2002–03—the same level of revenue investment that delivered the two-thirds reduction in rough sleeping.

No one in this country wants their fellow citizens to have to sleep in a cardboard box at night because they have nowhere else to go. In the same way, we should not tolerate children being forced to stay in over-crowded and expensive B&B hotels for weeks, months, and sometimes years, on end.

Today, I am making a commitment that by March 2004 local authorities will ensure that no homeless family with children has to live in a B&B hotel except in an emergency.

There may be exceptional circumstances, where some families have specific needs, or when the local authority is still processing a homelessness application, where B&B hotels of an acceptable standard may be used for a limited period. But I believe this should only happen where no reasonable alternative exists, and should not be for any more than six weeks.

In order to help local authorities achieve this target, we are making a number of changes.

Jointly with Alistair Darling, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, I am announcing changes to housing benefit rules to boost incentives for private sector leasing by local authorities and housing associations.

As these changes will take time to make the impact we want, we are introducing urgent measures to ensure that children are not forced to live in B& B hotels any longer than is absolutely necessary.

Therefore £35 million will be allocated during 2002–03 on a range of alternatives to using B&B hotels.

In order to ensure that local authorities do not use B&B hotels inappropriately in the future, we will revise the statutory guidance on homelessness. We will also ensure that, in the exceptional circumstances where it is used, it is of a reasonable standard.

I am also concerned that children and babies placed in temporary accommodation, including B&B hotels, should not miss out on important health care to give them a proper start in life. My Department is today issuing new advice to housing authorities on the arrangements that I consider should be put in place to ensure that all babies and children placed in temporary accommodation receive their health and developmental checks from health visitors and other primary health care professionals.

This Government is determined to tackle homelessness more effectively and to work in partnership with organisations and individuals across the country to make a real difference to the lives of homeless people.

Today we make a significant contribution towards achieving this objective and help build a Britain, which is modern, fair, and strong.

Transport 10-year Plan

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will publish the first annual revision to the Transport 10-year Plan. [42627]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* There will be periodic reviews of the 10-year Plan for Transport. The first review is expected to be published in July 2002.

Public-private Partnerships (Consultants)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the total external spending by his Department was on public-private partnership consultants in each of the last four years; how many full-time equivalent consultants were employed over this period; how many billed consultancy days there were per year; what the implied average cost of each PPP consultant was; how many consultancy firms were used by his Department over this period; and if he will make a statement. [43190]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 31 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 448W.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Press Office

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff in his Department's press office have received *(a)* termination and *(b)* redundancy payments in each of the last four years. [41081]

Angela Eagle: No press office staff have received termination and no redundancy payments have been made in the last four years.

Equal Pay

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the extent of the gender pay gap among staff in his Department. [41000]

Angela Eagle: In response to the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) Task Force "Just Pay" report, the Government have committed Departments and agencies to review their pay systems by April 2003 and prepare action plans to close any equal pay gaps. The Cabinet Office issued comprehensive guidance in January 2002 to assist Departments and agencies in carrying out these reviews. All Departments and agencies have until April 2003 to complete an equal pay review and prepare any necessary action plans to close any equal pay gaps.

Probation Service

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons were employed by the National Probation Directorate *(a)* on 1 April 2001 and *(b)* at the latest available date; what the budget was of the service; and if he will make a statement. [41152]

Beverley Hughes: As of 1 April 2001, there were 109 members of staff employed by the National Probation Directorate. This increased to a total of 205 members of staff at the end of January 2002, when the latest figures were collected.

This figure has been taken from the Staff-in-Post returns, which are completed on a regular basis and includes all full time permanent staff, temporary staff and secondments from other services.

At the latest available date, the budgetary cost for these members of staff was £8.264 million. This takes into account the increase of staff from April 2001 until January 2002.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to establish a pay review body for the National Probation Service. [41151]

Beverley Hughes: There are no plans to establish a review body for the National Probation Service. The Service has longstanding joint arrangements at national level for negotiating the pay and conditions of staff employed by the Probation Boards.

Probation Officers

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to address the shortage of probation officers in *(a)* Norfolk and *(b)* England and Wales. [41334]

Beverley Hughes: We are actively recruiting Trainee Probation Officers in all parts of England and Wales. This is carried out by annual recruitment drives and as a consequence recruitment of trainee probation officers has trebled in size.

The next recruitment drive will commence on 18 March 2002 and will be advertised in the National Press. We are expecting to recruit 1,000 trainees across the whole Probation Service.

Young Offenders Institution (Aylesbury)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the fire prevention and fire safety arrangements at Aylesbury Young Offenders Institution. [40843]

Beverley Hughes: Aylesbury Young Offenders Institution is subject to the requirements of the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997 as amended in 1999. Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997 call for risk assessments to be conducted and these have been completed for all premises in the establishment. In addition the establishment has been inspected by officers from the Crown Premises Inspection Group of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire Services.

Electronic Monitoring

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what forecast he has made for the number of offenders who will be electronically monitored in *(a)* two years time and *(b)* five years time. [40026]

Beverley Hughes: We are considering a range of options for the expansion of electronic monitoring in the criminal justice system. At present we cannot give any estimate of the number of persons who will be electronically monitored in two or five years time.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the estimated cost of electronic tagging is in *(a)* two years time and *(b)* five years time. [40024]

Beverley Hughes: The future cost of electronic monitoring will depend on a number of factors including the initiatives we take forward in this area, the response to them from the courts and prison governors, the outcome of the current public spending round, and the prices contained in bids for future electronic monitoring contracts.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the *(a)* contractors, *(b)* suppliers, *(c)* period of contract and *(d)* value of each contract for electronic monitoring services carried out on behalf of his Department in the last 12 months. [40061]

Beverley Hughes: The contractors are Premier Monitoring Services Ltd., Reliance Monitoring Services Ltd., and Securicor Custodial Services Ltd.

They deliver electronic monitoring services using equipment supplied by Electronic Monitoring Systems Incorporated, Elmotech, Guidance Control Systems Ltd. and Premier Geografix Ltd.

The contracts began on 28 January 1999 and are for a five-year period, which may be extended by up to a further two years.

The total value of the contracts in the 12 month period from February 2001 to January 2002 was £36,913,731.78.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offenders are being electronically monitored. [40025]

Beverley Hughes: The number of persons subject to electronic monitoring on 1 March 2002 was 3,685.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from firms providing electronic monitoring services in respect of the expansion of their operations; and if he will make a statement. [40058]

Beverley Hughes: Although the electronic monitoring contractors frequently discuss the level of business with Home Office officials, there have been no representations from firms specifically aimed at expanding their operations.

Leave Entitlements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the average annual leave entitlement of staff in his Department in each of the last four years. [31737]

Angela Eagle: Due to fluctuating numbers in each grade over the last four years it is not possible to provide information on average annual leave entitlements.

The current leave entitlement for staff in the Home Office and its Agencies is shown in the table:

	Leave entitlement
Non-agency Home Office[1] [2]	
Band A	Grades up to and including Higher Executive Officer and equivalents: 22 days on entry, 25 days after one year's service and 30 days after 13 years.
Band B	Grades above Higher Executive Officer, up to and including Grade six and equivalents: 25 days on entry and 30 days after 10 years' service.
Prison Service	
Band A	Prison officers. 22 days on entry, 25 days annual leave after one year's service and 30 days after 18 years.
Band B	Generalist grades up to and including Executive Officer and equivalents. 25 days on entry and 30 days after 16 years service (from 1 March 2002).
Band C	Generalist grades Higher Executive Officer and above and equivalents. 25 days on entry and 30 days after 15 years' service.
Passport and Records Agency	
One band	All staff receive 25 days on entry and 30 days after 10 years' service.
Forensic Science Service	
Band A	Grades up to and including Higher Executive Officer and equivalents: 22 days on entry, 25 days after one year's service and 30 days after 10 years.
Band B	Grades above Higher Executive Officer, up to and including Grade six and equivalents: 25 days on entry and 30 days after 10 years' service.

[1] i.e. excluding the Prison Service, Passport and Records Agency and forensic science service.

There have been a number of changes over the last four years to the annual leave entitlements of staff in the above bands. These have all primarily been aimed at reducing the qualifying period for the maximum leave allowance of 30 days.

Senior civil service

The annual leave entitlement for staff in the senior civil service is currently set by the Cabinet Office and has been unchanged in the last four years.

Staff Travel

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the *(a)* percentage and number of rail journeys undertaken on first class tickets, *(b)* average cost of a first class journey by rail and *(c)* total cost of rail travel in each of the past four years broken down by grade of civil servant. [37511]

Angela Eagle: Section 8 of the Civil Service Management Code, Paragraph 8.2.1 requires Departments and agencies to ensure that staff use the most efficient and economic means of travel in the circumstances, taking into account any management benefit or the needs of staff with disabilities.

The Home Office is committed to ensuring staff use the most efficient and economic means of travel commensurate with meeting their operational needs.

In 2001–02 (to the end of January 2002), 15,659 first class rail journeys have been taken, representing 30.9 per cent. of all rail journeys. The average cost of each journey was £133. Total costs for all rail journeys for the year are estimated at £4.8 million.

Both costs for previous years, and any analysis by grade, are not readily identifiable from the accounting system and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Correspondence

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to reply to the letters of 9 May 2001, 26 June 2001 and 28 August 2001 from the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South about Mr. David Stevenson of Irvine, Ref: C/W3/1306/RB/BHD. [37066]

Mr. Keith Bradley: My hon. Friend's letter of 9 May 2001, concerning his constituent Mr. David Stevenson, was certainly received in the Home Office, although no record has been found of the follow-up letters dated 26 June 2001 and 28 August 2001. It is unfortunate that the follow-up letters did not come to light as this would have made it clear that my hon. Friend had not received the reply to his original letter.

In fact a full reply was dispatched on 25 June 2001.

In light, now, of that letter not being received by my hon. Friend copies have been sent direct to his offices.

Sentencing

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to allow the courts to award stiffer sentences for persons convicted of assaulting pensioners. [38650]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The courts already have robust sentencing powers for offences of assault. The maximum penalty for causing grievous bodily harm or wounding with intent to cause such harm is life imprisonment. The maximum penalty for the offences of causing grievous bodily harm in the absence of intent to do so and the offence of assault occasioning actual bodily harm is five years' imprisonment. Common assault attracts a maximum penalty of six months' imprisonment.

Specific sentencing provisions for vulnerable groups would not only make criminal law more complex but contradict the important principle that the law is there to protect all members of our society. However, in passing sentence, the courts, as a matter of general principle, regard the fact that an offence has been committed against a vulnerable person as an aggravating factor that would ordinarily be persuasive of a more severe sentence.

There is no room for complacency. However, the Government are uncompromising in their response to serious and dangerous offenders. We believe that prison sentences must be as long as is necessary to punish and to protect the public. And where release eventually occurs, supervision must ensure that the risks are rigorously managed in the community for as long as necessary.

That is why we are looking seriously at the Halliday proposal for tougher determinate sentences for sex and violent offenders that will ensure they stay in prison, up to the full term if necessary, so long as they continue to present a risk of harm to our communities and that they are subject to strict and extended supervision on release.

We are also considering a requirement that where a life sentence is an option judges should not shy away from using it if the professional evidence shows that there is a clear risk that the offender will commit further sex offences. We want greater clarity and transparency, with indeterminate sentences given to serious offenders where appropriate.

The Government are also taking forward work to create a set of sentencing guidelines which are easily accessible and which command the respect of the judiciary, practitioners and the wider public.

Homicide Index Statistics

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the outcome has been of the review of the Homicide Index aimed at increasing the accuracy of data on homicide; what reforms and changes are being implemented as a consequence; and if he will make a statement. [38996]

Mr. Denham: "A Review of Information on Homicide: A Discussion Document" was published on 28 December 2001 on the Research, Development and Statistics (RDS) Home Office web site for consultation. The purpose of publishing the proposals at this stage is to open them to a wider process of consultation before the report is finalised and decisions taken as to how best to take forward its recommendations.

The review is also on the Office for National Statistics (ONS) National Statistics crime and justice theme web page: http://www.nationalstatistics.gov.uk/themes/yourviews/crime.asp. The closing date for the consultation is 5 April 2002.

Wolvercote Clinic

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether a new site has been identified for the Wolvercote Clinic; if the move of the Wolvercote Clinic to Chertsey remains a possibility; and whether there is a final date beyond which the Wolvercote Clinic's tenure of its site at Horton Hospital cannot be extended. [39015]

Beverley Hughes: No decision has been made on the relocation of the Wolvercote Clinic as the relocation project team has yet to complete its work and report to Ministers. A number of potential sites have been identified, including the one in Chertsey, and these are in the final stage of evaluation.

The clinic's tenure of its present site at Horton Hospital, Epsom, is currently the subject of discussions between the Home Office, the Department of Health and the Lucy Faithfull Foundation.

Special Urgency Provisions

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how often the Department has applied the special urgency provisions in paragraph 22 of Circular 18/84 (Development by Government Departments) to a development by the department; and if he will make a statement. [38716]

Angela Eagle: The Home Department has applied the special urgency provisions of Circular 18–84 26 times in the period since 1995. The procedure was used mainly in connection with urgent prisons and detention centre projects.

European Immigration Policy

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy towards participating in the Action Programme for Co-operation in the fields of borders, visas, asylum and immigration. [39657]

Angela Eagle: The Spanish Presidency's action plan on illegal immigration was adopted at the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council on 28 February 2002. The action plan responded to the conclusions of the European Council meeting held in Laeken. It calls for action in the following areas: visa policy, information exchange and analysis, pre-frontier measures, border management, improvement of cooperation and coordination at operational level, the work of Europol, aliens and criminals law and readmission/return.

The United Kingdom (UK) welcomes the action plan as a basis for the European Union's future policy on illegal immigration. The UK will decide whether to participate in measures arising from this plan.

Volunteers

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many members of his staff in each of the past two years have been granted a day's paid leave to work as a volunteer; and if he will make a statement. [39734]

Angela Eagle: A survey of Home Office staff for the year ending 31 April 2001 showed that 78 staff had taken paid leave to volunteer.

The Home Office is the lead Government Department for the active community initiative. Staff can take paid leave for volunteering in certain public capacities, for example school governors up to six days, magistrates up to 18 days. Staff can also take up to five days paid leave a year for any other voluntary activity.

A Volunteering Manager has recently been appointed, seconded from the voluntary sector, to actively promote volunteering among Home Office staff, ensure that a wide range of opportunities are available, monitor participation and evaluate the benefits to the individual and the Department.

Fair Trade Products

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether fair trade products are sold in his Department. [39838]

Angela Eagle: Fair trade products are not currently sold in the Home Office. However the Department fully supports ethical trading in mainstream business and Fair Trade products will be purchased where they meet the criteria of value for money principles, which includes quality, fitness for purpose and delivery against price.

The Home Office will be publishing an article on fair trade in the next edition of 'Purchasing Matters', an internal periodical for all procurement staff. In the near future the Home Office will be holding a purchasing symposium on the issue of Fair Trade in April 2002.

Sex Offenders

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has to propose a change to the law so that people convicted abroad of crime with a possible sexual element or motivation can be monitored on the Sex Offenders Register on their return to the United Kingdom; [39498]

(2) what plans he has to enable the *(a)* police and *(b)* Probation Service to monitor and control the activities of people who have been convicted abroad of offences including violence to children with possible sexual motivation; [39499]

(3) what notice can be given to a community when a convicted child murderer returns to the UK to live in that community after serving their sentence abroad; [39500]

(4) how many people who have been convicted of an offence abroad involving a sexual element have returned to live in the United Kingdom in each of the last three years for which records exist; and what mechanisms are in place to monitor and control their behaviour on their return to the United Kingdom; [39496]

(5) what powers exist to protect a community when a person who has been convicted abroad of child murder, with the strong possibility of a sexual motive in that crime, returns on release from prison to that community. [39494]

Beverley Hughes: The Home Office does not keep records of those convicted of offences abroad, including those involving a sexual element, who have returned to the United Kingdom. We are therefore unable to supply figures for the last three years.

Mechanisms already exist for the monitoring and controlling of dangerous offenders who come to the UK after having been convicted of an offence abroad.

The Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 imposed in relation to any area, a statutory duty on the chief officer of police and the local probation board to establish arrangements for assessing and managing the risks posed by persons who may cause serious harm to the public. This would include those convicted abroad.

If someone falls into this category, for example if a person who has been convicted of a violent offence with a sexual element abroad returns to this country, these multi-agency public protection arrangements will come into play.

Multi-agency public protection arrangements provide for the risk assessment of all potentially dangerous offenders. Following this a management plan is formulated according to the level and nature of risk that the offender poses. Typically, this would have components of monitoring, interventions designed to reduce re-offending and steps necessary to protect victims or potential victims. After the risk assessment, if it is in the interest of public protection, the police may also disclose information about the offender to relevant members of the community. Social Service departments who are the lead agency for child protection are members of the multi-agency public protection panels.

The review to the Sex Offenders Act 1997 looked at requiring those convicted of sex offences abroad to register on their arrival in the UK. The Government have asked for consultation and responses are currently being analysed to decide what appropriate action, if any, the Government should take.

Porton Down

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the progress of the investigation headed by Detective Superintendent Luckett into allegations of past criminal activity at DSTL Porton Down. [39318]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* A report on the death of Leading Air Craftsman Ronald Maddisson at Porton Down in 1953 was submitted to Her Majesty's Coroner for Swindon and the County of Wiltshire in January 2001.

In relation to allegations made by several hundred former service personnel who had attended Porton Down and participated in experiments, seven files have been forwarded to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) since September 2001. A final case file is expected to be forwarded within the next few weeks. A number of former Porton Down staff have been interviewed by the police in relation to the cases.

As part of the ongoing inquiry the police are looking at whether former volunteers have suffered any long term adverse health effects.

Race Equality Draft Code

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date the report by the Commission for Racial Equality on the draft Code of Practice on the duty to promote race equality will be placed before Parliament; how many consultees received the document *(a)* before 1 January 2002, *(b)* between that date and 25 January and *(c)* after that date; how many from each category have responded to the consultation; what the total cost was of the consultation pack and the cost per pack distributed; and if he will make a statement on the ability of elected authorities to respond within limited time. [41926]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* The Commission for Racial Equality is currently revising the draft Code of Practice in the light of comments received during the consultation period. A date for laying the Code of Practice before Parliament will be decided once I have approved the final draft.

The Commission for Racial Equality has advised me that about 45,000 consultation packs were distributed and some 900 responses have been received to date. A breakdown by date of dispatch is not available and the analysis by category of respondent is not yet complete. The cost of printing 55,000 packs and distributing 45,000 was £127,690.

The consultation period ran from the launch of the draft code of practice and supporting good practice guidance on 3 December 2001 until 28 February 2002. This proved sufficient time for some 900 individual and representative bodies to respond.

However, I am informed by the Commission for Racial Equality that distribution problems arose with parish councils. Difficulty in gaining access to addresses meant that only 3,000 packs were sent to parish councils in December 2001. A further 5,000 packs were due for dispatch in January 2002, but regrettably, a number were not sent out until late February 2002.

I am advised that, to date, 26 parish councils, including Totland and St. Helens parish councils from the hon. Member's own constituency, have complained to the Commission for Racial Equality about the late arrival of their packs. The Commission for Racial Equality has given these parish councils an extension until 15 March 2002.

Police (Domestic Violence)

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what guidance is issued to police forces on taking action in respect of personnel who have committed acts of domestic violence; [35541]

(2) what records police authorities keep in respect of a disciplinary action taken in respect of members of staff who have been perpetrators of domestic violence; [35538]

(3) if he will publish guidelines he issues to police authorities on dealing with domestic violence within their work force; [35465]

(4) how many police officers have been subject to disciplinary procedure as a result of perpetration of domestic violence in each of the last three years; [35550]

(5) if he will list for each police authority in England and Wales the number of *(a)* incidents of domestic violence perpetrated by staff, *(b)* the number of repeat incidents and *(c)* the number of disciplinary actions taken over the past five years. [35463]

Mr. Denham: There are no national guidelines to police forces on dealing with domestic violence among their staff or on action to be taken in respect of staff committing acts of domestic violence. Many forces do however have local policies and guidelines detailing how to deal with officers who are alleged to have committed domestic violence offences.

Police forces and authorities keep disciplinary records for individual officers, but there is no central guidance on what should be recorded, other than information that is returned to the Home Office for monitoring purposes. These centrally held figures do not separately identify numbers of police personnel who were subject to disciplinary action in respect of domestic violence, or the number of incidents concerned.

Work is however in progress to ensure that police forces respond effectively to any indication that police staff may be perpetrating domestic violence. This includes a redraft of note C of the Code of Conduct of the Police Regulations 1999 which concerns off duty conduct. Regional professional standards practitioners within police forces have suggested that this amended section will strengthen their powers when dealing with personnel who have allegedly perpetrated domestic violence.

Road Traffic Penalties

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to publish proposals for reform of road traffic penalties. [37630]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: We are currently in the process of formulating the Government's response to the consultation exercise on road traffic penalties. We hope to publish this soon.

This report has taken some time to complete due to the high number of detailed and comprehensive responses we received. We have also been waiting for the outcome of the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions commissioned research project into the law on dangerous driving by the Transport Research Laboratory. The publication of this report was delayed until January 2002.

Laeken Summit

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy towards the establishment of a common EU border *(a)* authority and *(b)* force, under (i) paragraph 42 of the Laeken conclusions and (ii) JHA proposals. [39639]

Angela Eagle: The European Council meeting held at Laeken called for closer cooperation between services responsible for external border control and to examine the conditions in which a mechanism or common services to control external borders could be created. Responding to calls for a common policy on illegal immigration, the Spanish Presidency drafted an action plan on illegal immigration. The action plan was adopted at the February 2002 Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council. The United Kingdom welcomes the action plan as a basis for the European Union's future policy in illegal immigration.

The United Kingdom is supportive of closer cooperation between national border authorities of European Union member states, which we believe is vital in tackling the criminal networks responsible for human trafficking and illegal immigration.

We are also keen to examine ways in which the external border of the European Union can be strengthened. We are awaiting the European Commission's Communication on European Border management, which may shape future policy in this area.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy towards establishing a common European policy on immigration and asylum, with reference to the conclusions of the Laeken Summit. [39637]

Angela Eagle: The conclusions of the European Council meeting held at Laeken identified areas in which further work is needed in order to progress towards a common European policy on asylum and immigration. The commitment made at Tampere to establish a common European asylum system is a top priority for the United Kingdom (UK). The treaty of Amsterdam committed member states to a broad range of measures designed to establish minimum standards for asylum procedures and policies across the Union within five years. The UK is participating actively in this process and has opted into all measures to date. We judge there are significant potential long-term benefits for the UK in terms of levelling the playing field across the Union.

The European Council meeting held at Laeken also called for closer cooperation between services responsible for external border control and to examine the conditions in which a mechanism or common services to control external borders could be created. Responding to calls for a common policy on illegal immigration, the Spanish Presidency drafted an action plan on illegal immigration. The action plan was adopted at the February 2002 Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council. The UK welcomes the action plan as a basis for the European Union's future policy in illegal immigration.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy towards the establishment of a European network for the training of magistrates, as set out in Council Document 13416/2/01. [39643]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I have been asked to reply. The Council document referred to was a discussion document prepared by the Belgian Presidency in November 2001. It has been superseded by the Presidency Conclusions of the European Council in Laeken held on 14 and 15 December 2001.

The European Judicial Training Network (EJTN) is a network of the national institutions responsible for judicial training in the Member States of the European Union, set up by the institutions themselves. The Judicial Studies Board (which has responsibility for the training of Judges in England and Wales) has been a member since its establishment in October 2000.

The Laeken conclusions refer to a proposal made by the French Government in December 2000 to put the Network on a legal footing, enabling it to receive financial and administrative support from the European Commission. No discussions of this proposal are scheduled at present.

Victim Support

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many nominations the agency dealing with victims has received for Charter Mark awards. [37001]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

Charter Mark is primarily a customer focused improvement programme dependent on applications from interested organisations. We have no record of receiving any nominations in respect of the Victim Support Agency. Nominations would be welcomed and actively pursued with nominees to encourage a full application and assessment to be made.

TREASURY

Public Services Productivity

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 1 March 2002, ref. 38310, on public services productivity, which outside organisations have been consulted on the paper; and if he will make a statement. [41398]

Mr. Andrew Smith: There has not been formal consultation with any outside body; but the Treasury take account of the wide range of views expressed publicly, as well as the advice of the Public Services Productivity Panel.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 1 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1571W, on public services productivity, how many officials in the Treasury are working *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time on the paper; and if he will make a statement. [42949]

Mr. Andrew Smith: A number of Treasury officials are contributing to the paper.

Public Service Agreements

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 27 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1326W, on public service agreements, what the name of each team mentioned is; how many people are in each team; and if he will make a statement. [41397]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The 13 departmental teams, and the number of people in each team, are as follows.

Team	*Number of people*
Defence, Diplomacy and Intelligence	13
Health	12
Devolved Countries and Regions	10
Education, Training and Culture	15
Home and Legal	17
Local Government	8
Housing and Urban	11
Transport	7
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	16
International Poverty Reduction	13
Tax Administration	5
Work and Pensions	12
Enterprise	18

The central team, General Expenditure Policy, employs 25 staff. While there are around 180 staff in these teams, not all the people concerned have responsibility for PSA monitoring.

Departmental Staff

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people are employed by his Department in each of the units listed on pages 10 and 11 of HM Treasury's 2001 departmental report; and if he will make a statement. [41311]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information is as follows:

Permanent Secretary (PERM)—98

Public Services (PSD)—198

Corporate Services and Development (CSD)—189

Budget and Public Finance (BPF)—98

Financial Regulation and Industry (FRI)—119

Financial Management and Reporting and Audit (FMRA)—54

Macroeconomic Policy and International Finance (MPIF)—168.

Refrigerators

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when HM Customs and Excise first acted to stop the export of second-hand and reconditioned fridges; on what grounds; and after what consultation with the exporters. [42092]

Mr. Boateng: EC Regulation 2037/2000 came into force with effect from 1 October 2000. It covers a wide range of controls in the trading of ozone depleting substances (ODSs), including a ban on the exportation of fridges and freezers containing CFCs in the refrigerant gases and foam insulation. However, following representations from the second-hand fridge export industry for further time to adapt to the change, the Government suspended operation of the ban on exports in November 2000. The ban was reintroduced in respect of fridges containing CFCs in the refrigerant gases and the foam insulation from 1 January 2001 and 1 January 2002 respectively.

Illegal Drug Imports

Gillian Merron: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the record of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in preventing illegal drugs entering the United Kingdom in each of the past three years. [42553]

Mr. Boateng: Customs' performance in preventing illegal drugs entering the UK is monitored against the targets set out in their Public Service Agreement and reported in their departmental annual reports.

Public-Private Partnerships

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the global sum of capital expenditure on public services, as a proportion of gross national product, is calculated in respect of sums provided under schemes of public-private partnership, in calculations made by the European Commission when issuing warnings and infraction communications to member states, indicating the treaty and legislative basis for distinctions in the source of capital and revenue expenditure. [42511]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The calculations made by the European Commission are from national accounts produced by national statistical offices according to the rules of the European System of Accounts 1995 (ESA95).

Annex II of ESA95 explains how to record capital expenditure when the public sector leases from the private sector. Chapter 2 explains how to determine whether a business is in the public or private sector. The legislative bases for the calculations are Council Regulation (EC) No 2223/96 of 25 June 1996 on the European system of national and regional accounts in the Community; and Council Regulation (EC) No 3605/93 of 22 November 1993 on the application of the Protocol on the excessive deficit procedure annexed to the Treaty establishing the European Community.

Public Appointments

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many appointments to public bodies have been made through his Department *(a)* from April 2000 to March 2001 and *(b)* since 31 March 2001; and how many of these were (i) men and (ii) women. [42149]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* The number of men and women appointed, or re-appointed, by Treasury Ministers to bodies sponsored by the Treasury during the periods in question is as follows:

Period	*Men appointed*[1]	*Women appointed*[1]
1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001	31	11
1 April 2001 to 28 February 2002	5	3

[1] Includes re-appointments.

Financial Services Authority

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the chairmanship of the FSA. [43655]

Mr. Gordon Brown: I am pleased to say that Sir Howard Davies has today agreed to an extension to his appointment as Chairman and Director of the FSA until 31 January 2004. At a time when the FSA has only just taken on its full regulatory powers and is establishing itself as a fully independent single regulator I believe it is invaluable to have Sir Howard remaining in post with his breadth of experience.

Housing Equity Release

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which of his Ministers has the lead responsibility for policy on housing equity release. [41305]

Ms Keeble: I have been asked to reply.

It is primarily the responsibility of the financial lenders to ensure that good quality equity release products are available. As Housing Minister, I am particularly interested in how local authorities will use their proposed new powers, contained in draft legislation currently before Parliament, to provide financial assistance to improve housing conditions. I also take a close interest in monitoring the impact of the developing equity release products on our overall policy to promote sustainable home ownership.

Autism Awareness Year

Tim Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what he is doing to encourage Autism Awareness year. [31887]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* I welcome the initiatives that aim to improve our knowledge and understanding of autism and raise awareness of the condition. I refer my hon. Friend to the replies given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Health on 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 672–73W, and by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 239W, which set out the Government's support for this initiative. I have nothing to add to those replies.

Civil Servants

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many new entrants to the Civil Service were employed in his Department in each of the last five years; and how many in each year were aged 50 and over. [36495]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* The table provides the information requested.

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Total	3,849	4,388	4,950	6,406	6,510
Of which aged 50 years and over	292	343	406	632	526
Of which below 50 years	3,557	4,045	4,544	5,774	5,984

Note:

Figures include HM Treasury, Inland Revenue, Customs and Excise, Office of Government Commerce, Debt Management Office, Royal Mint, Valuation Office, Government Actuary's Department, Department of National Savings and Investments, National Investments and Loans Office, Office of National Statistics and the Statistics Commission.

Airline Insurance

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what arrangements are in place to secure third party war risk and terrorism cover for British civil passenger aircraft after 20 March. [42962]

Ruth Kelly: My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary announced on 21 January that the Troika replacement insurance scheme for UK aviation would be extended for a final time until 20 March. There is nothing further to add to this announcement. There are now commercial providers of third party war risk and terrorism cover for airlines in the market.

Departmental Policies (Bristol, East)

Jean Corston: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Bristol, East constituency, the effects on Bristol of his Department's policies and actions *(a)* from 5 May 1994 to 2 May 1997, *(b)* from 2 May 1997 to 7 May 1998, and *(c)* since 7 May 1998. [35604]

Ruth Kelly: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by the Minister of State, Cabinet Office on 4 March 2002, *Official Report* column 80W. Bristol, East, along with the rest of the United Kingdom, is benefiting from the long-term action we have taken since 1997 to build economic stability and secure high and stable levels of growth and employment. Claimant count unemployment in the constituency, for example, fell by over 737, or 21 per cent., between May 1997 and May 1998; and has fallen by a further 900, or 32 per cent., since May 1998[1].

Macroeconomic stability is being complemented at the microeconomic level by the Government's policies to ease the transition from welfare into work and to make work pay for lower and middle income families, and to reduce child poverty. The Government are also committed to enabling all persons to share in the country's rising prosperity. The numbers of beneficiaries of the new deal, the working families tax credit, child benefit, state retirement pension, winter fuel payments, free TV licences and minimum income guarantee in the Bristol, East constituency are given in the table. These data are also available in the Library of the House of Commons.

Policy	*5 May 1994*	*2 May 1997*	*7 May 1998*	*March 2002*
New Deal 18–24	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not available	1,637 starts and 758 jobs gained (Dec 2001)
Working families tax credit	Not applicable	Not applicable	1,600 families (May 2000)	2,140 families (Aug 2001)
Child benefit	Not available	Not available	11,560 families (August 2000)	11,190 families (November 2001)
State retirement pension	Not available	Not available	15,400 (September 1999)	15,200 (September 2001)
Winter fuel payment	Not applicable	Not applicable	15,300 pensioners (winter 1999–00)	16,600 pensioners (winter 2000–01)
Free TV licences	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	[2]Around 7,300 pensioners over 75
Minimum income guarantee	Not available	2,500	2,600	2,900 (November 2001)

[1] Changes to ward boundaries mean that ONS can supply claimant count date for the Bristol, East constituency on a consistent basis only from January 1996 onwards.

[2] Over 99 per cent. of pensioners nationally have availed themselves of the free TV licence option.

Job Shares

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people are employed in his Department on a job share contract; and what percentage of vacant positions was advertised on this basis in the last 12 months. [35352]

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the extent of job sharing in his Department. [41009]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury does not employ any members of staff on job share contracts. There are 16 job sharers, filling eight posts, but these are individually employed on part-time contracts.

Job sharing is only one of a number of alternative and flexible working patterns that employees are welcome to take up. These include part-time working, compressed hours, job-sharing, home working, term-time or part-year working and flexible working hours.

Treasury also have an internal electronic notice board where staff can register their interest in job share and part time opportunities.

Most recruitment to Treasury is generally advertised as available for a range of alternative working patterns. However there are always some occasions where due to the nature of the work, this is not possible.

Capita

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many contracts the Department has with Capita; and how much they are worth; [38381]

(2) if he will list the contracts that have been awarded to the Capita Group by the Department. [39350]

Ruth Kelly: The information is as follows:

Details of HMT Contracts with Capita

Department: HMT (1)—Value, nil

Recruitment of Staff—Framework Agreement for HMT and its offices—see background note

Department: IR (0)—Value, nil

Department: HMCE (13)—Value £180,000

Information technology tests

Business analysts

Qualified lawyers pre-appointment inquiries

RAS helpline

Assistant print buyer

Contact centre staff

Internal comms. advisers/writers

Writers for internal newspaper

Instant recruitment—administrative officers

HR managers—appointments

Accounting adviser

2002 Inservice fast stream recruitment

2001 General fast stream recruitment

Department: OGC (1)—Value £200,000 (including two other firms of consultants)

Capita Design and Build Services are appointed as consultants under a property advice framework commission. No order has been placed for their services to date.

Accountancy Contracts

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the *(a)* number and *(b)* value of contracts awarded by his Department to (i) Arthur Andersen, (ii) Deloitte Touche, (ii) Ernst and Young, (iv) KPMG and (v) PricewaterhouseCoopers accountants in each year since 1997. [34983]

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the contracts agreed by his Department with the five largest accountancy firms since May 1997; and what was the total value of contracts with each. [42101]

Ruth Kelly: It has not been possible to establish the number and value of contracts awarded to the above named companies since 1997. This information is not held in the format required and any further examination would be of a disproportionate cost.

Second World War Debts

Bob Spink: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it Government policy to seek a final settlement with the USA to write-off the outstanding British debt which arises from the conduct of World War II. [41873]

Ruth Kelly: As I stated in my answer to the hon. Member on 28 February 2002, columns 1937–39W, the Government intend to meet their obligations under the 1945 Agreement with the United States Government by repaying in full the amounts lent in 1945.

Household Expenditure (Alcohol)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the expenditure on alcohol in the family expenditure and resources surveys in each region and nation in the last five years in *(a)* cash, *(b)* real and *(c)* percentage of household expenditure terms. [42614]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Jim Cousins, dated 13 March 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question on expenditure on alcohol from The Family Expenditure Survey. (42614)

The information available on a consistent basis from the Family Expenditure Survey is for financial years 1996–97 onwards, and is given in the attached table. Sample size in individual regions is small and data from three years have been combined to increase the reliability of the estimates. The estimates are still subject to sampling variability, however.

The Family Expenditure Survey, like other surveys of households and individuals, is known to understate alcohol expenditure.

For earlier years estimates have been published for the previous Standard Statistical Regions, replaced by Government Office Regions from 1996–97 onwards. They are available at current prices and as percentages of total expenditure in Family Spending 1995–96 and earlier reports, which are available in the House of Commons Library.

Expenditure on alcohol by UK countries and Government office regions: three year averages 1996–97 to 2000–01 (based on weighted data)

	Average weekly household expenditure ($)								
	Current prices			*At 2000–01 prices*			*Percentage of total expenditure*		
Government office region	*1996–97 to 1998–99*	*1997–98 to 1999–2000*	*1998–99 to 2000–01*	*1996–97 to 1998–99*	*1997–98 to 1999–2000*	*1998–99 to 2000–01*	*1996–97 to 1998–99*	*1997–98 to 1999–2000*	*1998–99 to 2000–01*
North East	14.20	14.40	16.50	15.40	15.20	16.90	5	5	6
North West	15.80	16.40	15.50	17.10	17.20	15.90	5	5	5
Yorks and the Humber	15.70	15.90	15.60	16.90	16.70	16.00	5	5	4

Expenditure on alcohol by UK countries and Government office regions: three year averages 1996–97 to 2000–01 (based on weighted data)

	Average weekly household expenditure ($)						*Percentage of total expenditure*		
	Current prices			*At 2000–01 prices*					
Government office region	*1996–97 to 1998–99*	*1997–98 to 1999–2000*	*1998–99 to 2000–01*	*1996–97 to 1998–99*	*1997–98 to 1999–2000*	*1998–99 to 2000–01*	*1996–97 to 1998–99*	*1997–98 to 1999–2000*	*1998–99 to 2000–01*
East Midlands	13.20	14.50	14.40	14.30	15.30	14.70	4	4	4
West Midlands	13.70	14.20	14.70	14.70	14.90	15.00	4	4	4
East	11.90	12.50	13.00	12.80	13.20	13.30	3	4	3
London	14.10	15.30	16.40	15.20	16.10	16.80	4	4	4
South East	13.10	13.80	14.10	14.10	14.50	14.50	3	4	3
South West	12.70	13.30	14.20	13.70	13.90	14.50	4	4	4
England	13.90	14.50	14.90	15.00	15.30	15.20	4	4	4
Wales	13.30	14.20	13.40	14.40	14.90	13.80	4	4	4
Scotland	13.70	14.70	15.10	14.80	15.40	15.50	4	5	5
Northern Ireland	11.20	12.40	13.20	12.10	13.10	13.60	4	4	4
United Kingdom	13.80	14.50	14.80	14.80	15.20	15.10	4	4	4

Source:

ONS, Family Expenditure Surveys 1996–97 to 2000–01

Energy Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on energy costs incurred by his Department in each of the last 10 years. [42451]

Ruth Kelly: The table shows energy costs the Treasury has incurred in each of the last 10 years. The figures exclude VAT.

Energy Costs 1990–2001

Year	£
1990–91	487,894
1991–92	448,015
1992–93	411,009
1993–94	364,710
1994–95	420,183
1995–96	328,628
1996–97	330,220
1997–98	305,411
1998–99	316,314
1999–2000	337,396
2000–01	210,696

Chief Economic Adviser

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Chief Economic Adviser is subject to the Code of Conduct for special advisers. [42929]

Ruth Kelly: Yes.

Bank Accounts

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people hold current bank accounts in each region covered by the regional development agencies in the age ranges *(a)* 0 to 8, *(b)* 18 to 24, *(c)* 25 to 50, *(d)* 50 to 65, *(e)* 65 to 85 and *(f)* 85 years and over at the latest date for which figures are available. [42958]

Ruth Kelly: The information is not readily available. The table sets out estimates (from the Family Resources Survey), of the proportion of respondents in each region and age category who had a bank account in the 2000–01 survey.

Percentage of respondents by age with a bank account by region

	Age group				
Government office region	*18–25*	*26–50*	*51–65*	*66–85*	*86+*
North East	76	82	82	72	62
North West and Merseyside	83	86	85	77	59
Yorkshire and the Humber	78	83	82	70	57
East Midlands	83	86	85	79	43
West Midlands	73	83	83	73	63
Eastern	88	93	90	84	80
London	84	85	84	75	57
South East	85	92	92	85	78
South West	86	91	90	85	84

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Equal Opportunities

Mrs. Calton: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, what procedures are in place to promote race equality and equality of opportunity for employees in the Palace of Westminster. [41937]

Mr. Kirkwood *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* The House of Commons Service values the diversity of its staff and is committed to developing the working practices which will allow every member of staff to contribute his or her best, regardless of race, sex, marital status, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation or any other irrelevant factor. The following arrangements to promote race equality and equality of opportunity for employees are in place:

Equal opportunities training for all staff;

Recruitment monitoring;

Provision of child care vouchers;

Paid maternity and paternity leave;

Access to caring leave;

Job share and part time working arrangements;

Holiday play scheme;

Work experience schemes, targeting under-represented groups;

Provision of prayer room facility during Ramadan;

Preferential access to leave for religious holidays;

Bullying and harassment policy and procedure;

No nationality restrictions for employment;

All staff are able to apply for any House vacancy following a successful probationary period;

Adaptations and aids available for staff with disabilities;

Rehabilitation leave to facilitate return to work following sickness absence;

Parental leave;

Career breaks.

Sitting Costs

Paddy Tipping: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, what estimate the Commission has made of the average cost of a day's sitting of the House in the last session for which figures are available. [41498]

Mr. Kirkwood: The overall cost of running the House administration (excluding capital works, etc.) in 2000–01 was some £103 million, giving an average daily cost of the order of £280,000. The difference in cost between a sitting day and a non-sitting day is negligible: the major costs, of accommodation and staffing, are not affected appreciably by sitting times. These figures do not include the cost of paying Members' salaries or allowances, which are not normally regarded as part of the cost of running the House itself.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Press Office

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General how many staff in her Department's press office have received *(a)* termination and *(b)* redundancy payments in each of the last four years. [41083]

The Solicitor-General: In my own Department, the legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, no staff in the press office have received termination or redundancy payments in each of the last four years.

In the Departments for which the Attorney General is responsible, details are as follows:

Crown Prosecution Service

The Crown Prosecution Service has made no termination or redundancy payments to any of its Press Office staff in each of the last four years.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

The Treasury Solicitor's Department does not have a dedicated press office. Any press matters are dealt with by the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers' press officer.

Serious Fraud Office

The Serious Fraud Office has made no termination or redundancy payments to any of its Press Office staff in each of the last four years.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Empty Properties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his estimate is of the *(a)* annual cost and *(b)* total value of the empty properties owned by (i) his Department, (ii) its agencies and (iii) other public bodies for which he has had responsibility in each of the last four years. [30067]

Mr. McCartney: The estimate of the annual cost and total value of empty properties owned by the Department and its agencies for the last four years is set out in the table. The figures relate solely to the former ES part of the DWP estate. The value of these properties has been consistently reducing; when last recorded that accounted for only 0.7 per cent. of total property owned.

	£thousand	*Percentage of total cost/value of the estate*
1997–98		
Annual costs	6,763	—
Value	2,135	—
1998–99		
Annual costs	6,231	3.6
Value	1,681	1.3
1999–2000		
Annual costs	5,435	3.3
Value	3,578	2.8
2000–01		
Annual costs	5,274	3.0
Value	1.168	0.7

The former DSS estate was transferred (for value) via the PRIME PFI project to Land Securities Trillium on 1 April 1998. Since this date the majority of buildings on the former DSS part of the DWP estate has been occupied as serviced accommodation on an as required basis. We have no vacant space as all such accommodation is surrendered to the service provider and the Department only pays for the space it occupies in these buildings.

In 1997–98 DSS had vacant estate with an annual cost of £21,755,150 and a value of £2,896,800. On 1 April 1998 Land Securities Trillium paid £2,896,800 for these vacant properties and assumed responsibility for all costs thereafter.

State Pensions

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the additional cost would be of the basic state pension in *(a)* 2010, *(b)* 2020, *(c)* 2030, *(d)* 2040 and *(e)* 2050 if, in one year out of every two, the inflation rate were (i) 2 per cent. and (ii) 1.5 per cent. [30396]

Mr. McCartney: The information is in the table.

Additional cost to basic state pension if in one year out of every two the inflation rate were two per cent. and 1.5 per cent.

£billion

	2 per cent. inflation	*1.5 per cent. inflation*
2010	0.4	0.8
2020	1.5	3.05
2030	3.2	6.55
2040	5	10.5
2050	6.55	13.85

Notes:

1. Figures are gross cost for GB rounded to the nearest £50 million.
2. Figures in 2001–02 prices.
3. Figures based on latest Government Actuary's Department statistics which takes account of the change in the state pension age for women.
4. Additional costs are based on the assumption that basic state pension would increase by 2.5 per cent. in the long run (as stated in the PBR).

Housing Benefit

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on progress of the consultations with local authority associations on the recovery of overpaid housing benefit from landlords further to paragraph 38 of the response by the DSS to the Social Security Committee report on housing benefit Cm4869. [30629]

Malcolm Wicks: Following consultation with the local authority associations, we amended housing benefit regulations to change the rule that overpaid benefit was in all cases recoverable from the person to whom it was paid. From 1 October 2001 where the landlord has been responsible for alerting the local authority in writing to the suspected overpayment, there appears to have been a fraud, and there is no evidence of landlord collusion, any resulting overpayment will not be recoverable from the landlord.

Landlords have an important role in preventing fraud. Those receiving direct payments of benefit already had a statutory responsibility to report changes in their tenant's circumstances, which they could have reasonably been expected to know. This measure encourages landlords to be vigilant and report their suspicions of fraud without fear of financial disincentive.

Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) on what dates statutory criteria were first issued to facilitate and determine the level of payment of industrial injuries disablement benefit for those suffering from spinal injury; [30778]

(2) what recent changes have been made to the statutory criteria first issued to facilitate and determine the level and payment of industrial injuries disablement benefit for those suffering from spinal injury. [30779]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The assessment of disablement for the purposes of Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit was introduced in 1948 by the National Insurance (Industrial Injuries) Act 1946 on recommendations made by the Beveridge report. This principle is a fundamental part of the industrial injuries scheme and has been carried through to the current legislation, which is covered at schedule 6 of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992. Further definition of the principles of assessment and prescribed degrees of disablement are in Schedule 2 of the Social Security (General Benefit) Regulations 1982.

The assessment of disablement is made by comparing the person claiming benefit with a person of the same age and sex whose physical and mental condition is normal. If, as in the case of a spinal injury, the degree of disablement is not prescribed within the regulations, the medical assessor will try to equate the disablement to those covered in the schedule.

There have been no recent changes to the legislation.

Departmental Secondments (Energy Industry)

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many staff were seconded between *(a)* BP, *(b)* Shell, *(c)* Enron, *(d)* Exxon-Mobil, *(e)* Conoco, *(f)* Texaco and *(g)* TotalFinaElf and his Department in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) April 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available. [33213]

Maria Eagle: No staff have been seconded between the Department (or the Employment Service or the former Department of Social Security) and the organisations listed from 1999 to the present date.

Jobcentre Plus

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many attacks on staff have taken place at employment centres in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [33589]

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many incidents of *(a)* physical and *(b)* verbal assaults have been recorded in (i) Benefit Agency offices and (ii) Employment Service offices in each year since 1997; how many have been recorded in Jobcentre Plus offices in each month since the inception of Jobcentre Plus; and how many were recorded in the equivalent offices prior to the inception of Jobcentre Plus. [32748]

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many physical assaults there have been on Benefits Agency and Employment Service staff in each of the last four years; and if he will make a statement. [32757]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 5 and 6 February 2002]:* The available information on the breakdown of incidents in the last five years is set out in the table. The figures reflect the improvements that have been made in recent years in gathering statistics on incidents. In recent years a possible under-reporting of incidents concerned both management and trade unions. An improved reporting form was introduced in April 1999, followed by a campaign by the Public and Commercial Services Union on reporting during 2000. The rise in reported incidents in the years from 1999 reflects this. As well as verbal abuse or threatening behaviour, non-physical incidents include cases of customers fighting or arguing with each other, in which no member of staff was involved, and occasions when only equipment or furniture was damaged. Employment Service offices are visited by around 25 million people per year and Benefits Agency offices by around 20 million.

	Employment Service		*Benefits Agency*	
	Physical	*Non-physical*	*Physical*	*Non-physical*
1997	—	—	100	3,426
1998	—	—	41	3,092
1999	241	3,835	129	3,561
2000	232	4,237	164	5,148
2001	222	3,637	135	4,910

Since the launch of the Jobcentre Plus pathfinder offices last October, only one case of physical contact has been recorded: a customer trod on the foot of a member of staff—possibly accidentally. There have been 148 incidents in which no physical contact was made, 145 of which involved verbal abuse and three attempted assault (attempted assaults includes cases where items are thrown but do not hit anyone, or when a customer reaches towards a member of staff but does not make contact).

During this period we estimate that approximately three-quarters of a million people have visited pathfinder offices. The monthly breakdown is in the table:

Month	*Cases involving physical contact in Pathfinder offices*	*Cases involving no physical contact in Pathfinder offices*
October 2001	1	14
November 2001	0	62
December 2001	0	32
January 2002	0	40
Total	1	148

In 2001, up to the launch of Jobcentre Plus on 22 October, there were 14 instances of physical contact between a Benefits Agency or Employment Service member of staff and a customer in the offices that subsequently became Pathfinders.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what further risk assessments have been carried out on the new Jobcentre Plus offices since their establishment; and if they have resulted in the deployment of extra security measures or staff. [32747]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 5 March 2002]*: Review risk assessments have now been completed in all of the Jobcentre Plus pathfinder offices that have opened since 22 October 2001. No additional security staff have been recommended as a result of these assessments.

New Deal for Young People

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have undertaken child care training and work experience through the New Deal for Young People; and how many of them have found permanent employment in this field. [33626]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Between 5 January 1998 and 4 January 2002, 7,016 young people had undertaken child care training and work experience through the full time education and training, voluntary sector and environmental task force options within New Deal for Young People. In the same period, 1,497 young people entered subsidised employment in child care through the employment option. A further 2,859 went directly into jobs in child care from the New Deal.

Source:
Employment Service Management Information

Asbestos (Compensation)

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the Government's policy is on providing compensation to those suffering from the effects of exposure to asbestos. [34274]

Malcolm Wicks: Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit is available for people who are 1 per cent. disabled through having contracted pneumoconiosis (including asbestosis and silicosis) or diffuse mesothelioma through their work, and to those at least 14 per cent. disabled from primary carcinoma of the lung where there is evidence of asbestosis or diffuse pleural thickening. The current maximum weekly rate is £112.90. In addition, if the person requires someone to look after them, constant attendance allowance, at a maximum of £90.40 a week, and exceptionally severe disablement allowance at £45.20 a week may be payable. Reduced earnings allowance is also available to compensate people, including those whose level of disablement is less than 14 per cent., who suffer a loss of earnings as a result of their disablement.

To make sure a person does not get compensation twice for the same need, benefits paid from the date of an accident or the date of claim in respect of a disease are recovered from the compensator up to the date of any final compensation payment, subject to a five year maximum. Future benefits are not taken into account. Nor are past payments inflated into present values.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions announced on 13 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 401W, additional support for people exposed to asbestos and affected by the 11 December 2001 Court of Appeal judgment in the "Fairchild" case is now available from his Department. The compensation scheme administered by DTLR under the Pneumoconiosis etc. (Workers' Compensation) Act 1979 will be extended to make payments to these people provided they meet the conditions of eligibility.

Skill Shortages

Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what steps he is taking to facilitate people gaining employment in industries in which skill shortages exist. [36866]

(2) what role he plays in the assessment of the level of skill shortages in *(a)* the building industry and *(b)* the road haulage industry. [36869]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We are working closely with employers to understand their needs, so we can improve the support we give to people without work. We have set up the National Employer Panel, an employer-led body which will recommend to Government ways of ensuring employment programmes are responsive to the changing needs of employers and individuals.

We have a dynamic labour market—with 6 million people changing jobs every year and a record 28.2 million people in work—and there are many competing opportunities. We recognise that some industries are facing difficulties in attracting new recruits with the required skills. We provide support for specific industries, where this is appropriate. For example, we have introduced Ambition: Construction which is designed to help meet skill shortages and help 1,000 long-term unemployed people into construction jobs. In addition, the Employment Service works closely with the road haulage industry in a number of locations to facilitate skills development in this sector.

The Department is also working closely with the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department for Education and Skills to address the recommendations of the Performance and Innovation Unit's Workforce Development report, which sets out a longer-term vision for addressing skill needs.

We, and colleagues at the Department for Education and Skills and the Department of Trade and Industry, have asked the Regional Development Agencies to lead the Framework for Regional Employment and Skills Action (FRESA). This strategic partnership of organisations includes the CBI, the TUC, the Learning and Skills Council, the Employment Service and Local Government Associations. The work of the FRESAs will provide a co-ordinated strategy for skills, ensuring a more efficient service for employers and individuals alike.

Child Poverty

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement about the Government's strategy to combat child poverty. [40143]

Malcolm Wicks: Details of the Government's strategy to combat child poverty can be found in our annual report on poverty and social exclusion, Opportunity for all. The most recent of these is Opportunity for all—making progress (CM 5260), which was published on the 19 September 2001 and is in the Library.

Homelessness

Dr. Desmond Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he will take to help local authorities cut the use of bed and breakfast hotels for housing homeless people. [43755]

Malcolm Wicks: We will provide extra funding through the housing benefit subsidy system, worth around £10 million in 2002–03, to help local authorities house homeless people in self-contained temporary accommodation rather than in bed and breakfast hotels.

Under current rules for temporary accommodation, the Department for Work and Pensions refunds 95 per cent. (the normal "full" subsidy rate) of any housing benefit that authorities pay on rents up to their subsidy threshold. Rents above the subsidy threshold up to the cap are reimbursed at 12.5 per cent., while there is no subsidy at all for rents above the cap.

From April 2002, we will raise the 12.5 per cent. reimbursement rate to 95 per cent. for leased and licensed accommodation, while keeping it unchanged for bed and breakfasts.

Paying full subsidy up to the cap should make private sector leasing an affordable option even in expensive areas, building on the significant increase in thresholds and caps that we introduced last year. It will give councils a major incentive to shift away from using bed and breakfast accommodation, benefiting thousands of homeless families. And we are considering strengthening that incentive further from April 2003, once authorities have had time to respond to the new arrangements: for example, by reducing the 12.5 per cent. subsidy on bed and breakfast rents.

This reform supports the homelessness strategy announced today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, at columns 1091–94W above.

Benefit Claims (Hackney)

Dr. Desmond Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if the London Borough of Hackney has met the terms of the direction he issued on 12 October 2001 in connection with claims for housing benefit and council tax benefit. [43756]

Malcolm Wicks: Following an assessment by the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate, we are satisfied that the London Borough of Hackney has met the terms of the direction given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 12 October 2001 in respect of housing benefit and council tax benefit.

The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate's report of its assessment has been placed in the Library.

The report shows that the authority responded well to the challenge of the direction and that it is also putting in place the necessary processes to improve performance generally. The large backlog of 39,000 outstanding cases on 19 April 2001 was cleared by 31 December 2001 and was done without compromising the standards of other benefits work not associated with the backlog. There were indications that the level of accuracy had in fact risen following the issue of the direction.

The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate did find some areas where they considered there was a need for improvement, for example in the way sample cases for checking were selected and recorded. The report suggests a number of areas of good practice that the Authority will be able to make use of to address the weaknesses identified.

There is still much that needs to be done to make the service fully effective, but the authority is to be commended for the significant improvements found by the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate.

Mental Health

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the integration of people with mental health problems in society. [40652]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply.

Standard 1 of the National Service Framework for Mental Health requires local services to develop and implement coherent strategies to combat discrimination against people with mental health problems and to promote their social inclusion. The Department of Health is working closely with the Department for Work and Pensions to find ways of providing active help and encouragement for them to move into work; taking the obstacles to work out of the benefits system; making sure that work pays; and promoting radical change in the workplace to ensure equality and opportunity.

Income-related Benefits (Newcastle)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people living in *(a)* the City of Newcastle upon Tyne and *(b)* the constituency of Newcastle upon Tyne, Central were in receipt of income-related benefits in *(a)* May 1996 and *(b)* each subsequent year to 2001, broken down by those of (i) pensionable and (ii) working age. [37285]

Malcolm Wicks: The available information is in the tables. A large proportion of people in receipt of the income-related benefits referred to in the first table may also be in receipt of housing benefit and council tax benefit.

Recipients of income-related benefits (other than housing benefit and council tax benefit)

	City of Newcastle upon Tyne local authority area		*Newcastle upon Tyne, Central parliamentary constituency*	
	Pension age	*Working age*	*Pension age*	*Working age*
May 1996	12,300	31,900	—	—
May 1997	12,000	29,900	3,800	8,100
May 1998	11,200	28,200	3,500	7,700
May 1999	11,100	28,200	3,500	7,800
May 2000	11,600	22,700	3,600	6,400
May 2001	12,300	22,600	3,800	6,600

Notes:

1. Income-related benefits include income support (IS), jobseeker's allowance (income based), family credit (FC) and disability working allowance (DWA). IS, jobseeker's allowance (JSA) and FC figures are based on 5 per cent. samples and are subject to a degree of sampling variation. DWA figures are from 100 per cent. count.

2. JSA was introduced in October 1996 to replace unemployment benefit and IS for the unemployed.

3. FC and DWA were replaced by tax credits in October 1999 which are the responsibility of the Inland Revenue.

4. Pension age is defined as cases where the recipient and/or partner is aged 60 and over for IS and JSA and the recipient is aged 60 and over for DWA and FC. Working age is defined as cases where both the recipient and partner are under age 60 for IS and JSA and the recipient is aged under 60 for DWA and FC.

5. Parliamentary constituency data are not available prior to 1997.

Sources:

1. Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, May 1996–2001.

2. Jobseeker's Allowance Quarterly Enquiry, May 1997–2001.

3. Family Credit Statistics, May 1996–99.

4. Disability Working Allowance Statistics, May 1996–99.

Housing benefit and council tax benefit recipients—City of Newcastle upon Tyne local authority area

	Housing benefit	*Council tax benefit*
May 1996	40,630	43,910
May 1997	39,140	42,430
May 1998	37,260	40,420
May 1999	36,300	39,510
May 2000	34,830	37,880
May 2001	32,360	35,380

Notes:

1. The figures refer to recipients, which may be a single person, a couple or a family. They have been rounded to the nearest 10 cases.

2. Housing benefit figures exclude any extended payment cases.

3. Nationally approximately 80 per cent. of housing benefit recipients also receive council tax benefit, therefore there will be a significant overlap between recipients of housing benefit and council tax benefit.

4. Figures for housing benefit and council tax benefit are not available by parliamentary constituency.

5. A split of cases by client group is not available at local authority level.

Source:

Housing benefit and council tax benefit Management Information System, quarterly 100 per cent. case load count, taken in May of each year from 1996 to 2001.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how he expects the incapacity benefit case load to change as a result of the fixed-term claim. [37079]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We are transforming the welfare system from a passive organisation paying out benefits to an active system that fights poverty, creates opportunity and helps people become self sufficient and independent. For people of working age we are taking a single approach to work and benefits to make work pay, make work possible and to support those who cannot work. This service will be delivered through Jobcentre Plus—a personal service with one goal: helping people of working age to live independent lives.

People making new or repeat claims to Incapacity Benefit in Jobcentre Plus Pathfinder offices are required to attend a work-focused meeting. These meetings provide disabled people with the opportunity to discuss with their personal adviser the help, benefits and opportunities available to them. We are ensuring that no-one is written off, or allowed to write themselves off. But we will not force people with disabilities into work and people who are eligible for Incapacity Benefit will receive it.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make it his policy for the general practitioner case notes of claimants for incapacity benefit to be used as evidence in support of such claims. [40787]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: People who claim a state incapacity benefit will at some point have their entitlement reviewed under the personal capability assessment (PCA). A lack of good quality information about a customer's medical condition can in some cases mean that seriously ill people, who should be completely exempted from the PCA procedures, are not identified as early as they could be. We also believe that better quality medical information would enable more customers to be correctly assessed under the PCA without the need for a medical examination.

Currently the customer's own doctor, usually their general practitioner (GP) will be asked to provide the Department's medical officer with a short factual report or a special statement containing clinical details. Working in collaboration with the Department's contractor, SchlumbergerSema Medical Services, we are currently piloting an alternative evidence gathering procedure in the Sheffield and Rotherham areas. With the permission of customers and GPs in the pilot areas, we are testing whether using GP medical records will provide the Department's medical officer with better factual information to advise the decision maker. We will be carefully evaluating this pilot to see whether there are benefits in terms of improved customer service and more robust and accurate decision making. The evaluation will be used to inform any future decisions on the use of GP casenotes in relation to benefit assessments.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many doctors are employed *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time to conduct medical examinations of claimants for incapacity benefit. [40782]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: There is an available pool of 179 full-time doctors and 852 part-time doctors to carry out medical examinations for customers claiming incapacity benefit.

Strikes

Mr. Purchase: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions with reference to official strikes at Friction Dynamics and elsewhere, if he will make it his policy not to allow the display of job advertisements in job centres where the clear intention of the employer is to recruit labour for the purpose of strike-breaking. [39354]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Jobcentres are instructed to remain neutral in cases where an employer is involved in a trade dispute and so vacancies are still taken and displayed by Jobcentres and on the internet job bank. In such circumstances, jobseekers who wish to apply for the vacancy are told that a dispute is in progress so that they can decide for themselves whether to apply.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the number of young people who have moved from the NDYP into sustained employment and who leave such employment without claiming jobseeker's allowance within 12 months. [40297]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The measure of whether a young person's job is sustained is based on their subsequent claims of jobseeker's allowance. No estimate has been made of the number who leave sustained employment and do not return to jobseeker's allowance within 12 months.

Benefits Agency

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what *(a)* clinical audit, *(b)* clinical governance and *(c)* quality control procedures are in force at the Benefits Agency Medical Services. [40568]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Clinical governance within the NHS requires organisations to take a corporate approach to quality and performance. This is the approach which the Government expects Medical Services to take in seeking continuously to improve and develop a customer-focused service able to deliver the specified standards of quality.

Medical Services carry out regular quality audit, by peer review, of the standard of medical reports provided by doctors engaged to work for them. Each doctor has his or her work audited at least once a year. Medical Services also carry out regular customer satisfaction surveys. The outcomes of audit and customer surveys are reported regularly to the Department and are validated by the Department's doctors on behalf of the Chief Medical Adviser.

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what advice has been given to the Benefits Agency Medical Services on the recognition of chronic fatigue syndrome by the Department of Health; what new guidance has been given to the Benefits Agency staff as a result; and if he will publish that advice and guidance. [40567]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: This Department fully recognises chronic fatigue syndrome as a potentially very disabling condition. Guidance to Medical Services doctors, who carry out assessments on behalf of the Department, and to decision makers who determine entitlement to benefits, exists in the Disability Handbook. The second edition, published in 1998, contains a section on chronic fatigue syndrome, which was written in discussion with experts in this area, including the ME Association. Guidance also exists in the report of the chief medical adviser's expert group on chronic fatigue, published in 1998.

The guidance in both these documents is in line with the report recently published by the Department of Health. Therefore no new guidance has been issued. Copies of both documents are available in the Library. The Disability Handbook can be purchased through the Stationery Office, and can also be accessed on the Department's web site.

Industrial Injuries

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will amend Regulation 30 of the Social Security (Claims and Payments) Regulations 1987 to extend the specified 12 month time period on compassionate grounds for making a posthumous industrial injuries disablement benefit claim. [40497]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* The rules for claiming industrial injuries disablement benefit (IIDB) are designed to be more flexible than those for other benefits that can be claimed by a person appointed to act on a deceased person's behalf by the Secretary of State.

In general most claims can be made only within 12 months of the date of death. IIDB, however, can be claimed within 12 months of the date on which the death certificate is issued. This reflects the fact that in many cases the cause of death recorded on the death certificate provides the basis for the IIDB claim.

We keep all our policies under review but have no plans to amend these rules.

Minimum Income Guarantee

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners aged under 65 are in receipt of minimum income guarantee. [42635]

Malcolm Wicks: As at November 2001 there were 322,900 minimum income guarantee claimants under the age of 65 in Great Britain.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Tibet

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to the answer from the hon. Member for Leeds, Central of 30 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 271, if her Department will continue to provide funding for Save the Children Fund's "Tibet Basic Education Project". [42964]

Clare Short: SCF is undertaking valuable work in Tibet with DFID support. I would like to see this continue and my officials are currently considering SCF's proposals for a further phase of their basic education project for poor indigenous Tibetans.

Parental Leave Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what estimate she has made of the *(a)* financial costs and *(b)* benefits to her Department of the Parental Leave Directive. [42488]

Clare Short: Two members of DFID staff have taken up the opportunity under the provisions of the Parental Leave Directive. No estimate has been made of the financial costs to the Department.

Debt Relief

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many African countries are in receipt of debt relief; and which have applied but have yet to receive help. [42709]

Clare Short: 21 of the 34 African countries listed under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiatives have, so far, qualified for debt relief. Of the 21 countries, 18 have reached their Decision Point and are receiving interim debt relief and three have completed the HIPC process and are receiving full debt relief. We hope that a further four will reach their Completion Point in the next six months. Of the remaining 13 countries, Sierra Leone is expected to qualify this month. However, further progress on the remaining 10 eligible countries (Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Comoros, Republic of Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, Somalia, Sudan and Togo) will be difficult, as they either are affected by conflict or have governance problems. Angola and Kenya are not eligible for HIPC debt relief, as they are regarded as potentially sustainable—both countries are eligible for Paris Club treatment on Naples terms, which would be sufficient to reduce their debts to a sustainable level, but have not applied for this.

As for non-HIPC sub-Saharan African countries, Nigeria is not eligible for debt reduction but has received relief through the Paris Club in the form of a rescheduling.

EBRD Projects

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 341W, on EBRD projects, if she will list the names of the projects that officials from her Department told UK representatives at the EBRD to support and the value of each of these projects in each of the last five years. [42770]

Clare Short: The information required is not kept centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Afghanistan

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress is being made in clearing *(a)* land mines and *(b)* unexploded bomblets from cluster bombs in Afghanistan. [40656]

Clare Short: Afghanistan has long been one of the countries most severely affected by land mines and Unexploded Ordnance (UXO). In the year 2000 an average of about 88 mine and UXO casualties were recorded each month. During 2000 a total of approximately 13,500 antipersonnel mines, 600 anti-tank mines and 300,000 items of UXO were destroyed.

The onset of hostilities after 11 September meant that mine clearance operations were badly disrupted by the departure of international staff and the threat to the safety of mine action personnel, forcing it to significantly curtail its operations. The Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan (MAPA) is now completing a period of retraining and is resuming operations wherever possible. In many areas mine and unexploded ordnance (UXO) clearance operations have returned close to the level that existed before 11 September. In addition, the process of expanding capacity to address the UXO threat has begun. The priorities for UNMAS in 2002 are the execution of emergency operations throughout the country and a subsequent return to 100 per cent. operational capacity, and to expand mine clearance capacity as resources become available.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment has been made of the amount of unexploded bomblets emanating from cluster bombs in Afghanistan. [40655]

Clare Short: The United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) has been notified by coalition forces of 188 sites where cluster bombs were used. UNMAS has estimated the number of bombs used and made an estimate of how many bomblets may be unexploded, but exact numbers are impossible to verify.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether inclement weather has prevented aid deliveries to the Badghis province of Afghanistan; and what actions are being taken to improve aid deliveries. [34951]

Clare Short: Emergency food provision in Afghanistan is primarily channelled through the UN World Food Programme (WFP). Needs have been met in most areas, but there remain pockets of unmet need in places difficult to access due to poor weather and insecurity. Badghis province is one of the most remote and seriously drought-affected areas in Afghanistan. Parts of Badghis are extremely difficult to access in the winter months.

Since September 2001, WFP has dispatched and distributed more than 56,000 metric tonnes of food in the western provinces of Afghanistan, including Badghis, to assist an average of 1.3 million people per month. Remote areas in the west of Afghanistan have received enough food to last up to the end of March.

In addition, WFP is deploying six helicopter-borne rapid assessment teams for assessment and delivery of emergency aid to remote areas, including parts of Badghis province. The teams are tasked with streamlining food aid operations, assessing health conditions, investigating non-food emergency needs, monitoring food distribution and verifying reports by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) on earlier food deliveries. If necessary, the helicopters will also allow WFP to airlift a limited amount of food aid on an emergency basis.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list each of the overseas trips made by herself and other members of her ministerial team in each of the last four years, specifying the purpose and cost of each trip. [30178]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on 5 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 707W.

Press Officers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many staff in her Department's press office have received *(a)* termination and *(b)* redundancy payments in each of the last four years. [41087]

Clare Short: No such payments have been made to press office staff in the last four years.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Student Finance

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of the percentage of graduates who will receive lifetime earnings of *(a)* less then 75 per cent., *(b)* 75 to 90 per cent., *(c)* 90 to 110 per cent., *(d)* 110 to 125 per cent., *(e)* 125 to 175 per cent. and *(f)* more than 175 per cent. of the average of those not participating in higher education. [32733]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* We estimate lifetime earnings profiles for individuals "who have participated in an undergraduate higher education course" (whether they graduated or not) using statistical simulation models and current employment and earnings data. The table shows the estimated distribution of undergraduate participant lifetime earnings, relative to the average of those "who do not hold a higher education qualification". Lifetime earnings are based on earnings between the ages of 18 and 59 years.

Data limitations mean that the figures in the table provide only a broad estimate of the distribution of lifetime earnings, and weight cannot be placed on the precise percentages in each band. The two comparison groups are not mutually exclusive, and both potentially include individuals who may have participated in higher education but did not subsequently obtain a qualification.

Estimated percentage of UG HE participant lifetime earnings above and below the average for those who do not hold an HE qualification

Distribution	*Percentage*
Less than 75 per cent. of the non-HE average	6
75 per cent. to less than 90 per cent.	5
90 per cent. to less than 110 per cent.	9
110 per cent. to less than 125 per cent.	7
125 per cent. to less than 175 per cent.	20
175 per cent. or more than the non-HE average	53
Total	100

Notes:

1. The Department has previously used two statements to support HE, and in particular its AimHigher campaign: that on average, graduates earn around 35 per cent. more than the national average; and, on average, earn around £400,000 more over their working lives than the national average.

2. The figures presented in the table do not invalidate these statements. They are based on different comparison groups and cannot be compared.

Sources:

Labour Force Survey, British Household Panel Survey, Student Income and Expenditure Survey 1998, Student Loan Company.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what has been the student loan *(a)* repayment threshold and *(b)* interest rate in each year since 1996; and what each will be in academic year 2002–03. [40557]

Margaret Hodge: The information requested is shown in the table.

Academic years	*Interest rate*[1] *(Percentage)*	*Mortgage style*[2] *loans deferment threshold (£)*	*Income contingent loans repayment threshold (£)*
1996–97	2.7	15,792	n/a
1997–98	2.6	16,488	n/a
1998–99	3.5	17,784	n/a
1999–2000	2.1	18,192	n/a
2000–01	2.6	19,104	10,000
2001–02	2.3	19,728	10,000
2001–03	[3]—	[3]—	10,000

[1] Interest is linked to inflation, so that the amount repaid will be worth, in real terms, what was borrowed.

[2] Mortgage style loans are not income contingent. They are paid back in a fixed number of monthly instalments. Most borrowers pay back 60 instalments over five years. If five or more loans are taken out they pay 84 instalments over seven years.

[3] To be set.

The interest rate and deferment threshold for mortgage style loans for the academic year 2002–03 are calculated at a later stage. The interest rate will be the retail prices index increase for the year to March 2002. The deferment threshold will be 85 per cent. of national average earnings for April 2002.

Children's Rights

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what the role of the Minister for Children will be in relation to *(a)* reporting to the UN Special Session on Children in May and *(b)* reporting to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in September; [35233]

(2) what the role of the Minister for Children and Young People will be in relation to reporting to the *(a)* UN Special Session on Children in May and *(b)* Committee on the Rights of the Child in September; [39992]

(3) which Ministers and officials will compose the delegation representing the UK's second report on the implementation of the UN Convention on Children's Rights at its examination by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in September; [39991]

(4) which Ministers and officials will comprise the delegation representing the UK's second report on the Implementation of the UN Convention on Children's Rights at its examination by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in September. [35232]

Mr. Denham *[holding answers 12 February and 4 March 2000):* The UN Special Session on Children in May will be an important opportunity for Governments across the world to re-affirm their commitment to improving the life chances of children and to review progress towards meeting that commitment. I plan to attend, subject to any parliamentary or other Government commitments.

Arrangements have not yet been finalised for the UN Committee's examination in September.

Nursery Places

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many and what percentage of three-year-olds have been in nursery places in maintained schools in each year since 1997. [38800]

Margaret Hodge: The available information on three-year-old provision in maintained nursery and primary schools is shown in the table.

Number[1,2] and percentage of three year olds in maintained nursery and primary schools, England, 1997 to 2001, position in January each year

Year	Number	Percentage[3]
1997	214,200	34
1998	222,000	35
1999	225,700	37
2000	229,900	38
2001	226,600	37

[1] Headcount of children aged three at 31 December in the previous calendar year, rounded to the nearest 100.

[2] May include some two-year-olds.

[3] Number of three-year-olds expressed as a percentage of the three-year-old population.

The number of three-year-olds taking up places at private and voluntary providers increased from 268,800 or 44 per cent. of the population of three-year-olds in January 2000, to 285,100 or 47 per cent. in January 2001, an increase of 16,000.

The figures for three-years-olds in schools and private and voluntary providers were published in Statistical Bulletin 11–01 "Provision for children under five years of age in England—January 2001" which is available at www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics/ and from the Library.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many people were employed in a press or public relations function in her Department on 1 January in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000, *(e)* 2001 and *(f)* 2002. [39937]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The following table shows the average staff numbers within DfEE/DfES press office and publicity division over the period in question:

FTE

Year	Press office total	Publicity division total
1996–97	19	50
1997–98	20.5	68
1998–99	29.5	51
1999–2000	27.5	44
2000–01	28	42
2001–02[1]	23	39

[1] The staffing figure for 2001–02 excludes five members of staff transferred to the Department for Work and Pensions from both the press office and publicity division, as part of the Machinery of Government changes following the general election.

Decade for Human Rights Education

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she last reported to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on UK activities in the framework of the Decade for Human Rights Education. [40526]

Margaret Hodge: My officials contributed to a report compiled by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in July 2000. This specifically mentions the contribution citizenship education will make from September 2002 and, in particular, that pupils will be taught about human rights as part of the national curriculum.

Higher Education

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the impact that meeting matchfunding requirements for joint infrastructure fund and science research investment fund schemes has had on the financial health of relevant higher education institutions. [41748]

Margaret Hodge: The Joint Infrastructure Fund (JIF), which provided a total of £750 million for research infrastructure in science and technology, had no general requirement for matched funding. The Science Research Investment Fund (SRIF) is worth a total of £1 billion over 2002–03 and 2003–04, of which £600 million was allocated to higher education institutions in England by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). SRIF has a requirement that 25 per cent. of the overall cost of a project is met by external contributions, except where there are partnerships between higher education institutions. HEFCE monitors the financial health of higher education institutions and has no concerns about the financial health of any institution in relation to JIF and SRIF requirements.

The issue of science research infrastructure funding for the HE sector is being considered by the Cross Cutting Review of Science and Research.

Learning and Skills Council

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what analysis has been carried out by the Learning and Skills Council on the skills base in coalfield areas compared to the national average. [41822]

Margaret Hodge: This is a matter for the Learning and Skills Council. I have therefore asked John Harwood, the council's chief executive, to write to my hon. Friend with the information requested and to place a copy of his reply in the Library.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many learning and skills council headquarters are situated in coalfield constituencies. [41824]

Margaret Hodge: The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) national office is based in Coventry and operates through 47 local arms. There are local LSC offices close to coalfield constituencies at: Stoke-on-Trent, Derby, Nottingham, Sheffield, Middlesbrough, Newton Aycliffe, Gateshead and Cramlington. The most important aspect is that the LSC's programmes are accessible throughout their local areas. The actual location of the office has no bearing on the quality, delivery and availability of the services on offer.

Administrators

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many full-time equivalent administrators there are in each local education authority in the south-west of England. [41872]

Mr. Timms: My Department does not collect this information.

Connexions Service

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether the Connexions Service retains information relating to young people's sexual orientation. [42134]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* Information relating to a young person's sexual orientation would not normally be retained. The young person might raise the subject and, in this case, the information would be recorded and retained only if the young person and the personal adviser agreed that this would be appropriate.

Veterinary Science (Wales)

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what discussions she has had with the National Assembly for Wales concerning the establishment of a veterinary science department at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth; and if she will make a statement; [42672]

(2) what representations she has received on the absence of a veterinary department in universities in Wales; and if she will make a statement. [42673]

Margaret Hodge: The Secretary of State has received no representations on the absence of a veterinary department in universities in Wales and has had no discussion with the National Assembly for Wales about the establishment of a veterinary science department at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth. The creation of a veterinary department in Wales is a matter for the Welsh Assembly.

Debt Repayment

Mr. Hendrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how development costs relating to the Government's proposed scheme to repay the outstanding loans of certain newly qualified teachers will be funded. [43597]

Mr. Timms: Parliamentary approval for additional resources for this new service will be sought in a Supplementary Estimate for the Department for Education and Skills. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £518,000 will be met by repayable cash advances from the Contingencies Fund.

Child Protection Services

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what cross-departmental initiatives are being proposed to ensure co-ordination of children's services with special reference to child protection services; and if she will make a statement. [40119]

Mr. Denham: In their consultation document "Building a Strategy for Children and Young People", the Government are seeking views on the establishment of Children and Young People's Strategic Partnerships as a vehicle for coordinating planning activity for children's services. These partnerships would bring together the full breadth of partners and services across the voluntary, community, statutory and business sectors, which impact on the lives of children and young people.

Later this year, the findings from a multi-inspectorate inspection of children's safeguards will be published. The inspection is looking specifically at safeguards for children in eight local authority areas, including the effectiveness of Area Child Protection Committees. The findings from both of these exercises will be of assistance in determining the most effective ways of coordinating services, including services for child protection. Any consideration of the effectiveness of child protection services will need to take into account the findings of the inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbie, which is due to report later this year.

Bristol Education Authority (Grants)

Valerie Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the category and amounts of each grant which her Department has provided to Bristol education authority in the last two years. [42712]

Mr. Timms: The following table shows the Department's allocated grants to Bristol local education authority in 2000–01 and 2001–02.

£

	2000–01	*2001–02*
Standards Fund (recurrent)	8,731,729	11,278,051
School Standards Grant	2,060,000	4,320,000
Teachers Pay Reform Grants	1,799,088	2,751,598
Nursery Education Grant (3-year-olds)	1,077,307	1,312,978
Nursery Education Grant (4-year-olds)[1]	588,271	n/a
Special Education Needs Co-ordinators (Early Years)	n/a	21,800
Early Years Training	33,900	149,486
Childcare Grant	217,370	1,107,705
Neighbourhood Nursery Initiative[2]	n/a	1,907,700
School Budget Support Grant	380,388	n/a
Education Budget Support Grant	n/a	698,369
Education Action Zone Grant[3]	628,000	847,990
Capital Grants	9,680,000	9,536,000

[1] Grant was transferred to the SSA in 2001–02.

[2] Funding for the period 2001 to 2004.

[3] Funding made directly to the Education Action Zone in Bristol.

Notes:

Amounts are in cash terms.

2001–02 figures may be subject to change.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, how many teachers have applied for early retirement on ill health grounds in each year since 1996; how many *(a)* have been granted retirement on ill health, *(b)* have been refused and *(c)* are awaiting a decision on their application; how long the average turn around is from the Teachers Pension Agency receiving the application to notification of the decision; and how many applicants have died whilst waiting for a decision on their application. [41794]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is not readily available. I will write to my hon. Friend shortly and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

HEALTH

Children's Rights

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what revision he plans to undertake of the second report under the UN convention on children's rights published in 1999 before its examination by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in September. [35234]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

The UK is obliged under the convention to submit a report every five years on progress in implementing it. The last report was issued in 1999 and will be considered by the UN later this year. Given the time that has elapsed since the last report was submitted and the important changes that have taken place since then, we intend to publish later this spring a brief update on UK progress since 1999.

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which Ministers and officials will comprise the delegation representing the UK's Second report on the Implementation of the UN Convention on Children's Rights at its examination by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in September. [35232]

Mr. Denham *[holding answers 12 February and 4 March 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

The UN Special Session on Children in May will be an important opportunity for Government's across the world to re-affirm their commitment to improving the life chances of children and to review progress towards meeting that commitment. I plan to attend, subject to any parliamentary or other Government commitments.

Arrangements have not yet been finalised for the UN Committee's examination in September.

Beta Interferon

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the cost of beta interferon in other countries. [4564]

Ms Blears: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The Department has made no detailed assessment of the costs of beta-interferon treatment in other countries. Direct comparisons of prices of products of this type can be misleading because they are often supplied direct to hospitals at a discount, making published list prices less significant. Furthermore some countries include distribution costs and some aspects of care within the list price while others account for them separately.

MMR Vaccine

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the advice issued in 1988 on the administration of the MMR vaccine to children included a choice of single vaccines. [28790]

Yvette Cooper: I apologise [illegible] the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer her to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The combined MMR vaccine was introduced as a replacement to the single measles vaccine and parents were advised to get their children immunised with the combined MMR vaccination. Single measles vaccine remained available for a short transitional period until the manufacturers of the vaccine advised the Department of Health that they no longer intended to supply single measles vaccine to the UK. Rubella vaccine remained part of the school girls immunisation programme until 1994 when it was discontinued. However, rubella vaccine remains available for rubella susceptible women and health care workers. Single mumps vaccine has never been routinely available.

I have placed in the Library copies of the 1988 leaflet which gave advice to parents as well as the media pack and the letter to the NHS from the Chief Medical Officer and Chief Nursing Officer that gave details of the introduction of the combined MMR vaccine.

Beechwood Lodge, Basingstoke

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will instigate an inquiry into the circumstances of the deaths of Alexander Deas, Joseph Gildea, Tony Spong and Peter Swain, former residents of Beechwood Lodge, Basingstoke, and assess the performance of Hampshire Social Services and other agencies in providing care and support for former residents of Beechwood Lodge. [35060]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

We are not planning to instigate an inquiry. However, there is an internal inquiry being undertaken by Basingstoke and Deane borough council and Stonham Housing Association about the closure of this resource and the arrangements made to meet the needs of the residents.

Pesticide Residues

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans his Department has to set up a monitoring programme for pesticide residues in fruit supplied to the national school fruit scheme; and if he will publish the results of such monitoring. [36088]

Yvette Cooper: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer her to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The Department of Health has established a programme of testing for pesticide residues on fruit supplied as part of the National School Fruit Scheme and will make the results available in due course.

Measles

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the outbreak of measles centred on a school in Edgware. [36035]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 13 February 2002]:* I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

There have been six confirmed cases of measles in two families.

The local health authority has written to all parents to encourage MMR vaccination and has also contacted all the GPs of children at the school to promote immunisation. GPs have also been asked to ensure that they notify any suspected case to consultants in communicable disease control so that salivary testing can be arranged.

Autism

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what proportion of children who have been diagnosed with autism and born since 1990 are male; [37419]

(2) at what age autism is most commonly diagnosed. [37418]

Jacqui Smith: In December 2001 the Medical Research Council (MRC) published a comprehensive review of autism research, which provides an authoritative overview of the current state of knowledge on the epidemiology and causes of autism. The report, which was commissioned by the Department and included a wide range of experts and a "lay" group including autism charities and parents, is available on the MRC website at www.mrc.ac.uk. It provides a broad account of the best available information about autism spectrum disorders, including issues concerning diagnosis.

On age at diagnosis, the report says:

> "There are a number of studies reporting that the majority of parents are aware that something is not quite right in the months leading up to the second birthday. In a study of individuals aged two to over 40 years, the average age at diagnosis was five years for autism and 11 years for Asperger disorder. Age at diagnosis is likely, however, to vary greatly by region (according to services available), by year (with age at diagnosis falling in many places) and by the nature of the autistic spectrum disorder (with high-functioning, and perhaps severely intellectually impaired, people being diagnosed later)."

Information about the proportion of children born with autism since 1990 who are male is not available.

Haemophilia

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many haemophiliacs have not received compensation for blood borne diseases which they may have contracted as a result of blood transfusions; and in what circumstances claims are rejected; [37204]

(2) how many haemophiliacs have received compensation for blood borne diseases contracted as a result of blood transfusions; and what criteria are used to determine *(a)* entitlement and *(b)* the level of compensation. [37203]

Yvette Cooper: In 1988, a special payments scheme was established through the MacFarlane Trust for haemophilia patients infected with HIV before the technology existed to eliminate the virus from blood products. To date, 1,240 haemophilia patients have received payments through the trust.

Under the special payments scheme, each registrant received £20,000 in 1990 and a further sum in 1991, depending on their status:

Single adult—£43,500
Married adult without dependent children—£52,000
Adult with dependent children—£80,500
Children under 18—£41,000.

In addition, each registrant has received since 1 October 1990 regular payments, which range between £255 and £650 depending on whether partners are also infected and on the number of dependent children.

A copy of the MacFarlane Trust handbook, with the full details of the scheme, has been placed in the Library.

Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 1 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 630W, what the cost of refurbishing each ministerial private office was in each year since May 1997. [37892]

Ms Blears: No ministerial offices have been refurbished since May 1997. The only works undertaken in addition to the Department's general maintenance, repair and renewal programme in the four-year period ending 31 March 2001 were in 1997–98 and totalled £19,000.

Free Nursing Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the average number of reassessments each person who is in receipt of free nursing care will need before they die; [39170]

(2) what estimates have been made of the number of self-funders who will be eligible for free nursing care in *(a)* 2002–03, *(b)* 2003–04 and *(c)* 2004–05; [39168]

(3) what assessment he has made of the benefit reductions to self-funders who are eligible for the top banding of free nursing care. [39169]

Jacqui Smith: People in nursing homes receiving national health service funding towards their care by a registered nurse will not have any benefits that they were receiving reduced as a result, regardless of the band of care to which they are assigned.

The numbers would be expected to rise from around 42,000 in 2001 by some 500 to 600 per year over the next few years. However, this estimate does not take account of other factors, such as the preferences of older people and rising home ownership among older people, which may affect this.

Special Urgency Provisions

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how often the Department has applied the special urgency provisions in paragraph 22 of Circular 18/84 (Development by Government Departments) to a development by the department; and if he will make a statement. [38712]

Ms Blears: The Department has no records of having made use of these provisions.

These provisions do not apply to national health service bodies.

Foreign Nationals

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to restrict free NHS treatment to foreign nationals visiting the UK; [38430]

(2) what *(a)* regulations and *(b)* checks exist to prevent health tourists coming to the UK to take advantage of free NHS treatment; and what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the (i) regulations and (ii) checks. [38429]

Mr. Hutton: Conditions of entry to the United Kingdom are a matter for the Home Office. Once a person has arrived in the United Kingdom their basis of entitlement to national health service treatment will be determined by the general practitioner or hospital providing treatment.

Treatment in NHS hospitals is subject to the provisions of the National Health Service (Charges to Overseas Visitors) Regulations 1989, as amended [in 1991 (SI No: 438), 1994 (SI No:1535), 2000 (SI No: 602), 2000 (SI No: 909)]. These regulations place a duty on hospitals and other NHS bodies to establish the residence qualification of all patients.

The Department of Health has been reviewing the way in which these regulations are applied by NHS trusts and revised guidance is also being drafted. In addition posters and leaflets, drawing attention to the charging regulations, have been issued to all hospitals and GP surgeries and are being sent to British embassies abroad.

Volunteers

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many members of his staff in each of the past two years have been granted a day's paid leave to work as a volunteer; and if he will make a statement. [39737]

Ms Blears: The Department has a special leave policy that allows for paid leave for voluntary work.

As arrangements for paid leave are made locally between staff and their managers we do not centrally record information on the numbers of staff that undertake paid leave to work as a volunteer.

Staff are encouraged to consider training and learning opportunities, including voluntary work, as part of their career development in the Department.

Fair Trade

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether fair trade products are sold in his Department. [39837]

Ms Blears: The Department's catering contractor has a company policy to buy fair trade goods from its suppliers and has a commitment to support fair trade.

Communications

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what level of expenditure will be required to implement the report on communications as part of the shifting the balance of power within the NHS. [39953]

Ms Blears: Communication was one of 12 specific topics covered by "Shifting the Balance of Power: the Next Steps", published in January, including others such as public health, professional leadership and research and development. All of these issues are being followed up in different ways.

The communications guidance sets out a list of responsibilities including greater patient and public involvement and improved communications with staff. No additional resources have been earmarked to implement the guidance.

Many existing communications staff will be transferring to the new organisations and the national health service is expected to enhance its communications capabilities as part of good management—not at the expense of other aspects of patient care.

Primary Health Care Trusts

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average size is of the population of a primary health care trust; and what guidelines his Department has on the ideal size of a trust. [40066]

Mr. Hutton: There is no upper or lower size limit for primary care trusts (PCTs). The size and the configuration of PCTs remains a local decision, taken in the light of local circumstances. PCT size will depend on the services it wishes to provide for its population, the views of local stakeholders, the impact on other local organisations—including the boundary relationships with local authority partners, and whether the PCT is fit for purpose.

The average population size of all PCTs from April 2002 will be around 170,000.

Design Champion

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the role is of the Design Champion in his Department. [40352]

Ms Blears: The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Lord Hunt of Kings Heath), the Department's ministerial design champion is spearheading the implementation of the Department's design programme "Achieving Excellence in Healthcare Design". He will strive to maximise the benefits of our investment in the hospital building programme and ensure cross-Government working.

He will raise the profile of design excellence by addressing the service and industry. For example, he will be delivering the keynote speech at the Primary Healthcare Design conference in May this year.

He will also work closely with the national health service and architectural bodies, personally mentoring two projects, being Walsall Design Exemplar and South Manchester Primary Care Trust development.

Rail Journeys (Staff)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy that rail journeys undertaken by staff in his Department should ordinarily be on standard class tickets. [40447]

Ms Blears: Section 8 of the Civil Service Management Code requires Departments and agencies to ensure that staff use the most efficient and economic means of travel in the circumstances, taking into account any management benefit or the needs of staff with disabilities. In line with that, the Department's policy is that all staff should consider travelling standard class unless they have a special need related to their work.

Waiting Times (Greater London)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are waiting for *(a)* knee replacement, *(b)* cataract and *(c)* hernia operations in the Greater London area. [40514]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not held centrally. Data are collected only at consultant specialty level.

Trust Merger (Lancashire)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the printing of stationery for a single Trust Board at Chorley and South Ribble and Preston hospitals before the consultation period on the proposed merger has been completed; [40684]

(2) when he expects to announce the conclusion of the consultation on the proposed merger of Chorley and South Ribble NHS Trust and Preston Acute Hospital NHS Trust. [40683]

Ms Blears: An announcement on the proposed merger will be made in due course.

NHS Charges

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is towards social services departments being charged by the NHS for people who remain in hospital after being medically discharged. [42599]

Jacqui Smith: The current policy is that councils with social services responsibilities, are not charged by the national health service for people who remain in hospital after being medically discharged.

Digital Hearing Aids

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with suppliers of digital hearing aids to provide a cost effective expansion of the delivery of the technology to the deaf and hard of hearing. [36963]

Jacqui Smith [holding answer 25 February 2002]: Officials in the National Health Service Purchasing and Supply Agency have held discussions with a majority of suppliers of digital hearing aids, as part of a supplier evaluation exercise. The discussions centred around supply chain issues, production facilities, quality control, capacity and flexibility. No conclusions have yet been reached.

The Royal National Institute for the Deaf is managing the Modernising Hearing Aid Services project on behalf of the Department. The other bodies involved in this project are the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency, and the Medical Research Council/Institute of Hearing Research.

Special Advisers

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on how many occasions since 1 May 1997 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; and if he will list the total cost, including (i) travel, (ii) accommodation and (iii) subsistence allowance, for each occasion. [37979]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* Special advisers in the Department did not travel abroad in an official capacity in the period 1 April 2000 and 31 March 2001. Information relating to the period from May 1997 was given in the reply to the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) on 5 July 1999, *Official Report*, column 393W. All travel by special advisers is undertaken in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code, and the Civil Service Management Code.

Commission for Health Improvement

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to merge the National Care Standards Commission and the Commission for Health Improvement. [38677]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* We have said that there should be closer working, and over time, organisational integration between the National Care Standards Commission, the Commission for Health Improvement, and other bodies so that health and social care services are subject to a common set of standards whether they are provided by public, private or voluntary sector organisations.

We will take further steps at the earliest opportunity to rationalise the number of bodies inspecting and regulating health and social care.

Asthma

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the needs of children with asthma will be included in the National Service Framework for Children; and if he will make a statement. [38505]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* We are currently in the process of clarifying the precise scope of the Children's National Service Framework (NSF).

This NSF will look at all aspects of children's health and development; it will not consider every disease and condition but will concentrate on generic standards.

We have decided that the NSF should set out exemplars to show how national standards should apply in particular areas. We have already announced that autism will be one. Asthma will be another. Exemplars will be used to illustrate how the standards should be applied to ensure that services delivered to children are effective and meet their needs.

MRSA

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his latest assessment is of the number of deaths caused in hospitals in England and Wales last year by MRSA superbug infections. [39211]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1087W.

Liverpool Royal Children's Hospital

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will consider placing a memorial at Liverpool Royal Children's Hospital to children whose parts were retained. [39693]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer Friday 1 March 2002]:* We believe this matter should be discussed locally between hospital staff and families affected by organ retention.

However, the Retained Organs Commission are happy to discuss with parents any views on this that they have.

Correspondence

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the hon. Member for Broxbourne will receive a reply to her letters of 23 October 2001, 29 November 2001, 2 January and 26 February, relating to correspondence about Zyban from her constituent, Mr. Edward Weston of Broxbourne. [39435]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* A reply was sent on 1 March 2002.

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the change in costs incurred by the NHS as a result of the introduction of the climate change levy. [38587]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* The estimated cost of the climate change levy, paid by the national health service on national contracts, is almost £24.5 million inclusive of VAT.

The effects of the climate change levy were designed to be offset by a reduction in the employers national insurance contributions.

Orthodontists (Mid-Essex Hospital Trust)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many children and young people under the age of 18 years have been waiting for *(a)* an out-patient and *(b)* an in-patient appointment with an orthodontist in the Mid-Essex Hospital Trust area; [38356]

(2) how many children and young people under the age of 18 years have been waiting: *(a)* under six months, *(b)* over six months but under one year, *(c)* over one year but under 18 months, *(d)* over two years, *(e)* over three years and *(f)* over four years for an in-patient appointment with an orthodontist in the Mid-Essex Hospital Trust area; [38358]

(3) how many children and young people under the age of 18 years have been waiting: *(a)* under 13 weeks, *(b)* over 13 weeks and under one year, *(c)* over one year and *(d)* over two years or more for an out-patient appointment to see an orthodontist in the Mid-Essex Hospital Trust area. [38357]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* The total number of patients waiting for a first out-patient appointment for orthodontics at Mid-Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust is shown in the table.

Waiting times for first outpatient appointment, Mid-Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust

		Of those GP written referrals seen, the number who waited (in weeks)				*Patients still waiting*	
Quarter/Speciality	*Number of GP written referral requests seen*	*0 to 3*	*4 to 12*	*13 to 25*	*26 plus*	*Over 13 weeks*	*Over 26 weeks*
September 2001							
Orthodontics	37	8	4	8	17	65	4
December 2001							
Orthodontics	75	7	11	32	25	28	16

Note:
This information is not collected by age.
Source:
Department of Health form QM08

Medical Tests

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what facilities are available in *(a)* the Brighton Healthcare NHS Trust and *(b)* the Worthing-Southlands NHS Trust to administer (i) Indium III octreotide imaging, (ii) fasting gut hormone profile, (iii) plasma chromogranin test, and (iv) 5HIAA urine tests; and how many such tests have been carried out there in the last 12 months. [42213]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* Details of the facilities available on each site and the number of tests carried out are not collected centrally.

Overseas Treatment

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which commercial agencies have been used for matching NHS patients with treatment centres on the continent; and what the basis is of their remuneration. [42268]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* GerMedic GmBh, a German company, has arranged treatment for patients from the south-east pilot scheme in two German hospitals. The NHS has negotiated with the organisation an overall price for the packages of treatment needed by patients, from which GerMedic will receive remuneration. The prices are commercially confidential.

Air Ambulances

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the areas of the country *(a)* which have been supported by an air ambulance service in the last 12 months, *(b)* which are currently supported and *(c)* where services are planned in the near future. [41494]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 8 March 2002]:* There are currently 12 charitably funded air ambulance services operating in England. These are:

Cornwall
Kent
West Midlands
Devon
North East England
Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire
Essex
North West England
Thames Valley
Dorset and Somerset
West Yorkshire
East Anglia.

In addition, the helicopter emergency medical service covers London within the M25 motorway. There are also helicopter air ambulance services provided in the form of joint operations with the police in both Sussex and Wiltshire.

The charities are responsible for the number of aircraft provided.

Information Technology

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the budget for IT in the NHS in each of the last five years. [42290]

Yvette Cooper [holding answer 11 March 2002]: There is not a specific budget for information technology investment. The majority of costs are met from the baseline allocations made via health authorities. Health communities then make their investment decisions based on local priority. These investments are not aggregated at a national level but have been estimated at £800 million per year—this estimate includes a very broad spectrum of costs including maintenance of finance and other administrative systems.

Some new funds have been made available for specific targeted information management and technology developments—£113 million was hypothecated in 2001–02 and £82 million for 2002–03. These sums revert to baseline after one year.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what contracts his Department has placed in the last two years or expects to place in the next two years for IT improvements in the NHS; and with which providers. [42291]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* Separate figures for IT improvements are not collated. The Department and the national health service organise contracts in such a way as to obtain both value for money and maintain local choice where appropriate. There are national contracts for major national infrastructure, central catalogue arrangements for mature products, and local procurements for many specific items, which need to be integrated with existing systems.

Cancer Care

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to respond to the Audit Commission/CHI report on cancer care in England and Wales. [42285]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* The Audit Commission and Commission for Health Improvement report provides a useful baseline to assess cancer services at the time of the publication of the Cancer Plan. In December last year, we published The "NHS Cancer Plan—Making Progress", which sets out the action and achievements made in the first year following the publication of the NHS Cancer Plan.

Drug Addicts

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average waiting time for treatment for drug addicts in *(a)* the last 12 months and *(b)* each of the previous five years. [12279]

Ms Blears: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

We do not hold figures for the years in question.

However, the National Treatment Agency (NTA) set targets for waiting times in December 2001 (see table) and asked Drug Action Teams (DATS) to notify the NTA of their current situation and the targets they are setting for this year. NTA regional managers will be working with DATS to identify a realistic workplan for them to achieve the targets over the next two years. The NTA is planning to initiate work with the NHS modernisation agency to work with the worst performers to identify shortcomings in their systems, structures and approach which are inhibiting improvement.

The NTA will be issuing guidance in March 2002 to all DATs on setting maximum waiting times for services for 2002–03.

	Average baseline waiting time (weeks) 1999–2000[1]	*NTA Maximum waiting times (weeks) 2002–03*	*NTA Maximum waiting times (weeks) 2003–04*
In-patient detox	6.1	4	2
Community prescribing—specialist	10.2	6	3
Community prescribing—GPs	5	4	2
Structured counselling	4	4	2
Structured day care programme	3.3	4	3
Residential rehab	5.4	4	3

[1] Based on average waiting times reported by DATs in 1999–2000 annual reports.

Note:

1 week = five working days.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W, on parliamentary questions, what changes he has made to the system for ministerial responsibility for answering questions, with special reference to clearing the backlog of unanswered questions. [42908]

Mr. Milburn: Subject to a final audit against the *Official Report*, all outstanding questions that were due for reply by the Department before 14 February have now received responses. Since 5 March we have received 453 parliamentary questions and answered over 700.

The investigation into the circumstances of the apparent systematic falsification of the record management system in the parliamentary section is under way; and I will report to Parliament on the outcome as soon as possible.

Remuneration

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the number of individuals in his *(a)* Department, *(b)* related agencies and *(c)* related non-departmental public bodies whose annual remuneration including benefits in kind exceeded (i) £100,000 and (ii) £200,000 in each of the last four years. [26313]

Ms Blears: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The information requested about the Department and its agencies is shown in the table.

(i) £100,000

Year	*(a) Department*	*(b) Agencies*
1998	[1]—	[2]—
1999	23	[2]—
2000	27	1
2001	11	1

[1] Statistics at this level are not recorded.

[2] Separate figures for the agencies are not recorded.

Source:

Cabinet Office staff in post as at 1 April annual returns.

(ii) £200,000 plus current salaries do not exceed this level.

The information for non-departmental public bodies is available in the annual Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies", copies of which are placed in the Libraries of the House.

Temporary Nursing Staff

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he will take against those trusts which choose not to use NHS Professionals to provide their temporary nursing staff. [30769]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Current advice to trusts about the use of NHS Professionals is contained in HCS 2001–02.

Transplant Centre (Glasgow)

Ms Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions there have been between the NSCAG and their Scottish colleagues on the new transplant centre in Glasgow. [4379]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 20 July 2001]:* I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Discussions have taken place with the Scottish Executive and they are participating in the work to develop national standards for the service.

Specific decisions on the restart of the adult heart transplant surgery service at North Glasgow University Hospital NHS Trust are however a matter for the Scottish Executive Minister for Health and Community Care.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Small Businesses

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of registered small businesses were located in rural areas in each year since 1990; and how many of those small businesses were *(a)* farming-related and *(b)* non-farming related. [40817]

Alun Michael: The earliest year for which information is available is 1994. Information on 1995, 1996, 1998 and 1999 is not readily available.

1994—35 per cent. of all VAT registered businesses are in rural districts/unitaries

(a) 84,180 are in the agriculture and fishing sector (SIC1992[1])

(b) 400,315 are in other sectors.

1997—35 per cent. of all VAT registered businesses are in rural districts/unitaries

(a) 80,000 are in the agriculture and fishing sector (SIC1992[1])

(b) 391075 are in other sectors.

2000—34 per cent. of all VAT registered businesses are in rural districts/unitaries

(a) 76,995 are in the agriculture and fishing sector (SIC1992[1])

(b) 405,915 are in other sectors.

2001—34 per cent. of all VAT registered businesses are in rural districts/unitaries

(a) 76,906 are in the agriculture and fishing sector (SIC1992[1])

(b) 409,560 are in other sectors.

[1] Nearest Farming related category as listed in the Standard Industrial Classification 1992.

Notes:

1. Rural areas are defined as the rural local authority districts and unitary authorities as classified by the Rural Development Commission and currently used by the Countryside Agency.

2. As 99 per cent. of all businesses in rural areas are "small" i.e. less than 50 employees, the figure for all businesses is provided. Sources: District/Unitary data from IDBR via NOMIS Ward level data from ONS Neighbourhood Stats website from IDBR.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of people were employed in rural areas by registered small businesses in each year since 1990; and how many of those employed worked in *(a)* farming-related and *(b)* non-farming related jobs. [40816]

Alun Michael: The information requested is not available from DEFRA sources. We are consulting the Office for National Statistics to see whether any figures can be produced.

Refrigerators

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will provide further financial assistance for local authorities for the storage of fridges for the period January to March; [41361]

(2) when she will announce the financial assistance to be given to local authorities for the storage of refrigerators from April 2002; and if she will make a statement. [41360]

Mr. Meacher: In early December, I announced a payment of £6 million to cover local authority costs from January to March 2002. This payment will be made through the Revenue Support Grant for 2002/2003 and will be distributed to waste disposal authorities according to the Standard Spending Assessment Formula. We are monitoring the impact of the Regulation and assessing what further action is required.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's understanding of paragraph 14 of the recitals to EC Regulation 2037/2000 as agreed on 29 June 2000. [38871]

Mr. Meacher: Paragraph 14 of the recitals to EC Regulation 2037/2000 states,

> "Provision should be made for the recovery of used controlled substances, and to prevent leakages of controlled substances."

Article 16 of the Regulation deals with the,

> "Recovery of used controlled substances"

and Article 17, "Leakages of controlled substances".

According to the clarification finally given of Article 16(2), it applies to the recovery of controlled substances in domestic refrigeration, used either as the refrigerant or to blow the insulating foam. Thus, the UK's understanding is that the provision referred to in paragraph 14 of the recitals relates inter alia to recovery from refrigeration insulating foam.

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the statement of the Minister for the Environment of 31 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 414, how the figure of £6 million was reached. [35923]

Mr. Meacher: This figure was based on early estimates of the costs that local authorities would have for storage in the period January to March 2002. However, we are monitoring developments and shall continue to assess the impacts of the Regulation to determine what further action is required beyond that.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement about meetings between her Department and Commissioner Wallstrom on the impact of the directive on disposal of refrigerators. [40298]

Mr. Meacher: I discussed EC Regulation 2037/2000 and its impact on the disposal of refrigerators on the telephone with Commissioner Wallstrom on 4 February.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State discussed EC Regulation 2037/2000 and its impact on the disposal of refrigerators with Commissioner Wallstrom in the margins of the Environment Council meeting on 4 March.

There have been numerous meetings between my officials and those from the European Commission where this issue was discussed. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 6 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 989w.

Refrigerants

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will issue guidance to departmental procurement officers indicating the Government's preference for using not-in-kind refrigerants where they are safe and do not entail excessive costs. [41181]

Mr. Meacher: My officials recently reminded Departments of the Government's preference for using refrigerants with the lowest global warming potential. This guidance is currently available in publications such as the "Green Guide for Buyers" which is on the Greening

Government website. The advice is to avoid procuring products containing or manufactured with gaseous and non-gaseous substances that contribute to climate change by specifying more environmentally acceptable alternatives where it is safe, cost-effective and technically feasible to do so.

Community Service Fund

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how many applications have been made for assistance from the Community Service Fund, broken down by county, for the provision of *(a)* village shops and *(b)* pubs; [41445]

(2) how many payments have been made from the Community Service Fund, broken down by county, for the provision of *(a)* village shops and *(b)* pubs; and what the total sum has been paid out to date. [41444]

Alun Michael: This information is not currently available in the detail requested at county level. I understand that the information should be available through the Countryside Agency's website at the end of March.

The table gives the information immediately available on the number of applications, payments and projects by region.

Community services grant information

Region	*Number of applications*	*Number of projects*	*Number of payments*	*£*
North East	22	13	20	66,981,77
North West	31	9	10	80,815.6
Yorkshire and The Humber	35	18	25	82,758.54
East Midlands	54	25	26	103,241.63
West Midlands	55	42	75	276,073.05
East of England	62	49	55	258,508.91
South East and London	65	38	37	169,159,96
South West	76	39	51	189,291.01
Total	400	233	299	1,226,830.47

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what has been the change in combined heat and power output since the introduction of the new electricity trading arrangement. [42530]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* NETA is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. However, the report by the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets, *Report to DTI on the Review of the Initial Impact of NETA on Smaller Generators*, issued in August, indicated that the export of power from CHP has reduced by around 60% compared with a year previously. The Government have consulted on their response to Ofgem's report and will publish their response shortly.

Litter and Graffiti

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what statistics are collated to quantify the amount of *(a)* litter and *(b)* graffiti by local authority area. [42241]

Mr. Meacher: The Department does not collate statistics quantifying the amount of (a) litter and (b) graffiti by local authority area.

Drinking Water

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research has been undertaken in respect of access throughout the working day to drinking water. [42678]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

The Health and Safety Executive has not undertaken research in respect to the provision and access of drinking water throughout the day in the workplace.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Tourism

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the estimated cost to the tourist industry is of *(a)* the events of 11 September and *(b)* foot and mouth; and if she will make a statement. [38835]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* It is estimated that foot and mouth disease caused direct losses to the tourism industry during the months of March–August 2001 of between £2.7 billion and £3.2 billion in terms of value added.

Visitor expenditure from overseas residents fell by £1.8 billion in 2001, compared to 2000. This downturn is mainly attributable to the impact of foot and mouth disease, the events of 11 September and current global economic conditions.

The impact across the country has been mixed and there are signs that we are now in the early stages of a recovery.

English Heritage Sites

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what her estimate is of the annual cost to English Heritage of allowing free access to English Heritage sites for *(a)* under 16s and students, *(b)* pensioners and *(c)* all visitors; [39698]

(2) what her estimate is of the annual cost to *(a)* the Government and *(b)* English Heritage allowing free access to English Heritage sites for (i) under 16s and students, (ii) pensioners and (iii) all visitors. [39697]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* Some 70 per cent. of English Heritage sites are already free to all visitors. In addition, over half a million children, students and teachers enjoy free admission to English Heritage sites on education visits. English Heritage estimate that extending free admission to all groups of young people would cost them £650,000 a year. Following the publication of *The Historic Environment: A Force for Our Future*, we are considering, together with all relevant bodies, how the principle of free access for children might be extended to the historic environment sector. There are no plans at this stage to extend this to other groups of visitors.

Film Production

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the Government are doing to encourage film production companies in the north-east. [40631]

Dr. Howells: The Film Council has undertaken a major initiative to increase the level of film activity in England under its England-wide Strategy. The most significant development within the north-east in response has been the creation of Northern Film and Media (NFM), which has developed a strategy for film in the region for the first time. Whilst NFM is responsible for activity right across the spectrum of film—exhibition and education as well as production—it is already dedicating substantial effort to supporting production companies and film making within the region. NFM also acts as a conduit between film makers in the north-east and Film Council-run film production funds and is expected to increase the take-up of these funds by north-east companies and individuals. In the next financial year NFM will directly invest over £1.1 million in the development of people, companies and projects in the north-east.

External Contracts

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many contracts were let by her Department, and agencies for which she is responsible, with external companies and organisations in the calendar years *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000, *(e)* 2001 and *(f)* 2002 to the latest date for which figures are available, indicating the (i) names of the companies and organisations involved and (ii) remuneration made in each case. [40824]

Dr. Howells: The details listed relate to contracts arranged by the Department's procurement team. Details of contract value are not currently held on the team's database and this information could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. Contracts of amounts below £5,000 are usually handled by individual divisions and there is no central record kept of these contracts.

Year	
1997	North London Universith
	HeriotWatt University
	Francis Carnwath
	AEA Consultants
	Tourism Research Group
	North London University (CELTS)
	Civil Service College
	Gartner Group
	Hornagold and Hills
	Barclay Simpson
	Stephanie Greenwood
	A. A. Barnes
	Alliance Paper Group
	Euro Log Limited
	J. Walter Thompson
	Coopers and Lybrand
	Mary Bustin
	Anthony Pender
	Merrell Holberton
	Chessington CC
1998	Pay and Personnel Agy
	JFM Moving Services
	Throwers
	Courtauld Institute
	Portman Travel
	Richard Girling
	CLA
	Dr. P. Johnson
	Kroll Associates
	British Library RIC
	Hurst Interior Ctts
	Institute of Public Finance
	Saxton Bampfylde
	Dudley Stationery Ltd.
	Roy Tutty Associates
	Angela Jackson
	Belmont Press
	Yale Press Ltd.
	Ancient House Press
	Colibri Press Ltd.
	Taylor Bloxham
	BSC Print Ltd.
	SRU Ltd.
	COI
	Nelsons
	SCPR
	Neil Watson
	Goddard Kay Rogers
	North London University-CELTS
	Paul Passemard
	EC Harris
	EC Harris
	Sykes and Sons Ltd.
	CAPITA/RAS
	CAPITA/RAS
	Geoff Broom Assoc
	T/A Quest
	Insight
	Sara John
	Sky Photo Services
	CAPITA/RAS
	Rebecca Hawkins
	John Myerscough
	Policy Studies Institute
	Institute of Public Finance
	Paymaster
	Bill Wilkinson
	City Despatch Service
	Nightspeed Services
	Key Training Ltd.
	Key Training Ltd.
	Inde Theatre Council
	Jane Leighton
	Chessington CS
	Lloyds Bank Ltd.
	London Economics
	IPF Ltd.
	NB Selection Ltd.
	Leisure Futures Ltd.
	Rebecca Hawkins
1999	Chessington CS
	nmc & kay
	Computer Cab
	Durham University
	Olsberg/SPI
	Deloitte and Touche
	John Stephens

Year	
	Watts and Partners
	Josephine Sammons
	WSP
	CAG
	Sheffield Hallam Uni
	KPMG
	Durham University
	Sara John
	Mori
	British Screen Advisory Council
	Jura Consultants
	Neil Jackson
	Sheffield Hallam
	Brann Interactive
	Chessington
	Bridge Media
	Birkbeck College
	The Industrial Soc.
	The Development Partnership
	PKF
	PricewaterhouseCoopers
	A. J. Kearney
	Felicity Woolf
	Keith Spencer
	Lloyds TSB
	Children's Play Policy Forum
	SPRITO
	Children's Play Council
	National Children's Bureau
	Spectrum
	PWC
2000	Right Management
	Brian Farrington
	Arts Metier
	Royal Bank of Scotland
	BIP
	Cubitt Theobald
	ORC International
	Xerox (UK) Limited
	Pannel Kerr Forster
	David Beeton
	City University
	Domino Consultants
	The Learning Laboratory
2001	University of North London
	Durham University
	Charles Leadbeater
	Organica
	OLSWANG
	Stewart Signs
	DTZ Pieda
	Karolyn Cooper
	SRU Limited
	Eurest
	Tim Mason
	Business Strategies
	PUK
	ORC International
	R. Whish
	SRU Limited
	MORI
	D. Farr
	SE/YST/BST
	Euclid
	TSO
2002	Royal Mint
	University of Limerick
	Nottingham Trent University
	Robert Palmer
	Kingshurst Consulting Group

World Heritage Sites

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to increase Government support for United Kingdom World Heritage sites. [41429]

Dr. Howells: The Government take their responsibilities for this country's World Heritage Sites very seriously. This was reflected in the Government's statement, The Historic Environment: A Force for Our Future (AFFOF), published on 13 December 2001, which included a commitment to complete management plans for all of England's current World Heritage Sites by the end of this year. We plan to publish an implementation plan to take forward the AFFOF agenda, including this commitment, shortly.

AFFOF followed on from the publication on 12 December 2001 of a Green Paper on the effectiveness of the existing planning system. This Paper is providing an opportunity for representations to be made on how best to safeguard the future of our World Heritage Sites through that system.

The management teams at our World Heritage Sites are, of course, eligible to apply for English Heritage and heritage lottery fund grants in the usual way.

Golden Jubilee Medal

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (i) if she will make it her policy that The Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal should be awarded to serving members of the Prison Service; [41643]

(2) if she will list the categories of people who will be entitled to be awarded the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal; [41453]

(3) what plans she has to extend the categories of those who will be entitled to receive the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal; and if she will make a statement. [41454]

Tessa Jowell: The medal is being issued to serving members of the armed forces and Royal Fleet Auxiliary and to the '999' emergency services. Eligibility is restricted to those who completed a minimum of five years' reckonable service on 6 February 2002—the 50th anniversary of the Queen's Accession. The detailed criteria for distribution are being worked out. The Prison Service is not an emergency service and therefore does not come within the criteria for the issue of the medal.

Swimming Pools

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many swimming pools there are in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* coalfield constituencies. [41809]

Mr. Caborn: We have contacted the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and Sport England to request the information required, and I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as it is available, placing copies of my letter in the Libraries of both Houses.

Lottery Bids

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many lottery bids were made from coalfield constituencies in the last 12 months; and what the United Kingdom average is. [41826]

Mr. Caborn: Comprehensive information on applications for lottery grants is not centrally held at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). However, research commissioned from Sheffield Hallam University by DCMS and Lottery distributors, which was published in 1999, found that coalfield areas had generated 2.5 fewer applications per 10,000 people than the national average.

Royal Institute of British Architects

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when her Department last met the Royal Institute of British Architects; and if she will make a statement. [41961]

Dr. Howells: Ministers and officials in my Department hold regular meetings with the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for the Arts met officials from RIBA on 11 October 2001.

Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when her Department last met the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment; and if she will make a statement. [41955]

Dr. Howells: Ministers and officials in my Department hold regular meetings with the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE). On 30 January 2002, officials attended a formal meeting which included most Commissioners. Less formal meetings between officials and CABE have taken place since. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State last met the Chairman and Chief Executive of CABE on 20 November 2001.

New Radio Stations

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what regulations govern introduction of new radio stations. [41369]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* The framework for independent radio licensing is contained in the Broadcasting Acts of 1990 and 1996, which set out the broad procedures which the Radio Authority must follow when advertising and awarding licences. The legislation includes general provisions for the authority to do all it can to secure a range and diversity of services, calculated to appeal to a variety of tastes and interests. In awarding individual local licences, the authority also has to consider how far the service would broaden the range of programmes available in the area by way of independent local radio services and, in particular, serve tastes and interests not already provided for.

In respect of the BBC, they must apply to the Secretary of State for any new radio services. The Secretary of State will then assess any proposal against the criteria set out in the public service approvals guidelines. These include distinctiveness (in programming and content) of the proposed BBC service from those provided by other broadcasters.

Non-Governmental Organisations

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to his answer of 1 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1633W, on non-Governmental organisations, what information he collates on the funding of non-Governmental organisations by his Department, with particular reference to those operating on a regional level; and if he will make a statement. [42541]

Mr. Caborn: My Department funds a large number of non-departmental public bodies which may in turn decide to pass on some of their allocation to non-governmental organisations. This information is not collated by my Department.

DEFENCE

Training

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are to *(a)* increase the number of training areas and *(b)* sell training areas. [41315]

Dr. Moonie: There are no plans to increase the total number of training areas, although, where appropriate, purchases may be made to augment existing sites if suitable land comes on to the market. Equally, the Department will dispose of land for which it no longer has a use.

As a general policy the size of the defence estate is kept under constant review. The Ministry of Defence is currently undertaking a study to identify its core sites. This study includes the training areas.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military training areas there are in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* England and *(d)* Northern Ireland. [41314]

Dr. Moonie: Excluding areas that are ranges only, the numbers of military training areas in the UK are as follows:

(a) Scotland—18

(b) Wales—9

(c) England—95

(d) Northern Ireland—2.

The terms of the land holdings comprise a mixture of freehold, leasehold and training rights licences.

The number of areas which are ranges only are:

(a) Scotland—9

(b) Wales—7

(c) England—22

(d) Northern Ireland—2.

War Pensions

Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what he estimates the cost of war pensions will be in each of the next 20 years. [42218]

Dr. Moonie: The cost of war pensions can be estimated only up to Financial Year 2006–07 and is set out in the table.

	£ billion
2002–03	1.186
2003–04	1.148
2004–05	1.118
2005–06	1.085
2006–07	1.046

Gripen Aircraft

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what work has been done to evaluate the Gripen aircraft; when it was completed; if the result of the evaluation is available; and if he will make a statement. [36950]

Dr. Moonie: The Gripen aircraft was evaluated as part of a Combined Operational Effectiveness and Investment Appraisal (COEIA), completed in 1996, in connection with the Eurofighter programme. Whilst Gripen is an excellent aircraft, our studies confirmed that Eurofighter is the most cost-effective option to meet the Royal Air Force's currently assessed future needs. However, the detailed results of the COEIA contain classified information, the release of which could compromise Royal Air Force operations. I am therefore withholding it in accordance with Exemption 1 (Defence, Security, and International Relations) of the code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Rail Journeys (Staff)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the *(a)* percentage and number of rail journeys undertaken on first class tickets, *(b)* average cost of a first class journey by rail and *(c)* total cost of rail travel in each of the past four years broken down by grade of civil servant. [37510]

Dr. Moonie: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Halliburton Brown and Root (Contracts)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the contracts he has with Halliburton Brown and Root; and what the total value is of such contracts. [37828]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence currently has no direct contracts with Halliburton Brown and Root (HB&R). However, HB&R, as part of consortia, are involved in the ongoing contracts with Devonport Royal Dockyard Limited, and BRAMA, which runs the Multi-Activity Contract at RAF Valley for support Hawk Aircraft. HB&R also lead the FASTTRAX consortium which was awarded the £290 million Heavy Equipment Transporter Private Finance Initiative contract in December 2001.

Gender Pay Gap

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the extent of the gender pay gap amongst staff in his Department. [40999]

Dr. Moonie: In response to the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) Task Force 'Just Pay' report, the Government have committed Departments and agencies to review their pay systems by April 2003 and prepare action plans to close any equal pay gaps. The Cabinet Office issued comprehensive guidance in January 2002 to assist Departments and agencies in carrying out these reviews. This work is currently underway in the Ministry of Defence.

Multi-role Armoured Vehicles

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the *(a)* estimated total project cost of, *(b)* total expenditure to date and *(c)* planned expenditure in each of the next three years on the multi-role armoured vehicle project. [42258]

Dr. Moonie: The total estimated procurement cost of the multi-role armoured vehicle is expected to exceed £1 billion. Expenditure to date amounts to some £20 million. I am withholding the information requested on planned expenditure for each of the next three years in accordance with Exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Advanced Air-launched Anti-armour Weapon

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the *(a)* estimated total project cost, *(b)* total expenditure to date and *(c)* planned expenditure for each of the next three years on the advanced air-launched anti-armour weapon project. [42259]

Dr. Moonie: The advanced air-launched anti-armour weapon project, BRIMSTONE, has approval to spend up to £849 million, but is currently forecast to spend some £809 million. Expenditure to the end of January 2002 is some £360 million. I am withholding information about planned expenditure for each of the next three years in accordance with Exemption 2 of the code of Practice on Access to Government Information which relates to internal discussion and advice.

Balkans

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the security situation in *(a)* Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and *(b)* Kosovo. [41899]

Mr. Ingram: In Macedonia the continued implementation of the August 2001 Framework Agreement has greatly reduced the potential for violence. We continue to call on all sides to maintain the restraint that they have shown since the agreement was signed. The two NATO-led Task Forces, Harvest and Fox, have made major contributions to restoring stability in Macedonia.

The security situation in Kosovo is generally improving. But organised crime and extremism remain significant problems and tackling them is a high priority for both the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and KFOR. We continue to impress on leaders from all sections of the community the importance of tolerance and participation in the democratic process in Kosovo.

QinetiQ

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will investigate the running and control in QinetiQ in respect of weapon handling. [41879]

Dr. Moonie: There are currently no plans to investigate the running and control in QinetiQ in respect of weapon handling.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what interest the management of QinetiQ are permitted to hold in the shares of QinetiQ. [42346]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 11 March 2002]*: At present, all QinetiQ shares are held by the Ministry of Defence on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence.

Any future share scheme will be subject to our negotiations with potential strategic partners. The MOD is committed to ensuring all staff, not just senior management, can participate in such a scheme.

A key principle of any scheme will be to gear benefits to a rise in value of QinetiQ, thus incentivising staff, and increasing the value to the taxpayer.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assets, business and shareholdings not previously owned by the Government have been acquired by QinetiQ. [42336]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* Acquisitions by QinetiQ and other such operational activities are a matter for the company and I have therefore asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member directly.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what provisions exist to stop QinetiQ gaining access to classified information after it has been transferred to the private sector that is not available to other companies. [42349]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* Prior to the vesting of QinetiQ as a plc on 1 July 2001, an extensive exercise was undertaken to ensure that any Government-only information was removed from the company. QinetiQ will only be given access to that Government information necessary for it to carry out tasks for Ministry of Defence customers on same basis as any other MOD supplier.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements he proposes to maintain a separation of work conducted by the Defence Science and Technical laboratory on behalf of *(a)* QinetiQ following its transfer to the private sector and *(b)* his Department. [42342]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* A set of guidelines has been drawn up which define those circumstances in which Dstl will take on work other than for Government. These apply equally whether the work is done for QinetiQ or any other commercial organisation. Any work carried out for any non-government customer, including the supply of services, goods, products or intellectual property, will be undertaken only with the authority of Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many civil service jobs will be taken over by private consultants as a result of the transfer of parts of DERA to the private sector; how many public sector redundancies there will be; what the cost of those redundancies will be; and who will bear the costs of those redundancies. [42343]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* On 1 July 2001, 8,720 DERA staff transferred to QinetiQ plc, and therefore ceased at that point to be civil servants. No other transfers from the public sector are currently envisaged as part of the PPP.

No redundancies are directly attributable to the transfer of staff to QinetiQ.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who the shareholders in QinetiQ are; and who has rights to acquire shares in QinetiQ. [42345]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* All the shares in QinetiQ are held by Ministry of Defence, on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, and currently no one else has the right to acquire shares. We will go through competitive process to identify by summer 2002 a preferred bidder for a proportion of the equity in QinetiQ.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who are the main contractors bidding for work from *(a)* the Defence and Science Technical Laboratory and *(b)* QinetiQ. [42348]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* At any one time there is an extremely broad range of commercial concerns and academia bidding for work generated by the requirements of Dstl and QinetiQ. It is not possible to actually predict who will be bidding for work from the two organisations given the wide nature of work that they would be seeking to subcontract.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what he estimates will be the total proceeds of sale of shares in QinetiQ to the private sector. [42341]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* It is premature to speculate at this stage on the potential value of the QinetiQ transaction, and to do so would undermine our negotiating position with potential investors. Our priority is to seek to maximise value to the taxpayer.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are to allow former DERA properties to be developed for *(a)* housing and *(b)* commercial development outside the normal business of QinetiQ. [42347]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 22 May 2000, *Official Report*, columns 319W-20W, detailing DERA's future estate redevelopment and disposal plans. At that time four sites, Chertsey, Bromley (Aquilla), West Drayton and Farnborough Queens site, were identified by DERA as becoming surplus as part of their continuous estate review process. Prior to the vesting of QinetiQ on 1 July 2001 only Farnborough Queens site was sold, although part of the site is leased back by QinetiQ. Information relating to the business plans of QinetiQ plc is commercial in confidence and therefore details of current property redevelopment and disposal plans is being withheld under exemption 14 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are to issue shares in QinetiQ on a recognised stock exchange. [42350]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* As I announced on 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 313–14W, the initial transaction involves the sale of a proportion of the shares in QinetiQ to a strategic investor, with a flotation of the remaining stake as a possible exit route in two to four years. Detailed planning for this would obviously take place nearer the time.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* real estate properties and *(b)* intellectual property rights that the Government have transferred or plan to transfer to QinetiQ, indicating (i) how each property has been valued, (ii) if he plans to make such transfers at full market value and (iii) what arrangements there will be to claw back increases in the value of such properties. [42344]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* The information is as follows:

(a) The real estate properties transferred to QinetiQ are listed:

List of QinetiQ owned sites

Name	*Location*	*Size*[1]
Aberporth	Aberporth, Ceredigion	48
Alverstoke	Gosport, Hampshire	9
Angle	Pembrokeshire	19
Aquila	Bromley, Kent	10
Bedford Enclave	Clapham, Bedford	6
Bedford Tunnels	Clapham, Bedford	35
Bedford Twinwoods	Clapham, Bedford	21
Bincleaves	Weymouth, Dorset	3
Chertsey	Chertsey, Surrey	121
Christchurch[2]	Christchurch, Dorset	3
Cobbet Hill	Woking, Surrey	76
Farnborough Codey	Farnborough, Hampshire	149
Fort Halstead	Sevenoaks, Kent	135
Fraser	Eastney, Portsmouth, Hampshire	5
Funtington North	Chichester, West Sussex	16
Haslar[2]	Gosport, Hampshire	16
Hurn Main	Bournemouth, East Dorset	98
Hurn Barnsfield	Bournemouth, East Dorset	143
Hurn Saddleheath	Bournemouth, East Dorset	20
Hutton Moor	West Super Mare, North Somerset	6
Malvern Main Site	Malvern, Worcester	28
Malvern Science Park	Malvern, Worcester	5
Pershore	Throckmorton, Worcester	110
Portsdown LBTS	Portsmouth, Hampshire	11
Pyestock North	Farnborough, Hampshire	53
Pyestock South	Farnborough, Hampshire	34
West Drayton	Heathrow, Middlesex	2

[1] Approximate hectares

[2] These sites are a mixture of freehold and leased land.

Note:

Sizes are approximate and have been rounded.

In addition QinetiQ are leaseholders at a number of other sites.

(i) GVA Grimley, an independent professional valuation company, were engaged by DERA to perform a valuation exercise to determine the "fair value" of the property portfolio as at 30 June 2001. The methodology used for the valuation was:

(a) Non-specialsed properties—existing use value

(b) Specialised properties—depreciated replacement cost

(c) Properties surplus to requirements—open market value

(d) Properties held as investment—open market value.

(ii) All properties were transferred to QinetiQ at the values calculated by GVA Grimley using the most appropriate methodology, as outlined in (i).

(iii) All sites where freehold or leasehold title has transferred to QinetiQ are subject to a clawback arrangement contractually agreed with the MOD. This limits QinetiQ's ability to make abnormal profits on disposal. The clawback agreement was based on the valuations conducted by GVA Grimley in 2001, with an allowance for inflation over the 12-year period of the agreement. It provides for MOD to share a proportion of any additional receipts above this value; this proportion starts at 50 per cent. and decreases gradually over the life of the agreement.

This clawback agreement provides an appropriate balance between sharing future benefits from estate sales and incentivising the company to manage its assets efficiently.

(b) Due to the volume involved, it is not possible to list all the Intellectual Property (IP) transferred to QinetiQ (e.g. over 3,000 patents that have been assigned to the company).

The basic principal adopted was that QinetiQ should be put in the same position as any other defence contractor, i.e. where IP had been generated within that part of DERA that was to become QinetiQ then QinetiQ should own the IPR. As with the rest of industry, MOD retains free user rights where public money was used to create the IP.

(i) and (ii) There was no valuation attributed to the IP at vesting as value will be realised within the value of future sales of MOD's shareholdings.

(iii) IP clawback provision has not been provided in this PPP. This mirrors MOD policy, which is not to include any form of levy agreement when letting contracts for research and technology with other parts of industry, the reason for this being that in contrast to equipment it is virtually impossible to trace the research and technology that may have been used to generate future revenue. As a significant shareholder in QinetiQ for the next few years, we believe that the freedom and encouragement to exploit results commercially represents better overall value for money than pursuing a clawback arrangement where the extent of bureaucracy would be great and the potential returns difficult to obtain.

Missiles

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the safety rules are for the use of missiles on beach ranges. [41876]

Dr. Moonie: All Ministry of Defence owned ranges operate under the regulatory system laid down in Joint Service Publication (JSP) 403. Each range will have a Supervising Authority that licenses the activities on the range and carries out regular inspections to ensure compliance with the current regulations.

Each range has a set of Standing Operating Procedures that govern the implementation of the approved safety procedures for the firing of specified missiles on the range.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will hold an inquiry into the loss of missiles in the Bristol Channel. [41877]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence's Chief Inspector of Explosives is to conduct an internal Board of Inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the loss of a pallet of munitions prepared for destruction at St. Thomas Head, Weston-super-Mare.

Porton Down

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the use of the London Underground to carry out experiments on the release of substances originating from Porton Down; and if he will categorise those carried out. [41979]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* In 1963 and 1964 the former Microbiological Research Establishment at Porton Down carried out two defence trials in the London Underground to assess the risk from biological warfare.

These trials involved dropping packages containing simulants for biological warfare agents from moving trains and then assessing how far they travelled and how long they survived.

These defensive sabotage trials were carried out with the knowledge of the relevant Ministers of the day, the London Underground and the oversight of the Biological Research Advisory Board. The reports of the trials have been in the Public Record Office for several years and have been widely reported in the media.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the experiments conducted on the spread of bacterial spores by Porton Down; [41976]

(2) how many experiments have been conducted by the Ministry of Defence into freeze-dried spores of the microbe Bacillus globigii; and of those, how many involved exposure of the microbe to the general public. [41977]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* The Biology Department was formed at Porton Down in 1940 and since then there has been a continuous interest in the spread of micro-organisms, of which bacterial spores are the most hardy.

Throughout the last 60 years there have been numerous experiments to assess the spread and transmission of bacterial spores. Many of these have been undertaken in the laboratory, some on the Porton Range, at sea and in other open areas.

There is no definitive list of experiments and trials undertaken by the Ministry of Defence, Porton Down over the years to evaluate the spread of bacterial spores. The research undertaken at Porton Down to improve the UK's understanding of this issue is collated in the following report 'BW and BW Defence Field Trials Conducted by the UK: 1940–1979' by GB Carter. I will place a copy in the Library of the House.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Government plans to release papers, previously due for release in 1995, held by the Public Records Office concerning experiments into Bacillus globigii spores; and if he will make a statement. [41978]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* Since the formation of the Biology Department at Porton Down in 1940 there have been numerous experiments to assess the spread and transmission of bacterial spores, many of which have involved the use of Bacillus globigii.

At present staff are unable to identify the papers to which the hon. Member is referring. However, if he would like to elaborate on his request I will look into the matter.

Defence Evaluation and Research Agency

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from the US Administration concerning the transfer of parts of DERA to the private sector; what concerns they raised; and how they will be resolved. [42339]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* As part of the DERA PPP consultation process, we had extensive contacts with and received representations from a wide range of organisations including the US and other Allies. I refer the hon. Member to the answers given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence to the hon. Members for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor) on 6 March 2000, *Official Report*, column 484W, for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) on 18 May 2000, *Official Report*, column 205W) and for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) on 22 June 2000, *Official Report*, column 241W, detailing these representations.

On the completion of the Consultation exercise, the US indicated that they welcomed the changes made in response to their representations and those of other interested parties. Mr. Rudy de Leon, US Deputy Secretary for Defense, said

> "I welcome the new proposal, which I believe to be constructive and workable. Inevitably there are a number of detailed issues to be resolved during implementation, but I am confident that these can be addressed satisfactorily."

During the separation process, we continued to work closely with all our international partners to ensure that they had confidence that the Ministry of Defence would be able to meet all of its obligations under international collaborative agreements. The arrangements put in place at the vesting of QinetiQ as a Plc on 1 July 2001 to ensure that international collaboration continued, are operating successfully.

GR7 Aircraft

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost is of upgrading GR7 aircraft with new engines, electronics and weapons; whether the upgrade of GR7 includes marinisation of the aircraft; what the cost of marinisation programme will be; how many GR7 aircraft will marinised; and when the marinised Harriers will be in service. [41887]

Mr. Ingram: The Harrier GR7 fleet will undergo two upgrade programmes over the next few years. First, 30 aircraft will be upgraded to GR7a standard by the integration of the Pegasus Mk107 engine. This will provide improved performance, particularly for carrier borne operation. This programme is due to be completed by the end of 2005 at a total cost of approximately £150 million.

Secondly, all Harrier GR7 and GR7a aircraft will receive avionics and weapons upgrades to provide the aircraft with a much improved capability, in particular the ability to deliver the new generation of smart weapons that are about to enter service. These aircraft will be designated Harrier GR9 and GR9a. Although the detailed content of the GR9 programme and the associated procurement strategy have yet to be finalised, it is estimated that the total cost will be approximately £330 million, of which 75% relates to routine maintenance and modification work being undertaken concurrently with the upgrade to minimise costs.

RAF Harrier GR7 aircraft have already successfully taken part in carrier operations. Studies to determine what further marinisation modifications will be necessary are being undertaken in addition to the Harrier GR9 upgrade programme.

Explosives

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (i) if he will make a statement on the strategic implications of the decision by BAE to move manufacture of explosives abroad; [41818]

(2) what his policy is on buying British made explosives for ordnance to be used on the battle field; [41815]

(3) what powers he has to compel the continuation of explosive manufacturing in the United Kingdom. [41817]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 656W.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Secondments

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many staff were seconded between *(a)* PWC Consulting and PricewaterhouseCooper, *(b)* Ernst & Young, *(c)* Deloitte & Touche, *(d)* KPMG and *(e)* Andersen and his Department in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) April 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available. [33873]

Mr. MacShane: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1266w.

Advertising

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the cost was of media advertising in each of the past five parliamentary Sessions including the current Session, for his Department in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Northern Ireland; and for the last two parliamentary Sessions and the current parliamentary Session, what the media advertising expenditure was per month in (i) England, (ii) Wales and (iii) Northern Ireland. [37407]

Mr. MacShane: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) on 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 627W.

Information on spend per month or a breakdown between countries could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Bieh, Sudan

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of the explosions at a UN World Food Programme compound in Bieh, Sudan on 21 February. [39552]

Mr. MacShane: We were deeply concerned about the attack by a Sudanese Government helicopter on an area next to a World Food Programme feeding station last month. It is our understanding that 18 people were killed and several others injured. This attack is particularly distressing at a time when hopes for peace in Sudan have been growing. Following the incident we made representations at a high level of the Sudanese Government, both in Khartoum and London, and asked the Sudanese Government for a full explanation.

We were pleased to hear that following pressure from the US and UK, the Government of Sudan have signed an agreement with the US on monitoring of reports of attacks on civilians. We hope that this agreement will help to prevent such incidents happening in the future.

We shall intensify our efforts to press all parties to the conflict on the need for a swift negotiated settlement in order to end the suffering caused by so many years of civil war.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the annual budget for communications activities, including press, public relations, marketing and internal communications, was for his Department for each financial year from 1997–98 to 2001–02. [39917]

Mr. MacShane: Neither communications activities nor the sub-headings listed have individual budgets specifically allocated to them within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office accounting system. However it is possible to identify and extract expenditure on some of the listed categories through other budgets.

Foreign and Commonwealth Office expenditure on communications activities for financial years (FYs) 1997–98 to 2001–02 was as follows:

£

Financial years	*Expenditure on communications activities*
1997–98	13,169,205
1998–99	11,565,330
1999–2000	12,788,979
2000–01	13,019,789
2001–02[1]	11,578,385

[1] Estimated

Note:

The figures include UK expenditure only, on the following categories: press, public relations, marketing and internal communications; including overseas expenditure could be undertaken only at disproportionate cost. 2001–02 is the current financial year, an estimating final expenditure figure is provided.

Overseas Territories (US Leases)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which of the territories leased for 99 years to the US Administration during World War II are due to be handed back at the end of this lease. [40669]

Mr. Bradshaw: In what are now the Overseas Territories, there is one: the 1941 lease agreement regarding the former US bases on Bermuda. We are in discussion with the US Government about early termination of this agreement, following which the land in question will be available for alternative use by the Bermuda authorities.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what *(a)* celebrations and *(b)* visits are taking place in connection with the 20th Anniversary of the Falklands War. [40668]

Mr. MacShane: Events are planned on the Falkland Islands for the 20th Anniversary of the Liberation of the Falklands on 14 June and for Remembrance Sunday on 10 November in a spirit of remembrance and reconciliation rather than celebration.

The Secretary of State for Defence will visit the Falklands in March. The Minister for the armed forces will attend the June Liberation Day events as the representative of her Majesty's Government and his Royal Highness the Duke of York will attend the Remembrance Day events in November.

Accountancy Contracts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the contracts agreed by his Department with the five largest accountancy firms since May 1997; and what was the total value of contracts with each. [42109]

Mr. MacShane: Since May 1997 contracts have been awarded in connection with the projects listed below:

Ernst and Young

PFI construction of new Embassy in Berlin;

Development of FCO Telecommunications Network;

Advice on Vat issues (2 contracts).

The total value of these contracts is £118,000

KPMG

Development and implementation of FCO's Information and Communications Technology Strategy;

Development of PRISM, FCO's new financial and human resource system;

Forecasting income from Consular Fees;

Review of Financial Regulations in Overseas Territories.

The total value of these contracts is £8.1 million.

Pricewaterhouse Coopers

FCO Telecommunications Network

The value of this contract is £813,000.

No contracts were awarded to Deloitte and Touche or Andersen during this period.

Tibet

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of China regarding the prison sentence imposed on Ngawang Sangdrol for protesting against the occupation of Tibet; and if he will make a statement. [41910]

Mr. MacShane: We raised the case of Ngawang Sandrol with the Chinese authorities at the seventh round of the UK/China Human Rights Dialogue held in London on 19–21 November.

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will press the Government of China to disclose the whereabouts of the XIth Panchen Lama. [41911]

Mr. MacShane: Yes.

European Union

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the development of the open method of coordination in the European Union. [42714]

Peter Hain: The Government see the open method of co-ordination as a useful element in the 'toolbox' of instruments for implementation of policy, to be applied on a case-by-case basis.

In areas where there is little scope for legislative solutions, it can add value at a European level in the form of co-operation, benchmarking and the exchange of best practice. In others the open method may complement a programme-based and legislative approach.

Colombia

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the reports on Colombia presented to the Human Rights Commission by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Human Rights Defenders and the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women. [42675]

Mr. MacShane: We welcome and support the presentation to the UN Commission on Human Rights of the reports on Colombia by Hina Jilani and Radhika Cooramaswamy, and will be looking at them closely. These reports and others will be taken carefully into account in the preparation of an EU chairman's statement on the situation in Colombia at the forthcoming 58th session of the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to monitor the actions of the self-defence forces in Colombia against human rights organisations; and if he will make a statement. [42676]

Mr. MacShane: The British embassy in Bogota continues to monitor the situation in Colombia closely, and has regular meetings with human rights NGOs to discuss their concerns about the activities of paramilitary self-defence forces.

As the EU make clear in its statement of 22 February following the termination of the demilitarised zone, we reject and condemn the practice of kidnapping, extortion and other crimes committed by armed groups in Colombia.

There can be no tolerance of the campaigns of violence and intimidation by any of the illegally armed groups in Colombia. Their murder and kidnap of elected politicians, trade union leaders, human rights defenders, aid workers and others is unacceptable. They must give up violence and the impunity of those who are involved in supporting their activities must be ended.

I stressed these points when I spoke to Gustavo Bell, Colombian Vice-President and Minister for Defence, on 7 March.

Madagascar

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what assessment he has made of the transparency and fairness of the presidential elections held in Madagascar on 16 December 2001; [41847]

(2) what assessment he has made of the *(a)* economic and *(b)* political impact of the recent violence and instability in Madagascar on neighbouring countries on the African mainland; [41848]

(3) what contacts the Government have had since 16 December 2001 with Mr. Ravalomanana, presidential candidate in the Madagascan elections of December 2001; [41849]

(4) if he will list, by date, visits by Ministers from his Department to Madagascar since 1 January 2000; and what plans Ministers from his Department have to visit Madagascar in 2002; [41850]

(5) what Her Majesty's Government's policy is towards the situation in Madagascar; and if he will make a statement; [41851]

(6) what discussions the Government have had with President Ratsiraka since 16 December 2001 regarding the protests and violence in Madagascar. [41852]

Mr. MacShane: The UK, along with its EU partners, the US, the Organisation of African Unity and the UN, continues to encourage the two parties in Madagascar, at both local and international level, to find a common solution to the current impasse over the result of the December presidential election. The UK ambassador in Antananarivo, along with other resident ambassadors, is following events closely and maintaining close contact with representatives of the two sides.

In their draft report on the presidential election, and in a series of communiqués, the consortium of independent election observers (which the UK part-funded) raised questions about the conduct of the elections, including their organisation, as well as their transparency and fairness. Because of the current volatile political situation, there has been no opportunity to examine these claims.

The crisis in Madagascar has had no impact to date on its neighbouring countries, although there is growing concern among both regional and international investors about the long-term impact on the Madagascan economy of the ongoing general strike. There were no UK ministerial visits to Madagascar in either 2000 or 2001, and there are no plans at present for visits during 2002.

Publicity Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the total real terms expenditure of his Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies on publicity in each of the years *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01 and *(e)* 2001–02 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole of the present year; and if he will break these figures down to indicate expenditure on (A) advertising and (B) press and public relations. [36171]

Mr. MacShane: The separately identifiable expenditure by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on the categories listed by the hon. Member was:

Expenditure on each category[1]

£

Year	*Advertising*	*Press and public relations*	*Total*
1997–98	59,391	—	59,391
1998–99	1,101,033	16,844	1,117,877
1999–2000	56,877	—	56,877
2000–01	53,249	223,024	276,273
2000–02[2]	49,581	65,142	114,723

[1] In real terms

[2] To date

The figures provided represent the expenditure of the FCO and not of Wilton Park, our only agency, or our 10 NDPBs; these details are not held centrally and could not therefore be ascertained without disproportionate effort and cost.

The Government are committed to using only cost effective channels to deliver the publicity necessary to support policy implementation. Paid advertising is only resorted to after careful consideration of the cost benefits. The figures in the table include expenditure on consular publicity but exclude expenditure on advertising for recruitment; identifying this expenditure separately would entail disproportionate effort and cost. The advertising figure for 1998–99 includes £1 million spent on a consular advertising campaign in the run-up to the World Cup 1998 in France. The figures for press and public relations include expenditure on public relations firms as part of FCO information campaigns. In addition to the expenditure identified, there was minor additional expenditure in London and overseas in the years concerned. This cannot be ascertained without disproportionate effort and cost.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Domestic Violence

Joan Ryan: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what has been the impact of the Children Act Sub-committee 'Guidelines for Good Practice on Parental Contact in Cases Where There Has Been Domestic Violence'. [43801]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Lord Chancellor's Department promulga[illegible] Guidelines during Spring 2001. A survey was carried [illegible] the late autumn 2001 on the use and effectiveness of the [illegible]es. This has shown that they have been broadly well received and have resulted in a generally heightened focus on domestic violence issues. However, there are indications that awareness of the guidelines is patchy, and that more contact centres are needed. The Department is taking steps to address these issues. Copies of the analysis of the survey, including the action to be taken, have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Census 1901

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make a statement about the selection process employed to choose the server engine for the 1901 Census on-line service. [38539]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The 1901 Census Online Service contract was awarded by the Public Record Office to QinetiQ Ltd., after a full competitive tendering exercise. QinetiQ and its sub-contractors selected the server engine based on robustness and scalability.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the ISP bandwidth of the 1901 Census website was at the time it was suspended; and what the planned ISP bandwidth is after the programme of enhancements has been completed. [38556]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The original ISP bandwidth was shared between the Census Online service and other BT Ignite customers. QinetiQ Ltd. advise that a dedicated bandwidth (currently configured at 20Mbit/sec plus burst capability) is now in place which will avoid interference with other ISP customers when the service is re-launched onto general internet access.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if all the errors detected in transcription during the checking of the computer transcriptions of the 1901 Census returns were corrected; and if she will make a statement. [38547]

Ms Rosie Winterton: All errors detected in transcription during the editing of the computer transcriptions of the 1901 Census returns were corrected. The Census online system provides a facility through which any undetected errors may be notified to QinetiQ and, following verification by the Public Record Office, changes will be applied to the database periodically.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proportion of the pages of the computerised transcriptions of the 1901 Census returns were checked for errors. [38546]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Public Record Office and QinetiQ carried out independent quality assurance checks on a proportion of the electronic pages (images) on all reels of transcribed data. Each reel of data was subject to two checks. A 10 per cent. sample was checked for functionality and data integrity. If it was below the accuracy rate required it was reworked. A separate 2 per cent. sample of each reel was then checked for accuracy of transcription. If the reel failed this test, then the whole reel was checked. Out of 2,152 reels of data, 85 per cent. were subject to this full check.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the budget allocated to cover the costs of checking the transcriptions onto computer of the 1901 Census returns. [38545]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The major proportion of the work of checking the transcriptions of the 1901 census returns was undertaken by the PRO. £350,000 was allocated by the PRO to quality assure the transcription process, with the remaining quality assurance costs being met by QinetiQ Ltd.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what budget was allocated for the work of transcribing the 1901 Census returns on to computer. [38542]

Ms Rosie Winterton: No budget was allocated by the PRO for the work of transcribing the 1901 Census returns on to computer. The cost of transcription was met by QinetiQ Ltd under the terms of its contract. £350,000 was allocated by the PRO to quality assure the transcription process with the remaining quality assurance costs being met by QinetiQ Ltd.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department who carried out the work of transcribing the 1901 Census reforms on to computer; how these people were selected; and if she will make a statement. [38541]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The QinetiQ Ltd team, including Enterprise and Supply Services (ESS), was formed in the initial stages of tendering for the 1901 Census project. The team was formed by QinetiQ from parties considered to be able to offer the best quality and value for money. ESS undertook the transcription of the 1901 Census returns. However to complete the transcription work to the standards and timescales required it became clear that additional resources needed to be employed. A proportion of this work was sub-contracted by ESS, after full competitive tendering, to commercial data input companies based in India, Sri Lanka (Hays Document Management) and in the UK (Atos Origin). All transcription was quality assessed by the Public Record Office and edited where appropriate regardless of where it had been transcribed.

Accountancy Contracts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the contracts agreed by his Department with the five largest accountancy firms since May 1997; and what was the total value of contracts with each. [42100]

Mr. Wills: The Lord Chancellor's Department replies on behalf of its agencies, the Court Service and the Public Guardianship Office, and the Lord Chancellor's other departments, the Northern Ireland Court Service, HM Land Registry and the Public Records Office. The information requested is as follows:

	Number of contracts	*£*
PricewaterhouseCoopers		
1997–98	3	460,056
1998–99	9	2,193,703
1999–2000	3	360,693
2000–01	4	65,812
2001[1]	3	73,717

	Number of contracts	£
Ernst and Young		
1997–98	nil	—
1998–99	1	227,588
1999–2000	1	29,375
2000–01	2	481,749
2001[1]	3	301,720
Deloitte and Touche		
1997–98	nil	—
1998–99	1	231,475
1999–2000	4	77,546
2000–01	4	193,778
2001[1]	11	905,050
KPMG		
1997–98	3	340,426
1998–99	1	1,433
1999–2000	3	56,025
2000–01	1	4,183
2001[1]	1	29,375
Andersen[2]	—	—

[1] To date.

[2] No contracts have been let during the time period stated.

These contracts were primarily let in relation to financial, technical and legal advice for PFI projects, business management advice for major projects and advice on IT requirements.

The Northern Ireland Court Service could not produce figures for 1997–98, as the information is not stored on their current accounting system.

Laeken Summit

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make a statement on her policy towards paragraph 43 of the Laeken conclusions, on a European network for training magistrates. [39644]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Council document referred to was a discussion document prepared by the Belgian presidency in November 2001. It has been superseded by the presidency conclusions of the European Council in Laeken held on 14 and 15 December 2001.

The European judicial training network (EJTN) is a network of the national institutions responsible for judicial training in the member states of the European Union, set up by the institutions themselves. The Judicial Studies Board (which has responsibility for the training of judges in England and Wales) has been a member since its establishment in October 2000.

The Laeken conclusions refer to a proposal made by the French Government in December 2000 to put the network on a legal footing, enabling it to receive financial and administrative support from the European Commission. No discussions of this proposal are scheduled at present.

Private Offices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the running costs were of *(a)* her Ministers' private offices, separately identifying expenditure on staff and *(b)* her Department in each year from May 1997 to the nearest date for which the information is available. [40978]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Expenditure on running costs for Ministers' private offices at the Lord Chancellor's Department, and for the whole Department over the periods requested is set out in the table.

Total admin. expenditure—cash £000

	Ministers' private offices	Lord Chancellor's Department
1997–98[1]	0	0
1998–99	1,055	454,525
1999–2000	1,257	498,744
2000–01	1,585	477,948
January 2001–02	1,292	395,541

[1] Data not readily available without disproportionate cost

Gravesend County Court

Mr. Pond: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many fee exemptions and remissions were issued by Gravesend county court in each six-month period beginning from January 1999. [41795]

Mr. Wills: Figures concerning the numbers of applications for fee exemption and remission are collected as a single figure and are provided in the table.

Applications for fee exemption/remission made at Gravesend County Court during the selected periods during

Period	Number of applications
January-June 1999	46
July-December 1999	91
January-June 2000	64
July-December 2000	70
January-June 2001	89
July-December 2001	91

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 14 March 2002

DEFENCE

Depleted Uranium

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans his Department has for further research into depleted uranium; and if he will make a statement. [44011]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has funded extensive research into DU munitions over many years. This work has been complemented by studies on the health and environmental consequences of the testing, development and battlefield use of DU munitions carried out by a range of governmental and non-governmental bodies in the UK and overseas. These studies, and the Royal Society's report, all indicate that the health risks associated with the battlefield use of DU are minimal, other than in a small number of very specific circumstances.

Nevertheless, there are a number of areas where we believe that further research is desirable to enhance the database on which to make judgments weighing the potential loss of life arising from not using DU munitions in battle against any potential longer term impact on human health and the environment resulting from its use. Some research will aid MOD in any future test-range decommissioning.

We therefore propose to carry out a programme of further research, which has been reviewed by the Royal Society, the Medical Research Council and the Natural Environment Research Council. We have given veterans' representatives early sight of the programme. The full details of our proposals have been placed in the Library of the House. They have also been published on the MOD's website.

Much of the work is in line with the recommendations of the Royal Society's report. In particular, we propose to conduct an epidemiological study to identify any links between exposure to DU and ill health, and a critical review of literature relating to the effects of DU inhalation on the pulmonary lymph nodes. We also intend to study the ways in which DU is transported from the point of introduction into the environment to the point at which it has the potential to affect the health of plant, animal or human life. Furthermore, we have already begun research into the corrosion and dissolution rates of DU in typical corrosion environments and in controlled laboratory studies. We intend to consider a range of soil types and profiles and marine environments in this work.

In addition, we propose to carry out research into the operational role of DU munitions and consider alternative penetrator materials. We aim to conduct a radiochemical analysis of DU rounds and examine contamination in the barrels used to fire DU round. Further to this, we aim to review and address work being conducted by others on biokinetic modelling related to uranic materials.

These research activities are in addition to work that MOD is already undertaking. We have set up the independent Depleted Uranium Oversight Board, which includes independent members of the scientific community and veterans' representatives as well as MOD staff and is now overseeing the programme of work to devise a valid test for uranium isotopes in urine and a methodology for a voluntary DU screening programme for Balkans and Gulf veterans. We are developing our policy of biological monitoring for DU for troops on operations. We are also collecting data on the levels of DU in environmental samples in Kosovo. Annual surveys are already in progress at UK ranges where DU has been fired.

It will be necessary to set priorities for funding each of the proposals, and re-assess their relevance and content as the research progresses.

Ministerial Transport

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his estimate is of the cost of *(a)* ministerial cars and drivers and *(b)* taxis for his Department in each of the last four years. [27914]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 30 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 405–06W.

A contract for a departmental taxi service for departmental staff has been in place since November 2001. No contract was in place before this. Expenditure against this contract for the current financial year to 13 February is £2,036. An additional £597 has also been spent outwith this contract.

The figures exclude any amounts spent on taxi hire outside of this contract and reclaimed by officials as travel and expenditure. That information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people were employed in a press or public relations function in his Department on 1 January in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000, *(e)* 2001 and *(f)* 2002. [39936]

Dr. Moonie: The number of people employed in a press or public relations function in the central corporate communications organisation of the Ministry of Defence is shown in the following table:

Date	*Number of staff*
1 January 1998	33
1 January 1999	34
1 January 2000	47
1 January 2001	45
1 January 2002	54

Note:
the figure for 1 January 1997 is no longer available.

The permanent joint headquarters, the single services, agencies and regional defence press offices also employ personnel in the press and public relations function, many in a secondary role to their main task. Accurate figures for these could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many press releases were issued by his Department *(a)* between 1 May and 31 December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive. [40030]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence press office issues all press releases on defence policy matters. The information is shown in the following table:

	Press releases issued
1 May to 31 December 1997	161
1998	202
1999	276
2000	238
2001	150

The single services, agencies and regional defence press offices issue their own press releases. They also re-issue some defence policy press releases for local distribution. Accurate figures, which take account of any "duplicate" releases, could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

HMS Sheffield

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if all the evidence held by his Department at the time of the inquiry into HMS Sheffield was put before the inquiry; [R] [42609]

(2) how many representations he has received in the last three years regarding the re-opening of the inquiry into the sinking of HMS Sheffield; and if he will make a statement; [R] [42611]

(3) what evaluation he has made of the evidence gathered in the last 12 months into the sinking of HMS Sheffield; and if he will set up a new inquiry; [R] [42610]

(4) if all the statements taken from the crew were later presented to the Board of Inquiry into the sinking of HMS Sheffield; and if he will make a statement. [R] [42607]

Mr. Ingram: As I informed the hon. Member in my reply of 9 July 2001, *Official Report,* column 365W, the Board of Inquiry into the sad loss of HMS Sheffield was conducted to the highest professional standards. It was the responsibility of the Board of Inquiry to ensure that it had all the information it needed to reach its conclusions about the loss of HMS Sheffield and to support its report and recommendations. This included interviews with 98 members of Sheffield's company. The Board had access to all available information and considered all the evidence that it believed to be relevant. As I informed the hon. Member previously, much of the information put before the Board of Inquiry remains classified. I am satisfied that the Board of Inquiry was conducted in a professional and proper manner and that no useful purpose would be served by re-opening this tragic incident. I am not aware of any representations other than those made by the hon. Member regarding the re-opening of the inquiry into the sinking of HMS Sheffield but this information would not be held centrally.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 26 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 1133W on departmental expenditure limits, if the change in the capital element of the defence departmental expenditure limit will be affected by the decision not to proceed with PPP for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency; and what effect the decision not to proceed with the PPP for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency will have on his Department's budget. [43391]

Dr. Moonie: We are proceeding with the DERA PPP as announced in the House on 6 March 2002, *Official Report,* columns 313–14W. Therefore, the change in the Ministry of Defence's Departmental Expenditure Limit in anticipation of a successful PPP is unaffected.

Persian Gulf

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the armed forces are serving in the Gulf; and what has been the figure in each of the last four quarters. [41853]

Mr. Ingram: The number of United Kingdom armed forces personnel serving in the Persian Gulf region fluctuates. Operational Detachments, Defence Attaches, Liaison Officers, Staff College students, training advisory teams and other service personnel are deployed, and their numbers are kept under review. In addition assets are regularly deployed and/or recovered for a variety of reasons; for example in September and October 2001 23,000 men and women were deployed to Oman for exercise Saif Sareea II.

The number of Service personnel in the Gulf region at the beginning of March is approximately 2,100.

Information relating to earlier periods is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British troops are based in Kuwait; and how this figure has changed in the last three months. [41855]

Mr. Ingram: As at 12 March there are 494 Service personnel based in Kuwait. On 4 January this year there were 496.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contingency plans he has in place to reinforce British troop deployments in the Gulf to support a United States strategy of pursuing military action in Iraq; and if he will make a statement. [41856]

Mr. Ingram: We share the concerns of all responsible Governments about Iraq's relationship with terrorism as well as its development of weapons of mass destruction and the potential threat the Iraqi regime poses to the international community. We are conducting a range of contingency planning, to keep all of our options open. There has been no decision to pursue military action in Iraq.

Interoperability

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the campaigns in Bosnia and Kosovo in terms of lessons for interoperability of equipment and personnel. [42950]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence constantly monitors the performance of our armed forces, including the interoperability of equipment and personnel. The process for collecting and analysing the lessons learned from operations is well proven. The results of our most recent analysis of operations in Kosovo can be found in the MOD publication "Kosovo: Lessons from the Crisis". This has already been placed in the Library of the House.

We are alert to the need to fine-tune our procurement priorities to take account of operational lessons learned. This is done in co-operation and consultation as necessary with our allies and likely partners.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Post Office

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to ensure banking services are made available through the Post Office network; and if she will make a statement. [41916]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* All the major banks have agreed to make their own basic bank accounts accessible at post offices. This agreement is now subject to detailed commercial negotiations between Post Office Ltd. and the individual institutions. The Post Office is also in discussion with the banks about wider access to their other bank accounts. These 'network' banking arrangements are strictly a commercial matter between the banks and the Post Office.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures she is taking to enable sub-postmasters to diversify the range of services available in their post offices; and if she will make a statement. [41915]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* Post Office Limited continually seeks opportunities to widen the network's client base in order to develop new products and services which will benefit customers and to ensure a viable future for the post office network. The Horizon automated platform, in which the Government invested £480 million, and which computerised the whole of the post office network should help this expansion.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what advertising budget will be made available for marketing the proposed Universal Bank Account. [41929]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* The delivery of the Post Office Card Account (POCA) is a commercial matter for Post Office Ltd. Accordingly, the Department of Trade and Industry will not be making any financial provision for its marketing or advertising.

Gender Pay Gap

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what the average gap between men's and women's pay is in the Stockton, North constituency; [42395]

(2) what plans the Government have to collate statistics on the gender pay gap in the Stockton, North constituency. [42396]

Alan Johnson: The Office for National Statistics publishes data on men and women's pay in the New Earnings Survey (NES). However, in the case of Stockton, North constituency, the data are not sufficiently reliable for publication. Data are available for the north-east Government Office Region (GOR).

According to the 2001 NES, average hourly pay for full-time employees, excluding overtime, in the north-east GOR, was £10.08 for men and £8.48 for women, a pay gap of £1.60 per hour.

Current trends in women's individual incomes have been explored in two studies, published last year, by the Women and Equality Unit (WEU). Copies of these reports are available on the WEU website http://www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/research/publications/researchandpublications.htm.

WEU Gender Briefing, which provides statistical briefing on the position of women compared with men in the labour market, is also available on the website http://www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/research/genderbriefing/home .htm.

There are no plans to commission further research into the gap between men and women's pay in the north-east GOR.

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what plans the Government have to commission data on the gender pay gap at regional and national levels; [41468]

(2) how the average gap between men and women's pay at regional and national levels is calculated. [41467]

Alan Johnson: Estimates of earnings by gender, region, and country of the UK are available from the annual New Earnings Survey (NES). Comparisons of gender pay differences are calculated by comparing estimates of average hourly earnings excluding overtime for full-time employees, for those employees whose pay was not affected by absence.

Current trends in women's individual incomes have been explored in two studies, published last year, by the Women and Equality Unit (WEU). Copies of these reports are available on the WEU website: http://www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/research/publications/researchandpublications.htm.

WEU Gender Briefing, which provides statistical briefing on the position of women compared with men in the labour market, is also available on the website: http://www/womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/research/genderbriefing/hom. htm.

There are no plans to commission further research into the gap between men and women's pay at regional and national levels.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to commission research into the gap between men's and women's pay in the Warrington, North constituency; and what the average gap is. [41441]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* The Office for National Statistics publishes data on men and women's pay in the New Earnings Survey. However, in the case of Warrington North constituency, the data is not sufficiently reliable for publication. Data are available for the Warrington unitary authority.

According to the 2001 New Earnings Survey (NES), average hourly earnings for full-time employees, excluding overtime, in the Warrington unitary authority was £11.78 for men and £9.14 for women, a pay gap of £2.64 per hour.

Current trends in women's individual incomes have been explored in two studies, published last year, by the Women and Equality Unit (WEU). Copies of these reports are available on the WEU website: http://www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/research/publications/researchandpublications.htm.

WEU Gender Briefing, which provides statistical briefing on the position of women compared with men in the labour market, is also available on the website: http://www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/research/genderbriefing/home .htm.

There are no plans to commission further research into the gap between men and women's pay in Warrington.

Helen Southworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her estimate is of the pay gap between men and women in *(a)* Warrington, South and *(b)* the north-west region; and if she will commission research into the gender gap between men's and women's pay in these areas. [42691]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* The Office for National Statistics publishes data on men and women's pay in the New Earnings Survey (NES). However, in the case of Warrington, South constituency, the data are not sufficiently reliable for publication. Data are available for Warrington Unitary Authority (UA) and the north-west Government Office Region (GOR).

(a) According to the 2001 NES, average hourly pay for full-time employees, excluding overtime, in Warrington UA, was £11.78 for men and £9.14 for women, a pay gap of £2.64.

(b) Average hourly pay for full-time employees, excluding overtime, in the north-west GOR, was £10.93 for men and £9.01 for women, a pay gap of £1.92.

Current trends in women's individual incomes have been explored in two studies, published last year, by the Women and Equality Unit (WEU). Copies of these reports are available on the WEU website. http://www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/research/publications/researchandpublications.htm.

WEU Gender Briefing, which provides statistical briefing on the position of women compared with men in the labour market, is also available on the website http://www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/research/genderbriefing/home.htm.

There are no plans to commission further research into the gap between men and women's pay in Warrington UA or the north-west GOR.

Broadband

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of rural-based businesses have broadband internet access; and what her expectation is for change in that percentage over the next five years. [42002]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* The Government have not made an assessment of the number of rural-based businesses with broadband access. A map showing availability of broadband services in the UK was contained in the UK Online annual report and has been placed in the Libraries of the House. The report states that satellite and leased-line services are universally available and offer one of the solutions to the issue of rural provision.

Fixed Wireless Licences

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she plans to take to dispose of fixed wireless broadband local loop licences unsold at the end of the recent auction round. [41907]

Mr. Alexander: An award process was opened on 15 October 2001 to give companies the opportunity to obtain the remaining fixed wireless licences in the 28GHz band when they consider that the time is right. Applications can be submitted at any time up until 14 October 2002.

Coalfields (Small Business Service)

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many small business service headquarters are situated in coalfield constituencies; [41820]

(2) how many small business services have sub-offices in coalfield constituencies. [41819]

Nigel Griffiths: The SBS provides business support through contracts with Business Link Operators, five of which are situated in or have sub-offices in coalfield constituencies, as defined by 1991 ward boundaries:

Coventry and Warwickshire
Derbyshire
South Yorkshire
Staffordshire
Chamber Business Services (Wigan).

In total, 16 Business Link Operators cover the coalfield constituencies. These are:

County Durham
Coventry and Warwickshire
Derbyshire
Gloucestershire
Greater Manchester
Kent
Leicestershire
North Yorkshire
Nottinghamshire
Chamber Business Enterprises (Salford)
South Yorkshire
Staffordshire
Tyne and Wear
Tyneside
West Yorkshire
Chamber Business Services (Wigan).

Miners' Compensation

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry further to her answer of 1 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 615W, on miners' compensation, what policy has been agreed for handling claims for loss of earnings from former mineworkers who are claiming for both respiratory disease and Vibration White Finger. [41969]

Mr. Wilson: Where a former mineworker makes a claim for both respiratory disease and Vibration White Finger, VWF, and is entitled to loss of earnings or services, there may be overlap between the claims, which could result in double compensation. Discussions are currently taking place between the Department and the Claimants' Solicitors Group as to how to process these claims. The general damages element of these dual claims can be dealt with while discussions are in progress.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Child Exploitation

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action she intends to take to prevent the future exploitation of children by aid workers in Africa. [40245]

Clare Short: UNHCR has undertaken to increase security in the camps, improve aid distribution, introduce a code of conduct and improve reporting procedures. A full investigation is underway by the UN Office of Investigation and Oversight Services. The UN Secretary General and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees have declared a policy of "zero tolerance" for this kind of abuse. We shall monitor closely UNHCR's implementation and development of the Framework for Action it has adopted to ensure that the exploitation of children exposed in their recent report is stopped. We shall encourage all implicated organisations urgently to review their policies and to ensure that they have appropriate procedures in place to prevent the recruitment of individuals who might exploit their positions of power and trust, and to detect and remove any individuals found doing so.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what guidelines her Department issues to aid organisations working with children regarding sexual exploitation. [40241]

Clare Short: We do not issue specific guidelines to partners on the conduct of their staff. It is the responsibility to each agency to set and monitor its own code of conduct. We shall encourage those implicated in the recent UNHCR/Save the Children-UK report urgently to review their policies and procedures for the detection and prevention of any exploitation by their staff of their positions of power and trust.

Angola

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much humanitarian aid the UK has sent to Angola in each of the last 10 years; and if she will make a statement on *(a)* the humanitarian situation in Angola and *(b)* international efforts to alleviate the situation. [42521]

Clare Short: The UK has spent 595,000 in 1992–93; 13,240,000 in 1993–94; 8,158,000 in 1994–95; 11,101,000 in 1995–96; 5,898,000 in 1996–97; 1,500,000 in 1997–98; 2,500,000 in 1998–99; 3,236,000 in 1999–2000; 2,240,000 in 2000–01. The final figure for the current financial year is not yet available, but is likely to be similar to last year. The humanitarian situation in Angola remains dire. The UN estimates that over 4 million have been displaced from their homes due to the conflict there. Repeated international attempts to gain access to those most affected by the war were thwarted by the military actions of both sides. The recent death of the UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi provides an opportunity to find a lasting peace. The Government and UNITA must seize this chance to bring an end to the suffering of the Angolan people.

Cameroon

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action she is taking to achieve the target of universal primary education in Cameroon. [42766]

Clare Short: None. Our direct support to poverty reduction efforts in Cameroon is focused on the forestry sector and we have no plans to expand into other areas.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much money her Department has provided to the Government of Cameroon *(a)* bilaterally and *(b)* multilaterally in each of the last five years. [42763]

Clare Short: We do not currently provide any budgetary support to the Government of Cameroon. Our direct assistance to Cameroon has been in the form of project-related support working with both Government and non-Government partners, mainly in the forestry sector.

Bilateral expenditure in Cameroon over the last five years is as follows:

£ million

Financial year	*Total DFID programme*[1]
1996–97	2.2
1997–98	2.1
1998–99	1.9
1999–2000	2.4
2000–01	3.1

[1] These figures do not include non-DFID debt relief

The UK's imputed share of multilateral assistance[1] given to Cameroon during 1995–99 (the latest year for which figures are available) is as follows:

$ million

Calendar year	*EC*	*UN*	*World Bank*
1995	4.4	1.7	0.6
1996	4.4	2.7	0.0
1997	2.4	1.8	0.6
1998	3.2	4.9	0.0
1999	5.7	5.3	0.0

[1] Based on DAC figures

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what actions her Department is taking to combat Government corruption in Cameroon. [42762]

Clare Short: We are actively engaged in the preparation of a Forest and Environment Sector Programme, which will include measures aimed at combating corruption in the forestry sector. We also currently fund an independent monitor of illegal logging. This support recognises the importance of the forestry sector for the Cameroonian economy and for poverty reduction, but that corruption in this sector is a major problem. More generally my Department has supported the inclusion of benchmarks on good governance, as part of the assessment of Cameroon's eligibility for debt relief under the heavily indebted poor countries initiative, and will encourage full implementation of the poverty reduction strategy.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action her Department is taking to bring good governance to Cameroon. [42761]

Clare Short: Our programme of support to Cameroon is focused on the forestry sector, which is acknowledged by Cameroon's interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper as being important for poverty reduction. We are actively engaged in the preparation of a Forest and Environment Sector Programme, which will include measures aimed at improving governance in the sector, and currently fund an Independent Monitor of illegal logging. We continue to play an active part in international community discussion of the Poverty Reduction Strategy process, which includes benchmarks on good governance.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment her Department has made of the level of Government corruption in Cameroon. [42764]

Clare Short: We have done no independent assessment of the level of government corruption in Cameroon. However, it has long been recognised by the international community that steps need to be taken to reduce the high levels of corruption that have hampered Cameroon's development. The Poverty Reduction Growth Facility (PRGF) and the interim Poverty Reduction Strategy paper linked to the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative, include commitments by the Government of Cameroon to tackle corruption and improve governance.

Afghanistan

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of United Kingdom funds for reconstruction in Afghanistan have been allocated to micro-credit agencies. [42760]

Clare Short: At present, no United Kingdom funds for reconstruction in Afghanistan have been allocated to micro-credit agencies.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on mortality rates in refugee camps in Afghanistan in the last six months. [42765]

Clare Short: Comprehensive data on mortality rates in internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps in Afghanistan are not available. However, as access has improved in Afghanistan, agencies have been able to provide better-targeted assistance and to monitor the situation more effectively. For example, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has reported a significant decrease in mortality rates at Maslakh camp outside Herat. An estimated 180,000 displaced persons, mostly from Ghor and Badghis provinces, have been living in Maslakh camp since September 2000. By December 2001, the crude mortality rate was 0.47 per 10,000 people: a death rate of approximately 50 persons per week. This figure has now halved to approximately 0.2 per 10,000.

The Immediate and Transitional Assistance Programme for the Afghan People, prepared by the UN in consultation with the Afghan Interim Authority, sets out priorities and objectives for the population of Afghanistan in the period up to December 2002. One of the key activities in the health sector is to strengthen the population and health statistical data system in Afghanistan. This will help build national capacity to collect and compile urgently needed data on the health needs of the Afghan population, and monitor mortality rates across the country.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the potential security concerns for refugees returning to Afghanistan. [42757]

Clare Short: The volatile situation remains a serious concern for refugees returning to Afghanistan. Sporadic fighting in some areas, continuing lawlessness, as well as the presence of mines and unexploded ordnance, continue to prevent unhindered access to parts of Afghanistan. Because of the precarious security situation in some parts of Afghanistan, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is cautioning Afghans against spontaneously returning to certain areas. Provinces and areas on UNHCR's 'caution' list include: Paktia, Khost, Zabul, Uruzgan, Nimroz, Helmand, Farah, Tora Bora and Sholgara.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what provision is being made for the safety of refugees returning to Afghanistan. [42758]

Clare Short: The Afghan Interim Administration (AIA) and the international community are committed to improving the protection of at-risk civilians. This includes creating conditions conducive to the voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in safety and dignity to their places of origin. Our support to agencies such as UNHCR, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), and the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) will help contribute to this important objective.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action is being taken to improve provision of public health clinics in Afghanistan. [42756]

Clare Short: At the Tokyo conference, the Afghanistan Interim Administration (AIA) identified the restoration of basic services, through an urban reconstruction programme to restore utilities and support municipal authorities, as one of their main priorities. In line with this, the United Nations (UN) Country Team for Afghanistan has prepared the Immediate and Transitional Assistance Programme for the Afghan People 2002 (ITAP) which prioritises the health sector as a key focus within Afghanistan. This includes activities to improve the provision of public health clinics.

My Department is continuing to channel support through the Red Cross movement and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) who are focusing on the rehabilitation of hospitals and health care clinics in order to provide essential, primary health care. We have recently provided an additional £2 million to the UN World Health Organisation (WHO) for the provision of technical and material support to the Ministry of Public Health.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what estimate she has made of the number of refugees who have returned to Afghanistan in each of the last six months. [42759]

Clare Short: Since October 2001, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimate that approximately 330,000 Afghans have returned to Afghanistan from neighbouring countries. There were no major returns in October 2001; approximately 65,000 Afghans returned during November and December 2001; over 100,000 in January 2002; approximately the same number in February 2002; and almost 65,000 people returned to Afghanistan from 1 to 10 March 2002.

Child Poverty

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the progress made in achieving the international development targets, with particular reference to ending child poverty by *(a)* the UK and *(b)* the international community. [42674]

Clare Short: There are two child specific Millennium Development Goals, reducing the under five mortality rate and ensuring that children of both sexes will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. However all the MDGs clearly have significant impacts on child poverty.

The contribution of the UK to making progress towards these targets is outlined in DFID's public service agreement. The results of our efforts so far will be published next month in our departmental report.

Global progress towards the goals is set out in the joint UN and World Bank report 'A Better World For All.' The report indicates that significant progress has been made towards halving the proportion of people whose income is less than a dollar a day, a target that will greatly impact on child poverty. Progress has also been made on a more limited basis, on reducing child mortality rates and increasing in the numbers of boys and girls enrolled in primary school.

The UN General Assembly has agreed to produce annual reports on progress in reaching the MDGs. This information should serve to motivate the international community and strengthen and better target the efforts made to support progress towards the MDGs. We are currently working with other donor partners, the UN, World Bank and Development Assistance Committee to increase the capacity of developing countries to monitor statistics on a country basis, to support international monitoring of the MDGs, and to enable developing countries to develop national strategies for poverty reduction and sustainable development on the basis of accurate and current information.

Flexible Working

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many and what proportion of the staff of her Department are *(a)* job sharing, *(b)* term working and *(c)* engaged in another form of flexible working. [42425]

Clare Short: Details of DFID's job sharers, and part time workers engaged in flexible working are contained in the following table. There is no central record of full time staff engaged in flexible working. We have no staff who are term working.

	Figure
Total number of staff in DFID headquarters[1]	1,597
Numbers of job share staff	18
Percentage of total job share staff	1.1
Numbers of staff engaged in other flexible working patterns	105
Percentage of total staff engaged in other flexible working patterns	6.6

[1] London and East Kilbride

Humanitarian Aid (Central Asia)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much humanitarian aid has been given to *(a)* Iran and *(b)* the northern border states of Afghanistan formerly part of the Soviet Union in the last 12 months. [42954]

Clare Short: In the last 12 months, my Department has provided over £1.7 million of humanitarian assistance to Iran, primarily for the benefit of Afghan and Iraqi refugees. Our support, which has been channelled through UN agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), has focused on emergency food assistance, and improvement of health care and education services for Afghan and Iraqi refugees.

In the same period, we have provided £2.2 million of drought relief assistance to Tajikistan. This has been channelled through UN agencies, the Red Cross and NGOs for food assistance, water and sanitation improvement, and livelihood and agricultural support.

In addition, the £60 million that we have disbursed in response to the crisis in Afghanistan since September 2001 includes a number of regional grants to humanitarian agencies. A proportion of this amount has therefore been spent in countries neighbouring Afghanistan, including Iran and the northern border states of Afghanistan.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

European Union

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 6 March 2002, ref. 40849, *Official Report*, column 395W, if he will conduct an internal analysis on the future of the various recurring annual direct and indirect *(a)* costs and *(b)* benefits arising from UK membership of the European Union. [42608]

Peter Hain: No.

General Affairs Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the outcome was of the General Affairs Council held in Brussels on 18–19 February; what the Government's stance was on each issue discussed, including its voting and record; and if he will make a statement. [42704]

Peter Hain: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I represented the UK at the Council. The GAC adopted the "A" points listed in document 6220/02. It also noted the resolutions, decisions and opinions adopted by the European Parliament listed in document 5079/02 PE-RE 5. Copies of these documents have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. No formal votes were taken. Conclusions were reached by consensus on a number of issues, as follows

Zimbabwe

The Council heard a report from the head of the EU election observation mission, whom the Government of Zimbabwe had refused to accredit. Ambassador Schori's report confirmed that the conditions did not exist for the EU to mount a credible mission. On 28 January, the Council had agreed that the consultations with Zimbabwe under Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement would be closed and targeted sanctions implemented if the Government of Zimbabwe prevented the deployment of an EU election observation mission, or if it prevented the mission from operating effectively, or prevented the international media from having free access to cover the election, or if there was a serious deterioration in the situation on the ground, or if the election was assessed as not being free and fair.

At the February GAC, the Council concluded that the principles enshrined in Article 9 of the Cotonou Agreement had not been respected despite all efforts made by the European Union through Article 8 dialogue and later, Article 96 consultations. Consequently, and in the light of its January agreement, the Council decided to close Article 96 consultations and take appropriate measures. Furthermore, the Council decided to implement targeted sanctions in the form of an embargo on the sale, supply or transfer of arms and technical advice, assistance or training related to military activities and an embargo on the sale or supply of equipment which could be used for internal repression in Zimbabwe, as well as a travel ban on persons who engage in serious violations of human rights and of the freedom of opinion, of association and of peaceful assembly in Zimbabwe and a freezing of their funds, other financial assets or economic resources. The Council also decided to withdraw without delay all EU electoral observers still present in Zimbabwe.

Work in other Council formations

The Council took stock of a presidency report on work on the most important issues currently under discussion in other Council configurations, including topics being considered in the ECOFIN, Agriculture, Justice and Home Affairs and Education Councils. The Council noted that a number of these issues were of particular relevance in the run-up to the spring European Council in Barcelona. The Council also agreed to monitor the work of the Convention on the future of the European Union.

Barcelona European Council

The presidency outlined plans for practical organisation of the Barcelona European Council, noting that the GAC on 11–12 March would focus on substantive preparations. The Council agreed that the Barcelona European Council should take a number of concrete steps on priority actions to be taken to ensure delivery of the EU's economic reform strategy set at the Lisbon European Council in 2000.

The Council noted that separate meetings with Heads of State or Government, Foreign Ministers and Finance Ministers from the candidate countries would be held during the Barcelona Council. The Council was informed that a summit with social partners would take place on 14 March with the participation of the President of the European Council, the President of the Commission, the Prime Ministers of Denmark and Greece, as well as their respective Employment Ministers.

Enlargement

The Council noted a Commission presentation on financial aspects of the enlargement negotiations, following recent discussions by Foreign and Finance Ministers. The Council invited the Commission to submit draft common positions for the negotiating chapters on Financial and Budgetary Provisions, Agriculture and Regional Policy and Co-ordination of Structural Instruments as soon as possible, taking into account the Council's deliberations. The Council recalled that timely production of these draft common positions was essential in order to keep to the road map laid down by the Nice European Council and the timetable for concluding negotiations agreed by the European Councils in Göteborg and Laeken. The Council reaffirmed that the negotiations will be based on the present acquis and on the financial framework ceilings decided by the European Council in Berlin in 1999.

Economic and social cohesion report

The Council heard a Commission presentation of the update to the second report on economic and social cohesion. The report updates the data presented in January 2001, analyses potential disparities in a Union of 25 and summarises the debate on future cohesion policy after enlargement. The Council instructed the Permanent Representatives Committee to examine this report with a view to further work by the Council in due course.

Debate on the effectiveness of the EU's external actions

The Council held a policy debate on ways for the Union to achieve more effective and comprehensive external action on the basis of a presidency paper and report by the Commission. Ministers addressed the relationship between development and foreign policy objectives; the need for improved flexibility and responsiveness; and the need for speedy delivery of external assistance and the quality of such assistance. The presidency suggested in particular that the Secretary-General/High Representative and the Commission looked further at specific areas of work for improving effectiveness, including the use of case studies, improved co-ordination in the field, better use of decentralisation and improving inter-pillar co-ordination. The outcome of this work should be submitted to the May GAC, at which an initial review could be undertaken with a possible further review in the autumn.

Middle East Peace Process

The Foreign Secretary and the German Foreign Minister both briefed partners on their visits to the middle east. The GAC reaffirmed the EU's view, as set out in the Laeken European Council declaration, that a political perspective must be established if there is to be sustained progress. It was accepted that an improved security situation was an essential first step and this required determined action by the Palestinian Authority. The importance of close EU-US co-ordination was stressed. High Representative Solana was asked to return to the region.

UN Financing for Development conference

The Commission presented proposals for increasing the quantity and quality of official development assistance (ODA). The Council invited the Permanent Representatives Committee to examine the Commission's proposals before the March General Affairs Council so that the Union can make an important contribution to the success of the UN conference, to be held that month in Mexico, through the adoption of positive initiatives.

Western Balkans

High Representative Solana briefed Ministers on developments in Montenegro. On Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), High Representative Petritsch outlined the recent achievements and the likely future challenges. He confirmed that he would step down by the end of May, to be succeeded by Lord Ashdown. The Council expressed its willingness to appoint Lord Ashdown as the EU Special Representative in BiH (EUSR) when he becomes High Representative. The Council announced the EU's readiness to ensure the follow-on to the UN International Police Task Force (IPTF) in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 2003.

Relations with third countries on combating terrorism

There was a brief discussion on the basis of a presidency paper on options for including counter-terrorism co-operation in future EU/third country agreements. Officials were invited to continue work, on the basis that there should be rapid progress to incorporate the EU's commitment to counter-terrorism into future agreements.

Meetings of EU Defence Ministers

The Council endorsed a presidency proposal that Defence Ministers should be able to meet under the aegis of the GAC, for discussion of military/capabilities aspects of ESDP.

Nepal

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received on human rights abuses in Nepal. [42602]

Mr. Bradshaw: We have not received any formal representations about human rights abuses in Nepal, although my officials are in contact with human rights NGOs and regularly discuss the situation with them.

We are very concerned about reports of human rights abuses committee by the Maoists. NGOs estimate that they may be responsible for the summary execution of 400 civilians.

We are aware of allegations in the Nepalese media of human rights abuses by the Royal Nepalese Army. We are concerned about this, and have made our views clear to the Government of Nepal: I myself did so during my visit to Kathmandu last month. Prime Minister Deuba has repeatedly stressed that abuses will not be tolerated. The Nepalese authorities have professed the need for improvement, and have undertaken to co-operate with the international community to achieve this.

The British embassy's human rights adviser in Kathmandu is monitoring the human rights situation closely and developing strategies to assist the Nepalese Government and civil society in tackling human rights issues.

People's Front

Valerie Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the oral statement of 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 130, by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, if he will make a statement on the status of the People's Front for the Liberation of Palestine. [43561]

Mr. Bradshaw: The People's Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) is not an organisation proscribed under the Terrorism Act 2000. The group is none the less a terrorist entity which, for example, claimed responsibility for the assassination of Israeli Tourism Minister Ze'evy in October 2001. The Bank of England froze the assets of the PFLP in 2001 as a result of its involvement in terrorism.

Hawk Aircraft

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Hawk aircraft have been exported to India in the last six months. [42767]

Mr. Bradshaw: None.

PRIME MINISTER

Air Travel

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Prime Minister if the Government have taken a decision on future provision for long-range royal and ministerial air travel. [44087]

The Prime Minister: After 36 years' service the VC10s were withdrawn from their ministerial transport role at the end of 2001. The royal family had ceased using the VC10 nine years ago. The Government considered a number of options for future long-range royal and ministerial air travel. These included chartering commercial aircraft, adapting an existing RAF aircraft, and procuring a new aircraft.

The Government have decided that when a dedicated aircraft is needed it will charter a commercial aircraft. In line with current practice, any accompanying business-people or press will usually be asked to pay their share of costs. Where there are security concerns RAF planes will be used. We assess that this approach is likely to be the most cost-effective. In many cases a dedicated aircraft is not necessary and Ministers and members of the royal family will continue to travel on scheduled flights.

For the longer-term the Ministry of Defence will consider whether cost-effective provision of royal and ministerial air transport might be incorporated within the contract for the RAF's future strategic tanker aircraft, due to enter service towards the end of this decade.

Social Services Spending

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) on 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 280, regarding social services spending, how much funding has been provided by *(a)* central Government and *(b)* local authorities through council tax in the last five years. [42636]

The Prime Minister: Social services funding is increasing by around 20.4 per cent. in real terms between 1996–97 and 2002–03; an average of 3.1 per cent. each year, compared with an average of 0.1 per cent. annual real terms growth between 1992–93 and 1996–97.

Local government's social service responsibilities are funded through general grant as part of the local government finance settlement, ring-fenced grants provided by the Department of Health and local authorities through council tax. Decisions on the budgets local authorities allocate to particular services are for local authorities to make bearing in mind their statutory responsibilities, their priorities and the wishes of their electorate. It is not therefore possible to say how much funding for social services has been provided through council tax or general grant.

General grant is distributed through standard spending assessments (SSA) formulae. The figures in the following table comprise personal social services SSA, which includes an assumed element for council tax, and ring-fenced grants paid by the Department of Health for social services in England. The figures exclude grants paid for social services by other Government Departments.

	£ million
1997–98	7,911.8
1998–99	8,479.8
1999–2000	8,862.9
2000–01	9,307.0
2001–02	9,957.2

Downing Street (Charity Receptions)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will set out the procedure by which charities apply for receptions at 10 Downing street; [43306]

(2) if he will list the charities for whom receptions have been given at 10 Downing street since May 1997. [43305]

The Prime Minister: The programme of events at No. 10 is designed to give access to as many people as possible. Events cover a very wide spectrum of charities including NSPCC, Barnados, Sargent Cancer Care for Children, Shelter, Help the Aged, and smaller charities such as Kids, Saving Faces and Contact a Family.

As has always been the practice, it is open to all charities to contact 10 Downing street to apply to hold a reception which is then considered. The guests lists are drawn up by the charity, which also funds the event.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Official Visits

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will list the official visits to *(a)* Paris and *(b)* Brussels made by each Minister in his Department in 2001 and the mode of travel used; and what guidance is provided to Ministers in his Department on the choice of mode of travel for such visits; [38151]

(2) if he will list the official visits within the UK outside London made by each Minister in his Department in 2001, giving for each *(a)* the origin and destination and *(b)* the mode of travel used; and what guidance is provided to Ministers in his Department on choice of mode of travel for official visits. [38187]

Dr. Whitehead: Since 1999 this Government have published an annual list of all overseas visits undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government have also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. Details of travel undertaken since 1 March 2001 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the current financial year. Copies of the lists are available in the Libraries of the House.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

The additional detailed information requested in respect of UK travel is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate costs.

Spring Supply Estimates

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the additional grants from the Scottish Executive in item lxxxi on page 8 of the Spring Supply Estimates. [40236]

Dr. Whitehead: The transfer of £1,293,000 to the Scottish Executive, reported at item lxxxi on page 8 of the Spring Supplementary Estimates, is in respect of rail freight facilities grant which, under section 211(4) of the Transport Act 2000, must be paid by the Scottish Executive.

Gender Pay Gap

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the extent of the gender pay gap among staff in his Department. [40997]

Dr. Whitehead: The Government have committed Departments and agencies to review their pay systems by April 2003 and prepare action plans to close any equal pay gaps. The Cabinet Office issued comprehensive guidance in January 2002 to assist in these reviews.

In advance of the Cabinet Office guidance and in conjunction with the local trade union side an equal pay review was instigated in the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Central) during the

2001 pay round, following guidelines contained in the Equal Opportunities Commission's code of practice. The outcome of this review is subject to the Governments commitment to review pay systems by April 2003.

Special Advisers

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many special advisers were employed by him and his predecessor *(a)* between 1 May and 31 December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive; and what the total amount spent on special advisers by the Department was in each of those years. [41256]

Dr. Whitehead: The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions employed a total of six special advisers between 1 May and 31 December 1997 at a total salary cost of £77,470. In 1998 a total of seven special advisers were employed (of whom no more than six were in post at any one time) at a total salary cost of £142,152. In 1999 a total of seven special advisers were employed (of whom no more than five were in post at any one time) at a total salary cost of £158,400. In 2000 a total of five special advisers were employed at a total salary cost of £197,092. In 2001 a total of eight special advisers were employed (of whom no more than five were employed at any one time) at a total salary cost of £132,278.

Departmental Staff

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whom he has recruited to replace Jo Moore. [41677]

Mr. Byers: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) on 12 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 908W.

Jo Moore

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether he consulted the Prime Minister on the future of Jo Moore after 11 September. [41283]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) on 17 October 2001, *Official Report,* column 1165.

Heathrow

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what projection he has made of the number of flights at Heathrow Airport in each of the next five years. [41888]

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of State has imposed a condition on the planning consent for Heathrow Terminal 5, requiring that from the date the Core Terminal Building opens for public use, the number of occasions on which aircraft may take-off or land at Heathrow shall not exceed 480,000 during any period of one year.

Airports

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of airport capacity in the south-east of England over the medium and longer terms. [41945]

Mr. Jamieson: The South East and East of England Regional Air Services Study (SERAS) has evaluated a wide range of airport development options, providing different levels of capacity. A full public consultation on the short-listed options is scheduled for spring 2002. Decisions made following the consultation will feed into an aviation White Paper which we plan to publish later this year.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the sites that are being considered for new airports within the south-east of England. [41963]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) on 12 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 922W.

Shoreham Harbour

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what information he has collated on the breakdown of harbour traffic throughput in Shoreham in the last year. [42325]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* In 2000, the latest year for which information is available, 1.8 million tonnes of traffic passed through the port of Shoreham. Of this, approximately 1.0 million tonnes were imports, 150 thousand tonnes exports and 0.6 million tonnes domestic traffic.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what information he has received from Shoreham Port Authority about their *(a)* debt levels and *(b)* bulk cargo levels for export and import. [42314]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* Information on debt levels at ports is not collected by my Department. In 2000, the latest year for which information is available, 0.7 million tonnes of bulk cargo were imported and 0.1 million tonnes of bulk cargo were exported.

Disabled Facilities Grants

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how much money has been allocated to disabled facilities grants in this financial year; [42544]

(2) how many disabled facilities grants have been processed for children in the last 12 months; [42542]

(3) how many disabled facilities grants have been processed for *(a)* adults and *(b)* children in the last two years. [42543]

Ms Keeble: The Government have allocated £87 million towards the expenditure by local authorities in England on Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) for 2001–02. This meets 60 per cent. of the total cost of such grants, the remaining 40 per cent. being met from elsewhere in local authorities' budgets. The latest estimate on the number of DFGs made in England is 28,097 for 2001–02. The Government do not collect data separately on the number of grants paid to adults or children.

Fire Service

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the recipients of money within the Fire Service under the private finance initiative, stating in each case *(a)* the amount awarded and *(b)* the purpose of the award. [42924]

Dr. Whitehead: PFI credits have been allocated to the following fire service schemes:

Scheme	*Allocation (£ million)*	*Purpose*
Avon/Somerset/Gloucestershire	16.900	Joint training centre
Cornwall	12.257	Estate management and replacement of fire stations
Greater Manchester	4.790	Fire station/divisional headquarters
London	45.000	Management and maintenance of vehicles and operational equipment
North Yorkshire	6.360	Fire station/training centre

Revenue support based on the level of PFI credits is paid once the scheme has come into operation.

£560,000 in total was paid in grant in 1997–98 to meet the development costs for fire service pathfinder schemes, including the ones listed in the table.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 27 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1370W, on fire authority funding, if he will list the recipients of the extra £53 million announced for emergency planning, stating in each case *(a)* the name of the fire authority, *(b)* the amount awarded and *(c)* the intended use of the money in each case. [42943]

Dr. Whitehead: The additional resources will be used to procure new equipment, including decontamination facilities and personal protective equipment for firefighters, and to meet training and other revenue costs. Decisions on the deployment of the equipment and allocation of the funding will be taken in the course of procurement. The equipment will include:

Large volume decontamination shelters and showers

Water management equipment

Ancillary equipment eg to provide power, heat and light

Radiation survey meters

Personal dosimeters

Protective clothing

Masks and filters for respiratory protection

Transport facilities

Communications and IT support.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people are employed in the fire service *(a)* in total and *(b)* broken down by (i) age, (ii) gender and (iii) ethnic background. [42925]

Dr. Whitehead: At 31 March 2001 there were 49,685 uniformed staff and 6,703 non-uniformed staff employed in the fire services of England and Wales. There were 1,866 women employed in the uniformed sector and 4,032 women employed in the non-uniformed sector. There were 613 minority ethnic uniformed staff and 293 minority ethnic non-uniformed staff.

All fire services in England and Wales are required to provide annually to Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate statistical information about personnel employed, analysed by gender and ethnic origin. Data on the composition of the work force broken down by age are not held centrally.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what extra training has been provided for fire fighters since 11 September 2001, broken down by each fire authority. [42926]

Dr. Whitehead: Fire service personnel already receive training for dealing with terrorist and major incidents. Since 11 September fire authorities have been issued with guidance on mass decontamination methods. Additional funding is being provided and fire authorities are being encouraged to undertake training with other services and agencies. Details of specific training carried out by each fire authority are not held centrally.

Housing Association Properties

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many housing association properties have been sold under the Right to Acquire provisions in each London borough in each year since the provisions came into force. [42968]

Ms Keeble: The Right to Acquire came into force on 1 April 1997. It gives eligible tenants of registered social landlords the right to purchase their rented home with the benefit of a discount. There have been 53 completed Right to Acquire sales in total from 1 April 1997 to the end of February 2002. 12 of these were in London boroughs, as follows:

	Completions
1999–2000	
Redbridge	1
2000–01	
Bexley	2
Croydon	1
Haringey	1
Newham	1
Waltham Forest	1

	Completions
2001–02[1]	
Bexley	1
Ealing	1
Newham	2
Sutton	1

[1] 11 months only

Council Properties

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many council properties have been sold under the right-to-buy provisions in each London borough in each of the last 10 years. [43946]

Ms Keeble: The information requested is included in the summary table referred to in my answer of 7 March 2002 to my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney), *Official Report*, column 554W, which is available in the Libraries of the House.

Flight Paths (Walthamstow)

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what changes in flight paths into Heathrow have taken place within the last year that have affected flight paths above Walthamstow; and whether they are permanent. [42945]

Mr. Jamieson: The Civil Aviation Authority has advised that apart from a short period following the terrorist attacks in New York on 11 September 2001 when there may have been a slight increase in the proportion of flights which overflew Walthamstow, there have been no changes to the flight paths into Heathrow in the past year.

Regulatory Impact Unit

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many Members his Department employs in its Regulatory Impact Unit; and if he will make a statement. [42933]

Dr. Whitehead: DTLR's new Regulatory Impact Unit was established in October 2001 and consists of four officials, two full time and two on a job-share basis.

This is more staff than in previous years and the unit is now a dedicated resource that covers better/regulation/regulatory reform issues only.

Correspondence

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Warrington, North, dated 21 November 2001. [43131]

Ms Keeble: I have written to my hon. Friend today and I apologise for the delay in replying.

A36

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Salisbury of 25 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 817W, for what reasons de-trunking negotiations on the A36(T) have been put on hold until early 2003. [43304]

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of State confirmed in February 2002 that following placement of an objection to de-trunking of the A46/A36 by the South West Regional Assembly a further study into the management of the route and the traffic problems related to the route in Bath would be commissioned shortly. Formal appointment of a consultant to undertake the work is progressing with interviews of those firms shortlisted taking place soon. Not until this study had been completed, December 2002 in the current programme, would Bath and North East Somerset Council agree to continue with de-trunking negotiations.

There are four other local authorities involved in taking over sections of the route on satisfactory completion of de-trunking negotiations. No serious obstacles to completing negotiations successfully with these remaining four authorities have been identified. Although this might suggest that a piecemeal de-trunking of the route is possible this would not be in the public interest nor would this course of action answer the Regional Assembly's objection.

Freight Industry (Illegal Migrants)

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact on the freight industry of the actions of people attempting to enter the United Kingdom illegally; and if he will make a statement. [43033]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government recognise that the current disruption to channel tunnel rail freight services caused by would-be illegal immigrants attempting to board these trains on the continent is causing severe hardship to many businesses in this country which depend on these services. We are pressing the French Government at the highest levels to ensure that sufficient police resources are applied to address the problem so that normal freight services can resume as soon as possible.

There is no evidence to date that the actions of people attempting to enter the United Kingdom illegally have had any significant impact on UK road freight operations.

Electronic Voting

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 27 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1371W, on electronic voting, whether he undertook an assessment of the relative ability of different age groups to access electronic voting before introducing the pilot schemes. [43352]

Dr. Whitehead: The Electoral Commission's evaluation of the electronic voting pilots will include an assessment of the impact of electronic voting on different age groups within the electorate. The traditional voting arrangements will remain available on 2 May for all voters in the areas where electronic voting is being trialed.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many planning applications for developments in areas of outstanding natural beauty have been called in since 1997; and how many of those were approved. [43390]

Ms Keeble: We estimate that about 30 planning applications for developments in areas of outstanding natural beauty have been called in since 1997 and that, of those, around one-fifth have been approved.

Harbour Boards (Isle of Wight)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions by what means nominations were sought for places on harbour boards on the Isle of Wight; how many appointments he has made to such bodies since 1997; who the appointees were; and what were their terms of office. [43353]

Ms Keeble: The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions is not aware of any "labour boards" on the Isle of Wight. There are a number of bodies responsible for local economic and work force development activities on the Isle of Wight, but none has national appointment processes, all being locally developed in response to the local need.

London Underground

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he plans to sign documents for the public private partnership with London Underground. [41292]

Mr. Jamieson: If a final decision is taken to proceed, PPP contracts for the modernisation of London Underground will be signed by London Underground, not the Secretary of State.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what assessment he has made of changes to the contracts to operate train lines under the proposed PPP scheme since 7 February; [42813]

(2) who is responsible for determining *(a)* whether there have been material changes in the contracts to operate train lines under the proposed PPP scheme since 7 February and *(b)* whether material changes to the contracts to operate trains under the proposed PPP scheme for the London Underground require a re-evaluation of the value for money survey carried out by (i) London Underground and (ii) Ernst and Young; [42815]

(3) under what circumstances changes to the contract to operate trains under the proposed PPP scheme for the London Underground will require a re-evaluation of the value for money survey carried out by *(a)* London Underground and *(b)* Ernst and Young. [42814]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* The proposed PPP contracts are for the modernisation of the Underground's infrastructure. London Underground will continue to operate the entire tube network, including trains.

London Underground is responsible for the contracts. London Underground has confirmed that it intends to take a final decision, including in relation to value for money, following completion of consultation with the Mayor and Transport for London.

I and my officials have been kept informed throughout development of the contracts. In taking any decisions that fall to me in my capacity as Secretary of State I will take into account all the relevant factors. I will, in particular, consider whether any changes to the contracts will affect my three key principles: that there is no privatisation, that safety is not compromised and that the contracts offer value for money.

10-Year Plan

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his estimate is of the required investment in the railway network for *(a)* safety and *(b)* repairs over the life of the Government's 10-year plan. [41304]

Mr. Spellar: All of the rail investment contained in the 10-year plan and SRA strategic plan contributes in some way to achieving our objectives of a better, safer and more reliable railway. It is not possible to provide a specific estimate for these categories.

National Rail Academy

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what requirement will be placed on *(a)* the train operating companies and *(b)* the successor company to Railtrack to employ people with qualifications from the National Rail Academy. [42810]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* The issue of qualifications will in part be addressed through the 'Framework for Skills' 18-Point Action Plan. It is likely that the National Rail Academy will have a key role to play in relation to standards and qualifications. However, its precise role and the relationship with the Rail Industry Training Council, the existing National Training Organisation and the prospective Sector Skills Council have yet to be determined.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) when the proposed National Rail Academy will be brought into operation; [42808]

(2) how much money has been allocated for *(a)* the development of and *(b)* the operation of a National Rail Academy; and if this money forms part of the funding proposed under the Ten Year Plan. [42807]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* The Government have made available £33.5 billion to improve the railways of which £500,000 is being allocated by the Strategic Rail Authority to develop a number of training initiatives during this year. There is currently no fixed establishment date for the National Rail Academy and it is likely that it will evolve progressively from a number of current initiatives.

Rail Industry (Skills)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the skills shortage in the rail industry in terms of *(a)* numbers of people and *(b)* skill areas. [42809]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* The progress report on the delivery of the Framework for Skills for the Rail Industry provides at Annexe 4 an analysis of the occupations in which there are skill shortages. The report is available on the Department for Education and Skills website—www.dfes.gov.uk/railindustry.

Special Purpose Vehicles

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guidance he has issued to the SRA in respect of the creation of special purpose vehicles for rail projects; and if he will place it in the Library. [42838]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* On 29 June 2001 I issued draft Directions and Guidance to the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA). These would direct the SRA to consider the use of Special Purpose Vehicles to undertake rail infrastructure works (section 8.2) and require the SRA to detail in its strategy how and by when such projects will be introduced (section 7.4). A copy was placed in the House Library at the time of their publication.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliamentary Video and Data Network

Ms Oona King: To ask the Chairman of the Information Committee what measures he is taking to improve remote access to PDVN for hon. Members' constituency staff; and what recent assessment he has made of the reliability of access to the network. [43127]

Michael Fabricant: I fully recognise the need to improve the reliability of remote access services for hon. Members' constituency staff. As a short-term measure, the Parliamentary Communications Directorate has tested an upgrade to the existing remote access software (Citrix) and plans to make it available shortly to all hon. Members. It is expected that this upgrade will improve the performance of the remote access service, within the limitations of the Citrix product.

The question of remote access for constituency staff is a matter for the President of the Council and is being pursued in the context of the changes to hon. Members' allowances which were agreed by the House on 5 July 2001. I understand that the House is in the final stages of placing a contract to provide Members with improved access to the Internet and to the Parliamentary Data and Video Network (PDVN) via a commercial Internet Service Provider (ISP). Once the necessary administrative, financial and technical elements are in place, Members' constituency offices will be able to connect directly to the PDVN using a Virtual Private Network (VPN), which will allow broadband access (such as ADSL where available) as well as ISDN and dial-up services. It is hoped that a pilot of the new service will take place in July 2002, and I am optimistic that this long-term solution will provide considerable benefits for hon. Members and their staff.

SCOTLAND

Devolution

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list powers transferred by her Department to the Scottish Executive under provisions of the Scotland Act in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02. [39330]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Powers transferred to the Scottish Executive between the specified dates are set out in the following statutory instruments:

Statutory instrument	*Power transferred*
2000–01	
S.I. 2000/1563	The Scotland Act 1998 (Transfer of Functions to the Scottish Ministers, etc.) Order 2000
S.I. 2000/3251	The Scotland Act 1998 (Cross-Border Public Authorities)(Adaptation of Functions etc.)(No. 2) Order 2000
S.I. 2000/3253	The Scotland Act 1998 (Transfer of Functions to the Scottish Ministers, etc.)(No. 2) Order 2000
S.I. 2001/954	The Scotland Act 1998 (Transfer of Functions to the Scottish Ministers, etc.) Order 2001
2001–02	
S.I. 2001/3504	The Scotland Act 1998 (Transfer of Functions to the Scottish Ministers, etc.)(No. 2) Order 2001

Scotland Act

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans she has to amend the Scotland Act 1998. [41418]

Mrs. Liddell: At present, I have no plans to amend the Scotland Act.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she last discussed the future of the Scotland Act 1998 with the Scottish Executive. [41417]

Mrs. Liddell: I discuss a range of issues with the First Minister at our regular meetings.

A76

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations she has received on vehicle speed limits on the A76 trunk road for *(a)* passenger cars and *(b)* heavy goods vehicles. [41414]

Mrs. Liddell: I have received no representations on this matter.

Nuclear Power Stations

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on Government policy on the future for nuclear power stations in Scotland. [41593]

Mr. Foulkes: The future role of all forms of power will be considered in the Energy White Paper which was referred to by the Prime Minister in his foreword to the Cabinet Office Energy Review publication.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consultations she has had with representatives of the Scottish Executive regarding a public inquiry into the foot and mouth outbreaks in Scotland. [41470]

Mrs. Liddell: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has announced two independent inquiries into the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in 2001. The "Lessons Learned" inquiry has been asked to make recommendations on the handling of any future major animal disease outbreak. The Royal Society has been asked to investigate the transmission, prevention and control of epidemic outbreaks of infectious disease in livestock, and to make recommendations. The "Lessons Learned" inquiry and the Royal Society inquiry both extend to Scotland, and the Scottish Executive has presented views to both inquiries. The inquiries will report to Ministers in the Scottish Executive as well as to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consultations she has had with Scottish Executive Ministers and European Union officials on a public inquiry into the foot and mouth outbreaks in Scotland. [41416]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger).

The European Commission will be kept in touch with the progress of these inquiries.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Relocation Expenses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his policy is on the payment of relocation expenses to staff in his Department. [41018]

Mr. Leslie: Cabinet Office policy is to reimburse approved costs that are necessarily and unavoidably incurred as a result of relocation. Levels of reimbursement are agreed on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the availability of funding in the management unit to which an individual is attached.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Higher Education

10. **Dr. Pugh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what progress the Government have made towards their target of 50 per cent. of young people entering higher education. [40728]

Margaret Hodge: We are making excellent progress towards meeting our ambitious but realistic target of participation in HE. The target is informed by our analysis of labour market needs over the next decade and by our determination to ensure opportunity for all throughout the education system.

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the proportion of students from secondary modern schools who went on to higher education in each of the last three years. [40740]

Margaret Hodge: Information on the number of pupils from secondary modern schools who go on to HE is not held centrally.

The available information, showing the previous type of educational institution of students accepted for entry to full-time undergraduate courses, is shown in the table. However, not all students who enter HE do so directly after they have left full-time education at 18; some spend a period in employment before returning to study, and others take a gap year to broaden their experience. Around a third of young people enter full-time higher education by the age of 20, including those who enter at ages 18, 19, and 20.

Students from England aged 18 accepted for entry to full-time undergraduate courses in the UK by previous educational institution

	Academic year of entry to higher education		
	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Maintained schools			
17-year-olds in previous year studying in maintained schools[1]	131,700	132,500	137,100
18-year-olds accepted for entry from maintained schools[2, 3]	64,100	64,900	68,200
Percentage proceeding to HE from maintained schools	49	49	50
Independent schools			
17-year-olds in previous year studying in independent schools[1]	36,000	35,000	35,200
18-year-olds accepted for entry from independent schools[2]	19,100	18,300	18,800
Percentage proceeding to HE from independent schools	53	52	53
FE colleges			
17-year-olds in previous year studying in FE colleges[1]	183,700	183,100	184,900
18-year-olds accepted for entry from FE colleges[2]	37,700	38,100	40,800
Percentage proceeding to HE from FE colleges	21	21	22

[1] Age as at August 31

[2] Age as at September 30

[3] Including city technology colleges and sixth form centres

Examination Boards

12. **Dr. Palmer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will replace the boards responsible for setting examinations in schools by a single board. [40730]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We have no plans to replace the current structure in England with a single board.

17. **Mr. Goodman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the operation of exam boards. [40736]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Millions of examination papers are taken by students in England and Wales each year. It is a massive and complex task to set and manage this number of exams—and a task that the awarding bodies generally perform to a high standard.

Engineering

13. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to promote engineering as a career; and if she will make a statement. [40731]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Government recognise the importance of engineering to the success of our economy.

To this end we have just launched a new science and engineering ambassadors programme as part of Science Year.

In addition, we have recently announced a new campaign to promote modern apprenticeships to young people and employers. Currently the engineering manufacturing sector has the largest number of young people undertaking advanced modern apprenticeship training.

Further Education Colleges

14. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the results of the recent inspections of further education colleges. [40732]

Margaret Hodge: Of the 64 college inspections carried out to date under the new regime, results have been published for 29 colleges. It is early days and conclusions so far are tentative. There have been some good results but there is still some way to go to achieve consistent quality.

Teachers' Pay

15. **Kevin Brennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what representations she has received from teaching unions about devolving teachers' pay and conditions to the National Assembly for Wales. [40733]

Mr. Timms: My right hon. Friend has received no such representations.

27. **Mrs. Brooke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers are expected to progress up the post-threshold pay spine this academic year. [40748]

Mr. Timms: Progress on the upper pay scale is by performance points awarded by individual schools. Teachers on point one of the upper pay scale since September 2000 become eligible to move to point two from September 2002. The number moving to point two will be determined by the number of performance points schools decide to award.

28. **Mr. Syms:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent research she has commissioned into the effect of performance-related pay on teachers' morale. [40750]

Mr. Timms: The Department's evaluation of the first round of performance threshold assessment included a MORI survey of teachers in a sample of schools. The results were summarised in the written evidence submitted by the Department to the School Teachers' Review Body in September. This is available on the DfES website:

http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/Teachers_Pay_Evidence_STRB_2001 and http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/Teachers_Pay_STRB_Supplementary_Evidence.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will issue guidance to schools on the advancement of teachers on the upper pay scale. [40749]

Mr. Timms: Progression on the upper pay scale is by performance points awarded by individual schools. Guidance on awarding such points was included in the Department's guidance on teachers' pay and conditions sent to all schools in September.

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent meetings she has had with the National Association of Head Teachers to discuss performance-related pay. [40737]

Mr. Timms: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given earlier today to the hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) and my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas) by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, on 14 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1003.

19. **David Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the cost in 2002–03 of continued funding of performance-related pay for teachers in the county of Leicestershire; and if she will make a statement. [40739]

Mr. Timms: The cost of threshold pay will depend on the number of teachers in Leicestershire assessed as meeting the threshold standards, including applicants currently being assessed. The cost of performance pay points will depend on the number of points Leicestershire schools decide to award.

Further Education

16. **Norman Lamb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the system of maintenance support available for young people in further education. [40734]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We are breaking down the financial barriers which prevent young people from succeeding in further education in a number of ways. We are piloting education maintenance allowances for young people in 56 local authority areas. We have increased the existing learner support funds from £6 million in 1997 to £51 million in 2001–02. And we are introducing the Connexions Card which will make a range of discounts and rewards available to young people who participate in learning.

Foreign Languages

18. **Valerie Davey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what preparations are under way to develop foreign language teaching in primary schools. [40738]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Languages National Steering Group, chaired by my ministerial colleague Baroness Ashton, is developing a national strategy for languages which we plan to publish in the autumn. Our recently published pamphlet, "Language Learning", sets out our aspirations for language learning and teaching and invites comments from key stakeholders. One of those aspirations is to widen the opportunities for language learning in the primary sector.

Learning and Skills Councils

20. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps she is taking to ensure that learning and skills councils co-ordinate their activities with those of the regional development agencies. [40741]

John Healey: The Learning and Skills Act 2000 requires that each of the 47 local learning and skills councils (LSCs) must, in preparing a plan for each financial year, have regard to the strategy of and consult any relevant regional development agency. The national council must consult any relevant regional development agency on whether such plans should be approved; and both national and local councils include a RDA nominee.

Local LSCs must have regard to RDA regional economic strategies and include in their plans a statement setting out how their learning and skills responsibilities will contribute to economic regeneration activities.

The Secretary of State, in her 2002–03 grant letter to the LSC, also asked that the council work closely with key partners in each region, including Government offices and RDAs, to help produce frameworks for regional employment and skills action. These frameworks will ensure a coherent approach to employment, skills and economic development.

Schools Funding

21. **Paul Holmes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what representations she has received on the funding of post-16 pupils in 11 to 18 schools in Derbyshire. [40742]

Mr. Timms: Derbyshire county council and a number of the schools which it maintains have made representations to the Department on this subject. A letter issued by the Department on 18 February 2002 to all local education authorities set out guidance on the treatment of allocations from the Learning and Skills Council for sixth forms in schools, so as to ensure a minimum gain for schools with allocations above their real-terms guarantee level.

Teacher Recruitment

22. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assistance she is giving to local education authorities experiencing difficulties in recruiting teachers. [40743]

Mr. Timms: In 2001–02 we established a new recruitment and retention fund of £33 million targeted on local education authorities, to pass to schools in areas of greatest difficulty. The feedback we have received has been positive and we have made a further £44 million available in 2002–03. In addition, the Teacher Training Agency fund recruitment strategy managers in 97 LEAs to help provide a co-ordinated local approach to vacancy filling.

23. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students have enrolled for teacher training in the last three years; and how many teacher trained graduates remained in the profession for a year or more in each of the last three years. [40744]

Mr. Timms: The numbers of students enroling on initial teacher training courses in England in the last three years were as follows:

	Number
1999–2000	25,967
2000–01	27,715
2001–02	29,045

Notes:

1. Includes universities and other higher education institutions, school-centred initial teacher training and the Open University. Does not include trainees employed in schools under the graduate and registered teacher programmes.

2. Recruitment figures include forecast registrations ITT providers expect later in the academic year.

3. 2001–02 recruitment figures exclude the 110 entrants on the fast-track teaching route, attending ITT as part of the programme.

4. Recruitment figures for 2001–02 are provisional and are subject to change.

Source:

Teacher Training Agency initial teacher training trainee numbers census

Physical Education

24. **Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what progress has been made to ensure that pupils receive a minimum two hours physical education per week within the curriculum. [40745]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The White Paper: "Schools: achieving success" sets out our commitment to physical education and school sport. We have pledged that all children will be entitled to two hours of high quality PE and school sport a week, within and beyond the curriculum.

To help deliver this, we have a School Sport Co-ordinator programme—494 co-ordinators are already in place and are working to increase the quality and quantity of after school sport and inter-school competition and to enhance links between local schools and their communities.

£130 million has been committed to rebuild primary school sport and arts facilities through the Space for Sports and Arts programme. A further £541 million from the New Opportunities Fund will be used to improve both primary and secondary schools sports facilities in every local education authority.

We are working closely with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and other partners, to expand the current programmes to assist schools in meeting the PE and school sport entitlement.

Science Students

25. **Dr. Starkey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps she is taking to encourage *(a)* boys and *(b)* girls to study science. [40746]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The National Curriculum is gender-free, requiring equality of opportunity for girls and boys between the ages of five and 16. Pupils study an equal balance of biology, physics and chemistry together with aspects of earth science and astronomy. Results in primary science are excellent; in 2001, 87 per cent. of pupils achieved level 4, the standard expected for their age, or above, a 25 per cent. increase since 1996. Building on the achievements at primary level, we are piloting a science strategy designed to raise standards for all 11 to 14-year-olds and a national programme will be introduced in all schools in September. In recognition of its importance in preparing young people for adult and working life, we are proposing the retention of science as a core subject for 14 to 16-year-olds in our consultation document: "14–19 extending opportunities, raising standards".

In January, we launched the science and engineering ambassadors scheme as part of Science Year. One of its main purposes is to encourage both boys and girls to continue their study of science beyond the age of 16.

Individual Learning Accounts

26. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she will introduce a replacement scheme for individual learners. [40747]

John Healey: There will be a replacement ILA-style scheme building on the strengths of the ILA and taking into account the findings of the current stakeholder consultation exercise which are due in early April. We will announce our plans in due course.

Research

29. **Dr. Naysmith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on her plans for funding research in universities; and if she will make a statement. [40751]

Margaret Hodge: The Department's policy is to strengthen research excellence and support world-class research. The Higher Education Funding Council for England implements this policy by providing funding selectively to higher education institutions, taking into account the quality of their research in each subject as measured by the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). The purpose of the RAE is to distribute funding, not to determine the amount of funding that should be made available. However, in the light of the improvement in quality shown in the 2001 RAE, my Department has made available an extra £30 million in 2002–03 to allow the Higher Education Funding Council for England better to support high quality research in higher education. Future research funding is being considered as part of the current spending review.

Standard Spending Assessment

30. **Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will extend the area cost adjustment element of the education SSA to Wiltshire. [40752]

Mr. Timms: We are currently working up proposals for a reformed system of school and LEA funding for introduction in 2003–04. We are taking a fresh and objective look at what provision is needed for area costs in education and have no presumptions that current funding in any particular area is too high or indeed too low. We expect to consult on proposals for the new system in the summer, after the spending review is complete.

Classroom Assistants

31. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many unqualified adults are working as classroom assistants in England; and if she will make a statement. [40753]

Mr. Timms: There were 95,815 full-time equivalent teaching assistants in England in January 2001. No data are held centrally on their qualifications.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many staff left the service of her Department and its agencies in the year ended 31 March 2001; how many left before attaining the formal retirement age of 60 years; and in respect of how many her Department and its agencies assumed responsibilities for making payments until retirement age. [37554]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: For information on staff that have left the Department during the year ended 31 March 2001, and on how many left before the age of 60, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office today. This Department has assumed responsibility for making payments until retirement age for 143 staff who left the DfEE and its agencies in the year ended 31 March 2001.

Official Visits

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) if she will list the official visits within the UK outside London made by each Minister in her Department in 2001, giving for each *(a)* the origin and destination and *(b)* the mode of travel used; and what guidance is provided to Ministers in her Department on choice of mode of travel for official visits; [38180]

(2) if she will list the official visits to *(a)* Paris and *(b)* Brussels made by each Minister in her Department in 2001 and the mode of travel used; and what guidance is provided to Ministers in her Department on the choice of mode of travel for such visits. [38144]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 421W.

Civil Servants

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will set out for each Civil Service grade within her *(a)* Department and *(b)* Department's executive agencies the (i) total number of staff employed, (ii) number aged (A) 16–25, (B) 26–35, (C) 36–45, (D) 46–60 and (E) over the age of 60 years, (iii) number of registered disabled and (iv) number of ethnic minorities. [39173]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given today by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office.

Non-Governmental Organisations

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list non-Governmental organisations operating in the south-west region that receive public funds from her Department; and what amount of annual funding they received in the most recent year for which figures are available. [39189]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Autism

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many autistic pupils there were in each year since 1997 in *(a)* South Tyneside, *(b)* the north-east and *(c)* the UK; [39619]

(2) how many schools there are in *(a)* South Tyneside, *(b)* the north-east and *(c)* the UK which specialise in the treatment of autism; and what plans there are to increase this number. [39620]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information requested is not available.

Educational Attainment

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the educational attainment of schoolchildren in *(a)* current and former coalfield areas and *(b)* England; and what improvement there has been since 1997. [41796]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: In January 2001, we jointly commissioned research with the Coalfield Communities Campaign that looked into patterns of educational achievement in the coalfields. Former and current coalfield areas are benefiting from the literacy and numeracy strategies at primary level.

Percentage attainment indicators for boys

	England		*Coalfields*	
Key stage 1	*1998*	*2000*	*1998*	*2000*
Level 2+ reading (comprehension test)	75	77	73	79
Level 2+ maths	83	89	82	88

The same trend applied to girls. Beyond Key Stage 1, performance in coalfield areas did improve but remained below the national average. The full research report is available on the Department's internet site www.dfes.gov.uk (DfES research report 314) and in the House of Commons Library.

We recognise that more still needs to be done which is why we published the Schools White Paper—Schools: Achieving Success. It is a significant package for the reform of secondary education and also sets out our vision for education for the years ahead. The full consultation paper is available on the Department's internet site.

Post-16 Education

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the staying on rate post-16 education is in *(a)* coalfield areas and *(b)* England. [41797]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Reliable data on the percentage of students continuing in post-compulsory education at age 16 for coalfield areas cannot be produced at present. Participation rates by LEA and by local LSC area for 16 and 17-year-olds are published in Statistical Bulletin 11/00: Participation in education and training by young people aged 16 and 17 in each local area and region, England, 1995–96 to 1999–00.

The percentage of 16-year-olds participating in full-time and part-time education in England was 78.5 per cent. (provisional) in 2000–01.

Pay and Conditions

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what discussions she has had with trade unions about *(a)* pay and conditions and *(b)* training of (i) teaching and classroom assistants and (ii) nursery nurses. [42089]

Mr. Timms: Last December my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met a representative from the GMB and school support staff including teaching assistants and nursery nurses to hear their views about the pay and conditions of service of school support staff.

Departmental officials are currently discussing in a working party with representatives of teachers, employers and support staff, a range of options for developing the role, career structure and training of support staff in schools.

Academic Qualifications

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of children left school with no academic qualifications in *(a)* coalfield areas and *(b)* England in each of the last 10 years. [41800]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The proportion of 15-year-olds that achieved no GCSE or GNVQ equivalent passes by 2000–01 was 5.5 per cent. for England as a whole. This information is not available for coalfield areas.

Drug Education

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what requirements there are for drug education and awareness in *(a)* schools, *(b)* colleges and *(c)* universities. [42552]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Drug education in maintained schools is a statutory part of the National Curriculum. DfES Circular 4/95 sets out the statutory position on drug education in schools and was supplemented by the guidance "Protecting Young People" (1998) which gives detailed advice on how to deliver drug education effectively.

There are no requirements for drug education and awareness work to take place in colleges and universities. However the universities' own representative body, Universities UK, has produced guidelines on drug and alcohol policies for higher education institutions.

Standards Fund

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 770–72W, if she will list

Standards Fund grants which are not allocated to LEAs on a formula basis; what additional education funding is not allocated through *(a)* the Standards Fund and *(b)* special grants; and which additional educational funding schools are expected to apply for. [43351]

Mr. Timms: All Standards Fund grants are allocated to local education authorities on a formula basis, except for grants supporting grammar school/non-selective school partnerships and the training school initiative, which are based on individual agreements between the Department and the partnership or school. The grants funding Welcome Back bonuses and Golden Hellos for teachers require applications from schools but are allocated by a formula on receipt of the application. Schools may also apply to become part of the Specialist Schools programme, funded through the Standards Fund, and if successful the resulting additional funding is allocated by a formula.

The following initiatives involve additional funding allocated by formula to local education authorities outside the Standards Fund or Special Grant mechanisms:

Nursery education grant;

Special educational needs co-ordinators (early years);

Early years training;

Child care grant;

Neighbourhood nursery initiative (primarily a child care grant);

Grant maintained school transitional grant for insurance; and

Capital funding for voluntary aided schools.

The last two initiatives listed will require applications from schools, with funding allocated by formula on receipt of the application. The Teachers' Threshold Grant and Teachers' Performance Pay Progression Grant, paid via Special Grants, are also allocated in this way.

Specialist Teachers

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on special needs teaching in Somerset, with special reference to the number of specialist teachers available. [40735]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Office for Standards in Education inspections of the Local Education Authority and schools indicate that overall the Local Education Authority's strategy for special educational needs is sound. There is a higher than average proportion of good provision for special educational needs pupils in mainstream schools. The number of statements maintained by the Local Education Authority has been declining each year since 1996 and the number of pupils in special schools has decreased to 1 per cent. The national average is [illegible]3 per cent.

Schools (Repairs)

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many of the schools requiring substantial repairs are expected to have had these repairs completed by 1 April; and what financial resources will be needed to complete such repairs between 1 April 2002 and 31 March 2004. [43023]

John Healey: In 1996–97, when this Government came to office, capital spending on school buildings was £683 million. This has risen to £2.2 billion for 2001–02, and will rise further to an annual rate of £3.5 billion by 2003–04. Between April 2002 and April 2004, over £6.4 billion will be available for investment in school buildings. Local education authorities and schools can use this greatly increased funding to address the backlog of repairs that had built up over years of under funding by the previous Administration. They can also start to modernise the schools estate to meet the teaching and learning needs of the 21st century.

The Department has an investment strategy target of having addressed the most urgent repairs in 7,000 schools by 2004. Investment decisions are best made at the local level, and the bulk of the funding we provide is allocated to local education authorities and to schools by formula to enable them to address the priority needs of their school buildings. The funding that is available from 2001–02 until 2003–04 includes £1.25 billion of NDS devolved formula capital which goes directly to all maintained schools in England to enable them to invest in their buildings. To reduce the bureaucratic burden, we are not at present requesting details of this investment, but the funding we are making available will enable this target to be met.

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills on how many of the schools requiring rebuilding or re-modelling work will have *(a)* commenced and *(b)* been completed by 1 April; and what financial resources will be needed to complete this work between 1 April 2002 and 31 March 2004. [43022]

John Healey: In 1996–97, when this Government came to office, capital spending on school buildings was £683 million. This has risen to £2.2 billion for 2001–02, and will rise further to an annual rate of £3.5 billion by 2003–04. Between April 2002 and April 2004, over £6.4 billion will be available for investment in school buildings. Local education authorities and schools are able to use this greatly increased funding to address the backlog of repairs that had built up over years of under-funding by the previous Administration. They can also start to modernise the schools estate to meet the teaching and learning needs of the 21st century.

The Department has an investment strategy target of having replacement or refurbishment completed or under way in 650 schools by 2004. Investment decisions are best made at the local level, and the bulk of the funding we provide is allocated to local education authorities and to schools by formula to enable them to address the priority needs of their school buildings. To reduce the bureaucratic burden, we are not at present requesting details of this investment, but the funding we are making available will enable this target to be met.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Miscarriages of Justice

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons have been released in each of the past 10 years as a result of miscarriages of justice who have had their original convictions quashed *(a)* on appeal and *(b)* otherwise. [38364]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* The information requested is not readily available. However, the table sets out the outcome of appeals heard by the full Court of Appeal (Criminal Division) in each of the last 10 years:

	Allowed	*Dismissed*	*Number of re-trials ordered*
1992	299	370	12
1993	402	524	20
1994	351	577	51
1995	253	521	52
1996	250	469	53
1997[1]	236	367	33
1998	290	403	73
1999	171	380	70
2000	150	333	72
2001	135	313	n/a

[1] From 1997, figures relate to applications rather than appellants.

It is not possible to tell from these figures exactly how many prisoners were released from prison in each of the last 10 years as a result of their convictions being quashed. This is because not all of those who have successfully appealed against conviction will be in custody at the time their convictions are overturned; the outcome of the re-trials ordered is not available; and the table does not take any account of summary convictions quashed by the Crown court, or of convictions quashed by the House of Lords (figures for which are not available). In addition, the table's figures for appeal outcomes from 1997 onward are for the number of applications heard (each of which could have involved more than one appellant). As to *(b)*, it is only appellate courts which have the power to quash a conviction.

Air Conditioning

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) which consultant was used to advise on the installation of air conditioning during the recent refurbishment of 50 Queen Anne's Gate; [41160]

(2) what measures were taken to ensure that the consultant advising on the installation of air conditioning during the recent refurbishment of 50 Queen Anne's Gate was aware of the Government's policy on the use of hydrofluorocarbon refrigerants in air-conditioning; and if he will make a statement on the measures taken by the consultant to source practical and safe alternatives to hydrofluorocarbon-based air-conditioning; [41161]

(3) whether an installer capable of installing not-in-kind air conditioning was invited to quote for the recent refurbishment contract for 50 Queen Anne's Gate. [41159]

Angela Eagle: The air conditioning central chiller plant in 50 Queen Anne's Gate was replaced last year, because the old plant contained Chlorofluorocarbons, which were banned from 31 December 2000. This project did not form part of a larger refurbishment.

The procurement of the replacement chillers was handled using the standard procurement procedures for works contracts below the value of £3.6 million. Consultant engineers, Torpy Management (now known as Halcrow) and the Facilities Management Contractors, Johnson Controls, were asked to select five firms established in this particular field to tender. Another firm chaired by the right hon. Member for Suffolk Coastal (Mr. Gummer) offering an innovative environmentally friendly solution approached our consultants. This firm was seriously considered, but was not invited to tender, because our consultants considered that the alternative offered would have increased the cost and project risk unacceptably. The building work required in an occupied building would have been more extensive. In making this decision, the consultants took advice from the then Property Advisers to the Civil Estate (now part of the Office of Government Commerce) and experts within their own organisation.

The consultants were aware of the Home Office's Greening Operations Policy, which advised that environmentally friendly alternatives to Hydrofluorocarbons should be used where feasible. It was their view that a safe, technically feasible and cost-effective environmentally preferable solution did not exist in this particular case, taking into account that the building is in need of a major overall refurbishment and the Department's plans to relocate to 2 Marsham Street in three to four years' time. However, the firms that were asked to tender were invited to offer environmentally innovative solutions—none did so and the contract was awarded in October 2000 to a firm using a standard environmentally compliant refrigerant containing Hydrofluorocarbons.

Cannabis

Mr. Bell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to hear from his Advisory Committee in relation to proposals to reclassify cannabis as a Class C drug; and if he will make a statement. [40198]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I have now received the advice of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, which I am currently considering.

Holocaust Memorial Day

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans the Government have to include the Armenian massacres by the Ottoman Empire in 1915 in the remembrance commemorated by National Holocaust Memorial Day. [39951]

Angela Eagle: The Government recognise the strength of feeling in the Armenian community about the massacres of 1915–16. It was an appalling episode in twentieth century history, condemned by the British Government of the day and now.

The Government continue to extend its sympathies to the descendants of the victims, along with an assurance that the massacres will never be forgotten.

The Government believe that Holocaust Memorial Day should focus on learning the lessons of the Holocaust and other more recent atrocities that raise similar issues.

A particular focus on events around the period 1939–45 and thereafter should not be seen as failing to acknowledge, sympathise with and respect the deep concerns about earlier events like the massacre of Armenians in 1915–16.

Indeed, the particular focus of Holocaust Memorial Day does not prevent recollection by the Armenian community in the United Kingdom of the appalling events of 1915–16. Others may also seek to highlight other atrocities.

UK Detention Services

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when contracts with UK Detention Services Ltd. will be signed for new prisons at *(a)* Ashford and *(b)* Peterborough. [40060]

Beverley Hughes: The contracts for the prisons at Ashford and Peterborough are due to be signed at the end of March 2002 and the middle of April 2002 respectively.

Prisons

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the staffing levels are for each category of staff at HMP Rye Hill; what the prisoner population is at HMP Rye Hill; and what plans there are to deal with overcrowding at HMP Rye Hill. [40063]

Beverley Hughes: The number of certificated staff at Rye Hill prison is 164 and that of support staff including sub-contractors is 78. As at 28 February 2002 the prison held 618 prisoners. The certified normal accommodation is 600. The contractually approved operational capacity is 660.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the staffing levels are for each category of staff at HMP Dovegate; what the prisoner population is; when HMP Dovegate is expected to reach full capacity; what plans there are to deal with overcrowding; what research is being commissioned by the contractor into the outcomes at HMP Dovegate; which organisation is carrying out the research; and if he will make a statement. [40062]

Beverley Hughes: The staffing levels at Dovegate prison are shown in the table.

	Main prison	*Therapeutic community*
Managerial	91	25
Prisoner custody officer	150	61
Support	83	9
Total	324	95

The main prison's population was 594 on 28 February 2002. The certified normal capacity is 600. Discussions on increasing this capacity within the contractual limits for overcrowding are under way. There are currently 81 participants in the therapeutic community and it is planned to reach the operational capacity of 200 by July 2002.

The contractor is in the process of letting a six-year research contract to Surrey university during which three topics in respect of the therapeutic community will be studied: the mechanism of individual change in relation to the therapeutic process, the behaviour of residents when they return to the prison system and the reconviction and re-offending rates of residents when they are released into the general community.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the staffing levels are for each category of staff at HMP Blakenhurst; how staffing levels have changed since the Prison Service assumed management of the prison; what changes to the regime have occurred since the Prison Service assumed management of the prison; and if he will make a statement. [40065]

Beverley Hughes: The current staffing levels at Blakenhurst prison are 14 managers, 208 operational grades, 64 other directly employed staff and 24 catering and educational staff, a total of 310. This is comparable to the planned complement of approximately 322 employees (including contracted out personnel) of the former contractor, United Kingdom Detention Services (UKDS) before the change in management.

Major changes in regime under Prison Service management include: a revision of the prison's daily visits timetable and the introduction of a booked visits scheme; the introduction of a Personal Officer Scheme; the revision of the prison's incentives and earned privileges scheme and of the anti-bullying strategy; the refocusing of education on the acquisition of basic skills and employment skills; the introduction of a new pre-release course addressing resettlement issues; an increase in domestic work for prisoners; the redevelopment of prison workshops with the opening in March of two new workshops providing work for 60 prisoners; and the introduction of an industrial cleaning course for 15 prisoners.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the staffing levels were for each category of staff at HMP Doncaster immediately prior to the commencement of the latest contract with Premier Custodial Group Ltd; what the staffing levels are for each category of staff at HMP Doncaster; and what the prisoner population is at HMP Doncaster. [40064]

Beverley Hughes: The number of staff at Doncaster prison immediately before, and after, the new contract is shown in the table.

	Old contract	New contract
Managerial	58	67
Prisoner custody officer	320	273
Support	256	279
Total	634	619

The population at Doncaster as at 1 March 2002 was 1,003.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the present staffing levels are for each category of staff at HMP Wandsworth; and what vacancies exist in each category. [40513]

Beverley Hughes: The figures are given in the table.

Grade category	*Staff in post on 28 February 2002*	*Vacancies on 28 February 2002*
Accountant	1	—
Administrative	59	6
Chaplaincy	3.5	1
Healthcare	33.5	3.5
Industrial	25.5	—
Non industrial	28	6
Operational support grade	103	—
Psychology	8	1
Officer grades	391.5	31.5
Governor grades	12	—
Grand Total	666	49

Offenders (Electronic Monitoring)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offenders are being electronically monitored in the Greater London area. [40512]

Beverley Hughes: On 28 February 2002, a total of 528 persons were being electronically monitored in the Greater London area.

Design Champion

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the role is of the Design Champion in his Department. [40528]

Angela Eagle: I am the Ministerial Design Champion for the Home Office. I will review the Department's capital works programme, the design quality aspects of that programme in relation to the Government's wider objectives, and in particular the prevention of crime. I aim to sponsor at least two projects within the Department's remit, and to oversee a departmental action plan to improve design quality across the Department and sponsored bodies. It is important to encourage a commitment to better public building and to ensure that high-quality design is part of an efficient and effective procurement process.

Sex Offenders

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people are on the Sex Offenders Register in each constituency in Essex, broken down by type of offence; [39497]

(2) how many people are on the Sex Offenders Register in Essex, broken down by *(a)* gender, *(b)* ethnic group, *(c)* original nationality at birth and *(d)* age, broken down by those aged (i) below 40, (ii) 40 to 59 and (iii) 60 years and above. [39495]

Beverley Hughes: The Sex Offenders Act 1997 requires offenders cautioned for, convicted of, or found not guilty by reason of insanity of an offence specified in Schedule One to the Act to provide certain details to the police. There is, however, no "register" of sex offenders, as such; nor are sex offenders subject to the requirements of the Act separately identified as such in criminal statistics.

Until recently, data on the number of sex offenders subject to the requirements of the Act were collated biannually on a national basis from the police national computer. However, this arrangement has been overtaken following guidance issued by the Home Office in respect of the provisions in section 67 of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000. The guidance requires information about the number of sex offenders subject to the Act's requirements in each police area to be published on an annual basis starting in 2002 and local systems are being put in place to deliver this. Until these systems are in place information on numbers of sex offenders subject to the Act's requirements could be obtained only by a specific exercise by the particular police force concerned. We have no plans to require publication by constituency or to break down published figures further.

Prison Education

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which prison workers receive an environmental allowance; whether prison education workers receive such an allowance; whether the money paid to those contracted to deliver prison education includes an element to pay environmental allowances; and if he will review these prison education contracts to ensure that the conditions under which prison education lecturers operate are taken into account. [40654]

Beverley Hughes: Prison environmental allowances are paid only to nursing and pharmacy grades employed under national health service Whitley terms and conditions. No other directly employed Prison Service staff receive an environmental allowance. Those contracted through a third party to deliver education do not qualify for an environmental allowance from the Prison Service. The composition of pay rates for staff employed by third party contractors is a matter for the contractor. What the Prison Service is buying is the provision of a range of education services to a particular standard and volume.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what mechanisms exist for prison education workers to appeal against the decision of prison governors to exclude them on the grounds of a breach of prison rules and regulations; and what plans the Government and Prison Service have concerning such mechanisms. [40413]

Beverley Hughes: Prison governors have a statutory right to exclude any representative of the education contractor from their establishment on the grounds of maintaining good order and discipline or security. The contractor is required to co-operate with any investigation relating to security and to make any staff available to be interviewed as part of such an investigation. Education workers have the right to representation either by the contractor or by a third party acceptable to both the contractor and establishment.

Police Service

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on maternity leave, maternity support leave, parental leave and adoption leave in the Police Service. [44041]

Mr. Denham: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has approved an agreement reached in the Police Negotiating Board (PNB) granting improved maternity leave to policewomen in England and Wales. The PNB Agreement also creates new rights for police officers to maternity support leave, adoption leave and to time off to care for dependants. The full details of the agreement are set out in Home Office Circular hoc 12–2002 that has been placed in the Library.

The changes include:

enabling policewomen to take split periods of maternity leave before and after childbirth;

giving police officers with responsibility for a child an entitlement to 13 weeks leave in respect of each child up to the age of five, with an entitlement to buy back, for pension purposes, reckonable service for any period taken as parental leave;

replacing the current two day paternity leave provision with an entitlement to five days paid maternity support leave for the child's father or partner or nominated carer of the expectant mother;

giving police officers five days adoption leave at or around the time of adoption; and

giving police officers an entitlement to paid leave, normally one or two days, to cope with short-term difficulties.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary approved the PNB Agreement in order to give police officers the same rights enjoyed by other workers under employment rights legislation.

Speed Cameras

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what requirements he sets for the conspicuity of speed cameras. [42510]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

New visibility rules for those areas participating in the safety camera netting off scheme were announced on 3 December 2001. These state that fixed site camera housings should be clearly signed and made visible by being painted or marked in yellow. Mobile enforcement units should also be clearly marked and visible to drivers. Areas currently outside the netting off scheme would need to comply with all the visibility requirements as a condition of joining.

Press Releases

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many press releases were issued by his Department *(a)* between 1 May and 31 December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive. [40035]

Angela Eagle: The number of press releases issued by the Department was:

	1997[1]	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Home Office	271	512	450	422	336
Prison service	67[2]	75	78	93	91
Probation inspectorate	2	3	—	11	14
Prisons inspectorate	—	7	39	38	59
Police inspectorate	—	—	—	1	2
Fire inspectorate	1	—	—	—	3

[1] 1 May to 31 December 1997

[2] Figure is for the full year.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assistance he gives to the funeral costs of asylum seekers; and how those funeral costs are met. [40565]

Angela Eagle: The Home Office does not give any assistance towards meeting the funeral costs of asylum seekers.

TREASURY

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the net saving in public expenditure that will be made in 2001–02 due to the public sector's reduced liability for national insurance contributions following the rebates associated with the climate change levy. [41828]

Mr. Boateng: The levy package is expected to lead to little change to the overall public finances in 2001–02. An estimate of the impact of the climate change levy package on the public finances was published by HM Customs and Excise in the Regulatory Impact Assessment for the levy in April 2000 including national insurance implications for public sector employees. Subsequently in Budget 2001 the Government revised the estimate of the cost of the enhanced capital allowances for investments in energy-saving measures from its previous figure of £100 million per year to £70 million for 2001–02 and £130 million for 2002–03.

Corporation Tax

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what annual tax revenues resulted from receipts under the I-E formula in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* each subsequent financial year to date. [42494]

Dawn Primarolo: Companies' corporation tax liabilities are based on their whole profits less any tax reliefs and deductions. Receipts are not attributed to specific parts of the tax calculation. Therefore, no reliable figures are available on the tax revenues generated by the I-E formula.

Capital Assets

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 12 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 889W, on capital assets, on what occasions since 1997 the accounting treatment of a PPP in the departmental accounts has differed from the accounting treatment in the national accounts; and if he will make a statement. [42499]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Matthew Taylor, dated 14 March 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question on capital assets. (42499)

There have been no differences because, as explained in my earlier reply, national accounts follow the treatment decided by departments on the basis of generally accepted accounting practice.

Earnings

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the value was of 60 per cent. of median earnings *(a)* in cash terms and *(b)* at December 2001 prices in each year from 1985. [42623]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 12 March 2002]*: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Terry Rooney, dated 14 March 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question requesting the value of 60 per cent of median earnings in cash terms and at December 2001 prices. (42623)

The New Earnings Survey (NES) provides earnings data for Great Britain for full-time employees on adult rates of pay. In the attached table, figures are provided for 60 per cent of median earnings for April of each year from 1986 to 2001, the latest date for which figures are available, given in cash terms and at December 2001 prices.

60 per cent. median earnings

Great Britain, not seasonally adjusted

	60 per cent. Median Earnings (£)	*At December 2001 Prices (£)*
April 1986	98.20	174.30
April 1987	105.03	178.90
April 1988	114.85	188.24
April 1989	125.55	190.47
April 1990	135.33	186.19
April 1991	148.21	193.09
April 1992	158.84	198.43
April 1993	164.11	202.39
April 1994	168.63	202.78
April 1995	174.56	203.14
April 1996	180.60	205.22
April 1997	188.92	209.58
April 1998	196.35	209.39
April 1999	203.63	213.74
April 2000	211.90	216.01
April 2001	222.08	222.46

Note:

1. Earnings are for full-time employees on adult rates whose pay is unaffected by absence.

Source:

New Earnings Survey, Retail Price Index.

Double Taxation

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the schedule to a draft Order in Council ratifying the new double taxation convention between the United Kingdom and the United States of America will be laid before Parliament; for what reason a draft Order in Council has not been laid before Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [42601]

Dawn Primarolo: We are considering a number of matters relating to the application of the double taxation convention. The intention is to submit the convention to Parliament on completion of these considerations.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with *(a)* the European Commission and *(b)* other EU member states on the terms of the new double taxation convention agreed between the UK and USA, signed on 24 July 2001; and if he will make a statement. [43085]

Dawn Primarolo: None.

Community Investment Tax Credit

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which projects under the community investment tax credit initiative are ineligible for EC state aid; and if he will make a statement. [43490]

Ruth Kelly: The Government are currently in discussions with the European Commission to assess the compatibility of the community investment tax credit with the state aids rules. These discussions have not yet been concluded.

Government Finance

Ian Stewart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will outline the Government's financing plans for 2002–03. [43888]

Ruth Kelly: The Government's preliminary financing plans for 2002–03 can be found in the "Debt and Reserves Management Report 2002–03". In order to comply with the requirement outlined in "The Code for Fiscal Stability" that a debt management report be published every financial year, the "Debt and Reserves Management Report 2002–03" has been published today. Copies are available in the House of Commons Library. Additionally, it is also available on HM Treasury and the Debt Management Office websites www.hm-treasury.gov.uk and www.dmo.gov.uk, respectively. An update of the financing plans will be published in this year's Budget papers on 17 April.

Pensions

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what reports his Department publishes on public sector pension schemes; [43347]

(2) what reports were published by Government Departments from their agencies dealing primarily with public sector pension schemes in the last five years. [43346]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Responsibility for administering individual public sector pension schemes and accounting for them rests with the bodies responsible for the schemes, not the Treasury, which does not keep lists of all related publications. Reports on individual schemes, on matters such as actuarial valuations and scheme accounts, are published by the body responsible for the scheme or, in the case of NHS and teachers pension scheme valuations, the Government Actuary's department. In July 2000 the Treasury published the report of the Government review of ill-health retirement in the public sector, which was a Treasury-chaired review.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Theatres

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many theatres there are in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* coalfield constituencies. [41325]

Dr. Howells: We have contacted the Arts Council of England to request the information required, and my noble Friend the Minister for the Arts will write to my hon. Friend as soon as it is available, placing copies of her letter in the Libraries of both Houses.

Cinema Screens

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many cinema screens there are in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* coalfield constituencies. [41810]

Dr. Howells: I understand from the Cinema Exhibitors Association that there are 2,954 cinema screens in the UK. Figures are not kept by coalfield constituency.

Public Libraries

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many functioning public libraries there were, broken down by local authority, in England in each year since 1997. [42238]

Dr. Howells: This information is not readily available. However, we can extract and then represent the required data from the 149 English Library Authorities from existing reference sources. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as this has been done, placing copies of my letter in the Libraries of both Houses.

Ministerial Design Champions Group

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether the Ministerial Design Champions Group will publish an annual report; and if she will make a statement. [41965]

Dr. Howells: The Ministerial Design Champions Group will not publish an annual report. However, each Ministerial Design Champion is committed to producing an Action Plan about what his or her Department is doing to promote better public buildings. My noble Friend Lord Falconer of Thoroton, Chair of the Design Champions Group, has asked Departments to report progress on their Action Plans at the next ministerial meeting in May.

Energy Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on energy costs incurred by her Department in each of the last 10 years. [42433]

Dr. Howells: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport does not have figures going back 10 years. The costs for the last eight years are:

Financial year	*Energy cost (£)*
1994–95	114,428
1995–96	114,847
1996–97	117,437
1997–98	121,916
1998–99	106,634
1999–2000	[1]132,908
2000–01	[1]134,527
2001–02	[2]132,825

[1] Includes part year occupation of a building.

[2] Figures for 2001–02 are costs to date.

Parental Leave Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate she has made of the *(a)* financial costs and *(b)* benefits to her Department of the parental leave directive. [42485]

Dr. Howells: To date no staff in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport have taken parental leave. We estimate future costs to be minimal as parental leave is currently unpaid. The Department already offers paid and unpaid maternity leave, paid paternity leave, career breaks, paid and unpaid special leave and a range of flexible working patterns, so we do not envisage the current parental leave arrangements to be of significant benefit to the Department.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her Department's policy is towards age discrimination. [42582]

Dr. Howells: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport is committed to providing a working environment where no one is disadvantaged. Our policy is not to discriminate against staff or eligible applicants for posts on the grounds of gender, marital status, race, nationality, ethnic origin, religion, disability, age or sexual orientation. Staff are treated equally and fairly and decisions are based solely on objective and job related criteria.

Verulamium

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will withdraw consent for ploughing on the archaeological site of Verulamium in Hertfordshire until an agreement on compensation is reached. [41840]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State is aware of the concerns that have been expressed about the impact of ploughing at Verulamium. Officials are currently exploring with English Heritage a number of issues relating to this site including possible compensation.

Ethiopian Artefacts

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the Ethiopian artefacts that remain in British possession from the raid on Mogdala in 1868. [42723]

Dr. Howells: There have been no requests for return from the Ethiopian Government for any of the objects in question. With regard to the manuscripts in the British Library, microfilm copies have been deposited in Addis Ababa, and scholars have access to the originals at the Library. We understand that the Ethiopian Government are content with these arrangements.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Municipal Waste

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much, and what proportion, of municipal waste has been *(a)* landfilled, *(b)* incinerated, *(c)* composted and *(d)* re-cycled in the United Kingdom in each year since 1990; and if she will make a statement. [42562]

Mr. Meacher: Data on municipal waste are available from the Department's Municipal Waste Management Survey 1999–2000. The results for England and Wales are as follows:

	1996–97		*1997–98*		*1998–99*		*1999–2000*	
	Thousand tonnes	*Percentage*	*Thousand tonnes*	*Percentage*	*Thousand tonnes*	*Percentage*	*Thousand tonnes*	*Percentage*
Landfilled	21,969	85	23,110	85	23,005	82	23,714	81
Incinerated	2,060	8	1,690	6	2,163	8	2,285	8
Composted and recycled[1]	1,803	7	2,127	8	2,601	9	3,218	11
Other disposal methods	147	1	238	1	143	1	115	0
Total municipal waste	25,979	100	27,166	100	27,912	100	29,332	100

[1] Separate figures for composted and recycled waste not available.

Data for earlier years are not available. 2000–01 data are currently being collected from local authorities. Totals and percentages may not add, due to rounding. Municipal waste in Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friends, the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

The Government's vision for sustainable waste management and their plan of action for achieving that vision are set out in its waste strategy for England and Wales, 'Waste Strategy 2000'. The strategy sets out the Government's targets for dealing with household waste: to recycle or compost at least 25 per cent. of household waste by 2005, 30 per cent. by 2010 and 33 per cent. by 2015. To ensure that all local authorities contribute to achieving the Government's targets, local authorities have been set challenging individual statutory performance standards for recycling and composting.

The Government have also set out the 'waste hierarchy' for municipal waste, whereby minimising the amount of waste produced is the preferred option wherever possible, with re-use, recycling and composting as preferable to incineration and landfill.

Abandoned Vehicles

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the outcome of the operation in respect of abandoned vehicles in Medway; what proposals she is considering for its extension to other local authorities; and if she will make a statement. [42559]

Mr. Meacher: Kent police piloted a "blitz" approach on abandoned vehicles in the Medway area (Operation Cubit) in co-operation with Kent county council, Medway council, DVLA and the Kent fire brigade for eight weeks in early 2001. To inform any decision on Cubit's expansion, the Home Office commissioned a detailed evaluation of the pilot. This is in progress but initial findings are that Cubit was highly effective at removing vehicles from the streets but that since Cubit ceased operations abandoned and untaxed vehicles have been returning to the areas originally targeted.

Since the original pilot in Medway, further operations have taken place and are shown in the table.

Operation Cubit	*Date*
Swanley	June 2001
Dartford	October 2001
Gravesend	October 2001
Maidstone	January 2002
Swale	January 2002
Hastings	February 2002
Brighton	February 2002
Liverpool	March 2002

To date the operations have removed almost 3,000 abandoned unlicensed vehicles from the streets of Kent and Hastings.We will be making an announcement very shortly about the extension of Operation Cubit to other local authorities.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures or statistics are collated to quantify the number of abandoned cars dumped by local authority area. [42242]

Mr. Meacher: Information on the number of abandoned vehicles removed by local authorities was collected for the first time in the Department's 2000–01 Municipal Waste Management Survey which should be published in July 2002.

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) now ask local authorities in England and Wales to include in their waste collection statistics figures on the number of abandoned and surrendered vehicles. The first figures requested cover the period 1 April 1999 to 31 march 2000. This information is published in the CIPFA waste collection and disposal statistics and summary tables are available at www.ipf.co.uk/sis. CIPFA will be requesting this information in future years.

Although the Refuse Disposal (Amenity) Act 1978 does not require local authorities to keep records of the numbers of abandoned vehicles that they deal with, we would expect them to do so because the numbers involved are on the increase and this has implications for their budgets.

Air Conditioning

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether an installer capable of installing not-in-kind air conditioning was invited to quote for the recent contract for the new departmental building in Temple Quay, Bristol; and if she will make a statement. [41180]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

Temple Quay house is a leased building and as such contracting for individual elements was not a matter for Government. However, WSP South Ltd. have designed the environmental services to provide a comfortable environment with minimal use of comfort cooling ie air-conditioning by adopting a mixed mode strategy. Full comfort cooling is provided only in areas where this strategy is impractical due to high heat gains eg computer rooms, printing rooms etc.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which consultant was used to advise on the installation of air conditioning during the recent equipping of a new departmental building, Temple Quay, Bristol. [41178]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

WSP South Ltd. and their agents advised on the design and installation of the air conditioning units.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Northern Ireland

32. **Andrew Mackinlay:** To ask the Solicitor-General if she will outline her rights and responsibilities that *(a)* exist and *(b)* are proposed in relation to Northern Ireland. [40754]

The Solicitor-General: I can exercise any of the powers of the Attorney-General for Northern Ireland. Following devolution of justice functions to Northern Ireland, I will have the power to exercise all the functions of the Advocate General for Northern Ireland.

Immunity

37. **Derek Twigg:** To ask the Solicitor-General what criteria are adopted by the law officers in granting immunity from prosecution. [40761]

The Solicitor-General: An immunity will be granted only if justified in the public interest, and generally where an assessment is made that it is more important to obtain information and assistance from the suspected person than to prosecute that individual.

Crown Prosecution Service

38. **Ian Lucas:** To ask the Solicitor-General what steps she takes to monitor the consistency of decisions to prosecute made by the Crown Prosecution Service. [40762]

The Solicitor-General: Prosecution decisions made by the Crown Prosecution Service are taken in accordance with the principles set out in the Code for Crown Prosecutors so that it can make fair and consistent casework decisions.

The application of the Code is underpinned by training and by line-management monitoring. In addition, casework performance data are collected and published each year in the Crown Prosecution Service's Annual Report to the Attorney-General and presented to Parliament.

The work of the Crown Prosecution Service is also subject to inspection by HM CPS Inspectorate, an independent statutory body established in 2000. The Chief Inspector is appointed by, and reports to, the Attorney-General on the quality of casework undertaken by the CPS.

Fraud Prosecutions

39. **Mr. Bryant:** To ask the Solicitor-General what assessment her Department has made of the obstacles to securing prosecutions for major fraud. [40763]

The Solicitor-General: Since its inception, the Serious Fraud Office has identified some common obstacles to securing prosecutions of major fraud cases and these can arise at either the investigative stage or during the trial. During the investigation these can include:

Dearth of police resource and expertise. This is addressed in the recent report of the Interdepartmental Working Party, chaired by the SFO, which has recommended the establishment of a national Police Fraud Squad or increased resources for the SFO to enable them to use more civilian investigators.

Sheer weight of documentary and computer-generated material which has to be sifted, analysed and organised often under constraints of time.

Most cases of major fraud have an international association as either the evidence, the witnesses or defendants are outside the jurisdiction of the courts.

Obstacles at the trial stage include:

Lack of a single substantive offence of "fraud", which obliges the prosecutor to charge theft or deception offences.

Demonstrating where dishonesty lies in unfamiliar commercial and financial transactions where the forum is unfamiliar with the context or the financial instruments involved.

Attempting to simplify what are, in many cases, essentially very complex commercial transactions in specialist financial markets can detract from the ability to demonstrate the "whole picture".

Availability of trained judges with experience of serious fraud cases. This is an issue currently being addressed by the senior presiding judge.

Money Laundering

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Solicitor-General what contribution the Serious Fraud Office is making to the Government's objective of reducing money laundering. [40760]

The Solicitor-General: The Serious Fraud Office investigates and prosecutes offences involving serious or complex fraud. It also pursues related laundering offences. It is investigating or has prosecuted seven cases involving money laundering offences (under the Criminal Justice Act 1988) in the last five years. the Serious Fraud Office also assists foreign competent judicial authorities with requests for information and the gathering of evidence via the UK Central Authority thus serving as an important part of the global deterrent against money laundering.

In many cases, financial gains are illusory or have long since been dissipated but whenever it is appropriate and practicable, the SFO will pursue proceeds during the investigation and these may be confiscated by the trial judge for distribution to creditors and investors. In addition, liquidators or administrative receivers can pursue recovery through civil proceedings.

WALES

Public Appointments

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the appointments made by his Department since 1 May 1997 of chairmen of *(a)* non-departmental public bodies, *(b)* commissions, *(c)* inquiries, *(d)* agencies and *(e)* task forces; and if he will list their (i) term of office, (ii) salary and (iii) known political affiliation (A) past and (B) present. [33890]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Information on the number, remit and membership of task forces, ad hoc advisory groups and reviews has been published by the Cabinet Office on a regular basis. The first report was published on 11 January 2000 and gives information for the period from 1 May 1997 to 31 October 1999. A second report was published on 27 July 2000, and covered the period 1 November 1999 to 30 April 2000. A third report was published on 13 December 2000 covering the period 1 May 2000 to 31 October 2000. The most recent report: "Task Forces, Ad Hoc Advisory Groups and Reviews", was issued in October 2001, and covers the period of the financial year 2000–01. Copies of these reports are placed in the Libraries of the House.

Information on political affiliations is sought at appointment stage but is not collected centrally. Membership and voting behaviour is a matter on which all citizens have the right to privacy.

The list of appointments made by my Department since 1 May 1997 has been placed in the Library.

National Assembly for Wales

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many meetings there have been between Ministers in his Department and the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales and his Cabinet in each of the past 12 months; and if he will list the *(a)* date and *(b)* subject of each meeting. [40507]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I meet the First Minister of the National Assembly nearly every week and other Ministers of the Assembly as the need arises. In addition my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary has regular meetings with Assembly Ministers. At these meetings we discuss a wide range of issues.

Wales Office

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to increase the number of staff in the Wales Office. [43229]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I told the House on 23 January 2002, that I had commissioned an external study of the Wales Office staffing level, *Official Report*, column 873. I am considering the findings of that report and I will, as promised, write to the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs when I have decided what changes I might make.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to move the location of the Wales Office in London. [43222]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have no such plans.

Special Advisers

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many special advisers were employed by him *(a)* between 1 May and 31 December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive; and what the total amount spent on special advisers by the Department was in each of those years. [41262]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Since becoming Secretary of State for Wales in August 1999 I have been supported by two special adviser posts.

They are paid in accordance with the Cabinet Office pay scales for special advisers: these are currently under review.

Public-private Partnerships (Consultants)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the total external spending by his Department was on public-private partnership consultants in each of the last four years; how many full-time equivalent consultants were employed over this period; how many billed consultancy days there were per year; what the implied average cost of each PPP consultant was; how many consultancy firms were used by his Department over this period; and if he will make a statement. [43194]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 1 February 2002 in respect of the Private Finance Initiative, *Official Report*, column 573W.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Free Television Licences

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list *(a)* the amount budgeted and *(b)* the total spent on the free television licence for the over-75s in each financial year since its introduction. [43366]

Maria Eagle: Annually Managed Expenditure is not cash limited.

We made payments on behalf of DCMS as follows:

	Paid to the BBC (£)	
	Television licence revenue forgone	*BBC administration costs*
2000–01	[1]305,503,000	17,061,000
2001–02	356,296,000	4,575,000

[1] Includes payment of £7.165 million made in 2001–02 in respect of 2000–01.

Note:

Any under/overpayment as of 31 March in a given year is settled by way of adjustment to the final payment in the subsequent financial year.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the number of people entitled to a non-automatic winter fuel payment for the 2001–02 winter; and of that number how many have yet to make a claim. [43356]

Maria Eagle: This winter, 2001–02, an estimated 500,000 people became newly entitled to a winter fuel payment. At least 255,000 of these people have been paid automatically.

Exact numbers of people who need to claim are not available; however, up to 8 March, over 217,000 claim forms had been received. Eligible people who need to submit a claim have until 30 March 2002 to do so and it is up to the individual to choose whether to claim.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will set out the national baseline targets for the total weekly benefit savings to be achieved by local authorities in each year since the introduction of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on *(a)* the basis on which the level of these targets were determined and *(b)* the performance of local authorities in meeting these targets in each year. [25732]

Malcolm Wicks: Tables showing individual threshold figures and the individual performance against the thresholds for each local authority, from the introduction of the weekly benefit savings anti-fraud incentive scheme in April 1993 to March 2001, have been placed in the Library.

The level of the threshold targets was determined according to local authority housing benefit and council tax benefit (HB/CTB) expenditure and by weighted case load to reflect estimates of relative risks of different types of cases using available data, such as the housing benefit accuracy reviews.

The weekly benefit savings scheme is being replaced over two years from April 2001 with a new, more comprehensive scheme to reduce fraud and error in HB/CTB covering prevention, detection, sanctions and prosecutions.

Economic Statistics

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list for *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales, *(d)* Northern Ireland, *(e)* each English region and *(f)* each local authority in the United Kingdom (i) income support claimants as a percentage of the population over 16, (ii) employment rates as a percentage of the working age population, (iii) economic activity rates as a percentage of the working population and (iv) unemployment rates. [34306]

Malcolm Wicks: The available information has been placed in the Library. Information on Northern Ireland is a matter for the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Employment

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the implications for the UK following the adoption by the European Commission of an action plan to remove obstacles to EU workers' mobility; and if he will make a statement. [37493]

Malcolm Wicks: The Department is currently considering the Commission's Action Plan on Skills and Mobility and the implications for this Department.

The Action Plan contains a number of proposals which fall within the policy responsibility of other Government Departments, principally the Department for Education and Skills. We will work with those Departments to agree the UK's position.

Benefits

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to review the current benefits system; and when the last review was carried out. [37952]

Malcolm Wicks: The benefits system is constantly under review.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the current rates of benefit are; when they were set; and what criteria were used to establish the level of benefit. [37953]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Laxton) on 28 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 895W.

Rates of benefit are reviewed each year taking into consideration the change in the general level of prices in the September prior to the April in which the new rates are to come into force. Generally, contributory and non-contributory benefits are uprated by the Retail Prices Index and income-related benefits by the Rossi index (RPI less housing costs). However, there is discretion to increase rates other than in line with the rate of inflation, for example, the minimum income guarantee was increased by more than inflation to help combat pensioner poverty.

Means-tested Benefit

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of children under 16 live in households where families claim means tested benefit in *(a)* St. Helens, South, *(b)* Merseyside, *(c)* the North West and *(d)* England. [38269]

Malcolm Wicks: Information is not available at constituency level for means-tested benefits.

As at May 2000, in England there were 2,310 thousand (22.9 per cent.) children under age 16 in families on means-tested benefits, and in the North West (including Merseyside) there were 390 thousand (27.2 per cent.) children under age 16 in families on means-tested benefits.

Minimum Income Guarantee

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many retirement pensioners are receiving the minimum income guarantee in *(a)* Great Britain, *(b)* each region of Great Britain and *(c)* each parliamentary constituency; and what the percentage change in the number of claimants in each category has been from the previous year. [39546]

Mr. McCartney: The information has been placed in the Library.

Poverty

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what proportion of children were living in poverty defined as living below 50 per cent. mean income after housing costs, expressed as an average for the period *(a)* 1992 to 1997 and *(b)* 1997 to 2001; [40294]

(2) what proportion of the population was living in poverty, defined as living below 50 per cent. mean income after housing costs, expressed as an average for the period *(a)* 1992 to 1997 and *(b)* 1997 to 2001. [40296]

Malcolm Wicks: Such information on low incomes as is available can be found in the publication Households Below Average Income 1994–95 to 1999–2000, a copy of which can be found in the Library. Data for the financial year 2000–01 will be published on 11 April 2002.

Employment and Social Policy Council (Scottish Representation)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether a Scottish Executive Minister will be a member of the UK delegation to the Employment and Social Policy European Union Council of Ministers meeting on 7 March; and what information is being provided by his Department to guarantee effective pre-council scrutiny by the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament. [40321]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* No Scottish Executive Minister attended the Employment and Social Policy Council Meeting on 7 March 2002.

It is the responsibility of the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament to scrutinise the Scottish Executive's involvement in preparations for EU Council meetings. These arrangements are a matter for the Committee and the Scottish Executive. The Department provides information to Scottish Executive officials as part of that process.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will estimate the monetary value of Child Support Agency maintenance assessments for 2000–01 that have been *(a)* collected and arranged and *(b)* classified as outstanding debt; [33341]

(2) how many child support assessments the CSA processed in 2000–01 in *(a)* less than 20 weeks, *(b)* between 20 and 52 weeks and *(c)* over 52 weeks; [33344]

(3) if he will estimate the *(a)* number and *(b)* value of compensation payments awarded by the CSA in 2000–01. [33345]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Steve Webb, dated 13 March 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply from me.

You ask three questions of the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions: one, if he will estimate the monetary value of Child support Agency maintenance assessments for year ending March 2001 that have been (a) collected and arranged and (b) classified as outstanding debt. Two, how many child support assessments the CSA processed in 2000 in (a) less than 20 weeks (b) between 20 and 52 weeks and (c) over 52 weeks. Three, if he will estimate the (a) number and (b) value of compensation payments awarded by the CSA in 2000–01.

Some of the information you have requested is not available in the format you have requested.

The total amount of maintenance that was collected and arranged as at March 2001 was £757.53 million, this is compared to £712.24 million for year ending March 2000 and £635.67 million for year ending March 1999. The amount of maintenance that was owed as at year ending March 2001 is £527.80 million. This amount has been accruing since the inception of the Agency in April 1993. It is not possible to show how much of this figure relates to any specific year.

Table 1 on the attached annex shows the number of Full Maintenance Assessment and Interim Maintenance Assessment Cases cleared in the year ending March 2001 and number of weeks it took to process them.

In the period ending March 2001 we have paid out £7.9 million in compensation on an estimated 12,696 cases. This figure includes over £1.1 million in Advance Payments of maintenance. These are lump sum payments of arrears paid to a parent with care when the Agency has delayed actioning a case. The arrears are however recovered from the non-resident parent over a period of time.

I hope this is helpful.

Annex 1: Table 1

Number of cases processed in year ending March 2001

	Maintenance assessment	
Time taken to process claims	*Full*	*Interim*
Under 20 weeks	53,287	1,139
Between 20 to 52 weeks	26,846	1,246
Over 52 weeks	20,623	1,390
Total cases processed	100,756	3,775

Source:

Strategic assurance team

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Public Appointments

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many appointments to public bodies have been made through her Department *(a)* from April 2000 to March 2001 and *(b)* since 31 March 2001; and how many of these were (i) men and (ii) women. [42155]

Ms Rosie Winterton: 143 new non-judicial appointments were made to the Lord Chancellor's non-departmental public bodies from April 2000 to March 2001. Of these, 86 were men and 57 were women. Since 31 March 2001, 252 new appointments have been made: 151 men and 101 women.

Golden Jubilee

Valerie Davey: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he will announce the results of the civic honours competitions held to mark Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee. [44196]

Mr. Wills: I am pleased to announce that Her Majesty has commanded that city status should be granted to Preston, Newport, Stirling, Lisburn and Newry and that Exeter should be honoured with the grant of a Lord Mayoralty, to mark the Golden Jubilee.

Before advising Her Majesty, my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor consulted my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, and the Secretaries of State for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland on the applications relevant to their Departments.

On the advice of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Lord Chancellor exceptionally recommended, and Her Majesty agreed, that two towns in Northern Ireland should be granted city status on this occasion.

I know that the unsuccessful applicants will be very disappointed not to have been honoured on such an important occasion. I can, however, assure them that the standard of all the applications was impressive and some were outstanding. The winners were particularly so and all deserve congratulations. The competitions have demonstrated a very positive attitude to Her Majesty's Golden Jubilee among towns and cities across the United Kingdom.

Electoral Roll

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will list the constituencies which have marked registers missing from the 2001 general election. [30104]

Ms Rosie Winterton: It is the responsibility of returning officers to ensure that marked registers are despatched to the Clerk of the Crown in good order and complete.

The Guidance to Acting Returning Officers in England and Wales was revised and reissued by the Home Office prior to the general election in 2001 and, at the request of this Department, specifically sought to remind them of previous concerns about incomplete and missing registers.

Given that context, the list is of constituencies in England and Wales where, to date, some marked registers, or part of them, are or appear to be missing is as follows:

Aylesbury
Bassetlaw
Battersea
Blackburn
Blackpool, North and Fleetwood
Carlisle
Chesterfield
Chipping Barnet
City of Chester
Don Valley
Doncaster, North
East Surrey
East Yorkshire
Eastleigh
Ellesmere Port
Enfield, North
Greenwich and Woolwich
Halifax
Harborough
Hastings and Rye
Hazel Grove
Hereford
Hexham
Kettering
Kingswood
Milton Keynes, South-West
Mole Valley
Newark
North Wiltshire
Northampton, South
Oxford, East
Oxford, West and Abingdon
Peterborough
Portsmouth, South
Rea[illegible] East
Romsey
Selby
Sittingbourne
Sleaford and North Hykeham
South Dorset
South Staffordshire
Torridge and West Devon
Twickenham
Warwick
Waveney.

Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer of 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 972W, what the cost of refurbishing each ministerial private office was in each year since May 1997. [37897]

Mr. Wills: The Lord Chancellor's Department has not carried out any refurbishment of Ministers' private offices during the period specified. However, two additional ministerial appointments have been made during this period and offices in Selborne house have been adapted for them. The work was carried out under a measured term maintenance contract and was not invoiced separately from other maintenance and repair work. It is not possible, therefore, to identify specific costs, but these are estimated to be less than £20,000 over the period.

Juries (Ethnic Minorities)

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received on the proposals that courts ensure ethnic minority representation on juries in cases where the parties identify the possibility of race being an issue. [38256]

Mr. Keith Bradley: I have been asked to reply.

To date, we have recorded 53 responses to Sir Robin Auld's recommendation on this issue. All the representations on Sir Robin's review of the criminal courts are being carefully considered and analysed in detail.

PUBLI[illegible] ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

Al Yamamah Report

Harry Cohen: To ask the Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission, pursuant to his answer of 13 February, *Official Report*, column 402W, who holds copies of the report. [35029]

Mr. Alan Williams: Copies of the 1992 National Audit Office Report on the Saudi Arabian Airforce Project—known as Project A1 Yamamah—are held by the National Audit Office and the Ministry of Defence.

HEALTH

Child Protection

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many case reviews following serious or fatal abuse under the Working Together to Safeguard Children Guidance have been held in each of the last five years; how many involved *(a)* child deaths, *(b)* serious physical assaults and *(c)* serious sexual abuse in each year; and what the ages and sex were of the children concerned. [39172]

Jacqui Smith: Information is not collected centrally on the numbers or types of serious case reviews that have been carried out in accordance with Chapter 8 of "Working Together to Safeguard Children" (1999).

Taken together, the findings of serious case reviews are an important source of information to inform national policy and practice. The Department of Health is responsible for identifying and disseminating common themes and trends across review reports, and acting on lessons for policy and practice. We will shortly be publishing an overview report drawing out the key findings of a selection of case reviews from the last two years, and their implications for policy and practice. At the same time, we are developing a comprehensive database of all serious case reviews.

NHS Professionals

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the oral answer to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) of 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 699, if he will make a statement on the records maintained by NHS Professionals concerning the identity, history, training and qualifications of its temporary staff. [39782]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* Health Service Circular 2001–02 and the guidance NHS Professionals—"A co-ordinated, NHS-led approach to temporary staffing", sets out national standards for good employment practice. This includes, record keeping and using the best of modern information technology and call centre technology within agreed national frameworks for terms and conditions of service, delivering high quality patient care through clinical governance.

The software used by NHS Professionals captures information on the identity, history, training and development and qualifications of its temporary staff helping to ensure the quality and accuracy of records relating to staff recruited through NHS Professionals.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what training in clinical matters the staff at NHS Professionals call centres have received. [39678]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* All call centre staff receive appropriate training and induction to ensure quality service and clinical governance.

Clinical specialists are used at the recruitment stage to ensure quality of temporary staff used by NHS Professionals.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the pensions costs of NHS professionals staff are charged out to its clients. [39680]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* Pensions costs are included in the management fee added on top of the hourly rate, currently at a maximum of 7.5 per cent.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what margins are added to the costs charged by NHS Professionals to its clients. [39679]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* The management fee aims to recoup operating costs and is currently set at a maximum of 7.5 per cent.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money has been spent on the set-up costs of NHS Professionals. [39677]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* National Health Service Professionals has been allocated £4 million to support the start up, as outlined in the Health Service Circular 2001–02, with £3 million this financial year to support the schemes extension. The service will be self-sustaining in the long-term and recoup costs directly from the NHS organisations using NHS Professionals.

Press and Public Relations

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence was used by his Director of Communications as the basis for his claims at a conference of NHS trust and health authority chairmen as to *(a)* the public view of the NHS and *(b)* the media's responsibility for that public view. [39842]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* The information presented to national health service trust and health authority chairman was drawn from the British Social Attitudes Survey and on studies conducted by MORI and Test Research. Copies of these studies have been placed in the Library.

Nurses

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what actions have been taken by the Weston Area NHS trust to recruit nursing staff from the Philippines; what the total cost of such recruitment has been; and whether additional resources have been made available to meet these costs. [40494]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* Weston Area national health service trust has not actively recruited nursing staff from overseas.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* nursing staff are employed and *(b)* nursing vacancies there are for (i) the Avon health authority and (ii) the Weston area NHS trust. [40493]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* The information requested is shown in the table.

Nursing staff in post (September 2000) and three month vacancy rate (March 2001)—Avon health authority and Weston area health trust

	Avon health authority	*Weston area health NHS trust*
Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff		
Three month vacancy rate per cent.	4.0	0.0
Three month vacancies (wte)	250	0
Staff in post (wte)	5,900	340

Notes:

1. Three month vacancies are vacancies as at 31 March 2001 which trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more (whole time equivalents).
2. Three month vacancy rates are three month vacancies expressed as a percentage of three month vacancies plus staff in post from the September 2000 medical and dental and non-medical work force census (whole time equivalent).
3. Numbers are rounded to the nearest 10.
4. Percentages rounded to one decimal place.

Source:

NHS Vacancy Survey, March 2001 and NHS Non-Medical Workforce Census, September 2000.

Ambulance Service (Diabetics)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about his policy in relation to the recruitment and retention of people with diabetes in the ambulance service. [40639]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* There is no bar to the recruitment and retention of people with diabetes in the ambulance service. Decisions on fitness for work are made on an individual basis depending upon the overall status of the applicant and their ability to perform their duties without risk to themselves or others.

NHS Cleaners

Mr. Hopkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase the number of cleaning staff employed by the NHS. [40645]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 13 March 2002]:* We recognise that the standard of cleanliness in our hospitals is important to patients, their relatives, staff and the public. The investment we have made since the publication of the NHS Plan has seen standards raised across the board. The implementation of the Patient Environment Action Team programme has ensured that this issue remains high on trusts' agendas and a further round of unannounced inspections is currently under way to ensure that the progress made has been maintained and, where necessary, built upon.

As announced in the NHS Plan, there is now a national standard of cleanliness for the NHS which all trusts with in-patient beds are required to report against as part of the performance assessment framework. This means that for the first time there is a comprehensive standard for the whole NHS which is outcome-based and measures what is, or is not, clean. NHS trusts will need to employ sufficient staff to ensure that these standards are met, or to adjust cleaning contracts accordingly.

The responsibility for ensuring wards are clean has been restored to ward sisters, with the support of modern matrons, and they have also been given the authority to withhold payment where the required standards are not met.

The NHS Plan also set a target for ward-housekeepers to be in place in 50 per cent. of hospitals by 2004. The duties of the ward house-keeper will include working alongside cleaning staff, who may be directly or indirectly employed, to ensure that ward environments are clean, tidy and well maintained and they will report to ward sisters. Already 41 per cent. of trusts have started to introduce ward-housekeepers.

Attracting staff to work in the NHS requires there to be career opportunities and pathways which are attractive and flexible. The introduction of the ward-housekeeper role provides a further pathway for staff, who may enter the NHS as cleaners, to develop their skills and continue their career in the NHS.

Mr. Hopkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cleaners are employed by private contractors providing services to the NHS. [40643]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 13 March 2002]:* The information requested is not collected centrally.

"The National Standards of Cleanliness for the National Health Service" was published in April 2001, and all trusts are required to ensure that these standards are implemented from this year. NHS trusts will need to ensure that cleaning contracts are adjusted to take account of these standards.

The national standards have been developed to ensure that all trusts with in-patient beds apply the same standards of cleanliness regardless of who provides the cleaning services.

Cleaners

Mr. Hopkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cleaners were employed by the NHS in each of the past 20 years. [40644]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 13 March 2002]:* The information requested is not available. The statistics collected in this area by the Department relate to all ancillary staffs and it is not possible to distinguish the numbers of cleaning staff.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 15 March 2002

WORK AND PENSIONS

Hospital Stays (Benefit Claims)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many people in Scotland have been claiming benefits whilst staying in long stay hospitals in *(a)* each of the past five years and *(b)* the current financial year; and what the forecast is for the next three years; [41834]

(2) what the total expenditure was on benefits for people in Scotland who stay in long stay hospitals in *(a)* each year of the past five years and *(b)* the current financial year; and what the forecast is for the next three years. [41835]

Maria Eagle *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* The information is not available in the format requested.

Disability Living Allowance

Paul Goggins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proposals he has to clarify the conditions of entitlement for the lower rate mobility component of disability living allowance. [44433]

Maria Eagle: Regulations have today been laid before Parliament together with copies of the Social Security Advisory Committee's report on them and the Secretary of State's response to that report.

The regulations make clear that for a severely disabled person to qualify for the lower rate mobility component of Disability Living Allowance on the grounds that fear or anxiety prevents them from walking out of doors on unfamiliar routes without guidance or supervision from another person most of the time, the fear or anxiety must be a symptom of a mental disability. This clarification is needed to remove uncertainty and the possibility of misinterpretation of the qualifying conditions in these circumstances. The regulations do not otherwise alter the conditions for entitlement to the lower rate mobility component, and severely disabled people whose physical or mental disabilities alone mean that they cannot walk out of doors on unfamiliar routes without guidance or supervision from another person most of the time will continue to qualify.

Minimum Income Guarantee

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much additional money, in total per year, would be paid to pensioners in North Norfolk if those not presently claiming the minimum income guarantee were to claim it. [43694]

Malcolm Wicks: The information requested is unavailable.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many entitled non-recipients of the minimum income guarantee there are in *(a)* the North Norfolk constituency and *(b)* England. [43695]

Maria Eagle: Estimates of the number of pensioners who may be entitled to but have not claimed the Minimum Income Guarantee are not available below national level. National estimates are contained in the publication "Take Up of Income Related Benefits: Statistics for 1999–2000". A copy is held in the Library.

PRIME MINISTER

Civil Servants

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Prime Minister if he will set out for each Civil Service grade within his *(a)* Department and *(b)* Department's executive agencies the (i) total number of staff employed, (ii) number aged (A) 16 to 25, (B) 26 to 35, (C) 36 to 45, (D) 46 to 60 and (E) over the age of 60 years, (iii) number of registered disabled and (iv) number of ethnic minorities. [39153]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 13 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 1072W.

Relocation Expenses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister what his policy is on the payment of relocation expenses to staff in his office. [41017]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 14 March 2002, *Official Report,* columns 1207–08W.

Gender Pay Gap

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the extent of the gender pay gap amongst staff in his Office. [40942]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 12 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 956W.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Brady: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral statement of 6 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 303, on the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, what plans he has to consult on the Zimbabwe's attendance at the Commonwealth Games, following the outcome of the Zimbabwean election; and if he will report the outcome if his consultations to Parliament. [43829]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 11 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 682W.

DEFENCE

Private Simon Jeans

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions since 1997 he has made representations to his Croatian counterpart regarding the killing of Private Simon Jeans in Split, Croatia, in September 1996. [43302]

Mr. Ingram: The case was raised at Ministerial level with the Croatian Defence Minister, during his visit to the UK in March 2000. This was in addition to regular dialogue between the British Embassy and Defence Staff in Zagreb and Split, and the Croatian authorities, throughout the course of the trial of those accused of killing Private Jeans.

Colerne Airfield

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what long-term plans he has for Colerne Airfield; [43522]

(2) what plans he has for the re-basing of 21 Signals Regiment from Azinghur Barracks at Colerne; [43515]

(3) how many civilian staff are employed at Azinghur Barracks, Colerne; [43516]

(4) if he will make a statement about the future of Colerne Airfield and Azinghur Barracks. [43523]

Mr. Ingram: An internal study into the future location of 21 Signal Regiment (AS), currently based at Azimghur Barracks, has been completed recently. The study concluded that in principle there were sound operational and financial reasons to support a move of the unit to Gamecock Barracks, Bramcote where it would be co-located with 30 Signal Regiment.

Colerne Airfield is not part of this work and there are no plans for its closure. The two other units at Colerne—1001 Support Unit RAF and Bristol University Air Squadron—are also not part of this internal study, but as the hon. Member is aware, we are undertaking a separate review of University Air Squadron Flying.

Further work is required before any decision to move 21 Signal Regiment could be finalised, and it would be premature therefore to make a statement about the future of Azimghur Barracks at this stage. The Ministry of Defence will, of course, be consulting with the Trade Unions and the 81 civilian staff who support 21 Signal Regiment in due course. I will write to the hon. Member once a final decision in made and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many flights by Bristol University OTC there have been in each of the last five years from Colerne Airfield. [43520]

Mr. Ingram: The information is not held in the format requested. However, it is possible to provide the number of hours which Bristol University Air Squadron flew in each of the last four years from Colerne Airfield. The Tutor aircraft used by the University Air Squadron are also used by the No. 3 Air Cadet Air Experience Flight and the hours flown by them are also shown.

Financial Year	*University Air Squadron*	*Air Experience Flight*
1998–99	1,580	2,825
1999–2000	1,668	2,428
2000–01	1,551	2,218
2001–02*	1,362	1,832

* to date

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of where Bristol University OTC will train if Colerne Airfield closes. [43521]

Mr. Ingram: There are no plans for Colerne Airfield to close, so no assessment of alternative locations for Bristol University Air Squadron to train has been undertaken. A review of University Air Squadron flying is being undertaken, but this is not specific to the Bristol University Air Squadron and the outcome of the review will not be known until the end of April at the earliest.

Harrier Aircraft

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost is of the Harrier GR7 upgrade; and if he will make a statement. [43634]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 13 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1166–67W.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Harrier GR7 will be upgraded to GR9 standard; and what the estimated completion date is of the upgrade programme. [43633]

Mr. Ingram: We currently plan to upgrade 68 Harrier GR7 aircraft to the GR9 standard with the work being completed during 2008.

HMS Talent

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the operational status of HMS Talent is; and if she will be operational for the rest of the year. [43692]

Mr. Ingram: HMS Talent is currently at sea conducting operations and has been operational since September 2001. The submarine is scheduled to remain fully operational until the end of May this year before entering a Lay-up period prior to refit.

NATO Central Europe Division

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has *(a)* made to and *(b)* received from his (i) Belgian, (ii) German and (iii) Dutch counterparts regarding the future of NATO's Multinational Central Europe division MND (C). [43637]

Mr. Hoon: In 2001, NATO's Military Committee agreed that the role of selected formations, including the Multinational Division (Central), must be addressed in the NATO Force Structure Review. We are discussing the future of this formation with our counterparts in Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the UK contribution is to NATO's Multinational Central Europe division MND (C). [43636]

Mr. Hoon: The United Kingdom has 27 peace establishment posts on the staff of the Headquarters Multinational Division (Central) in Germany. In addition, the United Kingdom assigns a number of forces to the Multinational Division (Central), which may be called on for specific operations. These include an Air Defence Regiment, Combat Service Support and elements of the Support Helicopter Force.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Correspondence

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will reply to letters from the hon. Member for Nottingham, North, relating to case work involving *(a)* Ms R. Ensor, *(b)* Mr. Byers, *(c)* Mrs. Carney, *(d)* Mr. M. Dawber and *(e)* Ms Sue Jayes; and if she will make a statement on her Department's policy on responding to letters from hon. Members. [37636]

Miss Melanie Johnson: My hon. Friend has received a reply dated 26 February 2002.

Insolvency Service

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her role is in authorising Insolvency Practitioners; and what representations she has received about changing this procedure. [42078]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Under the provisions of Section 392 of the Insolvency Act 1986, the Secretary of State may directly authorise individuals to act as insolvency practitioners and 133 are so authorised. Section 391 of the Insolvency Act 1986 provides that the Secretary of State may also recognise bodies as able to authorise their members to act as insolvency practitioners.

The regulation of insolvency practice was the subject of a review during 1997 and 1998. The report of the review committee was published in February 1999.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what training is provided to the staff responsible for the operation of the Insolvency Service hotline; and what the total training cost for the team has been since the hotline's introduction. [42073]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The hotline team currently comprises four Official Receiver trained staff with substantial experience of insolvency related matters. They do not require specific additional training.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what meetings she has had since 2001 with representatives of the Insolvency Service and if she will publish the minutes of the meetings. [42082]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I regularly meet officials from The Insolvency Service. Under Exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information minutes of those meetings are not published.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps her Department is taking to publicise to directors their insolvency liabilities; and how much this advertising has cost the Insolvency Service each year since 1997. [42066]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Insolvency Service produced a number of guidance leaflets regarding various insolvency related matters, which are available on its website, including a guide for directors which describes the various procedures in detail and informs directors what duties and responsibilities they have if their company is subject to insolvency procedures. The Insolvency Service has also ensured that the information provided by Companies House to the officers of newly formed companies contains details of their responsibilities whilst managing limited companies.

In addition, when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry successfully applies to have an unfit director disqualified from acting as a director, or accepts an undertaking not to act in that capacity, press releases are issued in local newspapers and trade journals relevant to the insolvent company. Details of the director's misconduct complained of in the application to disqualify are provided. Public reporting thus also assists greatly in the drive to increase the business community's awareness of the dangers of running a company whilst insolvent.

Publicity costs have been £155,000 in 1999–00; £112,000 in 2000–01 and £66,000 in 2001–02 (11 months). Costs for the period prior to 1999 cannot be obtained without incurring disproportionate costs.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what initiatives are in place to *(a)* monitor and *(b)* improve customer service standards in the Insolvency Service. [42081]

Miss Melanie Johnson: To monitor customer service standards The Insolvency Service has an audit process through which performance against its published service standards (set in accordance with Charter standards) is measured and monitored both locally and centrally within the Agency.

To further enhance customer service standards The Insolvency Service has: a National Consultative User Group and a Central Accounting Unit User Group; user comment cards and a website pop-up questionnaire; a complaints process; a staff New Ideas Scheme and an e-business strategy.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to make proposals regarding the bankruptcy period for personal insolvency cases. [42056]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The White Paper "Opportunity for All in a World of Change: Insolvency—A Second Chance" published the Government's proposals for reforms to the law of personal insolvency in July 2001.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans her Department has to remove the bankruptcy fee payable to the Insolvency Service. [42057]

Miss Melanie Johnson: There are no plans to remove the fee payable in relation to the Official Receiver's administration of a debtor's estate in bankruptcy.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received about the priority given to creditors of companies in administration under the Insolvency Act 2000. [42058]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have received no representations.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many insolvency petitions for *(a)* small and *(b)* medium enterprises were allocated to each Official Receiver's office in England and Wales in each year since 1997. [42060]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Statistics are not maintained distinguishing between small and medium sized enterprises.

Oil and Gas Exploration Licences

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on her Department's policy on the development of Fallow Field oil and gas exploration licences. [42718]

Mr. Wilson: The UK cannot afford to have petroleum discoveries or areas of the Continental Shelf lying fallow. We believe that petroleum licences should be in the hands of those companies that are committed to undertaking appropriate work to find, test and develop effectively the UK's petroleum resources in the shortest possible time span.

The DTI has worked with the oil and gas industry in PILOT to establish a robust mechanism that will encourage companies holding fallow blocks or discoveries to decide within a reasonable time scale (15 months for fallow blocks and just over two years for fallow discoveries), whether to be active and move towards development or relinquish the licences on which they sit so that others have an opportunity to act.

Officials in my Department have identified some 120 fallow discoveries and 160 fallow blocks on the UKCS where the current owners do not appear to be doing all that they can to generate activity. These fallow assets could encompass 250 undrilled structures and contain reserves equivalent to around 1.5 billion barrels of oil.

The mechanism was launched on 5 March and we immediately wrote to each licensee that has been identified as holding fallow blocks and discoveries to initiate the first stage of the process.

The performance of companies holding fallow assets will be reviewed every year to ensure that they remain focused on bringing forward activity.

Motor Vehicle Insurance

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will direct the Office of Fair Trading to inquire into the use by insurance companies' approved repairer schemes of language which prevents customers choosing to use alternative local garages. [42655]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations 1999 enable the Office of Fair Trading to act against businesses using standard terms in consumer contracts that cause consumer detriment including ambiguous or unintelligible terms. Any evidence to suggest such unfair contract terms should be passed directly to the Director General of Fair Trading.

Exchange Direct plc

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps her Department is taking to investigate Exchange Direct plc. [42668]

Miss Melanie Johnson: A winding up order was made against Exchange Direct plc on 23 January 2002 and the Official Receiver is now responsible for investigating the reasons for the company's failure and the conduct of its directors. The affairs of the company are also the subject of an investigation by police, and the Official Receiver will provide assistance as required.

Personal Debt

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will announce the result of the consultation on fee charging debt advice. [42624]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) consulted on draft guidelines for debt management companies last year. The OFT announced the outcome of its consultation and published the final guidance on 4 December 2001. Breaches of the guidance by companies could lead to the loss of their consumer credit licence.

Copies of the Guidelines are available from the OFT or from their website at: www.oft.gov.uk.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will announce the outcome of the consultation on excessive interest charged on personal debt. [42622]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* I published the results of our consultation on "Tackling loan sharks—and more!" on 15 February 2002. The consultation showed overwhelming support for proposals to clamp down on loan sharks and the other priorities identified.

Copies of both the Consultation Paper and the Summary of Responses are available from the Libraries of the House or from the DTI website at: www2.dti.gov.uk/CACP/ca/policy/consumercredit/review.htm.

Further details on specific proposals will be published over the course of next year.

Mirror Group Newspapers

Linda Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what actions she has taken following the publication of the Companies Act Inspectors' report into Mirror Group Newspapers plc on 30 March 2001. [44031]

Ms Hewitt: Independent inspectors were appointed under Companies Act powers to investigate and report on the affairs and membership of Mirror Group Newspapers plc. They were asked to look, in particular, at the flotation of Mirror Group Newspapers on 30 April 1991.

Following receipt of the report, the DTI's Companies Investigation Branch sought legal advice on whether disqualification proceedings should be instigated under the Company Directors Disqualification Act against any of those involved.

After careful consideration of advice from leading Counsel, officials have recommended, and I have agreed, not to institute disqualification proceedings.

Important lessons have been learnt from the Mirror Group Newspapers affair and, as the inspectors themselves noted, a number of important changes were made prior to their final report. The report made a number of further recommendations which have all been passed for consideration to the different Departmental bodies and regulators that hold responsibility in these areas.

As the inspectors suggested, the Company Law Review considered a number of issues and the Government will be announcing their response to these and the rest of the Review's recommendations in due course. I have recently announced the setting up of a group jointly with the Treasury and including other regulators to oversee and co-ordinate the response in the UK to auditing and accounting issues raised by the collapse of Enron. This work is also relevant to the concerns expressed by the inspectors on the independence of auditors. I have also announced an independent review of the role and effectiveness of non-executive directors in the UK. The review will report jointly to me and the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Where particular recommendations are the prime responsibility of other Departments and regulatory authorities I am liaising with these other bodies and will further inform the House in due course.

Arms Exports (Angola)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the Department's policy is on granting export licences for arms to Angola; and if she will make a statement. [42523]

Mr. MacShane: I have been asked to reply.

We consider export licence applications to Angola against the following:

(a) Whether the export is permitted under UN Sanctions. UN Security Council Resolution 864 (1993) imposed an arms embargo in relation to UNITA. The supply of arms and related material to Angola is prohibited except through named entry points provided by the Angolan Government. The UK interprets the scope of all such arms embargoes to cover goods and technology on Military List.

(b) UK national policy. It is UK policy not to grant export licences for new military or dual-use equipment for those countries intervening in the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Angola, Burundi, Namibia, Rwanda, Uganda and Zimbabwe) where there is a clear risk that it would be used in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Ministerial statement HC 184 and 185, Date in force 9 February 2000).

(c) If the application passes these stages, we then judge it against the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria. This includes assessing the proposed export against internal repression, internal conflict, external aggression concerns and risk of diversion (criteria 2, 3, 4 and 7).

HOME DEPARTMENT

Justice and Home Affairs Council

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the outcome was of the Justice and Home Affairs Council held in Brussels on 28 February; what the Government's stance was on the issues discussed, including its voting record; and if he will make a statement. [40653]

Angela Eagle: I represented the United Kingdom (UK) at the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council in Brussels on 28 February 2002.

International Co-operation of the European Union against organised crime (an open debate):

The Council held an open debate on the international co-operation of the European Union against organised crime. The debate focused on the need for enhanced external action, using the range of tools available including funding programmes and agreements based on Article 38 of the Treaty on European Union.

A points:

The A points were approved as in document PTS A 8 (6495/02) (a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House). These included adoption of the Council Decision setting up Eurojust and adoption of implementing rules under the Eurodac Regulation (2725/2000/EC).

Draft Framework Decision on the execution in the European Union of orders freezing property or evidence:

A general approach was approved on a Presidency compromise text, subject to six Parliamentary scrutiny reserves (Denmark, Sweden, Netherlands, Ireland, Italy and the UK), consideration of the opinion which the European Parliament delivered in September 2001 and re-consultation of the European Parliament on the revised text. Two amendments were agreed at the Council itself: *(a)* to include the language on fundamental rights which is used in Article 1(3) of the European Arrest Warrant text; and *(b)* the drafting of a further ground for refusal in Article 6 relating to the ne bis in idem principle. I will provide the European Scrutiny Committee with the consolidated English text resulting from the Council when it is issued. I will also write to the Chairman of the Committee about the term "general approach".

Relations with the United States of America (USA):

The Council endorsed a two-stage approach to drawing up an agreement with the USA on judicial co-operation in criminal matters, in accordance with the conclusions of the special JHA Council on 20 September 2001. The first stage will consist of continuing informal exploratory talks with the United States, and, in parallel, work within the Council on the scope and principles of an agreement or agreement. After this, a formal negotiating mandate would be adopted, if possible at the JHA Council on 25 April 2002. There was general agreement in the Council that particular attention would need to be given to human rights safeguards in relation to issues such as the death penalty and special courts and to data protection. There was also general agreement on the need for clarity about the areas in which an European Union (EU)/United States (US) agreement could add value to existing bilateral arrangements.

Green Paper on criminal law protection of the financial interests of the Community and the establishment of a European Prosecutor: presentation by the Commission:

Commissioner Schreyer presented the Commission's Green Paper to the Council. In a brief debate which followed, all but one of the speakers questioned the need for a European Public Prosecutor. A number of delegations pointed out that the decision to establish Eurojust had just been adopted and Eurojust should be given the chance to perform the role it had been given in relation to fraud against the Community budget.

Proposal for a comprehensive plan to combat illegal immigration and trafficking in human beings in the European Union:

The Council approved the comprehensive action plan, which is based on the Commission's Communication on illegal immigration.

Report on the introduction of the euro-Police co-operation (information point):

The Council took note of a presentation by the Director of Europol on law enforcement work to protect the euro before and during the changeover period. The Director reported that recorded incidents of counterfeiting were low in number and sophistication.

European Police College (CEPOL)—Provisional management solution:

The Council endorsed a provisional management solution, whereby Denmark will temporarily host the secretariat of CEPOL pending a decision on the location of the permanent secretariat. This will facilitate implementation of this year's annual work programme.

Amendments of the Europol Convention:

There was broad agreement on the principle of amending the Europol Convention to allow Europol staff to participate in joint investigative teams in a support capacity and to authorise Europol to ask Member States to initiate investigations, in accordance with the conclusions of the Tampere European Council. The Article 36 Committee was asked to work on finalising the necessary amendments. Debate focused on the possibility of introducing a simplified procedure for amending the Europol Convention. All delegations agreed on the need for a simplified procedure for amending the Europol Convention, but there was no consensus on the actual mechanism. The Presidency presented three options:

(i) a protocol providing for future amendments to the Convention to be made by a simple decision of the Council;

(ii) a variation of (i) limited to certain less sensitive articles; and

(iii) replacement of the Europol Convention with a Council Decision.

The first option raised constitutional difficulties for a number of Member States, and options (ii) and (iii) attracted most support. I indicated that the UK could accept any of the three options in principle, but we considered that option (iii) was the simplest and that option (ii) might prove difficult in practice. This was referred to the working group for further consideration.

Setting up an Air Marshal system in the European Union:

The Austrian Minister presented a paper describing national experience of air marshals and proposing that the EU should consider such a system. This received a cautious response. Together with a number of other Ministers, I noted that the Transport Council was considering this and other aviation security issues. It was agreed that the issue should be referred back to Coreper to consider whether it should be taken any further in the JHA area.

Any Other Business:

Austria reported that in accordance with Article 2(2) of the Schengen Convention, it intended to re-impose border controls during a visit by the Iranian President on 11–13 March 2002.

Meeting with the candidate countries in the margins of the Council:

Justice and Interior Ministers met with their counterparts from the candidate countries in the margins of the Council. A Joint Declaration on drugs was approved. The Candidate Countries also provided updates on their progress in improving border controls at their external borders.

Departmental Website

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total cost of his Department's website was in real terms in each of the last four years; and how many hits it received in each of those years. [36136]

Angela Eagle: The available information for the main Home Office website is shown in the table. Because members of the website team have not been employed exclusively on this work throughout the period, their costs have been excluded from this table.

Information is not held centrally on websites that are managed independently of the main site.

Year	*Cost*	*Number of page impressions*
1998–99	Not separately identified	Not available
1999–2000	£40,614	9,066,894
2000–01	£58,170	16,495,939
2001–02	£133,339	7,969,832 (to 30/9/01)

The Home Office website moved to a new server on 1 October 2001; reliable data are not yet available on the number of page impressions since that date.

The Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) established a separate site in late 2000. It measures unique visitors to the site, not the number of hits or page impressions. There were 836,711 unique visitors to the IND site during the year 2001, the first full year of operation.

With almost half of the homes in the United Kingdom now online* and public access on the rise, our website is an invaluable tool for disseminating important information to the public and in opening up new areas of knowledge about Home Office activity in general. It is a cost-effective vehicle that allows us to speak to many people at once and offers the option for anyone to give us their feedback.

* Oftel January 2002

Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been detained under the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 since the 19 December 2001; and if he will make a statement. [41155]

Mr. Blunkett: Nine foreign nationals have so far been detained using powers in Part IV of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act. Of those detained two have left the United Kingdom voluntarily; the other seven remain in detention.

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many foreign citizens have been detained under the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001. [40576]

Mr. Blunkett: Nine foreign nationals have so far been detained using powers in Part IV of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act. Of those detained two have left the United Kingdom voluntarily.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been held under suspicion of being a terrorist under the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001. [41368]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* Nine foreign nationals have so far been detained using powers in part IV of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act. Of those detained two have left the United Kingdom voluntarily; the other seven remain in detention.

Protec

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what Government security services are provided by Protec. [20158]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* Please accept my apologies for the delay in replying.

SDA Protec Ltd in the United Kingdom has carried out work across a number of Departments under arrangements approved by Government. It would not be appropriate for me to comment on individual commercial contracts.

Departments are required to ensure that any security contractor is reputable and reliable. Where a contractor needs access to sensitive official information then specific security standards must be met, and an appropriate security clearance is required for any employees requiring access to this information. Such companies are periodically inspected by the security authorities to ensure that these obligations are being fulfilled. If the hon. Member has any specific concerns I would be prepared to discuss these in confidence.

Police Legislation

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Acts of Parliament have affected the police service since 1990; and if he will list them. [31982]

Mr. Denham: A list of all those statutes which make an explicit reference either to the police or to police authorities has, due to its length, been placed in the Library. Additional statutes relating to the criminal justice system have also been included. Other statutes may also affect the police service as they do a wide variety of other bodies and organisations, although their provisions do not deal specifically with policing or criminal justice issues. However, an investigation of all Acts of Parliament since 1990 to assess their possible effect on the police in this way is not possible without disproportionate cost.

British Crime Survey

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will include road traffic injuries and fatalities in the British Crime Survey. [40546]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: This would not be appropriate. The British Crime Survey asks respondents about their experiences of, and views about, crime. This is a different matter to road traffic injuries and fatalities, which may or may not be the result of a criminal act, such as dangerous driving.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many incidents of drink related and disorderly crime there were reported in 1997 and each subsequent year in *(a)* Preston, *(b)* Blackburn, *(c)* Lancashire, *(d)* the North West of England, *(e)* Wales and *(f)* the UK. [40650]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many incidents of violent crime were reported in 1997 and each subsequent year in *(a)* Preston, *(b)* Blackburn, *(c)* Lancashire, *(d)* the North West of England, *(e)* Wales and *(f)* the UK. [40666]

Mr. Denham: Details are given in the table. Details for Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership areas have been collected centrally since 1 April 1999.

There was a change in counting rules for recorded crime on 1 April 1998, which expanded the offences covered, and placed a greater emphasis on counting crimes in terms of numbers of victims. Numbers of recorded crimes after this date are therefore not directly comparable with previous years. Over England and Wales as a whole, the change in counting rules caused an increase in total recorded violent crime of 83 per cent.

It should be noted that recorded violent crime is subject to changes in reporting and recording. The 2001 British Crime Survey found that, over England and Wales as a whole, reporting to the police of violent offences in total rose from 37 per cent. in 1997 to 45 per cent. in the 2000 calendar year.

The British Crime Survey has also shown that, in England and Wales as a whole, the number of violent crimes recorded in the survey decreased by 23 per cent. between the 1997 and 2000 calendar years, whereas violent crime recorded by the police increased by an estimated 14 per cent. Violent crime recorded by the police may therefore not necessarily be a reflection of real changes in the level of violent crime.

Information relating to Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Northern Ireland.

Recorded violent crime[1]: number of offences from 1997 to 12 months ending March 2001

Area	*1997*	*1998–99[2]*	*1999–2000[2]*	*2000–01[2]*
Preston[2]	—	—	1,705	1,695
Blackburn with Darwen[2]	—	—	1,423	1,996
Lancashire	5,550	12,183	11,615	13,870
North West of England	46,224	87,033	93,029	95,940
Wales	20,071	34,770	40,580	40,822
England and Wales	347,064	605,797	703,105	733,374

[1] Violent crime is comprised of violence against the person, sexual offences, and robbery.

[2] Year ending March.

[3] These figures are at Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) level.

— No data available.

Police Numbers

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give a breakdown of police officers by gender and rank for each police force in England and Wales. [40511]

Mr. Denham: The information requested was published in Home Office Statistical Bulletin No. 23/01, "Police Service Strength, England and Wales, 30 September 2001" and can be found in Table 3. A copy of the Bulletin is in the Library.

Table 3: Police Officer Strength as at 30 September 2001 by police force area, rank and gender, and officers per 100,000 population

England and Wales *Full time equivalents[1]*

	Male Ranks							
Police force	*Chief Constables*	*Assistant Chief Constables*	*Superintendents*	*Chief Inspectors*	*Inspectors*	*Sergeants*	*Constables*	*Total Male Ranks*
Avon and Somerset	1	3	23	29	135	411	1,971	2,573
Bedfordshire	1	2	12	9	52	124	654	854
Cambridgeshire	1	2	16	10	62	182	862	1,135
Cheshire	1	3	13	24	95	289	1,241	1,666
Cleveland	1	1	25	1	67	180	904	1,179
Cumbria	1	1	9	13	44	152	664	883
Derbyshire	1	3	17	22	87	249	1,179	1,558
Devon and Cornwall	1	3	30	33	130	385	1,865	2,447
Dorset	0	2	14	20	54	186	846	1,122
Durham	1	2	18	19	74	199	981	1,294
Essex	1	3	23	40	122	402	1,861	2,452
Gloucestershire	1	2	11	14	55	154	701	937
Greater Manchester	1	6	72	72	315	819	4,446	5,731
Hampshire	1	3	34	35	157	479	2,121	2,830
Hertfordshire	1	3	19	26	89	225	1,118	1,480
Humberside	1	2	23	21	101	252	1,243	1,643
Kent	1	4	29	33	139	432	2,069	2,707
Lancashire	0	2	28	37	150	467	2,019	2,702
Leicestershire	1	1	15	18	87	239	1,365	1,726
Lincolnshire	1	2	9	15	61	169	751	1,008
London, City of[3]	1	2	9	12	48	100	433	605
Merseyside	1	3	39	54	154	528	2,645	3,424
Metropolitan Police[2,3]	6	23	205	355	1,174	3,669	15,927	21,359
Norfolk	1	3	14	15	76	191	902	1,202
Northamptonshire	1	2	13	7	55	148	741	967
Northumbria	1	4	35	52	169	498	2,486	3,245
North Yorkshire	1	3	12	13	62	206	869	1,166
Nottinghamshire	1	3	21	24	116	323	1,411	1,899
South Yorkshire	1	4	35	46	168	430	1,919	2,603
Staffordshire	1	3	18	23	92	313	1,265	1,715
Suffolk	1	1	12	14	50	151	717	946
Surrey	1	2	15	20	74	248	1,280	1,640

Table 3: Police Officer Strength as at 30 September 2001 by police force area, rank and gender, and officers per 100,000 population

England and Wales *Full time equivalents*[1]

	Male Ranks							
Police force	*Chief Constables*	*Assistant Chief Constables*	*Superintendents*	*Chief Inspectors*	*Inspectors*	*Sergeants*	*Constables*	*Total Male Ranks*
Sussex	0	4	29	38	145	411	1,707	2,334
Thames Valley	1	2	46	34	179	473	2,320	3,054
Warwickshire	1	3	13	11	42	109	602	781
West Mercia	1	2	13	29	84	279	1,242	1,649
West Midlands	1	3	58	40	257	922	4,484	5,765
West Yorkshire	1	5	49	59	225	590	3,052	3,981
Wiltshire	0	2	14	15	54	160	682	927
Dyfed-Powys	1	2	12	19	49	166	681	930
Gwent	1	2	10	15	55	196	818	1,097
North Wales	1	2	13	28	67	218	914	1,243
South Wales	1	4	26	35	151	401	2,095	2,713
Total of all 43 forces	44	134	1,151	1,449	5,621	16,722	78,047	103,169
NCS	1	2	18	28	80	182	767	1,078
NCIS	1	3	5	24	26	59	128	246
Other Secondments[4]	0	7	71	49	83	133	301	644
Total	2	12	94	101	189	374	1,196	1,968
Total police officer strength	46	146	1,245	1,550	5,810	17,096	79,243	105,137

	Female Ranks							
Police force	*Chief Constables*	*Assistant Chief Constables*	*Superintendents*	*Chief Inspectors*	*Inspectors*	*Sergeants*	*Constables*	*Total Female Ranks*
Avon and Somerset	0	0	1	6	9	34	418	468
Bedfordshire	0	0	3	2	5	12	174	196
Cambridgeshire	0	0	0	0	4	17	194	215
Cheshire	0	0	3	1	8	37	306	355
Cleveland	0	1	0	1	5	16	233	256
Cumbria	0	1	0	1	2	11	177	191
Derbyshire	0	0	3	2	1	22	266	293
Devon and Cornwall	0	0	1	1	11	43	469	525
Dorset	1	0	0	2	5	19	212	239
Durham	0	0	0	1	7	18	281	306
Essex	0	0	3	3	8	45	427	486
Gloucestershire	0	0	0	2	1	18	210	231
Greater Manchester	0	0	4	14	31	116	1,141	1,306
Hampshire	0	0	1	4	12	78	523	618
Hertfordshire	0	0	1	2	11	33	316	363
Humberside	0	0	0	1	8	16	323	348
Kent	0	0	1	7	9	56	587	660
Lancashire	1	1	3	4	15	50	511	585
Leicestershire	0	1	2	2	3	22	306	336
Lincolnshire	0	0	2	0	3	18	154	176
London, City of[3]	0	0	0	1	3	7	83	94
Merseyside	0	0	3	3	21	64	580	671
Metropolitan Police[2,3]	0	4	13	22	71	411	3,495	4,016
Norfolk	0	0	1	3	3	23	205	234
Northamptonshire	0	0	0	0	1	18	193	213
Northumbria	0	0	4	2	12	41	590	648
North Yorkshire	0	0	1	0	3	17	204	224
Nottinghamshire	0	0	0	4	4	26	340	374
South Yorkshire	0	0	4	1	14	68	534	620
Staffordshire	0	0	1	2	5	29	367	404
Suffolk	0	1	1	1	5	12	180	199
Surrey	0	0	1	2	8	45	321	378
Sussex	1	0	2	3	14	54	429	503
Thames Valley	0	2	3	4	17	62	566	654
Warwickshire	0	0	1	1	3	5	140	149
West Mercia	0	1	3	1	10	25	305	345
West Midlands	0	1	3	5	27	129	1,502	1,667

			Female Ranks					
Police force	*Chief Constables*	*Assistant Chief Constables*	*Superintendents*	*Chief Inspectors*	*Inspectors*	*Sergeants*	*Constables*	*Total Female Ranks*
West Yorkshire	0	0	4	3	17	68	786	878
Wiltshire	1	0	1	1	3	17	203	225
Dyfed-Powys	0	0	0	0	1	17	150	168
Gwent	0	0	1	0	4	10	191	207
North Wales	0	0	1	1	0	23	223	248
South Wales	0	0	2	2	11	38	475	528
Total of all 43 forces	4	13	78	117	413	1,885	19,289	21,800
NCS	0	0	1	3	7	17	101	129
NCIS	0	0	0	0	1	3	21	25
Other Secondments[4]	0	0	2	7	14	27	90	139
Total	0	0	3	10	22	47	212	294
Total police officer strength	4	13	81	127	435	1,932	19,502	22,094

Police Force	*Total Police Ranks*	*Total officers per 100,000 population*	*Total Constables*	*Constables per 100,000 population*
Avon and Somerset	3,040	201.1	2,389	158.0
Bedfordshire	1,050	185.6	828	146.4
Cambridgeshire	1,350	184.8	1,056	144.7
Cheshire	2,021	205.3	1,547	157.1
Cleveland	1,434	257.6	1,136	204.1
Cumbria	1,075	218.8	840	171.1
Derbyshire	1,851	189.3	1,445	147.8
Devon and Cornwall	2,972	187.3	2,334	147.1
Dorset	1,360	194.8	1,057	151.4
Durham	1,600	263.8	1,262	208.0
Essex	2,937	180.3	2,287	140.4
Gloucestershire	1,169	206.9	911	161.3
Greater Manchester	7,036	272.1	5,586	216.0
Hampshire	3,449	193.1	2,644	148.0
Hertfordshire	1,843	175.4	1,434	136.5
Humberside	1,991	226.0	1,566	177.8
Kent	3,367	210.7	2,656	166.2
Lancashire	3,288	230.0	2,529	176.9
Leicestershire	2,062	219.6	1,671	178.0
Lincolnshire	1,184	186.7	905	142.6
London, City of[3]	699	—	517	—
Merseyside	4,095	291.8	3,225	229.8
Metropolitan Police[2,3]	25,374	353.5	19,422	270.4
Norfolk	1,436	178.6	1,107	137.6
Northamptonshire	1,180	188.5	935	149.3
Northumbria	3,893	275.3	3,075	217.5
North Yorkshire	1,390	184.3	1,072	142.2
Nottinghamshire	2,273	220.4	1,751	169.8
South Yorkshire	3,223	247.6	2,453	188.4
Staffordshire	2,119	199.9	1,632	154.0
Suffolk	1,146	168.5	897	132.0
Surrey	2,018	186.7	1,601	148.1
Sussex	2,837	186.3	2,136	140.3
Thames Valley	3,708	174.3	2,886	135.6
Warwickshire	930	182.3	741	145.4
West Mercia	1,994	173.9	1,546	134.8
West Midlands	7,432	283.8	5,986	228.6
West Yorkshire	4,859	229.0	3,838	180.9
Wiltshire	1,152	187.8	885	144.2
Dyfed-Powys	1,098	227.5	832	172.3
Gwent	1,303	233.9	1,009	181.0
North Wales	1,491	225.8	1,137	172.2
South Wales	3,241	260.2	2,571	206.3
Total of all 43 forces	124,969	236.0	97,337	183.9
NCS	1,207		868	
NCIS	271		149	
Other Secondments[4]	783		391	
Total	2,261		1,408	
Total police officer strength	127,231	240.3	100,153	182.4

[1] This and other tables contain full-time equivalent figures that have been rounded to the nearest whole number. Because of rounding, there may be an apparent discrepancy between totals and the sums of the constituent items.

[2] The Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner and Assistant Commissioners are counted as Chief Constables.

[3] Officers per 100,000 population for City of London and Metropolitan Police are combined.

[4] Secondments to Central Services and Inter-Force Units.

External Consultants

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations have won new contracts with *(a)* his Department and *(b)* executive agencies in each year of the past five years; [38741]

(2) which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations which previously held contracts with his Department *(a)* won new contracts at the culmination of the existing contracts and *(b)* won new contracts after a period of inactivity with his Department in each of the past five years; [38742]

(3) if he will list the 30 largest contracts awarded by his Department from *(a)* May 1997 to April 1998, *(b)* May 1998 to April 1999, *(c)* May 1999 to April 2000, *(d)* May 2000 to April 2001 and *(e)* May 2001 to the latest date, indicating in each case the values of the contracts and the companies with which the contracts were placed. [38743]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 28 February 2002]*: The Home Department is unable to provide the level of detailed information sought on contracts and contract costs. Records are not held centrally and to collate and maintain a central register of contracts awarded across the Home Office and its Agencies would incur disproportionate costs.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Car Auctions

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the statutory regulations that are in place to ensure that a minor cannot purchase a vehicle at a car auction; and what plans he has to review these regulations. [36402]

Mr. Jamieson: There are no statutory regulations preventing a minor from purchasing a motor vehicle at auction although many auctioneers prevent minors from attending.

Motor vehicles may be driven on private property by minors. Any vehicle driven on the road must be done so by the holder of an appropriate driving licence. The minimum age to drive a motor car is 17 years. Sixteen year olds are permitted to drive mopeds.

In addition, legislation requires a vehicle to be properly licensed and registered. The annual licensing process incorporates a documentary check of a person's insurance cover and, where appropriate, the roadworthiness certificate also.

Technical Support Contracts (Rail Safety)

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the *(a)* title, *(b)* date of award, *(c)* length of contract, *(d)* cost, and *(e)* terms of reference of technical support framework agreements and research or other contracts awarded since (i) 1 May 1997 and (ii) 1 January 2001 by the Health and Safety Executive relating to support of the work of the HMRI on (A) railway safety cases and (B) rail accident investigation. [38972]

Mr. Jamieson: Information provided by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) on their technical support and research contracts relating to railway safety cases and rail accident investigation has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Information about technical support contracts before January 2001 can only be provided at disproportionate costs.

Rail Delays

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reason *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Strategic Rail Authority do not (i) hold centrally, (ii) collate, (iii) make publicly available and (iv) place in the Library the total weekly rail delays, in minutes, caused by (A) Railtrack and (B) train operating companies as held by Railtrack. [40273]

Mr. Jamieson: Information on train delays, week by week, is collected and managed by Railtrack and currently shared, as a commercial and operational matter, with the train operating companies. The SRA publishes the Public Performance Measure (PPM) which directly reports on the punctuality and reliability of trains.

Rail Services (South-West)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will investigate the rail franchise situation in the South West and Wessex in order to seek to clarify the operating strategy; [41144]

(2) if he will list the bidders for rail franchises in the South West and Wessex areas. [41472]

Mr. Jamieson: As part of its revised franchising programme, the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) announced that it would be looking at the longer term benefits of combining franchises, in particular where two or more operators share access to a London terminal. Accordingly, it is considering combining the Great Western and Thames franchises in 2006. The SRA launched a consultation on its proposals, and the future of the Wessex franchise, on 12 March.

The SRA has signed Heads of Terms with Stagecoach for a new South West Trains franchise of up to 20 years.

Train Operating Companies

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) which train operating companies have failed to fulfil their contractual commitments related to action plans; and what steps the Strategic Rail Authority has taken as a consequence; [40953]

(2) which train operating companies have failed to fulfil their contractual commitments related to action plans; and what steps the Strategic Rail Authority has taken as a consequence. [40958]

Mr. Jamieson: Failure to meet contractual commitments is a potential breach of the train operator's franchise agreement. All breaches of franchise agreements, and the remedial action taken, are listed in the Strategic Rail Authority's Annual Reports, copies of which are in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many new train sets have been ordered by train operating companies in England and Wales in *(a)* the last year and *(b)* the last three months. [41299]

Mr. Spellar: Between 1 March 2001 and 28 February 2002, orders were placed for 1,267 new vehicles for entry into revenue passenger services across the National Rail network. 143 of these have been ordered since 1 December 2001.

Mr. Redwood: : To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many train operating companies have less than two years of their franchise left. [41303]

Mr. Spellar: Five.

Rolling Stock

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many new rolling stock vehicles *(a)* were ordered and *(b)* entered service on Britain's railways between 25 February 1999 and 31 December 2001; and if he will state the proportion of rolling stock that were new or refurbished as of (i) 25 February 1999, (ii) 31 December 2001 and (iii) the latest available date. [40961]

Mr. Jamieson: 1,352 new vehicles were ordered between 25 February 1999 and 31 December 2001. 1,045 new vehicles entered service between 1 January 1999 and 31 December 2001. Information on rolling stock refurbishments is not held centrally.

Rail Summit (Targets)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the SRA reviews the delivery by train operating companies and other industry bodies of the commitments agreed to at the 1999 National Rail Summit. [41244]

Mr. Jamieson: Many of the issues arising from the National Rail Summits are now being taken forward through the Strategic Rail Authority's Strategic Plan.

Train Drivers

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 814W, on driver training, how many of those new drivers that have been recruited, but are not being trained, are *(a)* working in the industry and *(b)* due to begin training; and how many drivers have subsequently left the industry over the same period. [41332]

Mr. Jamieson: The information is not available in the form requested. As of 5 January 2002, 10,542 drivers were working in the industry.

London Underground

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what independent assessment he has carried out into the assumptions made by London Underground for the PPP business case. [41684]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend, the Member for Croydon Central (Geraint Davies), on 7 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1103–04W.

Great Western Mainline

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reason the Great Western Mainline was excluded from the SRA Strategic Plan. [41758]

Mr. Jamieson: The Great Western Main Line is not excluded from the Plan. Proposed incremental improvements are set out on page 67. The SRA's approach to major infrastructure improvements, including relative priorities, is set out in section 5 of the Plan.

Main Line Trains

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the ability of main line trains to operate on the sub-surface lines in London. [41746]

Mr. Jamieson: Studies were undertaken by both Railtrack and London Underground Limited in 1999 when they were discussing Railtrack's proposals for the sub-surface infrastructure company under the PPP. It was concluded that: such a proposal would provide no additional net capacity; it would give rise to substantial costs in restructuring infrastructure and rewriting contracts; and, the interworking of mainline and existing tube rolling stock would give rise to technical and operational difficulties. Railtrack's proposals were subsequently abandoned.

Railway Electrification

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many miles of railway have been electrified in each of the past 15 years. [41764]

Mr. Jamieson: The number of electrified route kilometres open for traffic at the end of each year is as follows:

Year	*Electrified route kilometres*
1986–87	4,154
1987–88	4,207
1988–89	4,376
1989–90	4,546
1990–91	4,912
1991–92	4,886
1992–93	4,910
1993–94	4,968
1994–95	4,970
1995–96	5,163
1996–97	5,176
1997–98	5,166

Year	*Electrified route kilometres*
1998–99	5,166
1999–2000	5,167
2000–01	5,167

Greater Manchester Upgrade

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions why the upgrade in Greater Manchester has been excluded from the SRA Strategic Plan. [41760]

Mr. Jamieson: Page 98 of the Plan states:

"The SRA, in partnership with Railtrack, GMPTE, Manchester International Airport and the Highways Agency, has completed the *Greater Manchester Strategic Rail Study*, which sets out a strategy for the development of the rail network in Greater Manchester over the next 20 years. The first key building block, the creation of a TransPennine Express franchise, is currently underway. The partners in the study are now considering how best to take forward longer term options."

Railway Overcrowding

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how the Government's target for reducing overcrowding on the railways has changed since the publication of the 10-year plan. [41661]

Mr. Jamieson: The overcrowding target has not changed since the publication of the 10-year plan.

Crossrail

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reason Crossrail was *(a)* included in the 10-year plan and *(b)* excluded from the SRA Strategic Plan. [41761]

Mr. Jamieson: A Crossrail link was included in the Government's 10-year plan given its potential for delivering increased peak capacity into London.

Crossrail is also identified in the SRA's Strategic Plan as one of the major rail projects which are currently under development. Options for taking Crossrail forward are being developed by the SRA/Transport for London joint venture Cross London Rail Links Ltd.

Public-Private Partnership

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in how many PPP agreements an accounting allowance for social cost benefit similar to that used by London Underground has been made. [41683]

Mr. Jamieson: The relevant guidance from the Office of Government Commerce and Her Majesty's Treasury explain that, where appropriate, the factors captured by this allowance should be allowed for when evaluating the value for money of PPP-type schemes.

National Air Traffic Services

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the estimated level of capital investment by NATS is for *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03; and what the figures were in (i) 1996–97 and (ii) 1999–2000. [41296]

Mr. Spellar: The level of capital investment by NATS for 2001–02 is £72.8 million and is estimated at £90.7 million for 2002–03. The figures for 1996–97 and 1999–00 are £56.5 million and £52.0 million respectively.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of the anticipated investment by NATS over the next 10 years will come from the public sector. [41294]

Mr. Spellar: NATS' investment over the next decade will be in excess of £1 billion, all of which will be financed by the private sector. I also refer the right hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 807W.

Rail Freight

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to increase the gauge of railways to take the larger piggyback containers. [41342]

Mr. Jamieson: There are no current plans. The Strategic Rail Authority's preliminary studies suggest that the cost of enhancement of rail freight routes to permit the passage of lorry semi-trailers on flat railway wagons would not represent value for money.

Channel Tunnel Restrictions

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent discussions he has had with the French Government regarding the SNCF Channel Tunnel restrictions. [42734]

Mr. Jamieson: Ministers across Government are in frequent contact with the French authorities to press for urgent action to tackle the disruption to Channel Tunnel rail freight.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what impact the SNCF Channel Tunnel restrictions are having on congestion on United Kingdom roads. [42735]

Mr. Jamieson: In the light of continued disruption to cross channel rail freight operations, more goods may have to be transported by road, so it is likely that road freight movements will marginally increase. There is no evidence to date that this is having any significant impact on congestion on UK roads.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what impact the SNCF Channel Tunnel restrictions are having on the United Kingdom economy. [42736]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government recognise that the disruption caused by would-be illegal immigrants is causing severe hardship to many businesses in this country who depend on reliable freight services through the Channel Tunnel.

We are pressing the French Government at the highest levels to ensure that sufficient policing resources are applied to address the problem so that normal freight services can resume as soon as possible.

Motor Vehicles

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 6 March 2002, ref. 40023, on motor vehicles, if data are available for the Drylaw, Inch and Mayfield wards. [42768]

Mr. Jamieson: Motor vehicle data for Drylaw, Inch and Mayfield wards are available under the pre-1996 definition of Scottish wards only. The number of motor vehicles registered to keepers with addresses in the wards is shown in the table. The totals include vehicles registered to companies and other entities as well as to individuals. The volume data are for December 2000.

Electoral Ward	*Number of Motor Vehicles*
Drylaw	2,732
Inch	2,467
Mayfield	3,067

Road Accidents (Fire Service)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what is the average response time for the fire services to reach an accident on *(a)* a motorway and *(b)* an A-road, in each of the last three years; [42782]

(2) what the average length of time was which it took the fire services to complete all their official duties at an accident site on *(a)* an A-road and *(b)* a motorway in each of the last three years. [42784]

Mr. Byers: The information requested is not available centrally.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what duties the fire services have to carry out before an accident site can be cleared from *(a)*an A-road and *(b)* a motorway. [42783]

Mr. Byers: Under section 1(1) of the Fire Services Act 1947, it is the duty of the fire authority to make provision for fire-fighting purposes and, in particular, to secure for its area the services of a fire brigade and equipment to meet efficiently all normal requirements. Fire-fighting purposes is defined in the Act as "the purposes of the extinction of fires and the protection of life and property in case of fire". Under section 3(1)(e) of the Act the authority also has the power to use its brigade and equipment for purposes other than fire-fighting (which are commonly known as "special services"). Brigades attend road traffic accidents primarily for firefighting and rescue purposes. Operational procedures for dealing with road accidents are matters for fire authorities to determine locally in consultation with the relevant police authority.

Press Office

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when Ian Jones was first informed of his suspension on full pay. [41995]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 11 March 2002]*: Monday 4 March 2002.

Central Railway

Mr. Hopkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the proposal to build a freight railway by Central Railway Ltd. [43086]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 14 March 2002]*: I have written to the Chairman of Central Railway informing him of my response to his request for support for a hybrid Bill as a means of authorising the company's proposed freight railway.

The Government have made clear that we are committed to rail freight growth as a key element of sustainable distribution. To that end we will wish to support, in principle, projects that offer value for money in both the economic and environmental benefits they can bring to the country.

In considering Central Railway's request for early Government support for a Bill to promote its own project, I have taken into account a number of factors and listened to representations from many interested parties. In our view there is not enough evidence at the moment to enable the Government to support a hybrid Bill for Central Railway's project.

With the help of consultants and with the co-operation of Central Railway, the SRA will therefore carry out a further detailed assessment in order to test key remaining areas of the proposals. This is an essential piece of work if the Government are to be able to take an informed decision about Central Railway's hybrid Bill. The SRA anticipates that work to be completed by September.

Cleaner Vehicles Task Force

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will publish an updated Government response to the recommendations from the Cleaner Vehicles Task Force. [43879]

Mr. Jamieson: I have today published an updated response detailing the actions that Government has taken in the last 12 months to advance the recommendations of the Cleaner Vehicles Task Force and to accelerate the take up of cleaner fuels and cleaner, more fuel-efficient vehicles. Copies have been placed in the Libraries in the House.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Accommodation Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the cost was of hotel accommodation for departmental staff working away from home in each of the last four years. [41054]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information is set out for the last three financial years, prior to that, the service was undertaken by a different provider and records are not available except at disproportionate cost.

Financial year	*Spend £*
1998–99	823,567
1999–2000	1,020,420
2000–01	1,223,926

Unauthorised Absences

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many unauthorised absences there were in *(a)* state primary schools and *(b)* state secondary schools, broken down by each local education authority in England for each year since 1997. [42225]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The number of half days missed due to unauthorised absences in *(a)* maintained primary schools and *(b)* maintained secondary schools by each local education authority in England since 1997 are shown in the table, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

Accountancy Contracts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the contracts agreed by her Department with the five largest accountancy firms since May 1997; and what was the total value of contracts with each. [42099]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: This information could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Public Appointments

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many appointments to public bodies have been made through her Department *(a)* from April 2000 to March 2001 and *(b)* since 31 March 2001; and how many of these were (i) men and (ii) women. [42160]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* The numbers of men and women appointed or re-appointed to non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the former Department for Education and Employment and this Department during the periods in question are as follows:

	Men	*Women*
April 2000 to March 2001	86	37
April 2001 to March 2002	16	2

Regulatory Impact Unit

Matthew Taylor: : To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many members her Department employs in its Regulatory Impact Unit; and if she will make a statement. [42936]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department employs one full-time member of staff in its Regulatory Impact Unit, with line management support when necessary.

It is the job of the Departmental Regulatory Impact Unit to establish and promote the principles of good regulation in the Department. The Unit works closely with the officials responsible for developing policies in the Department and the Regulatory Impact Unit within the Cabinet Office. It focuses on those regulations that impact on business, charities and the voluntary sector.

In addition there are 11 members of staff who working in the Small Business Service on better regulation for small business across Government.

Specialist Teachers

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many shortage-subject specialist teachers in primary schools were *(a)* PGCE primary trained and *(b)* PGCE secondary trained. [43418]

Mr. Timms: This information is not collected centrally.

Standards Fund

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to the answer of 27 February 2002, *Official Report,* columns 1293–96W, on the Standards Fund, what factors account for the difference between the allocations for the Standards Fund per pupil for Poole, Bournemouth and Dorset. [43567]

Mr. Timms: The Standards Fund is not allocated on a simple per pupil basis, but in relation to the specific priorities it is designed to support in each local education authority. Significant variances in the per pupil figures for Standards Fund are due to: grants where one authority is acting as a co-ordinator for others in its area; or grants allocated to particular types of school; and grants that are allocated to respond to needs, which may not be reflected equally in all authorities. The per pupil figure for each of these types of grants for Dorset, Poole and Bournemouth are shown in the following table:

Main differences in Standards Fund per pupil

Grant	*Dorset £ per pupil*	*Poole £ per pupil*	*Bournemouth £ per pupil*
Regional coordination			
LEA Music Services	6	0	0
Child Protection Co-ordinators	0	0	2
Allocated by specific types of school			
Specialist Schools	18	8	17
Small Schools Fund	17	2	2
Specific needs based initiatives			
Induction of Newly Qualified Teachers	7	11	6
Reducing Infant Class Sizes	42	21	94
Fresh Start	0	0	110

Main differences in Standards Fund per pupil

Grant	Dorset £ per pupil	Poole £ per pupil	Bournemouth £ per pupil
Information Management Strategy	5	3	0
Classrooms of the Future	6	3	28
School Laboratories	4	4	0
Total	104	54	260

For other Standards Fund grants the total per pupil distribution is: £244, £251 and £247 for Dorset, Poole and Bournemouth respectively. The smaller differences are due to variances in the level of free school meal eligibility and the balance between primary and secondary pupils.

School Admissions (Racial Equality)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance she will make available to schools on the implementation of Commission for Racial Equality guidance that admissions should reflect the ethnic make-up of the community. [43832]

Mr. Timms: The Commission for Racial Equality will be issuing guidance to schools on how to comply with the general and specific duties as set out in the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of *(a)* which schools or categories of school are exempt from the Commission for Racial Equality guidance that school admissions should reflect the ethnic make-up of the community and *(b)* how the CRE guidance should be interpreted by admissions forums. [43831]

Mr. Timms: The guidance issued by the Commission for Racial Equality will apply to all maintained schools. It is the responsibility of individual admission authorities to ensure that their policies comply with all legislation, including the Race Relations Acts. Admission forums are advisory bodies and do not decide school admissions policies.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Accountancy Contracts

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will publish the *(a)* number and *(b)* value of contracts awarded by her Department to (i) Arthur Andersen, (ii) Deloitte Touche, (iii) Ernst and Young, (iv) KPMG and (v) PricewaterhouseCoopers accountants in each year since 1997. [34997]

Dr. Howells: The following contracts are those awarded over the stated time period:

	Date	£
Deloitte Touche	March 1999	227,000
KPMG	March 1999	23,000
PricewaterhouseCoopers	November 1999	67,000
PricewaterhouseCoopers	March 2000	56,000
PricewaterhouseCoopers	May 2001	22,000
PricewaterhouseCoopers	July 2001	96,000

Deloitte Touche is one of five companies who have framework agreements with DCMS for consultancy support to Quinquennial Reviews of DCMS funded bodies. These are not contracts as such, as any review work would be competed between the five companies and lead to an individual contract. Use of the framework agreements resolves some contractual issues and simplifies the tendering process. To date Deloitte Touche have not won any of the competitively tendered contracts under their agreement. The work awarded to the companies has, in the majority of cases, been research or consultancy work rather than accountancy.

Press Office

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many staff in his Department's press office have received *(a)* termination and *(b)* redundancy payments in each of the last four years. [41090]

Dr. Howells: None of my Department's press office staff have received termination or redundancy payments in the last four years.

Design Champions

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if she will list the composition of the Ministerial Design Champions Group; and if she will make a statement; [41957]

(2) if she will publish the terms of reference of the Ministerial Design Champions Group and its status in Government; and if she will make a statement. [41956]

Dr. Howells: The Ministerial Design Champions Group is an inter-departmental working group of Ministers chaired by my noble Friend Lord Falconer of Thoroton on behalf of the Prime Minister. It comprises: Lord Falconer—Chair (DTLR; Baroness Blackstone (DCMS); Angela Eagle (Home Office); Elliot Morley (DEFRA); Brian Wilson (DTI); Malcolm Wicks (DWP); Andrew Smith (HM Treasury); Dr. Lewis Moonie (MOD); Baroness Ashton (DfES); Michael Wills (LCD); Lord Hunt (DOH); Denis MacShane (FCO); Chris Leslie (Cabinet Office), Mike Watson MSP (Scotland); Sue Essex AM (Wales); Dr. Sean Farren (NI); Sir Stuart Lipton (CABE).

Each Ministerial Design Champion is expected to:

(i) maintain a clear understanding of the extent and content of his/her Department's capital programme, including buildings and infrastructure; and the design implications of that programme in relation to the Government's wider objectives such as promotion of health, prevention of crime, urban regeneration and improvement of the environment;

(ii) personally sponsor at least two projects within his/her Departmental remit in order to ensure his/her understanding of the issues and to drive home the message by example to other project sponsors and programme managers;

(iii) oversee a departmental action plan to improve design quality across his/her department and sponsored bodies, ensuring that procedures encourage the achievement of high design quality and that sufficient resources are allocated to the production of the plan and the delivery of its conclusions;

(iv) encourage a commitment to Better Public Buildings by all Ministers, officials and others who have influence over building works under his/her Department's authority; and

(v) ensure that high quality design is part of an efficient and effective procurement process, under HM Treasury's Achieving Excellence initiative and DETR's Rethinking Construction initiative.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) when the Ministerial Design Champions Group will next meet; and if she will make a statement; [41959]

(2) when the Ministerial Design Champions Group last met; and if she will make a statement. [41954]

Dr. Howells: The Ministerial Design Champions Group last met on 17 January 2002; it will next meet on 22 May 2002.

Public Appointments

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many appointments to public bodies have been made through her Department *(a)* from April 2000 to March 2001 and *(b)* since 31 March 2001; and how many of these were (i) men and (ii) women. [42162]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* The number of men and women appointed, or re-appointed, by Ministers in this Department to bodies sponsored by this Department during the periods in question is as follows:

Period	*Men Appointed*	*Women appointed*
1.4.00–31.3.01	101	52
1.4.01–28.2.02	102	53

This includes appointments to bodies sponsored by my Department where my role is to advise on appointments made by the Prime Minister or, through him, by Her Majesty The Queen. It does not include appointments made to former Home Office public bodies before the Machinery of Government changes in June 2001.

National Gallery/National Portrait Gallery

Miss Begg: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what progress has been made on the joint review of the National Gallery and National Portrait Gallery. [44336]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for the Arts has today published the second stage report of the joint review of the National Gallery and National Portrait Gallery.

The report underlines the value of both galleries and the contribution they make to this country's cultural life. Both galleries have achieved a great deal in the last few years and have risen to the challenges set by government and themselves.

The report also finds the need for a closer, more strategic relationship between the galleries and the Department.

A copy of the report has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Solicitors

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many complaints his Department has received about the conduct and quality of solicitors' performance in each of the last 10 years. [42176]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Complaints made to the Lord Chancellor's Department about solicitors can come up in many different contexts and no information is kept centrally about the number that relate to quality, conduct or any other matters. Concerns raised in correspondence are monitored. The Lord Chancellor's Department is not responsible for handling formal complaints against solicitors. This is the responsibility of the Law Society and its complaints-handling wing, the Office for the Supervision of Solicitors.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what action he is taking to measure the performance of and quality of service offered by solicitors. [42175]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The legal profession is self-regulating. The conduct of solicitors is a matter for their professional body, the Law Society. The Office for the Supervision of Solicitors (OSS) is a separate organisation, set up by the Law Society, to handle complaints against its solicitors.

The Lord Chancellor's Department Ministers, among others, are sent the OSS monthly digest of performance.

The OSS is subject to independent scrutiny by the Legal Services Ombudsman, Ms Ann Abraham. The Ombudsman, who is a lay person, may consider complaints about the decisions reached by the OSS and also has the power to investigate the original complaint. The Ombudsman is required to make an annual report to the Lord Chancellor on the discharge of her functions during the year to which the report relates. In her report the Ombudsman will also bring to the attention of the Lord Chancellor any wider concerns she has about the nature and level of complaints against members of the legal profession. A copy of this report is laid before each House of Parliament.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Correspondence

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) when she will reply to the letters from the hon. Member for Broxbourne of 4 September, 5 October, 2 November and 29 November relating to correspondence from the East Anglian Region of the National Farmers Union. [20954]

(2) when the hon. Member for Broxbourne will receive a reply to her letters of 4 September, 5 October, 2 November, 29 November 2001 and 2 January 2002 relating to correspondence from the East Anglian region of the National Farmers Union. [26354]

Mr. Morley *[holding answers 6 December 2001 and 14 January 2002]*: A reply was sent on 10 January to the hon. Member.

Environment Council

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the outcome was of the Environment Council on 4 March; what the Government's stance was on the issues discussed, including its voting record; and if she will make a statement. [40946]

Margaret Beckett: I represented the UK at Environment Council on 4 March, accompanied by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment, and the Minister for the Environment in the Welsh Assembly Government, Sue Essex. This was the first Environment Council of the Spanish Presidency. A Council decision on ratification of the Kyoto Protocol was agreed; the UK voted in favour. Four sets of Council Conclusions were adopted. Council also held a public debate exploring key aspects of a recently adopted Commission proposal for a directive establishing a regime for environmental liability.

The agreement of the Council decision on ratification of the Kyoto Protocol will enable the Community and member states to ratify the Protocol in time for it to enter into force before the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in August, subject to sufficient ratifications by other signatories. A legal base requiring a qualified majority (Article 175(1) of the Treaty) was agreed for the decision; at the UK's request a recital was added making clear that the legal base chosen for this decision should not be taken as a precedent for future decisions on burden-sharing. A declaration was also agreed noting Council's intention to agree future burden-sharing decisions by consensus. Council also adopted Conclusions reacting to the US climate change plan. These included a call upon Parties to the UN framework Convention on Climate Change—including the US—to live up to their responsibilities under the Convention, and a confirmation of the EU's willingness to continue dialogue through the EU-US High Level Group.

In preparation for WSSD, Council Conclusions were adopted setting out the EU's priorities including poverty eradication, access to safe drinking water and sanitation, and ways of giving special attention to Africa. Council reaffirmed the Gothenburg commitment to reach the UN target for official development assistance of 0.7 per cent of GDP and called for integration of sustainable development in bilateral and multilateral co-operation agreements. Council welcomed the Commission communication "Towards a Global Partnership for Sustainable Development" and its proposals for the components of a Global Deal at the Summit. The Conclusions identified EU actions in the run up to Johannesburg and beyond including the early ratification of several international environmental agreements. The Conclusions also stressed the need for integration and coherence of internal and external policies to ensure that the EU's economic, social and environmental objectives were mutually supportive and that the EU effectively contributed to sustainable development at all levels. The global dimension should be regularly addressed as part of the overall Sustainable Development package at Spring meetings of the European Council.

Council also agreed Conclusions on the EU Sustainable Development Strategy, to be submitted to the Barcelona European Council. The Conclusions took note of the Commission's synthesis report for 2002 and stressed the need to reflect environmental issues more extensively and to treat the three dimensions of sustainable development in a more balanced way. Council called on the Commission to put in place a system of Sustainability Impact Assessment as soon as possible and emphasised the importance of the EU becoming a highly eco-efficient economy.

Council Conclusions were adopted setting out the EU negotiating position for the Sixth Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, taking place in the Hague between 7–19 April. The Conclusions stressed the need for early ratification by the Community and member states of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and the International Treaty on Plan Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. Council also supported the preparation of an action plan for capacity-building for access to genetic resources and benefit-sharing. The Conclusions also called for increased co-ordination between international organisations and conventions, including the World Intellectual Property Organisation Inter-Governmental Committee, and the United Nations Commission on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

In the public debate on the proposed environmental liability regime, principal concerns expressed by other member states were the generous extent of the defences available to polluters, the potential burden on member states if polluters failed to act, and the scope of the directive. Several member states thought that there was a need to consider whether there was a gap in the proposed regime concerning damage caused by genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Beyond this, member states were evenly divided on whether the scope should be extended and on the need for a common framework for insurance. I underlined the complex nature of the proposal and the need to take on board the views of stakeholders. I argued that we would need careful examination of the associated costs and benefits of any proposed change to its scope, the defences or insurance arrangements.

The Spanish Presidency gave progress reports on a proposed directive establishing a Community greenhouse gas trading scheme; amendments to Directive 94/62/EC, concerning recycling and recovery targets for packaging and packaging waste; and amendments to Directive 96/82/EC, on the control of major-accident hazards involving dangerous substances (SEVESO II). The Commission presented proposals allowing Community implementation and ratification of the Cartegena Protocol on Biosafety. The Commission also updated Council on progress on chemicals legislation, a proposed directive on recycling of batteries and accumulators, and a proposed White Paper on integrated product policy.

Under Any Other Business, Spain reported on the outcome of a recent seminar considering the incorporation of gender perspectives into EU environmental policy-making. Austria reported on an international conference held in November 2001 on the role of the precautionary principle in chemicals policy. Germany invited Ministers to consider the environmental implications of the proposed airport noise directive currently under discussion in Transport Council. My right hon. Friend, the Minister for the Environment, noted that two recent studies had suggested a connection between transport and asthma in children. Contributory causes appeared to be ozone, particulates and nitrogen oxides. The Commission welcomed the dissemination of the research, and noted that it would shortly publish a Communication on children's health and the environment.

Technetium-99

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the Environment Agency's proposal in respect of technetium-99 discharges; what process she has established to consider representations on the proposal; and when she expects to take a decision in respect of the proposal. [40495]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 11 March 2002]*: In 1998, in the light of international concern about discharges of technetium-99 from BNFL's Sellafield site, Ministers requested that the Agency carry out a review of discharges of this radionuclide on a "fast track". In February 2000, the Agency published its "Scope and Methodology Document", describing its plans for the re-examination of radioactive discharge authorisations at Sellafield, including technetium-99, and sought public comment. In November 2000 the Agency published its "Explanatory Document" setting out its analysis of the situation concerning technetium-99 discharges, abatement technologies and a range of future approaches that might be taken. Public consultation on this document finished on 5 March 2001. The Agency took into account the responses that it had received and, in September 2001, published its proposed decisions on the future regulation of technetium-99 discharges. My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Secretary of State for Health will give a decision on this shortly.

Rural Work Force

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of those employed in agriculture are classified as having another form of paid employment; and if she will make a statement. [42905]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Malcolm Bruce, dated 15 March 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the proportion of those employed in agriculture who have another form of paid employment. (42905)

Of the 402,000 people shown by the Labour Force Survey to be employed in agriculture, 8 per cent had a job in another industrial sector also. The attached table shows details of the make up of this groups of people.

Proportion of people employed in agriculture[1] who have another job in a different industry; United Kingdom; autumn (September to November) 2001; not seasonally adjusted

	Thousands	*Per cent.*
All persons whose main job is in agriculture	383	100.0
of which:		
those with a second job, in a different industry	13	3.3
All persons with a second job in agriculuture	24	100.0
of which:		
those whose main job is in a different industry	20	80.6
Total employed in agriculture, either as their main or second job	402	100.0
of which:		
those with another job, in a different industry	32	8.0

[1] People employed in Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) 1992 Division A: Agriculture, hunting and forestry.

Source: ONS Labour Force Survey

TREASURY

Accountancy and Consultancy Costs

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total cost to his Department has been of services provided by *(a)* Arthur Andersen and *(b)* Accenture and Andersen Consulting for (i) accountancy services, (ii) consultancy work and (iii) other work in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [32103]

Ruth Kelly: The cost to the Treasury for consultancy services provided by Arthur Andersen was £80,000 in 2000 and £64,625 in 2001, and for Andersen Consulting £30,252 in 2000. Aside from inward secondees, no other services have been received from these firms in the last four years.

Afghan Heroin

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what actions HM Customs and Excise are taking to increase the proportion of Afghan heroin seized; and how many tonnes of Afghan heroin have been seized by Customs and Excise in each of the past 10 years. [40389]

Mr. Boateng: Customs work closely with other agencies in the UK and overseas to disrupt the supply of heroin to the UK market, the vast majority of which originates in Afghanistan. Statistics relating to the annual amounts of heroin seized by Customs are published on a routine basis in their annual departmental reports, but these are not disaggregated by their country of origin.

Running Costs (Government)

Mr. Swire: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a breakdown of the total running costs of central Government and their agencies for each year sine May 1997 to the latest date for which information is available. [40832]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* Table 5.1 of PESA 2001–02 (Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses, Cm 5101) and similar tables in previous PESAs give outturn data department by department for administration costs (running costs before 2000–01) since 1986–87, the first year for which there is published data.

Terrorism (Costs)

Bob Spink: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the total direct and indirect cost to the UK of actions taken by the UK arising from the attacks on the USA on 11 September 2001. [41874]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Funds have been approved by Parliament in the normal way in Supplementary Estimates. The Chancellor of the Exchequer gave details of additional public spending arising from attacks on the USA on 11 September 2001 in his Pre-Budget Report Statement to Parliament on 27 November 2001.

Gladwyn's Wood

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what discussions his Department has had with the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions concerning the future of Gladwyn's Wood, Denham, Buckinghamshire, with reference to its contiguity with Broadspring Wood, owned by the Highways Agency; [43783]

(2) if Gladwyns Wood, Denham, Buckinghamshire, is now in the ownership of HM Customs and Excise; and what plans his Department has for the wood. [43781]

Mr. Boateng: None. Gladwyn Wood is not in the ownership of HM Customs and Excise.

Approved Mileage Allowance Payments

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the entitlement of service company workers and others to tax relief and exemption under the Approved Mileage Allowance Payments scheme. [44415]

Dawn Primarolo: Draft legislation is being published today which will ensure that from 6 April 2002, people who work through intermediaries, such as service companies, and who fall within the "intermediaries legislation", will be entitled to the same relief and exemption under the new Approved Mileage Allowance Payments scheme as employees. Copies of the draft legislation are available in the Libraries of the House.

HEALTH

Physiotherapy

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to improve physiotherapy services *(a)* in London and *(b)* in general. [39029]

Mr. Hutton: The NHS Plan sets out targets to provide 6,500 more therapists and other health professionals and 4,450 more therapists and other key health professional training places by 2004. Further plans to increase the number of physiotherapists working in the NHS by 59 per cent., from 15,600 in 2000 to 24,800 in 2009, were announced in the follow-up document to the NHS Plan, *Investment and reform for NHS staff—taking forward the NHS Plan*, (published 15 February 2001).

Between 1999 and 2001 the number of qualified physiotherapists in England increased by 1,140 (from 15,070 in 1999 to 16,210 in 2001). Of these the number working in the London regional office area increased by 90.

Between 1999–2000 and 2000–01 the number of physiotherapy training commissions increased by 127 (9 per cent.) and further increases are planned.

In September 2001, as signalled in Meeting the Challenge; A Strategy for the Allied Health Professions (AHPs), 10 Workforce Development Confederations (WDC's) began working with 13 Higher Education Institutions in a first wave of modernising pre-registration education and training for the allied health professions, starting with Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, Radiography, Podiatry and Speech & Language Therapy education. These first wave courses will be established from the 2002–03 academic year and will feature wider entry gates to professional training, more part-time courses, the possibility of stepping on and off programmes, and more opportunities for shared learning. Several HEIs in England offer accelerated pre-registration courses in physiotherapy for existing graduates.

Individual health authorities are also responsible for assessing the broad health care needs of their population, and securing a range of hospital and community health services such as physiotherapy services to meet those needs. Decisions about the health care provision and the use of resources are best taken at local level because it is there that people's needs are best known and services can be tailored accordingly.

Orthodontists (Mid Essex Hospital Trust)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* part-time and *(b)* full-time orthodontists there are in the Mid Essex Hospital Trust area. [38355]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* There are fewer than five full or part-time orthodontists in the Mid Essex NHS Trust area. Exact figures cannot be provided as for data protection purposes national figures are collated on the basis that individuals will not be identified, and figures are sufficiently small to risk disclosure of information about an individual.

Pharmacists

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to increase the numbers of people training as pharmacists; and if he will make a statement; [41221]

(2) what discussions he has had with companies about the training of pharmacists; and if he will make a statement. [41222]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* There has been a significant increase in pharmacy student intakes over recent years, with 27 per cent. more new students starting their training in 2000 than in 1993. This points to a significant medium-term growth in the pharmacy work force, despite the change to a 4-year undergraduate course in 1997. Full figures are not yet available from the Pharmaceutical Society for 2001 as returns are still awaited from two schools of pharmacy. Work force modelling undertaken by the Department suggests that there will be a 12 per cent. increase in the pharmacy work force across the National Health Service and private sector between 1998 and 2003.

The Department has regular contact with a range of organisations with an interest in pharmacy, to discuss training issues.

NHS Staff (Assaults)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what figures he uses to monitor the NHS zero tolerance campaign on assaults on NHS staff. [40802]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 8 March 2002]:* The National Health Service's zero tolerance zone campaign to tackle violence against NHS staff is monitored using data collected from all NHS trusts and health authorities to a common definition issued in Health Service Circular 1999/229: "Working Together, Securing a Quality Workforce for the NHS: Managing Violence, Accidents and Sickness Absence in the NHS", a copy of which is in the Library.

Figures on reported violent incidents in 2000–01 are currently being analysed by the Department and will form the baseline for measuring progress against the Government's national improvement targets.

Radiographers

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list vacancy rates and full role calculations for radiographer posts by hospital trust. [42287]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Health Costs (Road Accidents)

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he proposes to take to recover health service charges from uninsured drivers. [43314]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 13 March 2002]:* It is already possible for National Health Service costs to be recovered from the Motor Insurers' Bureau in cases where the driver is uninsured for accidents that occur on or after 5 April 1999.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what his reasons are for the extent of the proposed increase in threshold for the upper limit that can be charged to insurance companies for the costs of health care for people injured in road accidents; [43312]

(2) for what reasons he withdrew the regulations to increase the threshold for the upper limit that can be charged to insurance companies for the costs of health care for people injured in road accidents; [43311]

(3) how many hospital charges exceeded £30,000 in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [43313]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 14 March 2002]:* Regulations were introduced on 28 January 2002 that increased the tariff and ceiling of charges for the recovery of National Health Services costs following road traffic accidents. The tariff was increased from a flat rate of £354 to £402 for treatment without admission and from a daily rate of £435 to £494 for treatment with admission. The ceiling of charges in any one case was increased from £10,000 to £30,000. The regulations were revoked on 7 February 2002 following representations from and on behalf of the insurance industry that they were not given adequate warning of the intended increases.

The increase in the ceiling of charges in any one case was proposed in the light of operational experience. Although the new scheme was intended to recover the full cost of treatment in the relevant cases a threshold had always existed but had failed to keep pace with the rising cost of medical treatment. Our data for the year from 1 February 2001 to 31 January 2002 show that 1,237 patients received treatment following a road traffic accident which cost in excess of £10,000 with 248 of these costing in excess of £30,000.

We will shortly be consulting on revised proposals for increasing the tariff and ceiling of charges.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consultations he has had with the Automobile Association on increases in the threshold for the upper limit that can be charged to insurance companies for the costs of health care for people injured in road accidents. [43564]

Ms Blears: The Department of Health will shortly be consulting on proposals for increasing the tariff and ceiling of charges for the recovery of National Health Service costs following a road traffic accident. The Automobile Association will be included in the consultation.

Free Prescriptions

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the medical complaints which provide entitlements to free prescriptions; and if he will make a statement. [43641]

Ms Blears: The medical conditions conferring exemption from prescription charges are:

(1) permanent fistula (including caecostomy, colostomy, laryngostomy, or ileostomy) requiring continuous surgical dressing or an appliance;

(2) the following disorders:

—forms of hypoadrenalism (including Addison's disease) for which specific substitution therapy is essential;

—diabetes insipidus and other forms of hypopituitarism;

—diabetes mellitus—except where treatment is by diet alone;

—hypoparathyroidism;

—myasthenia gravis; and

—myxoedema;

(3) epilepsy requiring continuous anti-convulsive therapy;

(4) a continuing physical disability which prevents the patient from leaving his residence without the help of another person.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will exempt sufferers of cystic fibrosis from paying prescription charges; and if he will make a statement. [43642]

Ms Blears: Our policy is to give priority to helping people who may have difficulty in paying charges, rather than extending the exemption arrangements to people with other medical conditions, including cystic fibrosis.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Indonesia

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of *(a)* the sufficiency of the territorial and temporal jurisdiction of the human rights court established in Indonesia to investigate alleged abuses in East Timor, *(b)* the likely impact of the Indonesian constitutional prohibition on retroactive prosecutions, *(c)* the experience, expertise and independence of the judges and lawyers appointed to the court, *(d)* the arrangements for the protection of victims and witnesses and *(e)* the level of co-operation on legal matters between the Indonesian and East Timorese authorities; and what plans he has to monitor the trials. [36928]

Mr. Bradshaw: *(a)* The question of the territorial and temporal jurisdiction of Indonesia's ad hoc human rights tribunals is a matter for the President of Indonesia to determine. The UK considers that their mandate should encompass all crimes against humanity perpetrated in East Timor before, during and after the Referendum of 1999. We will continue to raise our concerns about the jurisdictional limitations of the Tribunal with the Indonesian authorities, working closely with our partners in the EU.

(b) The question of retroactive prosecutions will be for the Tribunal to determine.

(c) The judges and prosecutors appointed to the Tribunal are professional lawyers. We welcome their appointment.

(d) There is currently no provision for victim/witness protection under Indonesian law. However, it is expected that this will be included in forthcoming legislation.

(e) The Indonesian Government and representatives from the UN Transitional Administration to East Timor (UNTAET) and the East Timorese leadership meet regularly to discuss a range of bilateral issues. They met most recently on 25 February.

Relocation expenses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is on the payment of relocation expenses to staff in his Department. [41020]

Mr. Bradshaw: If staff are permanently transferred within the UK in the interests of the FCO, they are helped with additional travel costs or the costs of moving home only if their home is no longer within normal commuting distance.

Litigation

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many cases *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies have defended in (i) industrial tribunals and (ii) the courts in each year since 1997; how many were concluded in their favour; and what the total cost to his Department of litigation was in each year. [41113]

Mr. Bradshaw: Cases defended by the FCO in Industrial Employment Tribunals:

1998: four cases defended, three decided in FCO's favour;

1999: three cases defended; all decided in FCO's favour;

2000: two cases defended; one case fully, one case partially in FCO's favour; total cost £16,811;

2001: five cases defended; two in FCO's favour*; total cost £100,461;

2002: one case defended; one in FCO's favour; total cost £1,373.

* Two cases from 2001 are still awaiting a decision. The information available on cases brought in courts other than Industrial/Employment Tribunals, on all cases prior to 1998, and cost information prior to 2000, can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 208W, on Zimbabwe what estimate his Department has made of the number of British citizens owed public sector pensions in relation to service in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe who are resident in the United Kingdom and whose pension payments have been suspended. [41867]

Mr. MacShane: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office does not hold a record of British Citizens resident in the UK who are former public sector employees of the Rhodesian authorities and entitled to pension payments in respect of their service. Nor does it hold a record of those pensioners whose pension payments have been delayed or suspended by the Zimbabwean authorities.

Deena Gilbey

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action the Government have taken to assist Deena Gilbey in her attempt to stay in the USA with her children. [41947]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Government have worked tirelessly on behalf of Mrs. Gilbey and the other British family members of victims of the 11 September atrocities. The British Embassy in Washington has worked with the White House, the State Department and Congress to ensure the fair and sympathetic treatment of British family members whose immigration or residency status in the US may have been affected by the terrorist attacks. The British Ambassador in Washington raised these cases with the Chair of the US Senate Judiciary Committee on 9 October 2001. Following this, the US Congress passed, and President Bush signed, anti-terrorism legislation (the Patriots Bill) that allows all British family members affected by 11 September to continue living and working in the US.

The US Immigration and Naturalisation Service have assured Mrs. Gilbey that does not face deportation.

The British Consulate General in New York remains in close touch with Mrs. Gilbey, and continues to monitor the situation closely, to ensure that she and others in a similar position do not have to suffer any further.

Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh to be put on trial; and if he will make a statement. [42681]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are in contact with the Pakistani authorities about Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh. We understand that they have not completed their investigations or made a decision about trial proceedings. We will continue to monitor this case closely.

Angola

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what representations he has made to the Angolan Government concerning restrictions on freedom of expression; and if he will make a statement; [42524]

(2) if representations are being made to the Angolan Government against their continued military offensive against UNITA; and if he will make a statement on what is being done by the international community to achieve new momentum in the peace process; [42519]

(3) what the British Government have done to show their condemnation of human rights abuses by *(a)* the UNITA rebel movement and *(b)* the ruling MPLA Government in Angola; and if he will make a statement. [42520]

Mr. MacShane: Following the death of Jonas Savimbi, the UK joined the EU partners in issuing a declaration urging both parties to put an end to the conflict in Angola. The Prime Minister has written to President dos Santos to encourage him to take steps to begin a process of national reconciliation and to address Angola's very serious humanitarian situation.

Her Majesty's Government believe that freedom of expression is essential to a functioning democracy. It is important for the improvement of human rights in Angola. The UK makes regular representations to the Government of Angola, bilaterally and through the EU, urging them to address human rights and humanitarian issues in Angola. We condemn human rights abuses by UNITA. UK support for sanctions against UNITA is a strong signal that their behaviour has been unacceptable.

The next opportunity for HMG to discuss Angola's human rights record will be the visit of Foreign Minister Miranda to the UK at the end of March, when he will meet the Foreign Secretary, Baroness Amos and the International Development Secretary. The International Development Secretary is also visiting Angola from 2–4 April.

Burma

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the authorities in Burma regarding the situation of Aung San Suu Kyi. [42404]

Mr. Bradshaw: Ministerial contact with the Burmese authorities is limited by the EU Common Position. However an FCO official visited Rangoon from 27 February–1 March where he met both Aung San Suu Kyi and members of the Burmese Government. The Burmese Government are aware of our view that all restrictions on ASSK should be removed. An EU Troika mission is visiting Rangoon from 13–15 March to gauge the latest developments and explain EU policy.

Non-governmental Organisations

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 6 March 2002, ref 39187, on non-governmental organisations, what information he collates on the funding of non-governmental organisations by his Department, with particular reference to those operating on a regional level; and if he will make a statement. [42540]

Mr. Straw: The FCO does not keep information centrally about the funding of NGOs and nor do FCO Commands keep that information broken down on a regional basis. It would be difficult to arrive at a precise answer because the FCO could be said to "fund" NGOs in a great variety of ways—some are contracted to provide specific services in relation to projects funded by Command Programme Budgets and specific Programme funds (e.g. Human Rights Project Fund), others may well receive financial support to attend conferences etc as guests of HMG. In some cases posts overseas may use local budgets to pay, for example, for accommodation of NGO visitors on official business.

UK Citizens (France)

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many United Kingdom citizens are held *(a)* on remand and *(b)* in custody following convictions within France. [42716]

Mr. Bradshaw: There are currently 65 British citizens held on remand in France and 105 British citizens who have been convicted and are serving prison sentences in France.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many United Kingdom lorry drivers are held *(a)* on remand and *(b)* in prison following conviction in France. [42717]

Mr. Bradshaw: There are currently 26 British lorry drivers held on remand in prison in France and 19 British lorry drivers who have been convicted and are serving prison sentences in France.

EU Enlargement

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Governments of *(a)* Poland, *(b)* Hungary, *(c)* the Czech Republic and *(d)* Slovenia on EU enlargement. [42721]

Peter Hain: Both my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I have regular discussions with candidate countries about their accession to the EU. As part of this dialogue I visited Hungary in September 2001 and the Czech Republic and Slovenia in January and will visit Warsaw later this month.

Public Appointments

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many appointments to public bodies have been made through his Department *(a)* from April 2000 to March 2001 and *(b)* since 31 March 2001; and how many of these were (i) men and (ii) women. [42163]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* The number of men and women appointed, or re-appointed, by Ministers in this Department to bodies sponsored by this Department during the periods in question is as follows:

Period	*Men appointed*	*Women appointed*
1.4.00–31.3.01	21	6
1.4.01–28.2.02	22	9

United Nations

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many full-time equivalent staff are employed at the United Kingdom Mission to the United Nations. [43553]

Mr. MacShane: There are 48 UK-based staff and 18.75 LE staff.

Freedom of Information Act

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 21 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 332W, on the Freedom of Information Act 2000, on what dates the steering group of senior officials has met since August 2000. [43478]

Mr. MacShane: The FCO's steering group of senior officials met on 13 September and 6 December 2001. It will next meet on 20 March.

In addition officials at working group level continue to meet regularly to review progress.

India and Pakistan (Nuclear Programmes)

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the Government's policy is regarding *(a)* exports to nuclear and nuclear-related end users in India and Pakistan and *(b)* contacts with India and Pakistan relating to their nuclear programmes. [44337]

Mr. Bradshaw: As the then Foreign Office Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) made clear on 10 July 1998, *Official Report,* column 687, many countries including the UK have in place strict controls on the export of nuclear-related goods to India and Pakistan. The UK also exercises caution over contacts between personnel from the British nuclear industry and their Indian and Pakistani counterparts. Current tensions between India and Pakistan demonstrate the need for both countries to exercise restraint.

The events of 11 September highlighted the fact that some terrorist groups will use any means to achieve their ends. We know that Osama bin Laden and the al-Qaeda network have shown an interest in developing chemical, biological and nuclear weapons. To ensure that such ambitions are not realised, we are encouraging all countries, including India and Pakistan, to take all steps necessary to ensure the better physical protection of their nuclear assets. We will be encouraging both countries to consider measures which contribute to the safety and security of their nuclear programmes.

Bearing these factors in mind, and consistent with our obligations under the Non-Proliferation Treaty, we have revised our policy as follows:—

> we will continue to deny all export licence applications (ELAs) for items listed on the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) Dual-Use List to nuclear and nuclear related end users in India and Pakistan. We will consider all applications for other items assessed as licensable, including those licensable under the WMD end use control, with particular vigilance in making licensing decisions on a case by case basis. Licences may be issued if there are no end use concerns. Consistent with our obligations under the Non-Proliferation Treaty, licences may also be issued in exceptional cases where the Government is satisfied that the proposed exports will contribute to the physical protection or security of civil or military nuclear facilities or assets in India and Pakistan;
>
> we will continue to discourage contacts by UK nuclear scientists or those working in the UK nuclear industry with their counterparts from, or personnel who we know are likely to work in, nuclear or nuclear related organisations in India or

Pakistan. We will also discourage visits by such counterparts and personnel to UK nuclear facilities. However, this will not apply where such contacts would contribute to the safety and security of India and Pakistan's nuclear programmes, or further the UK's non-proliferation objectives, consistent with our obligations under the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Since carrying out their nuclear tests in 1998, neither India nor Pakistan have demonstrated sufficient commitment to meet their obligations to reduce nuclear tensions set down in UNSCR 1172. We are now encouraging both countries to engage in a bilateral dialogue on nuclear confidence building measures.

US Anti-personnel Mines

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether US anti-personnel mines have been *(a)* transited, *(b)* stockpiled and *(c)* maintained on British Indian Ocean Territory during the conduct of operations in Afghanistan. [43524]

Mr. MacShane: No.

INDEX TO THE

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES SESSION 2001–2002 **VOLUME 381**

4th March—15th March 2002

Printed indexes to Hansard

The volume index is one of three printed indexes to Commons Hansard produced from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Indexing Service (POLIS). It contains references to material in the bound volumes of Hansard. The other indexes produced are:

- The fortnightly index to Hansard. This covers the same date range as the volume index but references are to the column numbering in the daily parts and weekly edition of Hansard.
- The sessional index to Hansard. This contains references to material in the bound volumes for a whole session.

Indexes on the Parliamentary website

Fortnightly, volume and sessional indexes covering material from the beginning of the 1999/2000 session will also appear on the Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk with links to the full text of Hansard.

SCOPE

The indexes include entries covering:

- The content of all material recorded in Hansard, including debates, procedural motions and questions.
- The names of all Members contributing to the Parliamentary business recorded in Hansard.
- The names of some types of Parliamentary business whenever they occur in Hansard. These are 'Ministerial statements', 'Business statements', 'Opposition days' and 'Estimates days'.

ARRANGEMENT

- All headings are in one word-by-word alphabetical sequence, with Members' contribution entries distinguished from other entries by italics.
- Where a Member contributes to Parliamentary business and is the subject of Parliamentary business there are separate contribution and subject entries, the subject entry coming first.
- Entries beginning 'Mac' and 'Mc' are sorted in one sequence as 'Mac'.
- 'St', when abbreviated for Saint, is filed as 'Saint'.
- Numbers are filed as if spelt out, e.g. '10 Downing Street' as if 'Ten Downing Street'.

HEADINGS

Choice of headings

- *Specificity*—Entries summarise the overall content of a debate or question as specifically as the various POLIS thesauruses allow. For example, Education, Higher education, Universities or the name of a particular university is used depending on the breadth of the item.
- *Name headings*—Specific entries are included for the names of people, places, institutions, organisations, committees, programmes, initiatives, publications and legislation when these constitute the overall subject of an item.
- *Organisations and subjects*—Organisation entries are preferred for material about the general performance, administration and staffing of an organisation (for example, United Kingdom Passports Agency, Standards). Subject entries are preferred for what organisations do as part of their duties (for example, Passports, Fees and charges).

Geographical coverage

- *Subject headings*—Subject headings are assumed to refer to the whole of England, Great Britain or the United Kingdom unless otherwise stated.
- *Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales*—Material relating to the whole of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales is indexed under these headings.
- *Places within the UK*—Material about specific towns, areas and institutions is entered under the name of the specific town, area or institution.
- *Foreign countries*—Most material relating to foreign countries is collected under the name of that country. Some additional material may be found under the names of—groups of countries, areas within countries, geographical features, place names associated with particular issues, politicians and heads of state, international bodies, and institutions and companies operating in those countries.
- *EC/EU material*—General material about the European Communities and European institutions as bodies is entered under 'European Communities' and 'EC institutions'. Organisational material about specific communities and institutions is entered under the name of the body, for example 'European Coal and Steel Community' or 'European Parliament'. Material about what the Communities and institutions are doing or propose to do is entered under various subject headings beginning 'EC' such as 'EC environmental policy'.

Parliamentary material and business

- *Material about Parliament*—This is indexed under 'Parliament', the names of the two Houses, the 'Palace of Westminster' and parts of the Parliamentary estate (such as 'Portcullis House').
- *Committees*—Material about committees is indexed under 'Committees', types of committee (such as 'Select committees') and the names of individual committees (such as 'Home Affairs Select Committee').
- *Parliamentary proceedings/procedures*—Material discussing these is indexed under the specific type of proceeding (such as 'Parliamentary questions' or 'Oral questions'), procedure (such as 'Calling of Members') or issue (such as 'Unparliamentary expressions').
- *Legislation*—Entries for Parliamentary proceedings on bills and statutory instruments are entered under their titles. Where the lead word of the bill or statutory instrument does not provide a full or clear indication of the subject there are additional subject entries when the bill or instrument is debated. For example, debates on the 'Child Support Pensions and Social Security Bill' have entries under 'Pensions' and 'Social security benefits' as well as under the title of the Bill.
- *Members' names*—These are given in the form by which the Member prefers to be known.
- *Speaker and Chair*—Contributions by the Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker and deputies'. Contributions from the chair during Committees of the Whole House are brought together under 'Chairman of Committee of the Whole House'. Significant rulings and statements (as opposed to routine comments) are indicated by the sub-heading 'Rulings and statements' in both cases.

Guidance on headings

- *Cross references*—'See' references indicate all the material has been entered under another heading. 'See also' references indicate that additional information may be found under another heading.
- *Concept thesaurus*—A copy of the subject thesaurus to POLIS, listing the concept entries used in the index, is available on the Parliamentary website. A hard copy is available from the Head of the POLIS Unit, House of Commons Library, 1 Derby Gate, London, SW1A 2DG (020 7219 6456).

REFERENCES

- References in the indexes are to columns rather than pages.
- References to debates, but not questions, are accompanied by the date of the item.
- There are separate sequences in Hansard for the material taken on the floor of the House, Westminster Hall sittings and written questions:
  - References consisting of a number by itself indicate material taken on the floor of the House.
  - References ending in 'wh' indicate Westminster Hall sittings.
  - References ending in 'w' indicate written questions.
- References under all headings except the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in one numerical sequence irrespective of whether the material is taken on the floor of the House, is discussed at a Westminster Hall sitting or is a written question.
- References under the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in numerical sequence under the following headings:
  - *Debates etc.* (which includes interventions and points of order as well as significant contributions to debates);
  - *Sittings in Westminster Hall* (covering all debates held as part of the Westminster Hall sittings); and
  - *Questions* (which includes written, oral and private notice questions).

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in connection with the progress of bills:

- 1R=First reading
- 2R=Second reading
- Com=Committee stage
- Rep=Report stage
- 3R=Third reading
- res=resolution
- amendt(s)=amendment(s)
- *=matter taken formally without debate or division.

Parliamentary background

- The Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk contains a range of information about Parliament and the full text of some Parliamentary papers and proceedings including Hansard.
- Information on current Parliamentary business is provided in the House of Commons Information Office *Weekly Information Bulletin*, available on the website and from The Stationery Office (020 7873 8499).
- Further information on Parliamentary proceedings and procedures is available from the House of Commons Information Office (020 7219 4272).

INDEX—SESSION 2001–02

4th March 2002–15th March 2002

A6
Bypasses 167w, 1087w

A12
Noise 188w

A36
1203–4w

A76
Speed limits 1207–8w

Abandoned vehicles
1234–5w
Medway 1234w

Abbott, Ms Diane
Debates etc.
Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 166
Police (08.03.02) 534–5
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Iraq (06.03.02) 70–1wh
Questions
General practitioners, Lancashire 805w
General practitioners, Standards 290w
Incinerators 290–2w
Iraq, Weapons 287
Smoking 832w

Abortion
Overseas visitors 135w

Absent voting
Diplomatic service 570w

Absenteeism
Pupils 238w

Accenture
Home Office 973w
Treasury 1288w

Accident and emergency departments
436w, 1016–7w
Attendance 546w
Chorley and South Ribble Hospital 992w
Hospital beds 1006w
Medical records 1017w
St George's Hospital Tooting 822w
Standards 1005w
Waiting lists 828w
Working hours 1005–6w

Accidents
Aviation 746–7w
Damages 963–4w
Fees and charges 1291–2w
Firearms 132–3w
Roads 94w, 141–2w, 381w, 561–2w, 612w, 1264w, 1277w
Shipping 746–7w

Accountancy
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 1281–2w
Dept for Education and Skills 1279w
Dept for International Development 335w, 897w
Dept for Work and Pensions 26–7w
Dept of Health 1009w
Dept of Trade and Industry 890w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1171w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 1176–7w
National Savings and Investments 468–9w
Northern Ireland Office 59w
Pension funds 702w
Solicitor-General 660–1w
Treasury 1114w

Administration of justice
Learning disability 154–5w
Northern Ireland 58w

Advance corporation tax
112w
Pension funds 110–1w

Advertising
Annuities 472–3w
Cabinet Office 1074–5w
Dept for Education and Skills 760–2w
Dept for International Development 337w
Dept of Health 1039–40w
Dept of Trade and Industry 592w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1169–70w
Home Office 974w
Jobcentres 1126–7w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 776–8w
President of the Council 605w
Small Business Service 1078–9w
Treasury 469–70w

Aerials
Petitions (04.03.02) 124, (11.03.02) 730
Planning permission 98–9w

Aerospace industry
150–1w
EC action 32w
Engineers 592w

Afghanistan
Armed conflict 31w, 312w, 323–4w, 658w
Asylum 1189–91w
Bomb disposal 686w, 1129–30w
Drugs 204–6w
Females 330–1w, 648w, 864w
Health services 1190w
International assistance 329–30w, 1130w
Microcredit programmes 1189w
Overseas aid 753–4
Peace keeping operations 30w, 870w
Prisoners 69–70w, 207–8w, 504w, 859–60w, 868w

Africa
Commonwealth Development Corporation 276–7
Crime prevention 647w
Debts 1129w
Health services 326w
Human trafficking 646w
International assistance 328w, 339–40w
Offences against children 646–7w, 1187w
Overseas aid 886

After school clubs
New Opportunities Fund 35w

Age
Retirement 23w

Agency nurses
Pay 1035w

Aggregates levy
(13.03.02) 308–14wh

Agricultural products
South West region 938–9w

Agriculture
Chemicals 478w
Manpower 1287–8w
Public relations 226w
Regulation 77–8w
Sustainable development 944w

***Ainsworth, Bob**, Parliamentary Secretary, Home Office*
Debates etc.
Cleveland Constabulary, Inquiries (06.03.02) 395–8
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Greater Manchester Police, Finance (05.03.02) 63–8wh
Questions
Airguns 598–9w, 721w, 980w
Bridges, Axle weights 924w
Cannabis, Decriminalisation 1222w
Drugs, Crime 48w
Drugs, Misuse 46w, 708w, 714w

***Ainsworth, Bob**—continued*
Drugs, Night clubs 968w
EC budget, Fraud 521w
European Police Office, USA 519–20w
Firearms, Licensing 312–3w
Money laundering 594–6w
Money laundering, Serbia 975w
National security 597w
Organised crime, EC action 519w
Police, Aviation 635–6
Police, Conditions of employment 632–[illegible]
Road traffic offences 1106w
Roads, Accidents 1264w
Schengen Agreement 521–2w

Ainsworth, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
World Summit on Sustainable Development (07.03.02) 439–41
Questions
Bioaerosols, Health hazards 937w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Meat 128w, 781w
Electronic equipment, Waste disposal 232w
Energy Policy Review 403
Environment protection, Northern Ireland Office 57w
Farmers, Supermarkets 936w, 1077w
Foot and mouth disease 782–3w
Foot and mouth disease, Cumbria 781–2w
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 718–9w, 782–3w
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries 71w
Foot and mouth disease, Kidderminster 783w
Foot and mouth disease, North Yorkshire 781w
Incinerators 290–2w
Incinerators, Pollution control 358–9w
Livestock, Markets 784w
Meat, Imports 937w
Non-departmental public bodies, Supermarkets 258w
Organic farming 936w
Recycling, EC law 401–2
Recycling, Private finance initiative 71–2w
Rural areas, National Lottery 784w
South East London Combined Heat and Power, Dioxins 359–60w
Wood, Smuggling 784–6w

Air ambulance services
1147w

Air conditioning
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 1235w
Dept for International Development 896w
Home Office 1221–2w
Ministry of Defence 870–1w
Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre 584–5w
RAF High Wycombe 656–7w, 870–1w
10 Downing Street 1069w

Air force
Resignations 658w

Air pollution
484w
Airports 375–6w

Air routes
Heathrow Airport 1203w

Air traffic control
Fees and charges 580–1w
Tanzania 340w, 648w, 685w

Aircraft
Hijacking 752w
Noise 375w, 562w

Airguns
598–600w, 721w, 980w

Airline Group
176w

Airports
Air pollution 375–6w
Finance 168w
St Helena 327–8w
Security 373–4w
South East region 918w, 1200w

Alcoholic drinks
Crime 1264w
Excise duties 200–1w, 473w
Expenditure 1114–6w
Measurement 593w
Misuse 435w, 1013w
Smuggling 200w

Aldeburgh
Arts festivals 345w

Alder Hey Children's Hospital
1145w

Alderley Edge bypass
923w

***Alexander, Mr Douglas**, Minister for E-commerce and Competitiveness, Dept of Trade and Industry*
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Consignia (12.03.02) 196–200wh
Questions
Broadband 3–4w
Broadband, Business 1185–6w
Consignia, External financing limits 357–8w
Email, Unsolicited goods and services 352–3w
Post codes, Northern Ireland 488w
Post offices 1183w
Post offices, Bank services 1183w
Post offices, North East region 670w
Post offices, Social security benefits 670w
Postal services, Rural areas 358w, 488w
Publishing 489–90w
Radio, Licensing 1186w
Telephone systems 673w

Allan, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Foreign Exchange Transactions Tax Commission Bill, 1R (13.03.02) 902–4
Questions
Email, Unsolicited goods and services 352–3w

Allen, Mr Graham
Debates etc.
Democracy, Electronic government (12.03.02) 863–5, 867
Questions
Members, Correspondence 1255w

Allergies
Latex 1004w

Allocation of time motions
see Timetabling of bills

Allowances
Councillors 104–5w, 173w

Alternative energy
488–9w

Alternatives to prison
West Midlands 54w

Alzheimer's disease
609w

Ambulance services
848w
Brighton 848–9w

Ambulance services—continued
Diabetes 1247w
Hampshire 989w
Per capita costs 424w
Roads 755w

Analgesics
Packaging 612–3w

Ancillary staff
NHS 1248–50w

Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Debates etc.
Ministerial statement intervention (06.03.02) 298
Zimbabwe (14.03.02) 1033–5
Questions
Afghanistan, Prisoners 207w
Democratic Republic of Congo, Elections 68w
Iraq 747–8
Montenegro 393–4w
Overseas investment 392–3w
Romania, Diplomatic service 391w
Turkey, Drugs 690–1w
Zimbabwe, Elections 68–9w, 742–3

Angola
392w, 1295–6w
Arms trade 1259–60w
Overseas aid 465w, 1187–8w

Animal experiments
517–8w
Genetic engineering 976–7w

Animal feed
Imports 227–8w

Animal welfare
Circuses 791w
Dogs 796w
Pigs 944w

Animal Welfare (Journey to Slaughter) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
1R (05.03.02) 152–4

Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986
Questions
976–7w

Anniversaries
Queen Elizabeth II 265w, 269w, 573–6w, 578w, 626w, 681w, 897w, 1063w, 1158w

Annual business inquiry
399–400w

Annuities
7–9, 9w, 10, 20w
Advertising 472–3w

Antisemitism
45–6w

Antitank missiles
Procurement 1162w

Anti-Terrorism Crime and Security Act 2001
Questions
597w, 1263w

Apache WAH-64 helicopter
30w, 653–4w

Apples
EC law 229w

Apprenticeships
see Modern apprenticeships

Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Sittings in Westminster Hall
NHS, Finance (12.03.02) 214wh
Questions
Turkmenistan, Drugs 692w

Archaeological sites
St Albans 1232w

Archaeology
Finance 935w

Areas of outstanding natural beauty
Planning permission 1204–5w

Armed conflict
Afghanistan 31w, 312w, 323–4w, 658w
Falkland Islands 1171w
Iraq 1066w
Kosovo 1182–3w
Middle East 505–6w, 683–4w, 688w
Sudan 861w, 1170w

Armed forces
Deployment 318w
Equal opportunities 316–7w, 655–6w
Gulf states 1182w
Housing 163–4w
Indonesia 867w
Kuwait 1182w
Macedonia 323w
Medals 681w
Northern Ireland 32w
Pensions 321w, 652–3w
Sierra Leone 652w
Training 318–20w, 1160w
USA 167w

Armenia
Holocaust Memorial Day 1222–3w

Armoured fighting vehicles
Procurement 1162w

Arms trade
Angola 1259–60w
Export controls 66w, 892w
Israel 590–1w, 689w

Army
Londonderry 656w
Manpower 650w

Arrears
Council tax 84w

Arrest warrants
British Transport Police 1087w

Arson
98w
Schools 953–4w

Art works
Ethiopia 1233w

Arthritis
Drugs 424–5w, 613–4w, 836w
Wales 1024w

Arthur Andersen
Home Office 973w
Treasury 699–700w, 1288w

Arts Council of England
North West Arts 934w

Arts festivals
Aldeburgh 345w

Asbestos
75w, 96–7w, 192–4w, 551–2w, 1015–6w
Compensation 1121–2w
Hospitals 608w
Industrial health and safety 95w, 179–80w, 910w
Scotland 693–4w

Asthma
194w, 1144–5w
Children 450w
Greater London 450w
Wales 529w

Asylum
709w, 1102w, 1107w
Afghanistan 1189–91w

***Asylum**—continued*
Appeals 971–2w
Children 970–1w
Deportation 158w, 392w
Detainees 49–50w, 313w, 975w
EC action 969–70w
Education 947–8w
Essex 157–8w
France 969w
Funerals 1228w
Housing 159–60w, 718w
Human rights 516w
RAF Turnhouse 719w
Throckmorton airfield 595–7w
Vietnam 206–7w
Voucher schemes 1010w

Asylum Support (Repeal) Order 2002
Debates etc.
(13.03.02) 988

Atherton, Ms Candy
Questions
Agricultural products, South West region 938–9w
Botswana, Ethnic groups 277–8
Bovine tuberculosis, Disease control 786–90w
Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Nancekuke 28–9w
Countryside, Access 641–2w
Food, Marketing 938w
Teachers, Recruitment 772w
Teachers, Training 1280w

Atkinson, Mr Peter
Questions
Livestock, Markets 410–1
Regional assemblies, Finance 172w

Atlantic Frontier Environmental Network
347–8w

Attendance allowance
1–3

"Audit and Accountability in Central Government"
(13.03.02) 889–900

Audit Commission (Borrowing Limits) Order 2002
Debates etc.
(12.03.02) 862

Auld Review
see Criminal Courts Review

Aung San Suu Kyi
1296w

Austin, Mr John
Debates etc.
Parliamentary privilege, Points of order (07.03.02) 521–2
Questions
Members, Correspondence 608w

Autism
543w, 1139w
Blue badge scheme 95w
Disabled Person's Transport Advisory Committee 95w
Special education 238–9w, 759w, 1217w
West Sussex 438–9w

Autism Awareness Year 2002
1110–1w

Automated credit transfer
Social security benefits 413–4w

Average earnings
1229w

Aviation
748–9w
Accidents 746–7w

***Aviation**—continued*
Insurance 11w, 695w, 1111w
Ministers 1196–7w
Police 635–6
Royal family 1196–7w

Avon Health Authority
Nurses 1247w
Per capita costs 550–1w

Axle weights
Bridges 924w

Aylesbury Young Offender Institution
Fire prevention 1097w

Babies
Hospitals 997–8w

Bacon, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Central Government Audit and Accountability Review (13.03.02) 900
Questions
Falkland Islands, Fisheries 739–40

Badgers
see Bovine tuberculosis

BAE Systems
Filton 670w

Bail hostels
713w

Bailey, Mr Adrian
Debates etc.
Iron and steel, USA (06.03.02) 319
Questions
Afghanistan, Prisoners 208w
HMS Fearless 474w
Water treatment, EC law 231w

Baird, Vera
Questions
Drift nets 483w
Employment, Discrimination 420–1w
Ethiopia, Overseas aid 892–3w
UN Commission on Human Rights, Capital punishment 692w

Baker, Norman
Debates etc.
Cemeteries (11.03.02) 731–4, 738
Early day motions, Points of order (11.03.02) 637
Police (08.03.02) 546, 556–64, 592
Questions
Animal experiments, Genetic engineering 976–7w
Animal welfare, Circuses 791w
Armed forces, USA 167w
British Petroleum 681–2w
Cendent Relocation (UK), Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 749w
Cendent Relocation (UK), Dept of Trade and Industry 667w
Civil service, Reform 878–9
Crime, Garages and petrol stations 716–7w
Floods, Lewes 483w
Fuels, Regulation 357w
Game, Farms 637–8w
Government bills 706–8w
Hinduja, Prakash 48–9w
Middle East, Peace negotiations 749–50
Motor vehicles, Northern Ireland 258w
Oil, Refineries 356w
Parliamentary questions, Dept for International Development 895w
Parliamentary questions, Ministry of Defence 475w
Pertussis vaccine 823–4w
Police, Conditions of employment 633
Police, Recruitment 160–1w

***Baker, Norman**—continued*
Porton Down, Human experiments 1167–8w
Relocation services, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 750w
Relocation services, Dept of Trade and Industry 667w
Sheep, MV Kalifeh 1 791w
Sheep, Shipping 791w
Standards, Home Office 49–50w
Tibet, Education 1128w

Baldry, Tony
Questions
Asylum, Housing 159–60w
Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference 343w
Democratic Republic of Congo, Overseas aid 894w

Baltic Sea
Chemical weapons 166w

Bank for Reconstruction and Development of Europe
see European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

Bank services
1115–6w
Ministerial statements (14.03.02) 1015–30
Post offices 26w, 414w, 1183w
Small businesses 149w, 492w

Bankruptcy
1256w
Fees and charges 1256–7w

Banks, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Police (08.03.02) 537, 552, 583–8

Barker, Gregory
Debates etc.
Iron and steel, USA (06.03.02) 317
World Summit on Sustainable Development (07.03.02) 448–9
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Hospitals, Waiting lists (12.03.02) 233–7wh
Questions
Alzheimer's disease 609w
Breast cancer 286w
Breast cancer, Screening 285–6w
Cancer, Counselling 286w
Cancer, Medical treatments 130w, 285w
Cancer, Waiting lists 286w
Cervical cancer, Screening 127–8w
Class sizes 634w
Crimes of violence, East Sussex 718w
Members, Correspondence 136–7w
Osteoporosis 1035w
Pre-school education, Finance 763w
Radiotherapy, Medical equipment 128–30w
Railtrack, Finance 141–2
Social security benefits, Lone parents 534–5w

Barnes, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
Dronfield School, Petitions (07.03.02) 523
Questions
Members, Correspondence 939w

Baron, Mr John
Debates etc.
Police (08.03.02) 599–602
Questions
Cameroon, International assistance 272–3
Crimes of violence 626–7
EC aid 860w
Individual learning accounts 997–8

Barrett, John
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Sudan (13.03.02) 259–60wh
Questions
Airports, Security 373–4w
Channel tunnel railway line, Freight 1088w, 1276–7w
Correspondence, Dept of Trade and Industry 678w
Energy, Dept of Health 831w
Motor vehicles, Edinburgh 374w
Motor vehicles, Scotland 1277w

Barron, Rt Hon Kevin
Debates etc.
Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL), Programme motion and Rep (11.03.02) 658

Basic education
Learning and skills councils 36w

Basingstoke
Institutional care 1138w

Baton rounds
969w
Northern Ireland 524–5w

Bayley, Hugh
Questions
Railways 81–2w
Railways, Safety 571–2w

***Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret**, Secretary of State for Environment Food and the Regions*
Debates etc.
World Summit on Sustainable Development, Ministerial statements (07.03.02) 437–49
Questions
Bioaerosols, Health hazards 937w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Meat 781w
EC Environment Council 1285–7w
Electronic equipment, Waste disposal 232w
Energy Policy Review 402–4
Farmers, Supermarkets 936w
Food Standards Agency 409–10
Foot and mouth disease 782–3w
Foot and mouth disease, Cumbria 781–2w
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 782–3w
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries 71w
Foot and mouth disease, Kidderminster 783w
Foot and mouth disease, North Yorkshire 781w
Incinerators, Pollution control 358–9w
Livestock, Markets 784w
Meat, Imports 937w
Organic farming 936w
Recycling, EC law 399–402
Recycling, Private finance initiative 71–2w
Rural areas, National Lottery 784w
South East London Combined Heat and Power, Dioxins 359–60w
Speeches, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 485w
Wood, Smuggling 784–6w

Bed and breakfast accommodation
Institutional care 616–7w, 841w

Beef
France 478–9w

Beer
Excise duties 200w

Begg, Miss Anne
Debates etc.
Equal opportunities, Females (14.03.02) 1067
Questions
National Gallery, Reviews 1283–4w
Social security benefits, Carers 4

Beggs, Mr Roy
Debates etc.
Environmental audit (07.03.02) 478
Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 158
Nuclear power stations (05.03.02) 225–6
Questions
Crimes of violence, Elderly 162w
Sentencing 1100–1w

Beith, Rt Hon A J
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 312w
Foot and mouth disease, Northumberland 212w
Fuel poverty 884–5w
Ministerial policy advisors 872
Motor vehicles, EC law 586–7w

Belgium
Social security benefits 17w
War graves 166–7w

***Bell, Mr Stuart**, Second Church Estates Commissioner*
Debates etc.
Cleveland Constabulary, Inquiries (06.03.02) 391–5
Questions
Cannabis, Decriminalisation 1222w
Cemeteries, Muslims 147w
Clergy, Females 147w

Bellingham, Mr Henry
Questions
British Irish Council 1070–1w
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 481w
Foot and mouth disease, Public footpaths 415–6

Benefits Agency
see Social Security Benefits Agency

Benefits Agency Medical Service
Standards 1127w

***Benn, Hilary**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for International Development*
Questions
Advertising, Dept for International Development 337w
Africa, Health services 326w
Botswana, Ethnic groups 277–8
Burkina Faso, Overseas aid 891w
Fair trade initiative, Dept for International Development 339w
South East Asia, Microfinance 271–2

Bennett, Andrew
Debates etc.
Oral questions, Points of order (04.03.02) 21
Questions
Compost 362w
Social security benefits, Belgium 17w
West coast railway line 139–40

Bennett, David
1020w

Bercow, Mr John
Debates etc.
Central Government Audit and Accountability Review (13.03.02) 890–2
Office of Communications Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (06.03.02) 356

***Bercow, Mr John**—continued*
Questions
Accountancy, Dept of Health 1009w
Accountancy, Solicitor-General 660–1w
Advertising, Dept for Education and Skills 760–2w
Advertising, Dept for International Development 337w
Advertising, Dept of Health 1039–40w
Advertising, Lord Chancellor's Dept 776–8w
Advertising, President of the Council 605w
Billing, Cabinet Office 955w
Billing, Home Office 972–3w
Buildings, Dept of Health 1140w
Buildings, Dept of Trade and Industry 2w
Buildings, Ministry of Defence 163w
Catering, Dept for International Development 341w
Catering, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 555w
Catering, Dept of Trade and Industry 668w
Catering, Lord Chancellor's Dept 962–3w
Catering, Northern Ireland Office 59–60w
Catering, President of the Council 605w
Catering, Treasury 106w
Cellular phones, Ministry of Defence 162w
Conferences, Dept for International Development 897–8w
Conferences, Home Office 973w
Conferences, Solicitor-General 659w
Conferences, Treasury 10w
Construction, Ministry of Defence 316w
Consultants, Scotland Office 511w
Council housing, Rents 84w
Discrimination, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 1232w
EC law, Dept for International Development 340–1w
EC law, Dept of Trade and Industry 2w
EC law, Lord Chancellor's Dept 56–8w
Empty property, Cabinet Office 777–9w
Empty property, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 218w
Empty property, Dept for Work and Pensions 1117–8w
Empty property, Home Office 978–9w
Empty property, Northern Ireland Office 57–8w
Empty property, Solicitor-General 883–4w
Energy, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 1231–2w
Energy, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1088w
Energy, Treasury 1115w
Equal pay, Cabinet Office 956–7w
Equal pay, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 931w
Equal pay, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 940w
Equal pay, Dept for International Development 899w
Equal pay, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1198–9w
Equal pay, Dept of Trade and Industry 668w
Equal pay, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 867–8w
Equal pay, Home Office 1096w
Equal pay, Ministry of Defence 1161–2w
Equal pay, Prime Minister 1252w
Equal pay, Treasury 471–2w
Equipment, Dept for International Development 892w
Equipment, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 84w
Equipment, Dept of Health 434w
Equipment, Dept of Trade and Industry 587w

Bercow, Mr John—continued
Flexible working, Dept for International Development 1191–2w
Flexible working, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1088w
Flexible working, Dept of Trade and Industry 886w
Holiday leave, Home Office 1098–100w
Holiday leave, Ministry of Defence 314w
Hospitals, Babies 997–8w
Hospitals, Private finance initiative 833–4w
Hotels, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 931w
Hotels, Dept for Education and Skills 384w, 1278–9w
Hotels, Dept for International Development 898w
Hotels, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 905w
Hotels, Dept of Trade and Industry 669w
Hotels, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 607w, 686w
Hotels, Lord Chancellor's Dept 963w
Hotels, Ministry of Defence 654w
Hotels, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 148w
Hotels, President of the Council 403–4w
Hotels, Prime Minister 680–1w
Hotels, Treasury 696–7w
Industrial disputes, Lord Chancellor's Dept 52w
Industrial disputes, Ministry of Defence 325w
Industrial disputes, Solicitor-General 873w
Inflation 472w
Information officers, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 1282w
Information officers, Dept for International Development 898w, 1131w
Information officers, Dept of Trade and Industry 588w
Information officers, Home Office 1096w
Information officers, President of the Council 605w
Information officers, Solicitor-General 1117w
Internet, Dept for Education and Skills 232–3w
Internet, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 792w
Internet, Home Office 1262–3w
Internet, Ministry of Defence 315–6w
Internet, Scotland Office 512w
Legal costs, Dept for Education and Skills 759w
Legal costs, Ministry of Defence 324w
Legal costs, President of the Council 404w
Legal costs, Solicitor-General 873–5w
Market research, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 209w
Market research, Dept of Health 1056w
Ministerial policy advisors, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1076w
NHS, Individual learning accounts 999w
NHS trusts, Procurement 804w
Offices, Dept for Education and Skills 235w
Offices, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1244–5w
Offices, Ministry of Defence 163w
Offices, Northern Ireland Office 58w
Offices, Solicitor-General 883w
Official cars, Dept of Health 1006w
Official cars, Ministry of Defence 1180w
Official hospitality, Solicitor-General 661–3w
Operating costs, Dept for International Development 893w
Operating costs, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1178w

Bercow, Mr John—continued
Operating costs, Northern Ireland Office 872w
Orders and regulations, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 574–6w
Orders and regulations, Dept for Work and Pensions 530w
Orders and regulations, Dept of Health 1010w
Orders and regulations, Home Office 42–5w
Orders and regulations, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 148w
Orders and regulations, Scotland Office 512–3w
Orders and regulations, Solicitor-General 877w
Orders and regulations, Treasury 10–1w
Parental leave, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 1232w
Parental leave, Dept for International Development 1128–9w
Parental leave, Dept of Trade and Industry 885–6w
Pay, Dept of Health 1149–50w
Private finance initiative, Dept of Health 279–81w
Public expenditure, Dept of Health 999w
Public private partnerships, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1096w
Public private partnerships, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1238w
Publications, Dept for Work and Pensions 532w
Publications, Solicitor-General 877–81w
Publicity, Dept of Health 1058w
Publicity, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1174w
Publicity, President of the Council 403w
Publicity, Solicitor-General 881–3w
Railways, Cabinet Office 421w
Railways, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 346w
Railways, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 939–40w
Railways, Dept for International Development 685w
Railways, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 562–3w
Railways, Dept of Health 1143w
Railways, Dept of Trade and Industry 356w
Railways, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 606w, 688w
Railways, Home Office 1099w
Railways, Lord Chancellor's Dept 405w
Railways, Ministry of Defence 653w, 1161w
Railways, Northern Ireland Office 523–4w
Railways, President of the Council 606w
Railways, Prime Minister 680w
Railways, Treasury 471w
Recruitment, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 269–70w
Recruitment, Dept for International Development 341w
Recruitment, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 735w
Recruitment, Dept of Trade and Industry 886–8w
Recruitment, Lord Chancellor's Dept 578–9w
Recruitment, Northern Ireland Office 59w
Recruitment, President of the Council 606w
Recruitment, Treasury 694–5w
Relocation services, Cabinet Office 1209–10w

Bercow, Mr John—continued
Relocation services, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 931–2w
Relocation services, Dept for Education and Skills 951w
Relocation services, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 792w
Relocation services, Dept for International Development 899w
Relocation services, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 905w
Relocation services, Dept of Trade and Industry 669w
Relocation services, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1294w
Relocation services, Lord Chancellor's Dept 773w
Relocation services, Ministry of Defence 655w
Relocation services, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 530w
Relocation services, Prime Minister 1252w
Relocation services, Treasury 401w
Secondment, Dept for Education and Skills 947w
Secondment, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 209–10w
Secondment, Ministry of Defence 324w
Secondment, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 528w
Social security benefits, Abuse 960w
Social security benefits, Patients 728w
Standards, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1075w
Suicide 805w
Temporary employment, Treasury 645w
Theft, Dept for International Development 891w
Theft, Dept of Trade and Industry 488w
Theft, Solicitor-General 663–4w
Trade unions, Dept for Education and Skills 503w
Trade unions, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 202w
Trade unions, Lord Chancellor's Dept 52–4w
Trade unions, Ministry of Defence 316w, 578w
Trade unions, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1076–7w
Trade unions, President of the Council 403w
Trade unions, Solicitor-General 876–7w
Visits abroad, Dept for International Development 1130w
Visits abroad, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 147–8w
Work sharing, Cabinet Office 780w
Work sharing, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 791w
Work sharing, Dept for International Development 898w
Work sharing, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 742w
Work sharing, Dept of Trade and Industry 669w
Work sharing, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 867w
Work sharing, Lord Chancellor's Dept 961–2w
Work sharing, Ministry of Defence 577–8w
Work sharing, President of the Council 604w
Work sharing, Prime Minister 1069w
Work sharing, Treasury 1112–3w
Written questions, Administrative delays 869w, 1045w

Berry, Mr Roger
Questions
Brain, Injuries 836–7w, 1006–7w
Credit unions, Disadvantaged 354w
Electoral Commission, Publicity 750w

Best, Mr Harold
Questions
Young offenders 710–1w

Best value
182–3w

Beta-interferon
1137w

"Better Services Better Working Lives"
879

Billing
Cabinet Office 955w
Home Office 972–3w

Bioaerosols
Health hazards 937w

Blackman, Mrs Liz
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Politics, Young people (05.03.02) 38–9wh
Questions
Railways, East Midlands 136–7

***Blair, Rt Hon Tony**, Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service*
Debates etc.
Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference, Ministerial statements (06.03.02) 291–303
Questions
Africa, Overseas aid 886
British Petroleum 681–2w
Cabinet committees 486w
Cancer, Waiting lists 289–90
City of London Corporation, Prime Minister 342w
City of London (Ward Elections) Bill 1998/99 342w
Commonwealth Games, Zimbabwe 682w, 1252w
Commonwealth Games, Manchester 888
Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference 343w
Community support police officers 888
Council tax 885–6
Crime 880–2
Data protection 487–8w
Debates, Prime Minister 682w
Domestic violence, Children 287–8
Equal pay, Prime Minister 1252w
European Commission, Public appointments 1067–8w
Evolution, Curriculum 886–7
Fair trade initiative 285
Film, Scotland 281
Future large aircraft 343w
Gibraltar 681w
Heart diseases, Surgery 288
Hospitals, Kent 288
Hotels, Prime Minister 680–1w
Housing, Greater London 882–3
India, Civil disorder 282
Institutional care, Lancashire 280–1
Iraq, Armed conflict 1066w
Iraq, Terrorism 344w
Iraq, Weapons 287, 884
Litter 284–5
Manpower, Prime Minister 486–7w, 1252w
Metropolitan Police, Conditions of employment 884
Middle East, Peace negotiations 887
Ministerial policy advisors 487w

***Blair, Rt Hon Tony**—continued*
Ministerial responsibility, Parliamentary questions 1069w
Ministers, Codes of practice 1066w
Mittal, Lakshmi 1066w
Moore, Jo 487w
Official engagements, Prime Minister 344w
Overseas investment, Government assistance 343–4w
Police, Conditions of employment 883–4, 887–8
Postal services, Competition 880
Prisoners' release, Northern Ireland 285
Public sector, Reform 486w
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 681w
Radiotherapy, Waiting lists 284
Railtrack, Finance 282–3, 285–7
Railways, Prime Minister 680w
Railways, Safety 287
Railways, Scotland 343w
Ramsbottom 342w
Relocation services, Prime Minister 1252w
Romania, Iron and steel 631w
Royal family, Aviation 1196–7w
Shipping, Safety 283–4
Sixsmith, Martin 487w
Social services, Finance 1197w
10 Downing Street, Air conditioning 1069w
10 Downing Street, Charities 1197w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 885
USA, Iron and steel 281–2, 487w, 884
Voluntary work, Dept for International Development 342w
Waste management 681w
Work sharing, Prime Minister 1069w
Working families tax credit, Minimum wage 885

Blakenhurst Prison
1224w

***Blears, Ms Hazel**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept of Health*
Debates etc.
Hospitals, Greater London (13.03.02) 992–6
Sittings in Westminster Hall
National Institute for Clinical Excellence (05.03.02) 20–3wh
NHS, Finance (12.03.02) 221–4wh
Questions
Accident and emergency departments 436w, 1016–7w
Accident and emergency departments, Hospital beds 1006w
Accident and emergency departments, Medical records 1017w
Accident and emergency departments, Standards 1005w
Accident and emergency departments, Waiting lists 828w
Accident and emergency departments, Working hours 1005–6w
Accidents, Fees and charges 1291–2w
Accountancy, Dept of Health 1009w
Advertising, Dept of Health 1040w
Air ambulance services 1147w
Alcoholic drinks, Misuse 1013w
Ambulance services 848w
Ambulance services, Brighton 848–9w
Ambulance services, Hampshire 989w
Ambulance services, Per capita costs 424w
Avon Health Authority, Nurses 1247w
Beta-interferon 1137w
Breast cancer, Herceptin 994–5w
Brighton Healthcare NHS Trust, Complaints 848w
Brighton Healthcare NHS Trust, Screening 1145–7w

***Blears, Ms Hazel**—continued*
Bristol, Dept of Health 1009–10w
Buildings, Dept of Health 1140w
Cancer, Brighton 854–6w
Capita, Dept of Health 464w
Chiropody, Manpower 433w
Chorley and South Ribble NHS Trust, Preston Acute Hospitals NHS Trust 1143w
Chronic fatigue syndrome 998–9w
Civil servants, Dept of Health 422–3w
Community health councils 461–2w
Construction, Dept of Health 987–8w
Correspondence, Dept of Health 432w, 1000–1w, 1048–9w
Cystic fibrosis, Medical treatments 436w
Cystic fibrosis, Prescriptions 1293w
Dental services, Fees and charges 987w
Dental services, Greater London 301w
Dental services, Isle of Wight 450w
Dentistry, Training 447–9w
Departmental responsibilities, Dept of Health 1056w
Design, Dept of Health 1142–3w
Drugs, Misuse 435w, 822–3w, 1148–50w
Enron, Dept of Health 427w
Equipment, Dept of Health 434w
Eyesight, Surgery 135w
Fair trade initiative, Dept of Health 1142w
Health action zones 433w
Hearing aids, South East region 986w
Heart diseases, South East region 462–4w
Herbal medicine, EC action 433–4w
Hospital beds 858w, 1033w
Hospital wards 545–6w, 847w
Hospitals, Admissions 434w
Hospitals, Catering 451w, 849w
Hospitals, Cemeteries 545w
Hospitals, Infectious diseases 857–8w
Hospitals, Mortuary 547w
Hospitals, Repairs and maintenance 434–5w
Hospitals, Waiting lists 814w
Injuries, Heating 429–30w
Land use, Dept of Health 1141w
Latex, Allergies 1004w
Leukaemia, Drugs 1065w
Market research, Dept of Health 1056w
Medical equipment 853–4w
Medical records 855–6w
Members, Correspondence 136–7w, 426w, 1049w, 1145–6w
Mental patients, Hospital wards 285w
Methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus 850w
Methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus, Death 1145w
Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust, Dental services 1146w, 1290w
Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust, Waiting lists 828w
Mid Sussex NHS Trust, Spinal injuries 850w
Mitchell, Violet 1001w
Multiple sclerosis, Cannabis 1029w
Multiple sclerosis, Drugs 1003w
NHS, Ancillary staff 1248–50w
NHS, Communication 1142w
NHS, Compensation 447w
NHS, Procurement 437–8w
NHS, Public appointments 1031–2w
NHS, Standards 438w, 998w
NHS Direct 1008–9w
NHS Direct, Mental health 430w
NHS Magazine 1029w
NHS trusts 1018w
NHS trusts, Public appointments 818w
Official cars, Dept of Health 1006w
Orders and regulations, Dept of Health 1010w

***Blears, Ms Hazel**—continued*
Osteoporosis 1035w
Pay, Dept of Health 1149–50w
Physiotherapy, Brighton 856–8w
Physiotherapy, Sussex 858w
Prescription drugs, Rationing 983w
Prescriptions, Fees and charges 983w, 1292–3w
Primary care groups, West Sussex 846w
Public appointments, Dept of Health 281–2w
Publicity, Dept of Health 1058w
Railways, Dept of Health 1143w
Roads, Accidents 612w
Schizophrenia, Prescription drugs 997w, 1019–20w
Television, Dept of Health 464w
Transplant surgery 1016w
UK Human Tissue Bank 1002–3w
Visits abroad, Dept of Health 1144w
Voluntary work, Dept of Health 1141w
Weston Area Health NHS Trust, Nurses 1247w
Written questions, Administrative delays 1045w, 1048w
Written questions, Dept of Health 276w

Blind
see Sight impaired

Blizzard, Mr Bob
Debates etc.
Early day motions, Points of order (11.03.02) 637
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Energy Policy Review (13.03.02) 284wh, 286wh, 289wh
Questions
Chronic fatigue syndrome 998–9w
Developing countries, Education 278–9
Disadvantaged, Transport 1070w
Energy Policy Review 403–4
Litter 284–5
Mayors, Referendums 553–4w
Railtrack, Finance 149
Recycling 477w

Blood
Donors 825w

Blood transfusions
Haemophilia 1140w

Bloody Sunday Tribunal of Inquiry
33w
Costs 51–2w

Blue badge scheme
Autism 95w

***Blunkett, Rt Hon David**, Secretary of State for the Home Dept*
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 312w
Anti-Terrorism Crime and Security Act 2001 397w, 1263w
Crime, Greater London 633–5
Energy, Home Office 975w
Police, Conditions of employment 621–4
Policy development grant, Home Office 981w
Protec, Contracts 1263–4w
Terrorism 603w

Blunt, Mr Crispin
Debates etc.
Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference (06.03.02) 301
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (04.03.02) 22–32, 36–7, 44–7, 57–9, 70–1, 73, 99–100, 102, 112
Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 169, 172

***Blunt, Mr Crispin**—continued*
Questions
Bloody Sunday Tribunal of Inquiry, Costs 51–2w
Food, Safety 550w
Mittal, Lakshmi 1066w
WENA Hotels, Egypt 869w

Board of Inland Revenue
see Inland Revenue

***Boateng, Rt Hon Paul**, Financial Secretary, Treasury*
Debates etc.
Consolidated Fund (No 2) Bill, 1R (07.03.02) 521
Environmental audit (07.03.02) 468, 487–92
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Aggregates levy (13.03.02) 311–4wh
Questions
Agriculture, Manpower 1287–8w
Climate change levy 8w, 117–8w, 199w, 1228w
Climate change levy, Euro 117w
Customs and Excise, Computers 118w
Customs and Excise, Criminal investigation 105w
Customs and Excise, Debts 397–8w
Customs and Excise, Northern Ireland 470w
Customs and Excise, Property transfer 1289w
Customs and Excise, X rays 112–3w
Drug seizures, Heroin 1288–9w
Drugs, Crime 1109w
Entrust, Landfill tax credit scheme 697–9w
Excise duties, Alcoholic drinks 473w
Excise duties, Beer 200w
Excise duties, EC law 109w
Excise duties, Fuels 116w
Excise duties, Tobacco 200–1w
Fuels, Northern Ireland 113w
Landfill tax 698w
Meat, Imports 105w
Mittal, Lakshmi, Taxation 117–8w
National Lottery, Franchises 116w
Overseas aid 109–10w
Pesticides 198–9w
Refrigerators, Export controls 1109w
Smoking 1015w
Smuggling 106–7w
Smuggling, Confiscation orders 108–9w
Smuggling, Fuels 113w
Smuggling, Tobacco 107–8w, 200w
Tax allowances, Derelict land 398w
Taxation, Construction 398–9w
VAT 114–5w
VAT, Computers 113–4w
VAT, Digital certificates 114–6w
VAT, Institutional care 116–7w
VAT, Private education 703w
Written questions, Administrative delays 398w

Bolivia
Floods 338w

Bolton
Primary care groups 426w

Bomb disposal
Afghanistan 686w, 1129–30w

Borrow, Mr David
Questions
Blood, Donors 825w
HIV infection 134–5w, 288w
HIV infection, Discrimination 419w
Hospital beds, Lancashire 612w
Institutional care, Lancashire 609w
Nutrition, Salt 295–6w

Boswell, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Iron and steel, USA (06.03.02) 315
Questions
Annuities, Advertising 472–3w
Connexions Service 501w
Developing countries, Education 683w
Incapacity benefit 19–20
Individual learning accounts 1215w
Learning and skills councils, Basic education 36w
National insurance contributions, Overseas residence 697w
National training organisations 250–1w
Pensioners, Income support 1128w
Pensions, Patients 17w
Pensions, Public sector 253w
Personal income 726–7w
Personal pensions 253w
Police, Conditions of employment 632
Prisoners, Personal records 46–7w
Rehabilitation 1059w
Roads, Accidents 94w
State retirement pensions 725–6w
State retirement pensions, Overseas residence 199w, 253–4w

Botswana
Ethnic groups 277–8

Bottomley, Peter
Debates etc.
Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL), Programme motion and Rep (11.03.02) 709, 711, 718–21
Questions
Filkin, Elizabeth, Pay 467–8w
General practitioners, Manpower 1024–5w
Maharaj, Krishna 202–3w
Shipping, Safety 374w

Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Questions
Hospitals, Waiting lists 826w
Leonard Cheshire Foundation 837–8w
Mitchell, Violet 1001w

Bovine spongiform encephalopathy
Meat 128w, 781w, 1008w

Bovine tuberculosis
Disease control 786–90w

***Bradley, Rt Hon Keith**, Minister of State, Home Office*
Questions
Children, Protection 982w
Children, Sexual offences 713w
Crime, Victims 619–21, 710w
Criminal Cases Review Commission 968–9w
Criminal Courts Review 709w
Criminal proceedings 311w, 978w
Genetics 981–2w
Juries, Ethnic groups 1245w
Members, Correspondence 1100w
Miscarriages of justice 311w
Miscarriages of justice, Prisoners' release 1221w
Pornography, Internet 979–80w
Sentencing 1100–1w

***Bradshaw, Mr Ben**, Parliamentary Secretary, Foreign and Commonwealth Office*
Debates etc.
Terrorism (04.03.02) 128–32
Unparliamentary expressions, Personal statements (07.03.02) 450
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Iraq (06.03.02) 82wh, 86–8wh
Questions
Afghanistan, Females 864w

Bradshaw, Mr Ben—continued
Afghanistan, Overseas aid 753–4
Afghanistan, Prisoners 69–70w, 208w, 504w, 859–60w, 868w
Aung San Suu Kyi 1296w
Debates, Prime Minister 693w
Egypt, WENA Hotels 869w
Employment tribunals, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1294w
Equal pay, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 867–8w
Football, World Cup 863w
France, Prisoners 1297w
Gilbey, Deena 1295w
Immigration, Applications 506–10w
India, Hawk aircraft 1196w
India, Nuclear weapons 1298–300w
India, Politics and government 868–9w
India, UN Security Council 865w
India-UK Round Table 865w
Indonesia, Armed forces 867w
Indonesia, Human rights 688w, 1293–4w
Iraq, Foreign relations 866–7w
Iraq, Human rights 864w
Iraq, Politics and government 864–5w
Israel, Arms trade 689w
Israel, Nuclear weapons 505w
Kashmir 861–2w
Levy, Lord 687–8w
Maharaj, Krishna 202–3w
Members, Correspondence 869–70w
Middle East, Armed conflict 505–6w, 688w
Middle East, Peace negotiations 861w
Nepal 203w
Nepal, Human rights 1195–6w
Nepal, Peace negotiations 203w
Nepal, Politics and government 203–4w, 863w
Pakistan, Politics and government 860–1w
Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine 1196w
Prisoners 64w
Public appointments, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1297w
Relocation services, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1294w
Russia, Overseas aid 859w
St Helena 860w
Sheikh, Ahmed Omar Saeed 202w, 1295w
Terrorism 748–9, 859w
Terrorism, Health insurance 868w
Trade unions, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 202w
USA, Leased territories 1171w
Vietnam, Asylum 206–7w
Voluntary work, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 203w
Work sharing, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 687w, 867w
Written questions, Administrative delays 869w
Zimbabwe, Overseas residence 504–5w

Brady, Mr Graham
Debates etc.
Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference (06.03.02) 303
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Greater Manchester Police, Finance (05.03.02) 61–6wh, 68wh
Questions
Children and Young People's Unit 390–1w
Darts, Sponsorship 274w
Education, Assessments 624w
Gifted children, Secondary education 756w
Higher education, Disadvantaged 39–41w
Higher education, Student numbers 39–40w
Literacy 251w
Non-teaching staff 502w

Brady, Mr Graham—continued
Pupil exclusions, Drugs 251w
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 626w
Schools 387w
Schools, Admissions 1281w
Schools, Curriculum 239–40w
Schools, Drugs 251w
Schools, Languages 1002
Schools, Playing fields 249w, 497–501w
Schools, Sponsorship 387–8w
Supply teachers, Manpower 242–8w
Teachers, Pay 954w
Teachers, Working conditions 502w
Transplant surgery 1016w
Vocational education, Finance 502w
Zimbabwe, Commonwealth Games 682w, 1252w
Zimbabwe, Overseas residence 504–5w
Zimbabwe, Pensions 208w, 1294w

Brain
Injuries 836–7w, 1006–7w

Brake, Tom
Debates etc.
Greater London (12.03.02) 813, 826–9
London Underground, Points of order (06.03.02) 320
Questions
Contracts, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1092–3w
Heathrow Airport 1199–200w
London Underground, Public private partnerships 84–8w, 169–70w, 371w, 555–6w, 735–7w, 915–6w, 1082w
Official hospitality, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 580w
Railtrack, Finance 143–4
Railway Industry Advisory Committee 89–90w, 750–1w
Railways, Safety 1271–2w
Research, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 90–1w, 901w
Research, Disclosure of information 750w
Secondment, Dept for Work and Pensions 1119–20w

Braunstone Community Association
103–4w

Brazier, Mr Julian
Debates etc.
Kent and Canterbury Hospital (07.03.02) 524–6, 528–30
Questions
Criminal Courts Review 709w
Hospitals, Kent 288

Brazil
Overseas aid 332w
Rain forests 337w

Breast cancer
286w
Herceptin 994–5w
Screening 285–6w

Breast feeding
House of Commons 467w

Breed, Mr Colin
Questions
Accident and emergency departments 436w
Dentistry, Student numbers 813w
Disability appeal tribunals, Doctors 728w
Foot and mouth disease, Compensation 783w
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 212w, 481w
Home helps 616w
Hunting 792w
Railtrack, Finance 148–9

Breed, Mr Colin—continued
Rural areas, Small businesses 1150–1w
Small businesses 799w

Brennan, Kevin
Questions
Ministerial policy advisors 871–2
Teachers, Wales 1211w

Bridges
Axle weights 924w
Somerset 372–3w

Brighton
Ambulance services 848–9w
Cancer 854–6w
Physiotherapy 856–8w

Brighton Healthcare NHS Trust
Complaints 848w
Infectious diseases 857–8w
Screening 1145–7w

Bristol
Cabinet Office 80w
Dept for Education and Skills 493w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 638w
Dept of Health 1009–10w
Education 1136w
Magistrates 405–6w
Treasury 1111–2w

British Indian Ocean Territory
Mines 1300w

British Irish Council
1070–1w

British Nuclear Fuels
see also Sellafield
672–3w
Company accounts 151w

British overseas citizenship
Special voucher scheme 161w

British overseas territories
860w

British Petroleum
681–2w

British Transport Police
Arrest warrants 1087w

British Trust for Conservation Volunteers
Finance 639–40w

Brixton
Police 156w

Broadband
3–4w
Business 1185–6w

Broadcasting
Regulation 935–6w

Broadcasting Act (Amendment) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
1R (12.03.02) 758–9

Brockenhurst
Petitions (07.03.02) 522–3

Brompton Barracks
Public private partnerships 657w

Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Sudan (13.03.02) 262wh
Questions
Asylum, Detainees 49–50w
Courts martial 651–2w
Criminal proceedings 311w
Environment, EC law 479w
Hospices, Finance 818w
Park and ride schemes, Finance 187–8w
Police custody 514w

Brooke, Mrs Annette L*—continued*
Prisoners 514w
Prisoners' release 514w
Refrigerators, Waste disposal 1151w
Schools, Crime 251–2w
Standards Fund, Dorset 1280–1w
Teachers, Pay 1211w
Written questions, Administrative delays 1045w, 1048w

***Brown, Rt Hon Gordon**, Chancellor of the Exchequer*
Debates etc.
Bank services, Ministerial statements (14.03.02) 1015–30
Questions
EC Finance Council 965–6w
Financial Services Authority, Public appointments 1110w

***Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas**, Minister for Work, Department for Work and Pensions*
Questions
Benefits Agency Medical Service, Standards 1127w
Employer Direct, Standards 531w
Employment, Disabled 18w
Employment, Disadvantaged 20w
Employment, Females 23w
Employment schemes 28w
Incapacity benefit 18–20, 534w, 536w, 1125–6w
Incapacity benefit, York 411w
Industrial injuries disablement benefit 1119w, 1128w
Jobcentre Plus 15w, 413w
Jobcentre Plus, Industrial disputes 957–8w
Jobcentre Plus, Manpower 533–4w
Jobcentres, Advertising 1126–7w
Jobcentres, Crimes of violence 1120–1w
Jobcentres, Information technology 16w, 27w
Jobcentres, Security 1121w
Long term unemployed 19–20w
New deal for young people 1121w, 1127w
New deal schemes, Doncaster 14w
Orders and regulations, Dept for Work and Pensions 530w
Personal income 726–7w
Publications, Dept for Work and Pensions 532w
Redundancy 18w
SchlumbergerSema 530–1w
Skilled workers, Recruitment 1122–3w
Social security benefits, Chronic fatigue syndrome 1127–8w
Social Security Benefits Agency, Crimes of violence 532–3w, 724–5w
Social Security Benefits Agency, Facilities 531–2w
Social Security Benefits Agency, Security 723–4w
Textiles, Sunderland 21w
Working mothers 13–4

Brown, Mr Russell
Debates etc.
Nuclear power stations (05.03.02) 237, 244–7
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Industrial health and safety (14.03.02) 318wh
Questions
Food Standards Agency 410
Tenants, Nuisance 175w

Browne, Mr Desmond
Debates etc.
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (04.03.02) 22, 27, 34–6, 41–4, 47, 50–1, 53–8, 60, 65–70, 72–4, 101–2, 117–8
Questions
Administration of justice, Northern Ireland 58w
Northern Ireland Dept of the Director of Public Prosecutions, Finance 197w

Browning, Mrs Angela
Debates etc.
Greater London (12.03.02) 854
Questions
Business questions 436
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 407–8

Bruce, Malcolm
Questions
Agriculture, Manpower 1287–8w
Animal feed, Imports 227–8w
Common agricultural policy 940w
Foot and mouth disease 212–3w, 481–2w
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 213w, 482w, 485w, 784w
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries 783–4w
Fuel poverty 360–1w
Hazardous materials, EC action 792–3w
Meat, Imports 229w
Pollution control, Local authorities 219–20w, 641w, 793w
Post offices 1183w
Post offices, Bank services 1183w
Radiation exposure 134w
Tipping of waste, EC law 217w
Waste disposal 72w

Bryant, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 157, 162, 177
Office of Communications Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (06.03.02) 330, 340, 342, 347, 349, 355–6, 358–9
Plaid Cymru, Points of order (12.03.02) 757
Questions
Fraud, Prosecutions 1013, 1236w
Pensioners, Income support 12

BSE
see Bovine spongiform encephalopathy

Buck, Ms Karen
Debates etc.
Police (08.03.02) 550, 598–9
Questions
Homelessness 146–7
Housing, Greater London 882–3
Young offenders, Greater London 625–6

Buckingham
Surgery 822w
Tuberculosis 1064w

Building Research Establishment
Libraries 347w

Burden, Richard
Sittings in Westminster Hall
European Parliament elections (06.03.02) 94–8wh
Questions
Middle East, Armed conflict 505–6w
Middle East, Peace negotiations 750–1
Sudan, Armed conflict 1170w

Bureaucracy
Police 711–2w

Burgon, Colin
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Politics, Young people (05.03.02) 43–4wh

Burgon, Colin*—continued*
Questions
Developing countries, Children 329w
Football, World Cup 863w

Burkina Faso
Overseas aid 891w

Burnett, Mr John
Debates etc.
Bank services (14.03.02) 1030
Central Government Audit and Accountability Review (13.03.02) 897
Questions
Fraud, Prosecutions 1012–3
Injuries, Heating 429–30w
Rural areas 414

Burnham, Andy
Questions
Business questions 430
Health services, Private sector 840w
NHS, Finance 142–6w
Rugby, National Lottery 13w
Wigan and Bolton Health Authority, Finance 811w

Burns, Mr Simon
Debates etc.
Greater London (12.03.02) 790, 802, 810–4
Questions
A12, Noise 188w
Afghanistan, International assistance 330w
Chelmsford Prison 159w
Community health councils 461–2w
Correspondence, Dept of Health 1000–1w
Dental services, Greater London 301w
Hospital beds 1011w
Institutional care 301–2w, 840–1w
Institutional care, Bed and breakfast accommodation 616–7w, 841w
Institutional care, Closures 808w
Institutional care, Fees and charges 462w, 1060–2w
Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust, Dental services 1146w, 1290w
Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust, Surgery 299–300w
Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust, Waiting lists 302w, 828w
Urban areas, Royal charters 962w
Written questions, Dept of Health 275–6w

Burnside, David
Debates etc.
Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference (06.03.02) 302
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (04.03.02) 90–1, 116
Questions
Armed forces, Northern Ireland 32w

Burstow, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Dept of Health, Points of order (05.03.02) 260–1
Greater London (12.03.02) 785
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Eyesight, Diseases (05.03.02) 45–8wh, 52wh
Questions
Children, Protection 1245w
Commonwealth War Graves Commission 322–3w
Drugs, Side effects 130–2w
Health services, Elderly 1037w
HIV infection 288–9w
Home care services, National vocational qualifications 433w
Home care services, Standards 434w
Hospital beds 296w

Burstow, Mr Paul—continued
Hospitals, Admissions 434w
Hospitals, Crimes of violence 1291w
Institutional care 425w
Institutional care, Fees and charges 425w, 1140–1w
Institutional care, Planning permission 426w
Malnutrition 137–8w, 615w, 994w
Manpower, Cabinet Office 1074w
Manpower, Dept for Education and Skills 1216w
Manpower, Dept for International Development 337–8w
Manpower, Prime Minister 1252w
Mentally incapacitated 549–50w
Nepal, Human rights 1195–6w
NHS, Fees and charges 1143w
Non-domestic rates, Institutional care 695–6w
Nurses, Manpower 141w
Official hospitality, Home Office 722w
Older workers, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 215w
Older workers, Dept for Work and Pensions 418w
Older workers, Treasury 1112w
Pensions, Patients 16–7w
Powers of attorney, Fees and charges 961w
Quality protects programme 451–61w
Refuges, Children 807w
Social services, Finance 1197w
Social workers, Training 131w, 609w
VAT, Institutional care 116–7w
Written questions, Administrative delays 275w
Written questions, Dept of Health 841–3w, 845w, 1046w

Burt, Alistair
Questions
Individual learning accounts 233w, 999
Individual learning accounts, Personal records 384–5w, 622–3w
National Asylum Support Service 630–1
Spinal injuries 828–9w
Yarls Wood Detention Centre 157w

Bus lanes
186w

Bus services
Concessions 1088w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 920w
Rural areas 752–3w

Business
Broadband 1185–6w
Euro 468w
Higher education 4w, 34–6w, 954w
Insurance 701w
Statistics 703w

Business links
Telephone services 591–2w

Business statements
417–36, (14.03.02) 1046–59

Butterfill, Mr John
Questions
Business questions 428
Regional government 148

***Byers, Rt Hon Stephen**, Secretary of State for Transport Local Government and the Regions*
Questions
Aviation 748–9w
Channel tunnel railway line 733–5w
Council housing, Empty property 1086w

Byers, Rt Hon Stephen—continued
Disciplinary proceedings, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 904w
Dismissal, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 905w
Homelessness 133–5, 146–7, 1093–6w
Information officers, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 903–4w
Jones, Ian 1278w
Local government, Elections 1086w
Local government, Manpower 755–6w
Local government, Reform 1085–6w
London Underground, Public private partnerships 916–7w, 1205–6w
Mayors, Elections 1090w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 904w, 1199w
Moore, Jo 901–2w
Official hospitality, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 580w
Railtrack 1084–5w
Railtrack, Finance 148–50, 755w, 913w
Railways, Finance 738w, 1207w
Railways, Skilled workers 1206w
Railways, Training 1206w
Roads, Accidents 1277w
Roads, Ambulance services 755w
Roads, Police 755w
Roads, Repairs and maintenance 755w
Sixsmith, Martin 901–3w
Sleeping rough, Statistics 186w
Trade unions, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 904–5w
Transport 1096w

Bypasses
A6 167w, 1087w

Cabinet committees
486w

Cabinet Office
Advertising 1074–5w
Billing 955w
Bristol 80w
City of London Corporation 422w
Empty property 777–9w
Equal pay 956–7w
Global Crossing 422w
Manpower 1073–4w
Non-governmental organisations 780w
Press releases 779w
Public appointments 955w
Public relations 779w, 1180w
Railways 421w
Relocation services 1209–10w
Travel 421–2w
Visits abroad 421–2w
Voluntary work 255w
Work sharing 257–8w, 780w

Cable, Mr Vincent
Debates etc.
Bank services (14.03.02) 1022–3
Iron and steel, USA (06.03.02) 312
Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 186–9
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Consignia (12.03.02) 190–3wh
Industrial health and safety (14.03.02) 332–5wh
Questions
Aircraft, Noise 375w
Airports, Air pollution 375–6w
Arthur Andersen, Treasury 699–700w
Developing countries, Overseas aid 275
Eyesight, Scotland Office 513w
Homelessness 146
Publicity, Dept of Health 1055–6w
Radiotherapy, Waiting lists 284

Cable, Mr Vincent—continued
Regional airports, Construction 376w
Regional airports, South East region 375w
Secondment, Dept for Education and Skills 946–8w
Secondment, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 528w
Stress, Scotland Office 511–2w
Work sharing, Cabinet Office 257–8w
Work sharing, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 687w
Work sharing, Treasury 1111–3w
Working hours, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 638–9w
Working hours, Home Office 518–9w

***Caborn, Rt Hon Richard**, Minister of State for Sport, Dept for Culture Media and Sport*
Questions
Darts, Sponsorship 274w
English Sports Council 13–4w
Gambling, Fees and charges 679–80w
Gambling, Manpower 346w
Gambling Review Body 346w, 680w
Gambling Review Body, Coastal areas 345w
Gaming machines 345w
National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts, Grants 934w
National Lottery 266w, 346w
National Lottery, Applications 1158–9w
National Lottery, Land 936w
National Lottery, NHS 140–1w
Non-governmental organisations, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 1160w
Orders and regulations, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 574–6w
Rugby, National Lottery 13w
Sports, Finance 13w
Sports, Tax allowances 263–4w
Sports, Training 263w
Swimming pools 1158w
Travel, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 259–61w
Visits abroad, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 260w
Winter sports, Gloucestershire 263w

Caesarean sections
991–2w

Cairns, David
Debates etc.
Iron and steel, USA (06.03.02) 318
Questions
Terrorism, Costs 11w

Calton, Mrs Patsy
Debates etc.
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (04.03.02) 50
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Greater Manchester Police, Finance (05.03.02) 67–8wh
Questions
Child protection committees, Finance 845w
House of Commons, Equal opportunities 1116–7w
Institutional care 1011–2w
Social services, Elderly 1063w

Cambridge Education Associates
242w

Cambridgeshire
Children 763w

Cameras
Speed limits 1227w

Cameron, Mr David
Debates etc.
Equal opportunities, Females (14.03.02) 1099
Greater London (12.03.02) 808, 812, 839, 842, 844–5
Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 164–5
Questions
Ministers, Codes of practice 1071w
Prisoners of war, Compensation 393w, 503w

Cameroon
International assistance 272–3
Overseas aid 1188w
Politics and government 1188–9w
Poverty 338w
Primary education 1188w

Campbell, Mr Alan
Questions
Speech therapy, Manpower 838w
Speech therapy, Training 283w

Campbell, Mrs Anne
Debates etc.
Equal opportunities, Females (14.03.02) 1080
Questions
Air pollution 484w
Children, Day care 763w
Developing countries, Disease control 897w
Education, Standard spending assessments 621–2w
Overseas aid, HIV infection 897w
Students, Finance 1007

Campbell, Mr Gregory
Debates etc.
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (04.03.02) 52–3, 70, 91–2

Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
Debates etc.
Zimbabwe (14.03.02) 1035–6
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Iraq (06.03.02) 83–4wh
Questions
Iraq 746–7
Military aircraft, Iraq 649w
Wild ducks 940–1w

Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Questions
Pension Service 22w

Cancer
Brighton 854–6w
Counselling 286w
Death rate 703–4w
Drugs 815w, 1019w
Health services 287w, 608w
Medical treatments 130w, 285w, 985w, 1148w
Nurses 814–5w
Research 610–1w
Voluntary organisations 138w
Waiting lists 286w, 289–90
Worthing 854–6w

Cannabis
Decriminalisation 1222w
Driving under influence 583w
Multiple sclerosis 1029w

Cape Wrath
Uranium 34w

Capita
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 346–8w
Dept for Education and Skills 234–5w, 759w
Dept for International Development 337w, 466w

Capita—continued
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 564–6w
Dept for Work and Pensions 23–6w, 418–9w
Dept of Health 464w
Dept of Trade and Industry 1w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 607w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 776w
Northern Ireland Office 526w
Treasury 1113w

Capital gains tax
400–1w

Capital punishment
UN Commission on Human Rights 692w

Car allowances
Service industries 1289w

Carbon dioxide
Nuclear power stations 152w

Care Standards Act 2000
Questions
542w, 839–40w

Carers
Social security benefits 3–4, 536w

Caribbean
Patrol craft 29w

Carmichael, Mr Alistair
Debates etc.
Equal opportunities, Females (14.03.02) 1109
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Consignia (12.03.02) 186wh, 192wh, 195–7wh
Iraq (06.03.02) 76–7wh
Questions
Common fisheries policy 408–9
Developing countries, Fisheries 332–3w

Casale, Roger
Debates etc.
Bank services (14.03.02) 1028
Central Government Audit and Accountability Review (13.03.02) 896
Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (13.03.02) 943–5, 948
Greater London (12.03.02) 766
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Industrial health and safety (14.03.02) 323wh, 353–5wh

Casey, Derek
259–60w

Cash, Mr William
Debates etc.
Central Government Audit and Accountability Review (13.03.02) 900
Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL), Programme motion and Rep (11.03.02) 639, 640–1, 643–5, 648–50, 652, 656–63, 666, 674–6, 678–84, 691–6, 698–710, 716–8
Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (13.03.02) 907–16, 918, 923–8, 930–1, 932–4, 936–45, 947–8, 953, 962–5, 969–70, 981
Questions
Crown Prosecution Service, Standards 1014

Catering
Dept for International Development 341w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 555w
Dept of Trade and Industry 668w
Hospitals 451w, 849w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 962–3w
Northern Ireland Office 59–60w

Catering—continued
President of the Council 605w
Treasury 106w

Caton, Mr Martin
Debates etc.
Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 197–201
Questions
Crime, Victims 710w
Institutional care, Fees and charges 1002w
Marriage guidance, Grants 404–6w
Shellfish, Poisoning 122w
Shellfish, Wales 528–9w

Cawsey, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Iron and steel, USA (06.03.02) 315

Cellular phone masts
see Aerials

Cellular phones
Ministry of Defence 162w
Theft 251–2w

Cemeteries
(11.03.02) 731–8
Hospitals 545w
Muslims 147w

Cendent Relocation (UK)
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 749w
Dept of Trade and Industry 667w

Census
Public Record Office 55–6w, 962w, 1175–6w
Scotland 61w

Central Africa
Peace negotiations 331–2w

Central America
Children 863w

Central Asia
Drugs 690–1w
Overseas aid 1192w

Central Europe
EC enlargement 1297w

Central Government Audit and Accountability Review
Ministerial statements (13.03.02) 889–900

Central Railway
738w
Freight 1278w

Centre for Policy Studies
659–60w

Cervical cancer
Screening 127–8w

Challen, Mr Colin
Debates etc.
Environmental audit (07.03.02) 454, 469–70
World Summit on Sustainable Development (07.03.02) 449
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Consignia (12.03.02) 195wh
Energy Policy Review (13.03.02) 279wh
Questions
Business questions 424–5

Challenger tanks
649w

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
81w

Chancellor of the Exchequer
see Treasury

Channel tunnel
919–20w

Channel tunnel railway line
560w, 733–5w
Finance 557–8w
Freight 137–8, 558w, 742–3w, 1088w, 1204w, 1276–7w
Scotland 174–5w

Chapman, Mr Ben
Debates etc.
Bank services (14.03.02) 1027
Questions
Construction, Standards 887w
Further education, Standards 1211w
Gamma hydroxybutyrate 515w
Kenya, Politics and government 333w

Chapman, Sir Sydney
Debates etc.
Greater London (12.03.02) 767
Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, Rep and 3R (15.03.02) 1129–30
Questions
Schools, Repairs and maintenance 1219–20w
Young offenders, Greater London 625

Charing Cross
Police stations 981w

Charities
10 Downing Street 1197w

Chaytor, Mr David
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Energy Policy Review (13.03.02) 280–1wh, 283wh
Questions
Business questions 435–6
Cameroon, International assistance 272
Energy Policy Review 873–4
Mersey Basin Trust 1082w
Radioactive wastes 405
Ramsbottom 342w
Sellafield, Radioactive wastes 1287w

Chelmsford Prison
159w

Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment
Nancekuke 28–9w

Chemical and biological warfare
547w, 1028w
London Underground 1167w
Vaccination 1028–9w

Chemical weapons
Baltic Sea 166w
Russia 474–5w

Chemicals
Agriculture 478w
Pregnancy 1012–3w

Cheshire Police Authority
Grants 154w

Child protection committees
Finance 845w

Child Support Agency
1241–2w
Powers 411–2w

Children
Abuse 159w
Asthma 450w
Asylum 970–1w
Cambridgeshire 763w
Central America 863w
Day care 763w, 1072w
Depressive illnesses 616w
Developing countries 329w, 1191w
Domestic violence 287–8
Employment 683w
General practitioners 1063–4w

Children—continued
Hospitals 1013w
Human trafficking 646–7w
Maintenance 412–3w, 604w, 723w
Mental health services 820w
Poverty 1123w
Protection 982w, 1135–6w, 1245w
Refuges 807w
Sexual offences 713w
Speech therapy 611w, 807w

Children Act 1989
Questions
547w

Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service
526w

Children and Young People's Unit
390–1w

Children in care
Standards 986–7w

Children's rights
1132–3w

Chiltern railway line
Finance 190w

Chiropody
539–41w
Manpower 433w

Chlamydia trachomatis
303–4w

Chope, Mr Christopher
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Sudan (13.03.02) 255–7wh
Questions
Animal experiments 517–8w
Departmental expenditure limits, Ministry of Defence 652w
Disability living allowance, Appeals 603–4w
Disability living allowance, Applications 603w
Electoral register 381–2w
Humber bridge, Repairs and maintenance 556–7w
Incapacity benefit 1126w
Manpower, Cabinet Office 1073–4w
Manpower, Dept for Education and Skills 1216w
Manpower, Northern Ireland Office 60–1w
Members, Correspondence 636w
Ministers, Codes of practice 1066w
Overseas investment, Government assistance 343w
Police, Secondment 156w
Satellite communications, Procurement 578w
SchlumbergerSema 530–1w
Sudan, Armed conflict 861w
Sustainable development, Government departments 793w
Visits abroad, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 176w
Visits abroad, Dept of Trade and Industry 148–9w
Visits abroad, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 606–7w

Chorley and South Ribble Hospital
1018–9w
Accident and emergency departments 992w

Chorley and South Ribble NHS Trust
Preston Acute Hospitals NHS Trust 1143w

Chronic fatigue syndrome
998–9w
Research 998w
Social security benefits 1127–8w

Churches
VAT 264w

Cinemas
1231w

Ciprofloxacin
993–4w

Circulars
Dept for Education and Employment 386w
Dept for Education and Skills 626–30w

Circuses
Animal welfare 791w

Citizens' advice bureaux
Finance 964w

City of London
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 180w
Local government finance 377–9w, 739w

City of London Corporation
Cabinet Office 422w
Northern Ireland Office 60w
Prime Minister 342w

City of London (Ward Elections) Bill 1998/99
Debates etc.
Order for further consideration read (07.03.02) 399, (14.03.02) 997
Questions
342w

City of Westminster
Local government finance 377–9w, 739w

Civil disorder
India 282

Civil proceedings
Gravesend 773–4w

Civil servants
Dept of Health 422–3w
Employment 236w
Employment tribunals 875
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1075w
Recruitment 256–7w

Civil service
Reform 872–3, 878–9, 1072w

Clapham, Mr Michael
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Industrial health and safety (14.03.02) 322wh, 327wh, 339–43wh
Questions
Employment, Disabled 18w
Industrial diseases, Compensation 417–8w
Latex, Allergies 1004w

Clappison, Mr James
Debates etc.
Bank services (14.03.02) 1029
Questions
Jobcentre Plus 413w
Jobcentre Plus, Industrial disputes 958w
Jobcentre Plus, Manpower 533–4w
Jobcentres, Crimes of violence 1120–1w
Jobcentres, Security 1121w
New deal for disabled people 17
New deal for young people 1127w
Police, Conditions of employment 621–3
Poverty 1241w
Social security benefits, Abuse 255w
Social Security Benefits Agency, Crimes of violence 724–5w

Clark, Mrs Helen
Debates etc.
Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, Rep and 3R (15.03.02) 1161–2

***Clark, Mrs Helen**—continued*
Sittings in Westminster Hall
National Asylum Support Service (12.03.02) 241–5wh
Questions
Chlamydia trachomatis 303–4w
Drugs, Misuse 708w
Institutional care, Standards 542–3w
Mental patients 1057w
Roads, Accidents 381w, 561–2w, 1264w
Speed governors 492w

Clarke, Rt Hon Tom
Debates etc.
Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference (06.03.02) 298–9
Questions
Brazil, Overseas aid 332w
Royal National Institute for Deaf People 1071–2w

Class sizes
634w

Cleaner Vehicles Task Force
1278w

Clelland, Mr David
Questions
Regional government 148

Clergy
Females 147w

Cleveland Constabulary
Inquiries 156w, (06.03.02) 391–8

Clifton-Brown, Mr Geoffrey
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Industrial health and safety (14.03.02) 322–9wh, 335–6wh, 341–2wh, 355wh, 357–8wh
Questions
Air traffic control, Fees and charges 580–1w
Airline Group 176w
Annuities 20w
Braunstone Community Association 103–4w
Exhaust emissions 362w
Foot and mouth disease, Compensation 416
Fraud, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 751w
Homelessness 135
Local government 560–2w
National Air Traffic Services 564w
National Air Traffic Services, Finance 741w
Railtrack, Finance 103w
Road traffic 1092w
Swanwick Air Traffic Control Centre 177w
Teachers, Training 1214w
Written questions, Administrative delays 756w

Climate change levy
6–8w, 117–8w, 199w, 1228w
Euro 117w
Horticulture 230w
NHS 1146w
Nuclear power stations 152w
Schools 759–60w

Clwyd
Pensioners 935w

Clwyd, Ann
Questions
Arms trade, Export controls 892w
Coalfields Regeneration Trust, Cynon Valley 187w
Dual use goods and technologies, Exports 588w

***Clwyd, Ann**—continued*
Foreign investment in UK, Cynon Valley 529–30w
Hazardous materials, Cynon Valley 365w
Higher education, Wales 1076w
Indonesia, Armed forces 867w
Indonesia, Human rights 688w, 1293–4w
Iraq 745
Iraq, Human rights 864w
Unemployment, Cynon Valley 529w
Welsh Development Agency 530w
Written questions, Administrative delays 354w

Coaker Mr Vernon
Debates etc.
World Summit on Sustainable Development (07.03.02) 448
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Politics, Young people (05.03.02) 24–8wh
Questions
Angola 392w
Angola, Overseas aid 465w
Attendance allowance 1–2
Bus services, Concessions 1088w
Community development 174w
Developing countries, Education 334w
Heart diseases 543w
Overseas aid 109w, 334–5w
Police, Conditions of employment 632–3
Prostate cancer 820–1w

Coal
Mining 102–3w

Coalfields Regeneration Trust
Cynon Valley 187w

Coastal areas
Gambling Review Body 345w

Coffey, Ms Ann
Questions
Local government, Standards 168–9w

Cohen, Harry
Debates etc.
Terrorism (07.03.02) 510, 514
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Industrial health and safety (14.03.02) 328–31wh
Questions
Aerospace industry, EC action 32w
Bennett, David 1020w
British Transport Police, Arrest warrants 1087w
Genetics 981–2w
Homicide 1101w
Jubilee line 89w
Legal aid 197–8w
London Underground, Public private partnerships 88–9w, 469w
M11 371–2w
Money laundering 594–6w
Money laundering, Serbia 975w
Pain, Health services 821–2w
Proceeds of crime, Nigeria 645w
Project Al Yamamah 1245w
Rahman, Shiblu 1049–50w
Sheikh, Ahmed Omar Saeed 202w, 1295w
Written questions, Administrative delays 1046w

Cohen, Ronald
111w

Colerne airfield
1253–4w

Collins, Mr Tim
Questions
Cancer, Medical treatments 985w
Civil service, Reform 873
Ministerial policy advisors 872

***Collins, Mr Tim**—continued*
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 572w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for Work and Pensions 27–8w
Ministers, Codes of practice 876–7
Mittal, Lakshmi 67w, 890–1w
Pancreatic cancer, North West region 984–5w
Surgery, Waiting lists 991w
Visits abroad, Dept of Health 1144w

Colman, Mr Tony
Questions
Combined heat and power 351–2w

Colombia
63–4w
Human rights 862–3w, 1172–3w
Peace negotiations 607w, 862w

Combined heat and power
351–2w, 643w, 942w, 1153w
NHS 831w

Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment
1159w

Commission for Health Improvement
National Care Standards Commission 1144w

Common agricultural policy
214–5w, 940w
EC enlargement 756
Euro 214w

Common fisheries policy
(04.03.02) 122, 408–9

Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL) 2001/02
Debates etc.
Programme motion and Rep (11.03.02) 638–729
Rep and 3R (13.03.02) 907–87
Questions
93w, 196w

Commonwealth Development Corporation
Africa 276–7
Overseas investment 891–2w

Commonwealth Games
Manchester (05.03.02) 61–8wh, 682w, 888, 1252w
Zimbabwe 682w, 1252w

Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference
343w
Ministerial statements (06.03.02) 291–303

Commonwealth of Independent States
Nuclear power stations 588w

Commonwealth War Graves Commission
322–3w

Communication
NHS 1142w

Community care
1024w

Community development
174w
Social Exclusion Unit 1071w
Wales 957w

Community health councils
461–2w

Community health services
Manpower 124–6w

Community investment tax credit
1230w

Community Punishment and Rehabilitation Service
see National Probation Service for England and Wales

Community service orders
Enforcement 772w

Community services grant
1153w

Community support police officers
712w, 888

Community transport
Excise duties 172w

Companies (Fees) (Amendment) Regulations 2002
Debates etc.
(11.03.02) 730

Company accounts
British Nuclear Fuels 151w

Company investigations
Exchange Direct 490w, 1258w
Mirror Group Newspapers 1258–9w

Company law
1081w

Competition
Postal services 880

Compost
362w

Computers
678w
Customs and Excise 118w
VAT 113–4w

Computers within reach programme
633–4w

Conditions of employment
EC law 356w
Metropolitan Police 884
Navigation 749w
Non-teaching staff 626w, 1218w
Police 621–4, 632–3, 883–4, 887–8, 1227w

Confiscation orders
Smuggling 108–9w

Congo (Kinshasa)
see Democratic Republic of Congo

Connarty, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Nuclear power stations (05.03.02) 225–6, 245, 250, 254
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Industrial health and safety (14.03.02) 355wh
Questions
Developing countries, Education 333w
EC Environment Council 1285–7w
EU Internal Market Consumer Affairs and Tourism Council 1077–8w
EU Justice Home Affairs and Civil Protection Council 1260–2w
Fuel poverty, Rural areas 484w

Connexions Service
501w, 769–70w, 952–3w, 1135w

Conservation
Dolphins (13.03.02) 293–9wh
Energy 73–6w, 361–3w, 640–1w
Fish 210–2w

Consignia
(12.03.02) 175–200wh
External financing limits 357–8w

Consolidated Fund (No 2) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
1R (07.03.02) 521

Consolidated Fund (No 2) Bill 2001/02—continued
2R* and 3R* (11.03.02) 729–30

Consultants
Engineering 149–50w
Hospitals 845w
Scotland Office 511w

Consultation papers
Dept of Health 1009w

Consumer Credit Act 1974
Questions
153w

Consumers
Credit 1080w, 1258w

Contamination
Olive oil 945–6w

Contracting Out (Local Education Authority Functions) (England) Order 2002
Debates etc.
(06.03.02) 390

Contracts
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 1155–7w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 100w, 1092–3w
Dept of Health 429w
Dept of Trade and Industry 2–3w
Home Office 1271w
Ministry of Defence 1161w
Northern Ireland Office 58–60w, 525–6w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 365–6w
Protec 1263–4w
Treasury 1113–4w

Contributions Agency
see Social Security Contributions Agency

Control of Fireworks Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (15.03.02) 1203

Conway, Derek
Debates etc.
Greater London (12.03.02) 764–5
Police (08.03.02) 535–6, 580–3
Questions
Norman Shaw buildings, Wood 585w

Cook, Frank
Questions
Cleveland Constabulary, Inquiries 156w
Equal pay, Stockton on Tees 1183–4w

***Cook, Rt Hon Robin**, President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons*
Debates etc.
Business statements (14.03.02) 1046–59
Questions
Advertising, President of the Council 605w
Business statements 417–36
Catering, President of the Council 605w
Correspondence, President of the Council 198w
Government bills 706–8w
Hotels, President of the Council 403–4w
Information officers, President of the Council 605w
Legal costs, President of the Council 404w
Members, Data protection 706w
Non-governmental organisations, President of the Council 605w
Publicity, President of the Council 403w
Railways, President of the Council 606w
Recruitment, President of the Council 606w

Cook, Rt Hon Robin—continued
Trade unions, President of the Council 403w
Voluntary work, President of the Council 605w
Work sharing, President of the Council 604w

***Cooper, Ms Yvette**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept of Health*
Debates etc.
Kent and Canterbury Hospital (07.03.02) 528–32
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Diabetes (13.03.02) 304–7wh
Hospitals, Waiting lists (12.03.02) 237–40wh
NHS, Negligence (06.03.02) 113–6wh
Questions
Abortion, Overseas visitors 135w
Alcoholic drinks, Misuse 435w
Alder Hey Children's Hospital 1145w
Asylum, Voucher schemes 1010w
Blood, Donors 825w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Meat 128w, 1008w
Breast cancer 286w
Breast cancer, Screening 285–6w
Caesarean sections 991–2w
Cancer, Counselling 286w
Cancer, Drugs 1019w
Cancer, Health services 287w, 608w
Cancer, Medical treatments 285w, 1148w
Cancer, Research 610–1w
Cancer, Voluntary organisations 138w
Cancer, Waiting lists 286w
Cervical cancer, Screening 127–8w
Chemical and biological warfare 547w
Chlamydia trachomatis 303–4w
Ciprofloxacin 993–4w
Dietary supplements, Research 983–4w
Disadvantaged, Greater London 547w
Drugs, Side effects 130–2w
Ear nose and throat, Medical equipment 1058w
Exercise referral schemes 133w
Firearms, Accidents 132–3w
Food, Pesticides 121–2w
Food, Safety 550w
Foot and mouth disease, Meat 1016w
Fruit, Schools 1138–9w
Genetics 136w
German measles, Vaccination 811w
Haemophilia, Blood transfusions 1140w
Health education, Sex 136w
Health services, Standards 801w
Heart diseases 543w
Heart diseases, Herefordshire 615w
Heart diseases, Males 991w
Heart diseases, Medical treatments 814w
Heart diseases, Surgery 138–9w
Hepatitis 1047–8w
Herceptin 1065w
HIV infection 134–5w, 288–9w
HIV infection, Health education 1047w
Home births 135w
Hospices, Finance 121w, 818w
Hospitals, Babies 997–8w
Hospitals, Children 1013w
Influenza 1061–2w
Influenza, Middlesbrough 1030w
Lung diseases 538w
Malnutrition 137–8w, 615w, 994w
Maternity services liaison committees 131w
Measles, Greater London 1139w
Meat, Imports 139–40w
Medical profession, Worcestershire 1040–1w
Medical treatments, EC countries 306w

Cooper, Ms Yvette—continued
Members, Correspondence 544w, 608w, 985–6w
Midwives, Greater London 614w
MMR vaccine 812w, 1032–3w, 1138w
MMR vaccine, Cumbria 985w
Multiple sclerosis 1064w
NHS, Climate change levy 1146w
NHS, Information technology 1147–8w
NHS, Powderject 305–6w
Nutrition, Salt 295–6w
Olive oil, Contamination 945–6w
Oral cancer 119–20w
Pancreatic cancer, North West region 984–5w
Pertussis vaccine 823–4w
Pregnancy, Chemicals 1012–3w
Prostate cancer 820–1w
Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham, Transplant surgery 537w
Radiation exposure 134w
Radiotherapy, Medical equipment 128–30w
Select committees, Dept of Health 988w
Shellfish, Poisoning 122w
Solihull Hospital 121w
Steroid drugs, Misuse 277w
Surgery 133w
Tuberculosis, Buckingham 1064w
Tuberculosis, Vaccination 304w, 1015w
Wade, Nikki 276w

Copyright (Visually Impaired Persons) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R (15.03.02) 1192–203

Corbyn, Jeremy
Debates etc.
World Summit on Sustainable Development (07.03.02) 447
Questions
Asylum, Appeals 971–2w
Higher education, Student wastage 946w
Nuclear weapons, USA 651w
Rented housing, Construction 176w
Whittington Hospital, Repairs and maintenance 808w

Cormack, Sir Patrick
Debates etc.
Iron and steel, USA (06.03.02) 313–4
Questions
Civil service, Reform 879
Regional assemblies 144–5

Corporate manslaughter
975–6w

Corporation tax
1228w

Corruption
Developing countries 331w

Corston, Jean
Questions
Bristol, Cabinet Office 80w
Bristol, Dept for Education and Skills 493w
Bristol, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 638w
Bristol, Dept of Health 1009–10w
Bristol, Treasury 1111–2w
Habitual offenders 715w
House of Commons, Breast feeding 467w
Magistrates, Ethnic groups 405–6w
Road traffic control, Schools 175w

Corus
Redundancy 349–50w

Cost of living
674w

Cotter, Brian
Questions
Arthritis, Drugs 614w
Avon Health Authority, Nurses 1247w
Business questions 434–5
Data protection 196w
Excise duties, Tobacco 200–1w
Eyesight, Surgery 826–7w
NHS, Per capita costs 550–1w
Post offices, Bank services 414w
Small Business Service, Advertising 1078–9w
Small Business Service, Manpower 1079w
Small Business Service, Public appointments 669–70w
Small businesses, Bank services 149w
Small businesses, Disabled 888w
Smuggling 106–7w
Smuggling, Confiscation orders 108–9w
Smuggling, Tobacco 200w
Weston Area Health NHS Trust, Nurses 1247w
Weston Hospital 550w

Council housing
Construction 82w, 173–4w
Empty property 1086w
Rents 84w

Council of Ministers
394–6w

Council of the Isles
see British Irish Council

Council tax
180–1w, 885–6
Arrears 84w
Greater London 181w
Tax rates and bands 104w

Councillors
Allowances 104–5w, 173w

Counselling
Cancer 286w
Miscarriages of justice 972w

Countryside
Access 641–2w

Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000
Questions
227w

County courts
Gravesend 1178w

Courier services
Northern Ireland Office 258–9w
Scotland Office 513w

Court of Appeal
54–5w

Courts
Northern Ireland 774–6w

Courts martial
651–2w

Cousins, Mr Jim
Questions
Afghanistan, Prisoners 504w, 859–60w
Alcoholic drinks, Expenditure 1114–6w
Asylum, Funerals 1228w
Aviation, Insurance 1111w
Bank services 1115–6w
Benefits Agency Medical Service, Standards 1127w
Chemical weapons, Russia 474–5w
Consignia, External financing limits 357–8w
Contracts, Ministry of Defence 1161w
Empty property, Tyne and Wear 582w
Future large aircraft 343w
Hazardous materials, Ministry of Defence 486w

Cousins, Mr Jim—continued
Incinerators 793–4w
Incinerators, Newcastle upon Tyne 794w
Iran, Overseas aid 1192w
Nuclear power stations, Commonwealth of Independent States 588w
Nuclear power stations, Decommissioning 162–3w
Pension credit 696w
Post offices, North East region 670w
Post offices, Social security benefits 670w
Social security benefits, Chronic fatigue syndrome 1127–8w
Social security benefits, Newcastle upon Tyne 1124–5w
Strokes 1012w
Students, Fees and charges 764–70w
Students, Finance 949–51w, 1000–1
Students, Loans 1132w
Taxation 471w
Whitehall and Industry Group, Secondment 422w

Coventry
Police 709w

Cox, Mr Tom
Questions
Carers, Social security benefits 536w
Children, Employment 683w
Electronic tagging, Greater London 1225w
Health action zones, Greater London 817w
Health services, Standards 801w
Human trafficking, Females 45w
Incinerators, Greater London 358w
India, Overseas aid 685–6w
Midwives, Greater London 614w
Priority routes, Greater London 82w
St George's Hospital Tooting, Accident and emergency departments 822w
Smoking 1015w
Sri Lanka, Overseas aid 648w
Surgery, Greater London 1143w
Wandsworth Prison 1225w

Cran, Mr James
Questions
Members, Correspondence 431–2w

Cranston, Ross
Questions
Afghanistan, Prisoners 868w
Police, Conditions of employment 624
Zimbabwe, Elections 741–2

Crausby, Mr David
Debates etc.
Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL), Programme motion and Rep (11.03.02) 710
Terrorism (07.03.02) 503–5
Questions
Employment, Females 23w

Credit
Consumers 1080w, 1258w

Credit unions
Disadvantaged 354w

Crime
6w, 880–2
Alcoholic drinks 1264w
Drugs 48w, 866w, 1109w
Elderly 1100–1w
Garages and petrol stations 716–7w
Greater London 633–5
St Helens 603w
Schools 251–2w
Victims 619–21, 710w, 1107–8w

Crime and Disorder Act 1998
Questions
923w

Crime prevention
Africa 647w

Crimes of violence
626–30, 1264–6w
East Sussex 718w
Elderly 162w
Employment Service 724w
Hospitals 849–50w, 1291w
Jobcentres 1120–1w
Social Security Benefits Agency 532–3w, 724–5w
Wales 517w

Criminal Cases Review Commission
968–9w

Criminal Courts Review
709w, 772–3w
Magistrates 409w

Criminal Evidence (Prohibition of Sale) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
1R (06.03.02) 304–6

Criminal Injuries Compensation (Northern Ireland) Order 2002
Debates etc.
(12.03.02) 862

Criminal investigation
Customs and Excise 105w

Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001
Questions
720w

Criminal proceedings
311w, 978w
Standards 635–6w

Criminal Records Bureau
Northern Ireland 712w

Crops
Genetically modified organisms 75–7w

Crossrail line
921w, 1275w

Crown Prosecution Service
307–11w, 1013–4, 1236w
Finance 309–10w
Labour turnover 307–8w
Manpower 664–8w
Standards 1014

Cryer, Mrs Ann
Debates etc.
Equal opportunities, Females (14.03.02) 1083–6
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Iraq (06.03.02) 73–4wh
Questions
Attendance allowance 3

Cryer, John
Debates etc.
Police (08.03.02) 544, 602–3
Questions
Business questions 432

Cultural heritage
(07.03.02) 133–74wh

Culture Online
267–8w

Cumbria
Foot and mouth disease 781–2w
MMR vaccine 985w

Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack
Debates etc.
Iron and steel, USA (06.03.02) 313
Questions
Energy Policy Review 403

Cunningham, Mr Jim
Debates etc.
Bank services (14.03.02) 1026
Questions
Afghanistan, Peace keeping operations 870w
Anti-Terrorism Crime and Security Act 2001 1263w
Apache WAH-64 helicopter 654w
Broadcasting, Regulation 935–6w
Council housing, Construction 82w
Criminal proceedings 978w
Flood control 484w
Fraud, Prosecutions 1012
Jobcentre Plus 15w
Local government, Standards 168–9w
Radio, Licensing 1159w
West Midlands Police, Manpower 709w

Cunningham, Tony
Debates etc.
Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, Rep and 3R (15.03.02) 1131, 1151–2, 1190
Zimbabwe (14.03.02) 1041
Questions
Africa, International assistance 328w
Asbestos, Industrial health and safety 910w
Sheep, Transport 478w

Curriculum
Evolution 886–7
Schools 239–40w

Curry, Rt Hon David
Questions
Annuities 9
Tipping of waste, Hazardous materials 794w

Curtis-Thomas, Ms Claire
Debates etc.
Equal opportunities, Females (14.03.02) 1068, 1076
Police (08.03.02) 564–73
Questions
Centre for Policy Studies 659–60w
Children, Abuse 159w
Construction, Government departments 149w
Crime 6w
Crime, Victims 1107–8w
Criminal proceedings, Standards 635–6w
Crown Prosecution Service 309–11w
Crown Prosecution Service, Finance 309–10w
Crown Prosecution Service, Labour turnover 307–8w
Crown Prosecution Service, Manpower 664–8w
Engineering, Consultants 149–50w
Engineering, Higher education 678w, 762–3w
Engineering, Manpower 150w
Engineering, Skilled workers 497w, 888–9w
Engineering, National vocational qualifications 250w
Exports, Licensing 399w, 701–2w
Financial services, EC action 111w
Further education, Science 625–6w
Gambling, Fees and charges 679–80w
GCE A level, Mathematics 249–50w
Higher education, Business 34–5w
Modern apprenticeships 390w
NHS, Procurement 304w, 437–8w
Postgraduate education, Student numbers 250w
Royal commissions 253w
Sector skills councils 670w
Sexual offences 1011–2
Small Business Council 589w

Curtis-Thomas, Ms Claire—continued
Small businesses 646w
Small businesses, Emergencies 1079w
Small businesses, Investment 470–1w
Small businesses, Regulatory impact assessments 149w
Small businesses, Tax allowances 704w
Small businesses, Venture capital 150w
Students, Debts 41w
Students, Finance 761–2w
Taxation 705w
Television, Licensing 679w
Trade promotion 353w

Customs and Excise
Computers 118w
Criminal investigation 105w
Debts 397–8w
Northern Ireland 470w
Property transfer 1289w
X rays 112–3w

Cynon Valley
Coalfields Regeneration Trust 187w
Foreign investment in UK 529–30w
Hazardous materials 365w
Unemployment 529w

Cyprus
EC enlargement 755–6

Cystic fibrosis
Medical treatments 436w
Prescriptions 1293w

Czech Republic
Iron and steel 3w, 503w

Dalyell, Mr Tam
Debates etc.
Central Government Audit and Accountability Review (13.03.02) 897
Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference (06.03.02) 297
Iron and steel, USA (06.03.02) 313
Nuclear power stations (05.03.02) 230
Nuclear power stations, Points of order (06.03.02) 320
Scottish Parliament, Points of order (13.03.02) 901
Terrorism (07.03.02) 497, 501
World Summit on Sustainable Development (07.03.02) 443
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Iraq (06.03.02) 69–71wh, 73wh, 76wh, 85wh
Questions
Bolivia, Floods 338w
British Indian Ocean Territory, Mines 1300w
Business questions 423
Civil servants, Employment tribunals 875
Iraq 748
Iraq, Armed conflict 1066w
Iraq, Politics and government 864–5w
Iraq, Terrorism 344w
Official engagements, Prime Minister 344w
Porton Down, Human experiments 1104w
Post offices, Bank services 26w
Railways, Industrial relations 191–2w

Damages
Accidents 963–4w

"Damages for Future Loss Consultation Paper"
963w

Dams
Export credit guarantees 2w

***Darling, Rt Hon Alistair**, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions*
Questions
Annuities 7–10
Post offices, Bank services 26w
Rapid Response Service 14–6

Darts
Sponsorship 274w

Data protection
196w, 487–8w
Members 706w

Data Protection Act 1998
Questions
706w

Davey, Mr Edward
Debates etc.
Central Government Audit and Accountability Review (13.03.02) 894
Greater London (12.03.02) 762, 765, 768, 779, 781–9, 793, 797–8, 834
London Underground (15.03.02) 1204–8

Davey, Mrs Valerie
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Eyesight, Diseases (05.03.02) 50wh
Questions
Education, Bristol 1136w
Fair trade initiative 285
Hearing aids 543–4w
Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine 1196w
Primary education, Languages 1212–3w
Schools, Languages 1002–3
Urban areas, Royal charters 1243w

David, Mr Wayne
Questions
Housing, Sales 1088–9w

Davidson, Mr Ian
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Industrial health and safety (14.03.02) 320–1wh, 329wh, 344–5wh
Questions
Aerospace industry 150–1w
Developing countries, Corruption 331w
Equal pay, Glasgow 668w
Military aircraft, Procurement 653w

Davies, Rt Hon Denzil
Questions
European Commission 869w

Davies, Geraint
Debates etc.
Central Government Audit and Accountability Review (13.03.02) 897–8
Greater London (12.03.02) 763–4, 768, 777, 836, 838–43
Police (08.03.02) 537, 547, 552, 560–1
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Consignia (12.03.02) 189–90wh, 194wh
Questions
Afghanistan, Prisoners 859w

Davies, Mr Quentin
Debates etc.
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (04.03.02) 77–83, 89, 93–5, 113–5

Davis, Rt Hon David
Questions
East Riding Health Authority 845–6w
Fire services 746w
Hospitals, Admissions 612w
Hospitals, Kingston upon Hull 545w
Humberside Fire Authority, Standard spending assessments 746w
Standard spending assessments, East Riding 751–2w

***Davis, Rt Hon David**—continued*
Standard spending assessments, Institutional care 751w
Surgery, Death 612w
Surgery, Kingston upon Hull 544–5w

Dawson, Mr Hilton
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Politics, Young people (05.03.02) 33–5wh
Sudan (13.03.02) 257–9wh, 265wh
Questions
Africa, Overseas aid 886
Children's rights 1132–3w
Sudan, Peace negotiations 327w
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1137w

Day care
Children 763w, 1072w

Day surgery
551w

Dead bodies
Transport 1082–3w

Deaf
see Hearing impaired

Death
Methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus 1145w
Surgery 612w

Death rate
Cancer 703–4w

Debates
Prime Minister 682w, 693w

Debts
Africa 1129w
Customs and Excise 397–8w
NHS trusts 118–9w
Students 41w

Decriminalisation
Cannabis 1222w

Deep vein thrombosis
565–7w

Defaulters
Gravesend 773w

Defence equipment
Northern Ireland 705w
Procurement 325w, 476w

Defence estimates
(07.03.02) 520

Defence Evaluation and Research Agency
Legal profession 164w
Public private partnerships 313–4w, 577w, 1168w

Defence Fire Service
Medals 578w

Defence Science and Technology Laboratory
1163–4w

Democracy
Electronic government (12.03.02) 863–70

Democratic Republic of Congo
Elections 68w
Overseas aid 894w

***Denham, Rt Hon John**, Minister of State, Home Office*
Debates etc.
Greater London (12.03.02) 850–4
Police (08.03.02) 533–43, 547, 557–9, 597, 607–9
Questions
Administration of justice, Learning disability 154–5w
Airguns 599–600w

***Denham, Rt Hon John**—continued*
Baton rounds 969w
Cheshire Police Authority, Grants 154w
Children, Abuse 159w
Children, Protection 1135–6w
Children's rights 1132–3w
Cleveland Constabulary, Inquiries 156w
Community support police officers 712w
Crime, Alcoholic drinks 1264w
Crime, Garages and petrol stations 716–7w
Crime, St Helens 603w
Crimes of violence 626–30, 1264–6w
Crimes of violence, East Sussex 718w
Crimes of violence, Wales 517w
Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 720w
Criminal Records Bureau, Northern Ireland 712w
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 718–9w
Gamma hydroxybutyrate 515w
Hertfordshire Constabulary 713w
Homicide 1101w
Humber Police, Sick leave 157w
Immobilisation of vehicles, Fees and charges 722w
Members, Correspondence 157w
Neighbourhood wardens, Lancashire 709w
Police, Brixton 156w
Police, Bureaucracy 711–2w
Police, Conditions of employment 1227w
Police, Domestic violence 1105–6w
Police, Health insurance 158–9w
Police, Housing 155–6w
Police, Legislation 1264w
Police, Manpower 1266–70w
Police, Newark 981w
Police, Pay 708–9w, 714–5w
Police, Pensions 977–8w
Police, Recruitment 160–1w
Police, Secondment 156w
Police, Somerset 712w
Police stations, Charing Cross 981w
Police stations, Newark 597w
Pornography, Internet 980w
Porton Down, Human experiments 1104w
Robbery 713–4w
Theft, Motor vehicles 158w
Travelling people 715w
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1137w
West Midlands Police, Manpower 709w
Young offenders, Greater London 625–6

Dental services
Fees and charges 987w
Greater London 301w
Isle of Wight 450w
Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust 1146w, 1290w

Dentistry
Student numbers 813w
Training 447–9w

Departmental expenditure limits
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 376w, 571w
Ministry of Defence 325w, 652w, 1181–2w

Departmental responsibilities
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 740–1w
Dept of Health 1056w
Home Office 48w
Scotland Office 1208w
Treasury 111–2w

Depleted uranium
see Uranium

Deployment
Armed forces 318w

***Deployment**—continued*
Reserve forces 474w

Deportation
Asylum 158w, 392w

Depressive illnesses
Children 616w

Deprivation indicators
1092w

Dept for Culture Media and Sport
Accountancy 1281–2w
Capita 346–8w
Contracts 1155–7w
Discrimination 1232w
Employment tribunals 933w
Energy 1231–2w
Equal pay 931w
Hotels 931w
Information officers 1282w
Internet 269w
Manpower 344w
Ministerial policy advisors 933–4w
Non-governmental organisations 1160w
Orders and regulations 574–6w
Parental leave 1232w
Public appointments 1283w
Public relations 264w, 576–7w, 929w
Publications 270–4w
Railways 346w
Recruitment 269–70w
Relocation services 931–2w
Travel 259–61w
Visits abroad 260w
Voluntary work 344–5w
Warrington 528w

Dept for Education and Employment
Circulars 386w

Dept for Education and Skills
Accountancy 1279w
Advertising 760–2w
Bristol 493w
Capita 234–5w, 759w
Circulars 626–30w
Correspondence 493–4w
Design 387w, 769w
Fair trade initiative 757–8w
Hotels 384w, 1278–9w
Internet 232–3w
Land use 237–8w
Legal costs 759w
Manpower 1216w
Non-governmental organisations 1217w
Offices 235w
Press releases 764w
Private finance initiative 387w
Public appointments 756–8w, 1279w
Public expenditure 756w
Public relations 1133w
Regulatory Impact Unit 1279–80w
Relocation services 951w
Research 384w
Retirement 947w
Secondment 236–7w, 946–8w
Television 249w
Trade unions 503w
Travel 1216w
Visits abroad 1216w
Voluntary work 387w
Warrington 391w

Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs
Air conditioning 1235w
Bristol 638w
Empty property 218w
Equal pay 940w
Fair trade initiative 642w
Internet 792w
Market research 209w

***Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs**—continued*
Older workers 215w
Railways 939–40w
Relocation services 792w
Secondment 209–10w
Speeches 485w
Voluntary work 224–5w
Warrington 795w
Work sharing 791w
Working hours 638–9w

Dept for International Development
Accountancy 335w, 897w
Advertising 337w
Air conditioning 896w
Capita 337w, 466w
Catering 341w
Conferences 897–8w
EC law 340–1w
Employment tribunals 894w
Equal pay 899w
Equipment 892w
Fair trade initiative 339w
Festivals and special occasions 897w
Flexible working 1191–2w
Hotels 898w
Information officers 898w, 1131w
Manpower 337–8w
Ministerial policy advisors 896–7w
Non-governmental organisations 465–6w
Operating costs 893w
Parental leave 1128–9w
Parliamentary questions 895w
Press releases 466w
Public appointments 895w
Public relations 465–6w, 682–3w
Railways 685w
Recruitment 341w
Relocation services 899w
Theft 891w
Visits abroad 1130w
Voluntary work 341–2w
Wood 894–5w
Work sharing 898w

Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions
Bus services 920w
Capita 564–6w
Catering 555w
Cendent Relocation (UK) 749w
City of London 180w
Contracts 100w, 1092–3w
Correspondence 555–6w
Departmental expenditure limits 376w, 571w
Departmental responsibilities 740–1w
Disciplinary proceedings 904w
Dismissal 905w
Energy 1088w
Equal pay 1198–9w
Equipment 84w
Fair trade initiative 179w
Flexible working 1088w
Fraud 751w
Grants 913–4w
Hotels 905w
Information officers 903–4w
Manpower 373w
Ministerial policy advisors 572w, 904w, 1199w
Non-governmental organisations 177w, 1086w
Official hospitality 580w
Public expenditure 743–5w
Public private partnerships 82w, 1096w
Railways 562–3w
Recruitment 735w
Regulatory Impact Unit 1203w
Relocation services 750w, 905w
Research 90–1w, 901w, 910–1w

***Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions**—continued*
Stationery 562w
Supply estimates 380w, 1198w
Trade unions 904–5w
Travel 1198w
Visits abroad 176w, 1198w
Voluntary work 179w
Warrington 190w
Work sharing 742w

Dept for Work and Pensions
Accountancy 26–7w
Capita 23–6w, 418–9w
Empty property 1117–8w
Ministerial policy advisors 27–8w
Older workers 418w
Orders and regulations 530w
Publications 532w
Secondment 1119–20w
Sight impaired 725w
Warrington 253w

Dept of Health
Accountancy 1009w
Advertising 1039–40w
Bristol 1009–10w
Buildings 1140w
Capita 464w
Civil servants 422–3w
Construction 987–8w
Consultation papers 1009w
Contracts 429w
Correspondence 432w, 1000–1w, 1048–9w
Departmental responsibilities 1056w
Design 1142–3w
Energy 831w
Enron 427w
Equipment 434w
Fair trade initiative 835w, 1142w
Festivals and special occasions 1063w
Forms 538–9w
Information officers 1062–3w
Land use 1141w
Manpower 1054w
Market research 1056w
Ministerial policy advisors 1062–3w
Official cars 1006w
Orders and regulations 1010w
Parliamentary questions 1048–9w
Pay 1149–50w
Private finance initiative 140w, 279–81w
Public appointments 281–2w, 1031–2w
Public expenditure 999w, 1025–6w
Public private partnerships 282–4w
Public relations 1054–5w
Publicity 1055–6w, 1058w
Railways 1143w
Select committees 988w
Television 464w
Terrorism 1055w
Visits abroad 1144w
Voluntary work 1141w
Written questions 192w, 275–6w, 841–5w, 1046w, 1049w, 1149w

Dept of Trade and Industry
Accountancy 890w
Advertising 592w
Buildings 2w
Capita 1w
Catering 668w
Cendent Relocation (UK) 667w
Contracts 2–3w
Correspondence 589–90w, 678w
EC law 2w
Equal pay 668w
Equipment 587w
Flexible working 886w
Global Crossing 153w
Hotels 669w
Information officers 588w

***Dept of Trade and Industry**—continued*
Land use 348w
Non-governmental organisations 592w
Parental leave 885–6w
Press releases 4–5w
Public expenditure 1w
Public relations 5w, 593w
Railways 356w
Recruitment 886–8w
Regulatory Impact Unit 353w
Relocation services 667w, 669w
Theft 488w
Visits abroad 148–9w
Voluntary work 350w
Warrington 673w
Work sharing 669w

Derbyshire
Enterprise grant scheme 3w
Sixth form education 1213w

Derelict land
Tax allowances 398w

Design Champions Ministerial Group
1231w, 1282–3w

Detainees
Asylum 49–50w, 313w, 975w

Developing countries
see also Heavily indebted poor countries initiative
Children 329w, 1191w
Corruption 331w
Disease control 279–80, 336–7w, 897w
Drugs 331w
Education 278–9, 333–4w, 683w
Fisheries 332–3w
Foreign trade 333w
Overseas aid 273–6

Devolution
Public expenditure 201w

Dhanda, Mr Parmjit
Debates etc.
Criminal Evidence (Prohibition of Sale) Bill, 1R (06.03.02) 304–6

Diabetes
120–1w, (13.03.02) 300–7wh
Ambulance services 1247w
Fire services 570w
Police 537w

Dietary supplements
Research 983–4w

Digital broadcasting
268–9w

Digital certificates
VAT 114–6w

Dioxins
South East London Combined Heat and Power 359–60w

Diplomatic service
Absent voting 570w
Romania 391w

Dir92/83/EEC
109w

Dir96/48/EC
908–9w

Dir99/74/EC
943–4w

Dir2000/43/EC
570w

Dir2000/60/EC
480w

Dir2001/16/EC
908–9w

Dir2001/82/EC
228w

Director of Public Prosecutions
see Crown Prosecution Service

Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland
see Northern Ireland Dept of the Director of Public Prosecutions

Disability appeal tribunals
Doctors 728w

Disability Discrimination Act 1995
Questions
382w, 419w, 536–7w, 888w

Disability living allowance
1251w
Appeals 603–4w
Applications 603w
Hyperactivity 419w, 439–40w

Disabled
Employment 18w
Railways 739–40w
Small businesses 888w
Taxis 748w

Disabled facilities grants
1200–1w

Disabled Facilities Grants and Home Repairs Assistance (Maximum Amount) (Amendment No 2) (England) Order 2001
Debates etc.
(04.03.02) 123–4

Disabled Person's Transport Advisory Committee
Autism 95w

Disadvantaged
Credit unions 354w
Employment 20w
Greater London 547w
Higher education 39–41w
Transport 227w, 1070w
Young offenders 710w

Disciplinary proceedings
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 904w

Discrimination
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 1232w
Employment 28w, 420–1w
HIV infection 419w
Mentally ill 1124w

Disease control
Bovine tuberculosis 786–90w
Developing countries 279–80, 336–7w, 897w
Foot and mouth disease 212–3w, 406–8, 481–2w, 485w, 718–9w, 782–4w

Diseases
Eyesight (05.03.02) 45–53wh

Dismissal
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 905w

Dismore, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, Rep and 3R (15.03.02) 1139–45, 1158–60, 1171–2, 1176, 1181–2, 1189–90
Terrorism (04.03.02) 127
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Industrial health and safety (14.03.02) 326–8wh, 347–50wh
Questions
Absent voting, Diplomatic service 570w
Corporate manslaughter 975–6w
Housing benefit, Abuse 1119w
Measles, Greater London 1139w

***Dismore, Mr Andrew**—continued*
Pensions, Patients 16w

Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Questions
Hinchingbrooke Hospital, Manpower 1014w
Institutional care 830w
Members, Correspondence 636w

Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Questions
Elections, Expenditure 752w
NHS, Finance 296–300w

Doctors
Disability appeal tribunals 728w
Retirement 1000w

Dodds, Mr Nigel
Questions
Customs and Excise, Northern Ireland 470w
Police, Northern Ireland 525w

Dogs
Animal welfare 796w

Dolphins
Conservation (13.03.02) 293–9wh
Fishing gear 216–7w

Domestic violence
1174–5w
Children 287–8
Police 1105–6w

Donaldson, Mr Jeffrey M
Questions
Bloody Sunday Tribunal of Inquiry 33w
Defence equipment, Northern Ireland 705w
Prisoner escapes, Northern Ireland 705w
Regional assemblies 145

Doncaster
New deal schemes 14w

Doncaster Prison
1224–5w

Donohoe, Mr Brian H
Debates etc.
Nuclear power stations (05.03.02) 221
Questions
Council of Ministers 394–6w
Europe Day 394w
Hong Kong, Foreign relations 394w
Members, Correspondence 1100w

Donors
Blood 825w

Doran, Mr Frank
Debates etc.
Nuclear power stations (05.03.02) 223, 225, 228

Dorset
Standards Fund 1280–1w

Double taxation
USA 1229–30w

Doughty, Sue
Debates etc.
Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL), Programme motion and Rep (11.03.02) 691, 699
Environmental audit (07.03.02) 482–3
Questions
Electronic equipment, Waste disposal 477w

Drew, Mr David
Questions
BAE Systems, Filton 670w
Channel tunnel railway line, Freight 742–3w

***Drew, Mr David**—continued*
- Children in care, Standards 986–7w
- Computers 678w
- Disability living allowance, Hyperactivity 419w, 439–40w
- Energy, Conservation 361–3w, 640–1w
- Farm business tenancies 229w
- Local strategic partnerships 102w
- Madagascar, Politics and government 868w
- Planning permission, Rural areas 83w
- Railway stations 103w
- Railways, Engineers 558w
- Railways, South West region 743–4w, 1272w
- Sewers 230–1w
- Social security benefits, Stroud 535–6w
- Transport, Disadvantaged 227w
- Village halls 227w

Drift nets
- 483w

Drinking water
- Working conditions 1153w

Driving
- Licensing 738w

Driving under influence
- Cannabis 583w

Dronfield School
- Petitions (07.03.02) 523

Drown, Ms Julia
- *Questions*
- Cameroon, International assistance 273
- Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 227w
- Home births 135w
- Hospitals, Waiting lists 807w
- Railways, Safety 168w

Drug seizures
- Heroin 1288–9w

Drugs
- Afghanistan 204–6w
- Arthritis 424–5w, 613–4w, 836w
- Cancer 815w, 1019w
- Central Asia 690–1w
- Crime 48w, 866w, 1109w
- Developing countries 331w
- Health education 1218w
- Leukaemia 1065w
- Misuse 46w, 435w, 708w, 714w, 822–3w, 1148–50w
- Multiple sclerosis 1003w
- Night clubs 968w
- Pupil exclusions 251w
- Schools 251w
- Side effects 130–2w
- Turkey 690–1w
- Turkmenistan 692w

Dual use goods and technologies
- Exports 588w

Duchy of Lancaster Benevolent Fund
- 1070w

Dumping
- Plastics 670–1w

Duncan, Mr Alan
- *Sittings in Westminster Hall*
- Iraq (06.03.02) 84–6wh
- Sudan (13.03.02) 263–6wh, 268wh, 271wh
- *Questions*
- Colombia 63–4w
- Colombia, Peace negotiations 607w
- Latin America 64w
- Listed buildings, Internet 932w
- Middle East, Peace negotiations 752–3
- Nepal 203w
- Nepal, Peace negotiations 203w

***Duncan, Mr Alan**—continued*
- Nepal, Politics and government 203–4w

Duncan, Mr Peter
- *Debates etc.*
- Nuclear power stations (05.03.02) 224, 239, 243–4
- *Questions*
- A76, Speed limits 1207–8w
- Asbestos, Industrial health and safety 179–80w
- Broadband, Business 1185–6w
- Combined heat and power 1153w
- Commonwealth Development Corporation, Africa 276–7
- Commonwealth Development Corporation, Overseas investment 891w
- Electricity Act 1989 693w
- Employee share ownership schemes 966–7w
- Females, Scotland 899–900w
- Foot and mouth disease, Compensation 213w
- Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries 1209w
- Foot and mouth disease, Taxation 967w
- Industrial diseases, Compensation 671w
- Jobcentres, Information technology 27w
- Livestock, Markets 411
- Members, Data protection 706w
- MV Solway Harvester 752w
- National Lottery, Land 936w
- Natural gas 672w
- NHS, National insurance contributions 1038w
- NHS Direct 1009w
- Overseas aid, Health education 684–5w
- Plastics, Dumping 670–1w
- Post offices, Bank services 1183w
- Railways, Freight 137
- Scotland Act 1998 1207w
- Shipping, Accidents 746–7w
- Sight impaired, Dept for Work and Pensions 725w
- Social security benefits, Automated credit transfer 413–4w

Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
- *Debates etc.*
- Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference (06.03.02) 293–5
- *Questions*
- Council tax 885–6
- Crime 880–2
- Railtrack, Finance 285–7
- USA, Iron and steel 281–2

Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
- *Debates etc.*
- Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 156
- *Questions*
- Accident and emergency departments, Working hours 1005–6w
- Railways, Freight 137–8

***Eagle, Angela**, Parliamentary Secretary, Home Office*
- *Sittings in Westminster Hall*
- National Asylum Support Service (12.03.02) 245–8wh
- *Questions*
- Advertising, Home Office 974w
- Air conditioning, Home Office 1221–2w
- Animal experiments 517–8w
- Animal experiments, Genetic engineering 976–7w
- Antisemitism 45–6w
- Arthur Andersen, Home Office 973w
- Asylum 709w, 1102w
- Asylum, Appeals 971–2w
- Asylum, Children 970–1w
- Asylum, Deportation 158w
- Asylum, Detainees 49–50w, 313w, 975w

***Eagle, Angela**—continued*
- Asylum, EC action 969–70w
- Asylum, Essex 157–8w
- Asylum, France 969w
- Asylum, Funerals 1228w
- Asylum, Housing 159–60w, 718w
- Asylum, Human rights 516w
- Asylum, RAF Turnhouse 719w
- Asylum, Throckmorton airfield 595–7w
- Billing, Home Office 972–3w
- British overseas citizenship, Special voucher scheme 161w
- Conferences, Home Office 973w
- Contracts, Home Office 1271w
- Correspondence, Home Office 522–3w
- Departmental responsibilities, Home Office 48w
- Design, Home Office 1225w
- Empty property, Home Office 978–9w
- Equal pay, Home Office 1096w
- EU Justice Home Affairs and Civil Protection Council 520–1w, 1260–2w
- European Police Office, Terrorism 519w
- Experience Corps 514–5w
- Fair trade initiative, Home Office 1103w
- Hinduja, Prakash 48–9w
- Holiday leave, Home Office 1098–100w
- Holocaust Memorial Day, Armenia 1222–3w
- Human trafficking, Females 45w
- Immigration 516w, 1107w
- Immigration, Marriage 516w
- Immigration controls, EC action 1106w
- Information officers, Home Office 1096w
- Internet, Home Office 1262–3w
- Land use, Home Office 1102w
- Members, Correspondence 982w
- Minister for Women, Home Office 47w
- National Asylum Support Service 630–1
- Official hospitality, Home Office 722w
- Orders and regulations, Home Office 42–5w
- Press releases, Home Office 1227–8w
- Racial discrimination 1104–5w
- Racial discrimination, EC action 520w
- Railways, Home Office 1099w
- "Secure Borders Safe Haven White Paper" 158w
- Standards, Home Office 49–50w
- Visits abroad, Home Office 979w
- Voluntary work, Home Office 1102–3w
- Warrington, Home Office 717–8w
- Work permits, Applications 45w
- Work permits, Lithuania 974–5w
- Working hours, Home Office 518–9w
- Yarls Wood Detention Centre 157w, 522w, 719–20w

***Eagle, Maria**, Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Work and Pensions*
- *Questions*
- Attendance allowance 1–3
- Carers, Social security benefits 536w
- Diabetes, Police 537w
- Disability appeal tribunals, Doctors 728w
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995 536–7w
- Disability living allowance 1251w
- Disability living allowance, Appeals 603–4w
- Disability living allowance, Applications 603w
- Disability living allowance, Hyperactivity 419w
- HIV infection, Discrimination 419w
- Income support 1252w
- Minimum funding requirement 536w
- New deal for disabled people 16–8
- Pensioners, Income support 961w
- Secondment, Dept for Work and Pensions 1119–20w

Eagle, Maria—continued
- Sight impaired, Dept for Work and Pensions 725w
- Social security benefits, Appeals 723w, 730–4w
- Social security benefits, Carers 3–4
- Social security benefits, Patients 1251w
- Social security benefits, Stroud 535–6w
- State earnings related pension scheme 723w
- Television, Licensing 1238–9w
- Winter fuel payments 1239w

Ear nose and throat
- Medical equipment 1058w

Early retirement
- Teachers 1136–7w

East London river crossing
- 917w

East Midlands
- Railways 135–7

East Riding
- Hospitals 545w
- Standard spending assessments 751–2w
- Surgery 544–5w

East Riding Health Authority
- 845–6w

East Sussex
- Crimes of violence 718w
- Institutional care 548w
- Teachers 42w

Eastbourne
- Institutional care 548w

EC action
- Aerospace industry 32w
- Asylum 969–70w
- Emissions trading scheme 73–4w
- Financial services 111w
- Hazardous materials 792–3w
- Herbal medicine 433–4w
- Immigration controls 1106w
- Magistrates 1107w, 1177–8w
- Organised crime 519w
- Ozone layer 797–8w
- Parental responsibility 50w
- Racial discrimination 520w
- Railways 102w

EC Agriculture Council
- Scottish Executive 229–30w, 361w

EC aid
- 860w
- West Africa 326–7w

EC budget
- Fraud 521w

EC Cons Doc 7262/2001
- (04.03.02) 122

EC Cons Doc 7263/2001
- (04.03.02) 122

EC Cons Doc 7377/2001
- (04.03.02) 122

EC Cons Doc 7378/2001
- (04.03.02) 122

EC countries
- Health services 295w
- Hip replacements 829w
- Medical treatments 306w, 809w, 1060w, 1147w
- Railways 908–9w
- Rapid deployment forces 476w
- Small businesses 149w

EC defence policy
- 31w
- NATO 31w

EC enlargement
- 863–4w
- Central Europe 1297w
- Common agricultural policy 756
- Cyprus 755–6
- Romania 391w

EC Environment Council
- 1285–7w

EC Finance Council
- 965–6w

EC Foreign Affairs Council
- 1192–5w
- Scottish Executive 65–6w, 504w, 870w

EC grants and loans
- Gibraltar 61–2w

EC labour policy
- 1240w

EC law
- Apples 229w
- Conditions of employment 356w
- Dept for International Development 340–1w
- Dept of Trade and Industry 2w
- Environment 479w
- Excise duties 109w
- Food 942–3w
- Lord Chancellor's Dept 56–8w
- Motor vehicles 217–8w, 586–7w, 1090w
- Parliamentary scrutiny 62–3w
- Pears 229w
- Poultry 796w, 943–4w
- Recycling 399–402
- Tipping of waste 217w
- Veterinary medicine 228w
- Water 480w
- Water treatment 231w

EC Research Council
- Scottish Executive 355w

Economic and monetary union
- 106w, 112w, (05.03.02) 262–70
- Publicity 645w

Edinburgh
- Motor vehicles 374w

Education
- Assessments 388–90w, 624w, 1209–11w
- Asylum 947–8w
- Bristol 1136w
- Developing countries 278–9, 333–4w, 683w
- Finance 770–1w, 1218–9w
- Human rights 948–9w
- Leeds 241–2w
- Per capita costs 951–2w
- Prisons 716w, 1226–7w
- Qualifications 1218w
- Standard spending assessments 621–2w, 1215–6w
- Standards 771–2w, 1217w
- Tibet 1128w
- Wales 232w

Edwards, Mr Huw
- *Questions*
  - Asylum, Voucher schemes 1010w
  - Child Support Agency, Powers 411–2w
  - Children, Poverty 1123w
  - Financial services, Low incomes 492w
  - Foot and mouth disease, Compensation 416
  - Postal services, Rural areas 488w
  - Salmon, Severn estuary 941–2w
  - Severn bridge 558–9w
  - Students, Fees and charges 37w
  - Students, Finance 37–8w, 494–5w

Efford, Clive
- *Questions*
  - Uranium, Health hazards 1179–80w

Egypt
- WENA Hotels 869w

Elderly
- Crime 1100–1w
- Crimes of violence 162w
- Health services 1037w
- Residential and nursing care see Institutional care
- Social services 440–6w, 1063w

Elections
- Democratic Republic of Congo 68w
- Expenditure 752w
- Local government 173w, 570w, 1086w
- Mayors 1090w
- Zimbabwe 68–9w, 686w, 740–3

Electoral Commission
- Publicity 750w

Electoral register
- 381–2w, 511w, 1243–4w

Electricity
- 348–9w

Electricity Act 1989
- *Questions*
  - 693w

Electrification
- Railways 1274–5w

Electronic equipment
- Waste disposal 5w, 78w, 232w, 477–8w, 937–8w

Electronic government
- 79–80w, 877–8
- Democracy (12.03.02) 863–70
- Local authorities 183–4w

Electronic tagging
- Greater London 1225w
- Offenders 1098w

Electronic voting
- 1204w

Ellman, Mrs Louise
- *Debates etc.*
  - Terrorism (04.03.02) 126
- *Questions*
  - Jobcentre Plus 15w
  - Local government finance, Liverpool 744w
  - Miscarriages of justice, Counselling 972w

Email
- Treasury 401–2w
- Unsolicited goods and services 352–3w

Emergencies
- Small businesses 1079w

Emissions trading scheme
- EC action 73–4w

Employee share ownership schemes
- 966–7w

Employer Direct
- Standards 531w

Employment
- Children 683w
- Civil servants 236w
- Disabled 18w
- Disadvantaged 20w
- Discrimination 28w, 420–1w
- Females 23w

Employment credit
- 696w

Employment schemes
- 28w

Employment Service
Crimes of violence 724w

Employment tribunals
Civil servants 875
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 933w
Dept for International Development 894w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1294w

Empty property
Cabinet Office 777–9w
Council housing 1086w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 218w
Dept for Work and Pensions 1117–8w
Home Office 978–9w
Housing 173w
Northern Ireland Office 57–8w
St Helens 83–4w
Solicitor-General 883–4w
Tyne and Wear 582w

Energy
Conservation 73–6w, 361–3w, 640–1w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 1231–2w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1088w
Dept of Health 831w
Home Office 975w
Social rented housing 903w
Treasury 1115w

Energy Policy Review
(13.03.02) 272–92wh, 402–4, 873–4

Energy supply
Scotland 673–4w

Engineering
1211w
Consultants 149–50w
Higher education 41w, 678w, 762–3w
Manpower 150w
National vocational qualifications 250w
Skilled workers 497w, 888–9w

Engineers
Aerospace industry 592w
Railways 558w

Engines
Future large aircraft 871w

English Heritage
933w
Fees and charges 1154–5w

English Partnerships
1085w

English Sports Council
13–4w

English Tourism Council
Finance 269w

Ennis, Jeff
Questions
Drugs, Misuse 714w
Enterprise grant scheme, South Yorkshire 889w
Long term unemployed 19–20w

Enron
Dept of Health 427w

Enterprise grant scheme
Derbyshire 3w
South Yorkshire 889w

Entertainers
Vetting 982w

Entrust
Landfill tax credit scheme 697–9w

Environment
EC law 479w

Environment Agency
220w

Environment protection
Forests 364w
Northern Ireland Office 57w

Environmental audit
Estimates days (07.03.02) 451–92

Environmental health
Primary care trusts 830w

Epsom
Housing benefit 410w

Equal opportunities
Armed forces 316–7w, 655–6w
Females (14.03.02) 1060–115
House of Commons 1116–7w

Equal pay
5–6w
Cabinet Office 956–7w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 931w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 940w
Dept for International Development 899w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1198–9w
Dept of Trade and Industry 668w
Finchley 669w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 867–8w
Glasgow 668w
Home Office 1096w
Milton Keynes 151w
Ministry of Defence 1161–2w
North West region 1185w
Prime Minister 1252w
Stafford 151w
Statistics 1184w
Stockton on Tees 1183–4w
Treasury 471–2w
Warrington 1184–5w

Equitable Life Assurance Society
966w

Equity
Mortgages 1110w

Essex
Asylum 157–8w
Institutional care 825–6w
Sexual offences 1225–6w

Estimates days
Environmental audit (07.03.02) 451–92
Terrorism (07.03.02) 493–522

Ethiopia
Art works 1233w
Overseas aid 892–3w

Ethnic groups
Botswana 277–8
Juries 1245w
Magistrates 405–6w
Prisoners 600–4w
Public appointments 1071w

EU Employment and Social Policy Council
Scottish Executive 1241w

EU Internal Market Consumer Affairs and Tourism Council
1077–8w
Scottish Executive 489w

EU Justice Home Affairs and Civil Protection Council
520–1w, 1260–2w

Euro
Business 468w
Climate change levy 117w
Common agricultural policy 214w

Europe Day
394w

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
341w, 693w, 1129w

European Commission
869w, 1172w
Public appointments 1067–8w

European Communities
see also EC and EU headings

European Federation of Journalists
68w

European Parliament elections
(06.03.02) 90–108wh

European Police Office
Terrorism 519w
USA 519–20w

Evans, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 170–2, 201
Questions
Correspondence, Dept for Education and Skills 493–4w
Correspondence, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 555–6w
Correspondence, Dept of Health 432w
Correspondence, Dept of Trade and Industry 589–90w
Correspondence, Home Office 522–3w
Correspondence, Northern Ireland Office 61w
Correspondence, President of the Council 198w
Crime, Alcoholic drinks 1264w
Crimes of violence 1264–6w
Crimes of violence, Wales 517w
Institutional care, Lancashire 839w
Official hospitality, Lord Chancellor's Dept 404w
Social services, Elderly 440–6w

Evolution
Curriculum 886–7

Ewing, Annabelle
Debates etc.
Nuclear power stations (05.03.02) 229, 246, 253
Police (08.03.02) 541, 596–8
Roads, Safety (08.03.02) 615
Questions
Accountancy, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 1281–2w
Accountancy, Dept for International Development 335w
Accountancy, Dept for Work and Pensions 26–7w
Accountancy, Northern Ireland Office 59w
Attendance allowance 3
Contracts, Treasury 1113–4w
Minister for Women, Home Office 47w
Police, Pay 708–9w
Retirement, Age 23w
Social security benefits, Patients 723w, 1251w

Exchange Direct
Company investigations 490w, 1258w

Excise duties
Alcoholic drinks 200–1w, 473w
Beer 200w
Community transport 172w
EC law 109w
Fuels 9w, 116w
Motor vehicles 1089–90w
Tobacco 200–1w

Executives
NHS 427–8w, 1065–6w
Social rented housing 172w

Exemptions
Stamp duties 966w

Exercise referral schemes
133w

Exercise Tradewinds 01
30–1w

Exhaust emissions
362w

Experience Corps
514–5w

Explosives
Factories 656w, 1169w

Export controls
Arms trade 66w, 892w
Refrigerators 1109w

Export credit guarantees
Dams 2w

Exports
Dual use goods and technologies 588w
Languages 674w
Licensing 399w, 701–2w
Meat 944–5w

External financing limits
Consignia 357–8w

Eyesight
Diseases (05.03.02) 45–53wh
Scotland Office 513w
Surgery 135w, 826–7w

Fabricant, Michael
Debates etc.
Bank services (14.03.02) 1030
Channel tunnel, Points of order (13.03.02) 906
Ministerial statement intervention (14.03.02) 1025
Ministers, Points of order (04.03.02) 21
Office of Communications Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (06.03.02) 322–3, 326–8, 330–3, 341–4, 353–4, 361–4, 376, 384–6
Oral question time intervention (04.03.02) 3
Questions
Attendance allowance 2
Developing countries, Education 279
Electronic government 878
North Korea 755
Parliamentary data and video network 1207–8w
UK membership of EC 395w, 1192w

Factories
Explosives 656w, 1169w

Fair trade initiative
285, (14.03.02) 1116–24
Dept for Education and Skills 757–8w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 642w
Dept for International Development 339w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 179w
Dept of Health 835w, 1142w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 606w
Home Office 1103w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 526w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 365w
Solicitor-General 875–6w
Treasury 110w

Falkland Islands
Armed conflict 1171w
Fisheries 739–40

Fallon, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Central Government Audit and Accountability Review (13.03.02) 898
Greater London (12.03.02) 811, 815
Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 166
Questions
Civil servants, Dept of Health 422–3w
Experience Corps 514–5w
Housing, Prices 189–90w
Housing, South East region 188–9w
Shared ownership schemes 189w

Family practitioner services
Nurses 838–9w

Fares
London Underground 370–1w
Public transport 92w
Railways 190–1w, 919w

Farm business tenancies
229w

Farmers
see also Agriculture
Supermarkets 936w, 1077w

"Farming and Food"
944w

Farms
see also Agriculture
Game 637–8w
Plastics 485w

Farrelly, Paul
Debates etc.
Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference (06.03.02) 301
Office of Communications Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (06.03.02) 327

Fast track teaching programme
Costs 35–6w

Females
Afghanistan 330–1w, 648w, 864w
Clergy 147w
Employment 23w
Equal opportunities (14.03.02) 1060–115
Human trafficking 45w
Microcredit programmes 340w
Public appointments 879, 1071w
Scotland 899–900w

Festivals and special occasions
Dept for International Development 897w
Dept of Health 1063w

Field, Rt Hon Frank
Questions
Clergy, Females 147w
Community care 1024w
Hospitals, Children 1013w
Medical treatments, EC countries 306w
National Insurance Fund 468w
Pensioners, Income support 414–5w
Pensions, Public sector 1230–1w

Field, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL), Programme motion and Rep (11.03.02) 642, 653–5, 659, 662, 696–7, 717, 723, 725–6
Police (08.03.02) 536, 549, 582, 587
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Industrial health and safety (14.03.02) 330–1wh, 343–5wh
Questions
Advance corporation tax, Pension funds 110–1w
City of London, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 180w
Council tax 180–1w

***Field, Mr Mark**—continued*
Council tax, Greater London 181w
Departmental expenditure limits, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 376w
Housing, Greater London 376–8w
Leasehold 196w
Local government finance 738–40w
Local government finance, City of London 377–9w, 739w
London Underground, Speed limits 1082w
Non-domestic rates, Greater London 180w
Pension funds, Accountancy 702w

Filkin, Elizabeth
Pay 467–8w

Film
North East region 929–32w, 1155w
Scotland 281

Filton
BAE Systems 670w

Financial services
EC action 111w
Low incomes 492w

Financial Services Authority
Public appointments 1110w

Finchley
Equal pay 669w

Fire prevention
Aylesbury Young Offender Institution 1097w

Fire services
101w, 746w, 1091w
Diabetes 570w
Finance 1201w
Local strategic partnerships 1090w
Manpower 1201–2w
Private finance initiative 1202w
Standards 98w
Training 1202w
Vacancies 1091w

Firearms
Accidents 132–3w
Licensing 312–3w
Northern Ireland 58w

Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997
Questions
58w

Firearms (Replica Weapons) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (15.03.02) 1203

Fireworks
152–3w

Fish
Conservation 210–2w

Fisheries
483w
Compensation 152w
Developing countries 332–3w
Falkland Islands 739–40

Fishing
485w

Fishing gear
Dolphins 216–7w

Fishing vessels
363–4w
Decommissioning 212w

Fitzsimons, Lorna
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Greater Manchester Police, Finance (05.03.02) 62wh, 66–7wh
Questions
Planning 141

***Fitzsimons, Lorna**—continued*
Students, Finance 999–1000
Terrorism 748–9

Flexible working
Dept for International Development 1191–2w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1088w
Dept of Trade and Industry 886w

Flight, Mr Howard
Questions
Customs and Excise, Criminal investigation 105w
Double taxation, USA 1229–30w

Flint, Caroline
Questions
After school clubs, New Opportunities Fund 35w
Children, Day care 1072w
Coal, Mining 102–3w

Flood control
363w, 411–3, 484w

Floods
642w
Bolivia 338w
Lee Valley 942w
Lewes 483w
River Roding 483–4w

Flook, Mr Adrian
Questions
Annual business inquiry 399–400w
Education, Per capita costs 951–2w
Leukaemia, Drugs 1065w
Local education authorities, South West region 1135w

Flynn, Paul
Debates etc.
World Summit on Sustainable Development (07.03.02) 449
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Sudan (13.03.02) 253–5wh
Questions
Arthritis, Drugs 613–4w, 836w
Business questions 434
Drugs, Misuse 46w, 822–3w, 1148–50w
Institutional care, Prescription drugs 1003–4w

Follett, Barbara
Questions
Chiropody 539–41w
Chiropody, Manpower 433w
Medical treatments, Costs 287–8w
Zimbabwe, Elections 740–1

Food
EC law 942–3w
Marketing 938w
Pesticides 121–2w
Safety 550w

Food Labelling Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R adjourned (15.03.02) 1203

Food Standards Agency
409–10

Foot and mouth disease
212–3w, 481–2w, 782–3w
Compensation 213w, 416, 783w
Cumbria 781–2w
Disease control 212–3w, 406–8, 481–2w, 485w, 718–9w, 782–4w
Inquiries 71w, 216w, 783–4w, 1209w
Kidderminster 783w
Meat 1016w
North Yorkshire 781w
Northumberland 212w

***Foot and mouth disease**—continued*
Public footpaths 415–6
Rodents 213–4w
Scotland 1209w
St Agnes Farm 482–3w
Taxation 967w
Tourism 1154w

Football
World Cup 863w

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Accountancy 1171w
Advertising 1169–70w
Capita 607w
Employment tribunals 1294w
Equal pay 867–8w
Fair trade initiative 606w
Freedom of Information Act 2000 1297–8w
Hotels 607w, 686w
Land use 608w
Non-governmental organisations 391w, 1296w
Public appointments 1297w
Public relations 1170w
Publicity 1174w
Railways 606w, 688w
Relocation services 1294w
Secondment 1169w
Sponsorship 65w
Trade unions 202w
Visits abroad 606–7w
Voluntary work 203w
Wines 67–8w
Work sharing 687w, 867w

Foreign Exchange Transactions Tax Commission Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
1R (13.03.02) 902–6

Foreign investment in UK
Cynon Valley 529–30w

Foreign loans
World War II 1114w

Foreign relations
Hong Kong 394w
Iraq 866–7w
Zimbabwe 862w

Foreign trade
Developing countries 333w

Foreign workers
Nurses 122–4w

Forests
Conferences 798w
Environment protection 364w
Subsidies 795–6w

Forfeiture
774w

Forms
Dept of Health 538–9w
Patent Office 740–1w

Forth, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Business questions intervention (07.03.02) 422, 434, (14.03.02) 1051, 1053
Copyright (Visually Impaired Persons) Bill, 2R (15.03.02) 1198–9
Greater London (12.03.02) 760
Jones, Ian, Points of order (04.03.02) 40, 64–5
Oral question time intervention (13.03.02) 880
Roads, Safety (08.03.02) 610
Questions
Business statements 417–21
Ministerial responsibility, Parliamentary questions 1069w

***Forth, Mr Eric**—continued*
Public appointments, Dept for Education and Skills 756–8w
Public appointments, Dept of Health 281–2w
Public appointments, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1237w
Written questions, Dept of Health 1149w

Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Questions
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 407
Regional assemblies 145
Terrorism 749

Foster, Mr Don
Debates etc.
Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL), Programme motion and Rep (11.03.02) 653, 674–5, 714
Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (13.03.02) 935, 970–1
Greater London (12.03.02) 785, 787
Questions
Channel tunnel railway line 560w
Contracts, Northern Ireland Office 58–60w
Electronic government 79–80w
Fire services 1091w
Fire services, Finance 1201w
Fire services, Local strategic partnerships 1090w
Fire services, Manpower 1201–2w
Fire services, Private finance initiative 1202w
Fire services, Training 1202w
Fire services, Vacancies 1091w
Industrial health and safety 563–4w
Industrial injuries 563w
NHS, Finance 277–80w
Passenger's Charter 905–6w
Public expenditure, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 743–5w
Rail Industry Group 735w
Railtrack, Finance 370w, 911–2w
Railways 373w, 559w
Railways, Disabled 739–40w
Railways, Finance 191w, 369w
Railways, Greater London 907w
Railways, Manpower 1273w
Railways, Repairs and maintenance 583w
Railways, Safety 745w
Railways, Skilled workers 907–8w
Railways, Standards 379w, 745w, 906–7w, 1272–3w
Research, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 910–1w
Rolling stock, Procurement 1273w
Secondment, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1169w
Transport, Finance 583w, 741–2w
Transport, Schools 382w
Travel, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 259–61w
Visits abroad, Cabinet Office 421–2w
Visits abroad, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 260w
Visits abroad, Dept for Education and Skills 1216w
Visits abroad, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1198w
Visits abroad, Home Office 979w
Visits abroad, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1076w
Visits abroad, Treasury 704w

***Foster, Mr Michael Jabez**, (Hastings and Rye)*
Debates etc.
Greater London (12.03.02) 837

***Foster, Mr Michael John**, (Worcester)*
Questions
Kashmir 862w
Medical profession, Worcestershire 1040–1w

Foster care
Pensions 420w

***Foulkes, Mr George**, Minister of State, Scotland Office*
Debates etc.
Nuclear power stations (05.03.02) 222, 241, 251–5
Questions
Nuclear power stations, Scotland 1208w

Fox, Dr Liam
Questions
Accident and emergency departments, Attendance 546w
Bridges, Somerset 372–3w
Cancer, Voluntary organisations 138w
Children Act 1989 547w
General practitioners, Performance appraisal 805–6w
General practitioners, Recruitment 805w
General practitioners, Training 304–5w
Hearing aids 833w
Hospital wards 545–6w
Hospitals, Catering 451w
Hospitals, Cemeteries 545w
Hospitals, Mortuary 547w
Hospitals, Waiting lists 544w
Infectious diseases 1029w
Members, Correspondence 803w
National Care Standards Commission, Commission for Health Improvement 1144w
NHS, Communication 1142w
NHS, National Lottery 140–1w
NHS, Powderject 305–6w
NHS, Public appointments 1031–2w
NHS, Standards 438w
NHS Direct 1008–9w
NHS Magazine 1029w
NHS trusts, Debts 118–9w
NHSnet 423–4w
Patients 138w
Roads, Tolls 141w
Smoking 832w
Surgery, Private sector 281w
Terrorism, Dept of Health 1055w
Tuberculosis, Vaccination 304w, 1015w
Wade, Nikki 276w
Wright, Lauren 1004–5w
Written questions, Administrative delays 275w

France
Asylum 969w
Beef 478–9w
Prisoners 1297w
War graves 166w, 475w

Franchises
National Lottery 116w
Railways 1273w

Francis, Dr Hywel
Debates etc.
Iron and steel, USA (06.03.02) 314–5
Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 193–6
Questions
Community development, Wales 957w
Sports, Wales 366w

Francois, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Environmental audit (07.03.02) 457, 470–2
Equal opportunities, Females (14.03.02) 1068
Greater London (12.03.02) 772

***Francois, Mr Mark**—continued*
Terrorism (07.03.02) 511
Questions
Crime, Greater London 633–4
Gibraltar, Spain 866w
NHS, Executives 427–8w
Social security benefits, Abuse 17–8w

Fraud
201w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 751w
EC budget 521w
Prosecutions 1012–3, 1236w
Training and enterprise councils 631–3w

Freedom of Information Act 2000
Questions
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1297–8w

Freight
918w
Central Railway 1278w
Channel tunnel railway line 137–8, 558w, 742–3w, 1088w, 1204w, 1276–7w
Railways 137–8, 1276w
West coast railway line 137

Fruit
Pesticides 225–6w
Schools 1138–9w

Fuel poverty
360–1w, 884–5w
Rural areas 484w

Fuels
Excise duties 9w, 116w
Northern Ireland 113w
Regulation 357w
Smuggling 113w

Funerals
Asylum 1228w

Fur Farming (Compensation Scheme) (England) Order 2002
Debates etc.
(11.03.02) 730

Further and Higher Education Act 1992
Questions
769w

Further education
Finance 1212w
Science 625–6w
Standards 1211w

Future large aircraft
343w, 658w
Engines 871w

Gale, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 207–8
Questions
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, Public private partnerships 577w
Sixsmith, Martin 902w

Galileo project
Road traffic control 382w

Galloway
Industrial diseases 671w

Galloway, Mr George
Debates etc.
Unparliamentary expressions, Personal statements (07.03.02) 450
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Iraq (06.03.02) 80–3wh, 88–9wh
Questions
Israel, Arms trade 590–1w, 689w
Israel, Nuclear weapons 505w

Gambling
Fees and charges [illegible]79–80w
Manpower 346w

Gambling Review [illegible]dy
346w, 680w
Coastal areas 345w

Game
Farms 637–8w

Gaming machines
345w

Gamma hydroxybutyrate
515w

Gapes, Mike
Debates etc.
Greater London (12.03.02) 761–2, 819, 821–6
Metropolitan Police, Points of order (13.03.02) 901
Zimbabwe (14.03.02) 1040
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Iraq (06.03.02) 75wh
Questions
River Roding, Floods 483–4w
Sub-Saharan Africa, Overseas aid 329w

Garages and petrol stations
Crime 716–7w

Gardiner, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
Bank services (14.03.02) 1025
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Mortgages (05.03.02) 54–8wh, 60wh
Questions
Arts festivals, Aldeburgh 345w

Garnier, Mr Edward
Debates etc.
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (04.03.02) 23, 26–7, 55, 60–1, 84–6
Questions
Speeches, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 485w
Written questions, Administrative delays 794–5w

Gas supply
see Natural gas

GCE A level
Mathematics 249–50w
Physics 249–50w

Gehring, Amy
240w

General practitioners
276w
Children 1063–4w
Lancashire 805w
Manpower 1024–5w
Performance appraisal 289w, 805–6w, 1038w
Recruitment 805w
Retirement 999–1000w
Standards 289–90w
Training 304–5w
Waiting lists 548–9w

Genetic engineering
Animal experiments 976–7w

Genetically modified organisms
Crops 75–7w
Imports 76–7w
Maize 210w

Genetics
136w, 981–2w

George, Andrew
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Dolphins, Conservation (13.03.02) 295–6wh
Questions
Common agricultural policy, Euro 214w
Fish, Conservation 210–2w
Fisheries 483w
Fishing vessels, Decommissioning 212w
Hearing aids 1143–4w
Recycling, EC law 400
Regional planning and development 1072w
Sea fisheries committees 211w

George, Rt Hon Bruce
Debates etc.
Environmental audit (07.03.02) 483
Terrorism (07.03.02) 493–5

German measles
Vaccination 811w

Gerrard, Mr Neil
Questions
Heathrow Airport, Air routes 1203w
National Asylum Support Service 630
Pensioners, Income support 961w
Right to buy, Greater London 1202–3w
"Secure Borders Safe Haven White Paper" 158w

Gibb, Mr Nick
Debates etc.
Central Government Audit and Accountability Review (13.03.02) 896–7
World Summit on Sustainable Development (07.03.02) 447–8
Questions
British Nuclear Fuels 672–3w
British Nuclear Fuels, Company accounts 151w
Housing benefit, Abuse 5
New Millennium Experience, Expenditure 262w
Police, Brixton 156w
Police stations, Charing Cross 981w
Social security benefits, Abuse 414w, 960w
Television, Licensing 266w

Gibraltar
681w
EC grants and loans 61–2w
Spain 61w, 504w, 866w

Gibson, Dr Ian
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Energy Policy Review (13.03.02) 273–4wh
Industrial health and safety (14.03.02) 345–7wh
NHS, Negligence (06.03.02) 109–13wh, 116wh
Questions
Airports, Finance 168w
Mental health services 819w
Mental health services, Finance 819–20w
National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts, Grants 934w
Probation officers, Manpower 1097w
Schizophrenia, Prescription drugs 1019–20w

Gidley, Sandra
Debates etc.
Equal opportunities, Females (14.03.02) 1065, 1079–83, 1093
Greater London (12.03.02) 769, 816, 846–7
Sittings in Westminster Hall
NHS, Finance (12.03.02) 213–5wh
Questions
Electoral register 1243–4w
Health centres 429w

Gidley, Sandra—continued
Maternity services liaison committees 131w
Members, Correspondence 426w

Gifted children
Secondary education 756w

Gilbey, Deena
1295w

Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Debates etc.
Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference (06.03.02) 300–1
Equal opportunities, Females (14.03.02) 1087, 1090, 1110–3
Zimbabwe (14.03.02) 1039
Sittings in Westminster Hall
National Institute for Clinical Excellence (05.03.02) 3–6wh, 11–2wh
Questions
Royal Parks Constabulary 261–2w
Winter fuel payments, Overseas residence 959–60w

Gilroy, Linda
Questions
Damages, Accidents 963–4w
Mirror Group Newspapers, Company investigations 1258–9w
Pensioners, Housing benefit 14–5w
Poverty, Urban areas 1073w

Glasgow
Equal pay 668w
Transplant surgery 1013–4w, 1150w

Global Alliance for Vaccination and Immunisation
12–3w

Global Crossing
Cabinet Office 422w
Dept of Trade and Industry 153w
Treasury 105w

Gloucestershire
Integrated administration and control system 223w
Structure plans 382–3w
Winter sports 263w

Goggins, Paul
Questions
Colombia, Peace negotiations 862w
Commonwealth Games, Manchester 888
Disability living allowance 1251w
Employment schemes 28w
Poverty, North West region 1072–3w

Golden Jubilee 2002
see Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries

Goodman, Mr Paul
Questions
Crimes of violence 626–7
Education, Assessments 1210–1w
Pensioners, Income support 12
Surgery, Buckingham 822w
Tuberculosis, Buckingham 1064w

Governing bodies
Schools 625w

Government bills
706–8w

Government departments
Buildings 209w
Construction 149w
Hearing impaired 1071–2w
Operating costs 1289w
Refrigeration 1152–3w
Standards 1108w
Sustainable development 793w

Government offices for the regions
Finance 779–80w

Graduates
Income 1131w

Graffiti
1153w

Grammar schools
1008–9

Gravesend
Civil proceedings 773–4w
County courts 1178w
Defaulters 773w
Repossession orders 773w

Gray, Mr James
Debates etc.
Terrorism (07.03.02) 514–7
Questions
Accidents, Fees and charges 1291–2w
Air force, Resignations 658w
Colerne airfield 1253–4w
Defence equipment, Procurement 476w
Education, Standard spending assessments 1215–6w
Foot and mouth disease, St Agnes Farm 482–3w
Future large aircraft 658w
Galileo project, Road traffic control 382w
HMS Sheffield 33w
HMS Vanguard, Repairs and maintenance 33w
Military aircraft, Procurement 655w
Military bases, York 655w
Patrol craft, Weapons 33w
Roll-on roll-off ships 326w
Submarines 165w
Transport Research Laboratory, Publications 101w
Type 22 frigates, Weapons 34w
Type 42 destroyers, Decommissioning 34w

Grayling, Chris
Questions
Advance corporation tax, Pension funds 110–1w
Airports, South East region 918w
Best value 182–3w
Bus services, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 920w
Central Railway 738w
Channel tunnel 919–20w
Channel tunnel railway line, Finance 557–8w
Chiltern railway line, Finance 190w
Crossrail line 921w, 1275w
Departmental responsibilities, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 740–1w
Developing countries, Disease control 279–80
Disadvantaged, Transport 1070w
East London river crossing 917w
Freight 918w
Gehring, Amy 240w
Grants, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 913–4w
Great Western Railway 1274w
Housing benefit, Epsom 410w
Institutional care 1014w
Institutional care, Fees and charges 611w, 1026–7w
Institutional care, Standards 1001–2w
Local authorities, Public private partnerships 920w
Local government, Publications 183–5w
Local government finance 1083w
Local government finance, Surrey 91w
London Underground, Public private partnerships 914–5w, 1274–5w

Grayling, Chris—continued
London Underground, Rolling stock 1274w
McAllister, Iain 171w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1199w
Moore, Jo 901–2w
Motor neurone disease, Medical treatments 537–8w
Motor vehicles, Licensing 374w
Motor vehicles, Testing 185–6w
Patent Office, Forms 740–1w
Planning permission, Greenbelt 185w, 747w
Police, Housing 155–6w
Police, Pay 714–5w
Public transport, Fares 92w
Public transport, Passengers 920–1w
Railtrack 170w
Railtrack, Finance 171w, 370w, 373w, 737–8w, 912w
Railways 191w
Railways, Assets 170w
Railways, EC countries 908–9w
Railways, Electrification 1274–5w
Railways, Fares 190–1w, 919w
Railways, Finance 170–1w, 379–80w, 908w, 918w
Railways, Greater Manchester 1275w
Railways, Repairs and maintenance 560w
Railways, Road traffic 919w
Railways, Safety 380w
Railways, Training 747w
Regional development agencies, Finance 747w
Roads, Construction 917w
Roads, Expenditure 585w
Roads, Privatisation 380w
Roads, Repairs and maintenance 91–2w
Roads, Safety 561w
Roads, Tolls 917w
Roads, Wales 1083w
Schools, Inspections 41w
Social Security Benefits Agency, Crimes of violence 533w
Speed limits, Road signs and markings 561w
Supply estimates, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 380w, 1198w
Supporting people programme 181–2w
Teachers, Misconduct 240w
Timeplan 252w
Trains, Overcrowding 1275w
Transport, Dead bodies 1082–3w
Transport, Finance 178w, 559w, 918–20w
Transport, Land use 918w
Transport, Schools 747w
Transport, South East region 92–3w
West coast railway line 139, 171w
Wolvercote Clinic 1101–2w

Great Eastern Railway
Passengers 191w

Great Western Railway
1274w

Great Western Trains
Standards 380w

Greater London
Asthma 450w
Council tax 181w
Crime 633–5
Dental services 301w
Disadvantaged 547w
Electronic tagging 1225w
Health action zones 817w
Hospital beds 995w
Hospitals (13.03.02) 989–96
Housing 376–8w, 882–3

Greater London—continued
Incinerators 358w
Measles 1139w
Midwives 614w
Non-domestic rates 180w
Opposition days (12.03.02) 760–862
Physiotherapy 1290w
Priority routes 82w
Railways 81w, 907w
Right to buy 567w, 1202–3w
Road traffic 141w, 383w
Road traffic control 380–1w
Roads 187w
Surgery 1143w
Young offenders 625–6

Greater London Authority Act 1999
Questions
84–5w, 87–8w, 383w

Greater Manchester
Railways 1275w

Greater Manchester Police
Finance (05.03.02) 61–8wh

Green, Mr Damian
Questions
Circulars, Dept for Education and Employment 386w
Circulars, Dept for Education and Skills 626–30w
Further and Higher Education Act 1992 769w
Pre-school education 1133w
Primary education, Literacy 38w
Primary education, Standards 38–9w
Pupils, Absenteeism 238w
Schools, Standards 40w
Teachers, Pay 1005–6

Green, Matthew
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Politics, Young people (05.03.02) 37–9wh

Greenbelt
Planning permission 185w, 747w

Greenway, Mr John
Debates etc.
Iron and steel, USA (06.03.02) 316
Questions
English Heritage, Fees and charges 1154–5w
English Sports Council 13–4w

Grieve, Mr Dominic
Questions
Crime, Victims 620–1
Customs and Excise, Property transfer 1289w

Griffiths, Jane
Debates etc.
Environmental audit (07.03.02) 454–6
Greater London (12.03.02) 787–8
Questions
Bus lanes 186w
Great Western Trains, Standards 380w
Local government finance 567–8w

***Griffiths, Nigel**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept of Trade and Industry*
Questions
Arms trade, Israel 590–1w
Business links, Telephone services 591–2w
Dual use goods and technologies, Exports 588w
Exports, Languages 674w
Exports, Licensing 399w
Fisheries, Compensation 152w
Small Business Council 589w
Small Business Europe 349w
Small Business Service, Advertising 1078–9w

Griffiths, Nigel—continued
Small Business Service, Manpower 1079w
Small Business Service, Public appointments 669–70w
Small businesses 799w
Small businesses, Disabled 888w
Small businesses, EC countries 149w
Small businesses, Emergencies 1079w
Small businesses, Location 1186w
Small businesses, Regulatory impact assessments 149w
Small businesses, Venture capital 150w
Trade promotion 353w
Written questions, Administrative delays 354w, 674w

Griffiths, Mr Win
Debates etc.
Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference (06.03.02) 300
Questions
Diabetes, Ambulance services 1247w
Diabetes, Fire services 570w
Diabetes, Police 537w
Immigration, Applications 506–10w
Zimbabwe, Politics and government 862w

Grogan, Mr John
Debates etc.
Office of Communications Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (06.03.02) 364–5
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Consignia (12.03.02) 187–8wh
Questions
Flood control 412–3
Learning and Skills Council for England, Grants 502w
Natural gas 353–4w
North Korea 754
Rents, Selby 909–10w

Guided weapons
29w, 1166–7w

Gulf states
Armed forces 1182w

Guillotine motions
see Timetabling of bills

Gummer, Rt Hon John
Debates etc.
Environmental audit (07.03.02) 452, 458, 465–9, 478
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (04.03.02) 94, 101
World Summit on Sustainable Development (07.03.02) 445

Gynaecology
Manpower 445–8w

Habitual offenders
715w

Hackney
Social security benefits 1123–4w

Haemophilia
Blood transfusions 1140w

Hague, Rt Hon William
Questions
Armed forces, Equal opportunities 655–6w

***Hain, Rt Hon Peter**, Minister for Europe, Foreign and Commonwealth Office*
Questions
British overseas territories 860w
Central Europe, EC enlargement 1297w
Council of Ministers 394–6w
Cyprus, EC enlargement 755–6
Czech Republic, Iron and steel 503w
EC aid 860w
EC enlargement 863–4w

***Hain, Rt Hon Peter**—continued*
EC enlargement, Common agricultural policy 756
EC Foreign Affairs Council 1192–5w
EC Foreign Affairs Council, Scottish Executive 65–6w, 504w, 870w
EC law, Parliamentary scrutiny 62–3w
Europe Day 394w
European Commission 869w, 1172w
European Federation of Journalists 68w
Gibraltar, EC grants and loans 61–2w
Gibraltar, Spain 61w, 504w, 866w
Laeken Summit (EC) 395–7w
Mittal, Lakshmi 63w, 509w
Romania 64–5w
Romania, EC enlargement 391w
Romania, Iron and steel 63w
Romania, Official visits 391w, 510–1w
Sponsorship, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 65w
UK membership of EC 62w, 395w, 1192w

Hall, Patrick
Questions
Public sector, Reform 486w

Hamilton, David
Debates etc.
Nuclear power stations (05.03.02) 243, 249–50
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Consignia (12.03.02) 192–3wh
Questions
Business questions 426–7

Hamilton, Mr Fabian
Questions
Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 720w

Hammond, Mr Philip
Debates etc.
Greater London (12.03.02) 775, 779–80
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Level crossings (06.03.02) 117–22wh
Questions
Broadband 3–4w
Business links, Telephone services 591–2w
Police, Aviation 635–6
Radio, Licensing 1186w
Road traffic control, Greater London 380–1w
Taxation 470w
Telephone systems 673w

Hampshire
Ambulance services 989w

Hancock, Mr Mike
Debates etc.
Terrorism (07.03.02) 505, 508–10
Questions
Apache WAH-64 helicopter 653–4w
Armed forces, Housing 163–4w
Armed forces, Macedonia 323w
Arms trade, Export controls 66w
Business questions 429–30
Challenger tanks 649w
Defence equipment, Procurement 325w
Dolphins, Fishing gear 216–7w
Future large aircraft, Engines 871w
Guided weapons 29w
Herbal medicine, EC action 433–4w
HMS Sheffield, Inquiries 1181w
Institutional care 1011–2w
Institutional care, Standards 986w
Jobcentres, Crimes of violence 1120–1w
Mercenaries 66–7w, 325–6w
Military aircraft 1161w
Military bases, Security 29w
Ministry of Defence Police 164–5w
NHS, Standards 835–6w
Prisoners 64w

***Hancock, Mr Mike**—continued*
Tomahawk missiles 653w

Harbour authorities
749w

Haringey
Local government finance 184w

Harman, Rt Hon Harriet, Solicitor-General
Questions
Accountancy, Solicitor-General 660–1w
Centre for Policy Studies 659–60w
Conferences, Solicitor-General 659w
Crime 6w
Crimes of violence, Elderly 162w
Criminal proceedings, Standards 635–6w
Crown Prosecution Service 307–11w, 1013–4, 1236w
Crown Prosecution Service, Finance 309–10w
Crown Prosecution Service, Labour turnover 307–8w
Crown Prosecution Service, Manpower 664–8w
Crown Prosecution Service, Standards 1014
Empty property, Solicitor-General 883–4w
Fair trade initiative, Solicitor-General 875–6w
Fraud, Prosecutions 1012–3, 1236w
Immunity from prosecution 1235w
Industrial disputes, Solicitor-General 873w
Information officers, Solicitor-General 1117w
Legal costs, Solicitor-General 873–5w
Money laundering 1236–7w
Northern Ireland, Solicitor-General 1235w
Northern Ireland Dept of the Director of Public Prosecutions 195w
Offices, Solicitor-General 883w
Official hospitality, Solicitor-General 661–3w
Orders and regulations, Solicitor-General 877w
Prosecutions 194–5w
Publications, Solicitor-General 877–81w
Publicity, Solicitor-General 881–3w
Retrospective legislation 409–10w
Sexual offences 1011–2
Theft, Solicitor-General 663–4w
Trade unions, Solicitor-General 876–7w

Harrier aircraft
1168–9w, 1254w

Harris, Dr Evan
Sittings in Westminster Hall
National Institute for Clinical Excellence (05.03.02) 9–10wh, 14–8wh
NHS, Finance (12.03.02) 215–8wh
Questions
Cancer, Drugs 1019w
Hospital beds 832w
Hospital beds, Greater London 995w
Hospitals, Repairs and maintenance 434–5w
Influenza 1061–2w
Medical profession, Training 282w
Medical treatments, EC countries 809w
NHS, Per capita costs 136w, 292–6w
NHS Professionals 837w, 1007w, 1034–5w, 1150w
NHS Professionals, Complaints 837w
NHS Professionals, Standards 1033–4w
Surgery 995–7w, 1050–3w
Yarls Wood Detention Centre 719–20w

Harris, Mr Tom
Debates etc.
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (04.03.02) 32–3, 80, 82–5, 88

***Harris, Mr Tom**—continued*
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Iraq (06.03.02) 82wh
Questions
Channel tunnel railway line, Scotland 174–5w
Electoral register 511w

Harvey, Nick
Debates etc.
Office of Communications Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (06.03.02) 340–1, 357–60, 363, 378–80
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Cultural heritage (07.03.02) 147–50wh
Questions
Agriculture, Public relations 226w
Children, Protection 982w
Contracts, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 1155–7w
Culture Online 267–8w
Digital broadcasting 269w
English Tourism Council, Finance 269w
Flood control 363w
Internet, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 269w
Manpower, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 344w
Millennium Exhibition 367–9w
National Lottery 266w
Objects in lieu of tax 268w
Pornography, Internet 979–80w
Publications, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 270–4w
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 265w
Television, Dept for Education and Skills 249w
Television, Dept of Health 464w
Written questions, Administrative delays 345w

Havard, Mr Dai
Questions
Arthritis, Drugs 424w

Hawk aircraft
India 1196w

Hawkins, Mr Nick
Questions
Commonwealth Development Corporation, Africa 277
Councillors, Allowances 173w
Night clubs, Drugs 968w

Hayes, Mr John
Questions
Business questions 430

Hazardous materials
Cynon Valley 365w
EC action 792–3w
Ministry of Defence 486w
Tipping of waste 794w
Waste management 72w

Heald, Mr Oliver
Sittings in Westminster Hall.
National Institute for Clinical Excellence (05.03.02) 5wh, 9wh, 14–5wh, 18–21wh
Questions
Accident and emergency departments, Hospital beds 1006w
Asthma 194w
Asthma, Wales 529w
Cancer, Health services 608w
Community health services, Manpower 124–6w
Depressive illnesses, Children 616w
Doctors, Retirement 1000w
Family practitioner services, Nurses 838–9w
Forms, Dept of Health 538–9w

***Heald, Mr Oliver**—continued*
  General practitioners, Performance appraisal 1038w
  General practitioners, Retirement 999–1000w
  Health action zones 433w
  Hospitals, Closures 830w
  Medical profession, Training 284–5w
  Mental health services 819w
  Mental health services, Children 820w
  Mental health services, Nurses 989–90w
  Mental health services, Standards 430w
  Mental health services, Young offender institutions 127w
  Mental health services, Young people 127w
  Mental patients 430–2w, 617–8w
  Mental patients, Hospital wards 285w
  Mentally ill 989w
  NHS 1038w
  NHS, Finance 1015w
  NHS, Standards 1058–9w
  NHS Direct, Mental health 430w
  NHS Professionals 1246w
  NHS Professionals, Expenditure 1246w
  NHS Professionals, Standards 1034w
  Nurses, Foreign workers 122–4w
  Nurses, Manpower 838w
  Psychiatric nurses, Young people 616w
  Schizophrenia, Prescription drugs 997w
  Suicide 809–10w, 834–5w
  Written questions, Dept of Health 843w

***Healey, John**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for Education and Skills*
  Questions
  Computers within reach programme 633–4w
  Engineering, Skilled workers 497w
  Further education, Science 625–6w
  Individual learning accounts 233–4w, 390w, 623–4w, 997–9, 1010–1, 1215w
  Individual learning accounts, Personal records 384–5w, 622–3w
  Learning and skills councils 1213w
  National training organisations 250–1w
  Rapid Response Service, Finance 495–6w
  Schools, Playing fields 249w, 497–501w
  Schools, Repairs and maintenance 1219–20w
  Schools, Rural areas 385–6w
  Sector skills councils, Sports 235w
  Students, Finance 494–5w
  Training and enterprise councils, Fraud 631–3w

Health action zones
  433w
  Greater London 817w

Health authorities
  Lancashire 817w
  Location 461w
  Reform 816w

Health centres
  429w

Health education
  Drugs 1218w
  HIV infection 1047w
  Overseas aid 684–5w
  Sex 136w

Health hazards
  Bioaerosols 937w
  Uranium 1179–80w

Health insurance
  Ministry of Defence 315w
  Police 158–9w
  Terrorism 403w, 868w

Health services
  552–3w
  Afghanistan 1190w
  Africa 326w
  Cancer 287w, 608w
  EC countries 295w
  Elderly 1037w
  Heart diseases 462w, 608w
  Overseas visitors 1141w
  Pain 821–2w
  Private sector 435–6w, 812–3w, 840w
  Research 806w
  Standards 801w

Hearing aids
  449–50w, 543–4w, 833w, 1143–4w
  South East region 986w

Hearing impaired
  Government departments 1071–2w

Heart diseases
  543w, 800–1w
  Health services 462w, 608w
  Herefordshire 615w
  King Edward VII Hospital Medhurst 462w
  Males 991w
  Medical treatments 814w
  South East region 462–4w
  Surgery 138–9w, 288

Heath, Mr David
  Debates etc.
  Copyright (Visually Impaired Persons) Bill, 2R (15.03.02) 1200
  Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, Rep and 3R (15.03.02) 1129, 1145–7, 1159–61
  Sittings in Westminster Hall
  Eyesight, Diseases (05.03.02) 45–6wh
  Questions
  Community service orders, Enforcement 772w
  Iraq 743–5
  Ministers, Codes of practice 877
  Railways, Safety 287
  Rapid Response Service 15
  Social security benefits, Overpayments 415–7w

Heathrow Airport
  167–8w, 1199–200w
  Air routes 1203w

Heating
  Injuries 429–30w

Heavily indebted poor countries initiative
  335–6w

Hedges and ditches
  102w, 381w

Helicopters
  29–30w

Henderson, Mr Ivan
  Questions
  "Damages for Future Loss Consultation Paper" 963w
  Motor vehicles, Young people 1271w

Hendrick, Mr Mark
  Debates etc.
  Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 161–2
  Questions
  International Development Association 328w
  Teachers, Loans 1135w

Hendry, Mr Charles
  Debates etc.
  Zimbabwe (14.03.02) 1043
  Sittings in Westminster Hall
  Politics, Young people (05.03.02) 39–42wh

***Hendry, Mr Charles**—continued*
  Questions
  Business questions 423
  Refrigerators, Waste disposal 643–4w

Hepatitis
  1047–8w

Hepburn, Mr Stephen
  Questions
  Film, North East region 929–32w, 1155w
  Homelessness 134–5
  Individual learning accounts 390w, 624w
  Industrial diseases, Compensation 351w
  Institutional care, South Tyneside 990–1w
  National Lottery 346w
  Special education, Autism 238–9w, 1217w

Herbal medicine
  EC action 433–4w

Herceptin
  1065w
  Breast cancer 994–5w

Herefordshire
  Heart diseases 615w
  Institutional care 615–6w

Hermon, Lady
  Debates etc.
  Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (04.03.02) 25, 33, 36, 42–4, 46, 49, 51–2, 61, 69, 71–2, 80–2, 89–90, 110, 119–20
  Questions
  Sellafield 356–7w

Heroin
  Drug seizures 1288–9w

Hertfordshire
  Starter home initiative (06.03.02) 125–32wh

Hertfordshire Constabulary
  713w

***Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia**, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry*
  Debates etc.
  Equal opportunities, Females (14.03.02) 1060–9
  Iron and steel, Ministerial statements (06.03.02) 307–19
  Questions
  Accountancy, Dept of Trade and Industry 890w
  Advertising, Dept of Trade and Industry 592w
  Buildings, Dept of Trade and Industry 2w
  Business, Higher education 4w
  Capita, Dept of Trade and Industry 1w
  Catering, Dept of Trade and Industry 668w
  Cendent Relocation (UK), Dept of Trade and Industry 667w
  Contracts, Dept of Trade and Industry 2–3w
  Correspondence, Dept of Trade and Industry 589–90w, 678w
  Corus, Redundancy 349–50w
  Cost of living 674w
  Dams, Export credit guarantees 2w
  EC law, Dept of Trade and Industry 2w
  EC Research Council, Scottish Executive 355w
  Employment, Discrimination 420–1w
  Energy supply, Scotland 673–4w
  Equal pay 5–6w
  Equal pay, Dept of Trade and Industry 668w
  Equipment, Dept of Trade and Industry 587w
  Flexible working, Dept of Trade and Industry 886w

Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia—continued
Global Crossing, Dept of Trade and Industry 153w
Hotels, Dept of Trade and Industry 669w
Information officers, Dept of Trade and Industry 588w
Iron and steel 3w
Iron and steel, Czech Republic 3w
Iron and steel, USA 674–5w
Land use, Dept of Trade and Industry 348w
Members, Correspondence 154w, 350w
Mirror Group Newspapers, Company investigations 1258–9w
Mittal, Lakshmi 1–3w, 154w, 349w, 890–1w
Non-governmental organisations, Dept of Trade and Industry 592w
Oil, Exploration 593–4w
Parental leave, Dept of Trade and Industry 885–6w
Plastics, Dumping 670–1w
Press releases, Dept of Trade and Industry 4–5w
Public expenditure, Dept of Trade and Industry 1w
Public relations, Dept of Trade and Industry 5w, 593w
Railways, Dept of Trade and Industry 356w
Recruitment, Dept of Trade and Industry 886–8w
Regulatory Impact Unit, Dept of Trade and Industry 353w
Relocation services, Dept of Trade and Industry 667w, 669w
Sector skills councils 670w
Small businesses, Bank services 492w
Small businesses, Loan guarantee scheme 349w, 589w
Space technology 675–8w
Theft, Dept of Trade and Industry 488w
Visits abroad, Dept of Trade and Industry 148–9w
Voluntary work, Dept of Trade and Industry 350w
Warrington, Dept of Trade and Industry 673w
Work sharing, Dept of Trade and Industry 669w

Higher civil servants
Manpower 955–6w

Higher education
236w
Business 4w, 34–6w, 954w
Disadvantaged 39–41w
Engineering 41w, 678w, 762–3w
Research 1134w, 1215w
Student numbers 39–40w, 1210w
Student wastage 946w
Teachers 763–4w
Wales 1076w

Highways Agency
Expenditure 91w

Hijacking
Aircraft 752w

Hillingdon
NHS 1042–4w
Water supply 638w

Hinchingbrooke Hospital
Manpower 1014w

Hinchliffe, Mr David
Questions
Health authorities, Location 461w
Hospitals, Consultants 845w

Hinduja, Prakash
48–9w

Hip replacements
EC countries 829w

Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England
see English Heritage

HIV infection
134–5w, 288–9w
Discrimination 419w
Health education 1047w
Overseas aid 647–8w, 897w
Senegal 329w
South Africa 466–7w

HM Chief Inspector of Schools
see Office for Standards in Education

HMS Fearless
474w

HMS Invincible
33w

HMS Sheffield
33w
Inquiries 1181w

HMS Talent
1254w

HMS Vanguard
Repairs and maintenance 33w

Hoban, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Greater London (12.03.02) 817, 843–4
Sittings in Westminster Hall
National Institute for Clinical Excellence (05.03.02) 6–8wh
NHS, Finance (12.03.02) 207–10wh
Questions
Business, Higher education 4w, 36w, 954w
Incapacity benefit 18
Refrigerators, Waste disposal 477w
Small businesses, Telephone services 397w
Stamp duties, Exemptions 966w
Taxation, Self-assessment 966w
Teachers, Pay 1003

***Hodge, Margaret**, Minister of State for Universities, Dept for Education and Skills*
Questions
After school clubs, New Opportunities Fund 35w
Children, Day care 763w
Dentistry, Student numbers 813w
Education, Human rights 948–9w
Further and Higher Education Act 1992 769w
Further education, Standards 1211w
Graduates, Income 1131w
Higher education, Business 34–6w, 954w
Higher education, Disadvantaged 39–41w
Higher education, Engineering 762–3w
Higher education, Research 1134w, 1215w
Higher education, Student numbers 39–40w, 1210w
Higher education, Student wastage 946w
Higher education, Teachers 763–4w
Human rights 1133–4w
Learning and skills councils 1134w
Learning and skills councils, Basic education 36w
Medicine, Student numbers 35w
Postgraduate education, Student numbers 250w
Pre-school education 1133w
Pre-school education, Finance 763w
Schools, Climate change levy 759–60w
Skilled workers 1134w
Students, Debts 41w
Students, Fees and charges 37w, 764–70w

Hodge, Margaret—continued
Students, Finance 37–8w, 761–2w, 949–51w, 1006–8
Students, Loans 1132w
Veterinary medicine, Wales 1135w

Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Debates etc.
Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference (06.03.02) 297
Questions
Business questions 424
Iraq 745–6

Holiday leave
Home Office 1098–100w
Ministry of Defence 314w

Holmes, Paul
Questions
Administration of justice, Learning disability 154–5w
Capita, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 346–8w
Capita, Dept for Education and Skills 234–5w
Capita, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 566w
Capita, Dept for Work and Pensions 23–6w
Prisons, Education 1226–7w
Sixth form education, Derbyshire 1213w
Teachers, Pay 240w
Training and enterprise councils, Fraud 631–3w
Transplant surgery 1021w

Holocaust Memorial Day
Armenia 1222–3w

Home births
135w

Home care services
National vocational qualifications 433w
Standards 434w

Home detention curfews
707–8w

Home energy efficiency scheme
640w, 795w, 797w, 960w

Home helps
616w

Home Office
Accenture 973w
Advertising 974w
Air conditioning 1221–2w
Arthur Andersen 973w
Billing 972–3w
Conferences 973w
Contracts 1271w
Correspondence 522–3w
Departmental responsibilities 48w
Design 1225w
Empty property 978–9w
Energy 975w
Equal pay 1096w
Fair trade initiative 1103w
Holiday leave 1098–100w
Information officers 1096w
Internet 1262–3w
Land use 1102w
Minister for Women 47w
Official hospitality 722w
Orders and regulations 42–5w
Policy development grant 981w
Press releases 1227–8w
Railways 1099w
Standards 49–50w
Travel 979w
Visits abroad 979w
Voluntary work 1102–3w

Home Office—continued
Warrington 717–8w
Working hours 518–9w

Homelessness
93–4w, 133–5, 146–7, 923–4w, 1093–6w, 1123w

Homicide
1101w

Hong Kong
Foreign relations 394w

Hood, Mr Jimmy
Debates etc.
Terrorism (04.03.02) 130
Questions
EC Finance Council 965–6w
EC Foreign Affairs Council 1192–5w

***Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey**, Secretary of State for Defence*
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 31w
Afghanistan, Peace keeping operations 30w, 870w
Chemical weapons, Russia 474–5w
EC defence policy 31w
NATO 30w, 1254–5w
NATO, EC defence policy 31w
Public expenditure, Ministry of Defence 476w
Rapid deployment forces, EC countries 476w

Hope, Phil
Questions
Developing countries, Drugs 331w

Hopkins, Mr Kelvin
Questions
Alcoholic drinks, Misuse 435w
Central Railway, Freight 1278w
Drugs, Misuse 435w
NHS, Ancillary staff 1248–50w

Horam, Mr John
Debates etc.
Environmental audit (07.03.02) 451–4, 492
Questions
Hospices, Finance 121w

Horticulture
Climate change levy 230w

Hospices
Finance 121w, 818w

Hospital beds
296w, 832w, 858w, 990w, 1011w, 1033w
Accident and emergency departments 1006w
Greater London 995w
Lancashire 612w
Mental health services 125–7w
Merseyside 815–6w
North West region 801–2w
North Yorkshire 1010–1w
South East region 1011w

Hospital wards
545–6w, 847w
Mental patients 285w
Repairs and maintenance 810–1w

Hospitals
1047w
Admissions 434w, 612w
Asbestos 608w
Babies 997–8w
Catering 451w, 849w
Cemeteries 545w
Children 1013w
Closures 830w
Consultants 845w

Hospitals—continued
Crimes of violence 849–50w, 1291w
East Riding 545w
Greater London (13.03.02) 989–96
Infectious diseases 857–8w
Kent 288
Kingston upon Hull 545w
Mortuary 547w
Private finance initiative 806–7w, 833–4w, 1027–8w
Private sector 834w, 1007w
Repairs and maintenance 434–5w
Waiting lists (12.03.02) 233–40wh, 423w, 436–7w, 544w, 807w, 809w, 814w, 826–7w
Wales 608w

Hotels
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 931w
Dept for Education and Skills 384w, 1278–9w
Dept for International Development 898w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 905w
Dept of Trade and Industry 669w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 607w, 686w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 963w
Ministry of Defence 654w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 148w
President of the Council 403–4w
Prime Minister 680–1w
Treasury 696–7w

House of Commons
Breast feeding 467w
Equal opportunities 1116–7w
Operating costs 1117w

Housing
Armed forces 163–4w
Asylum 159–60w, 718w
Empty property 173w
Finance 747–8w
Greater London 376–8w, 882–3
Hyndburn (12.03.02) 225–32wh
Police 155–6w
Prices 189–90w
Rural areas 554w
Sales 1088–9w
South East region 188–9w
Telford 100–1w
Urban areas 179w
VAT 9w
West Midlands 1084w

Housing benefit
371w, 959w
Abuse 4–6, 1119w, 1239w
Epsom 410w
Non-dependent deductions 729–30w
Pensioners 14–5w
Students 958w

Housing investment programmes
175w

Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Debates etc.
Bank services (14.03.02) 1019–20

Howarth, Rt Hon Alan
Debates etc.
Iron and steel, USA (06.03.02) 316
Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 181–6, 204
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Cultural heritage (07.03.02) 155–66wh

Howarth, Mr George
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Iraq (06.03.02) 74–6wh, 80wh
Questions
Attendance, Lord Chancellor's Dept 51w

Howarth, Mr George—continued
Correspondence, Dept of Health 1049w
Departmental responsibilities, Dept of Health 1056w
Hospital beds, Merseyside 815–6w
Hospital beds, North West region 801–2w

Howarth, Mr Gerald
Questions
Antitank missiles, Procurement 1162w
Armoured fighting vehicles, Procurement 1162w

***Howells, Dr Kim**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for Culture Media and Sport*
Debates etc.
Office of Communications Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (06.03.02) 326, 330, 334–5, 345, 367, 373–4, 387
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Cultural heritage (07.03.02) 133–8wh, 140–2wh, 146wh, 168–74wh
Questions
Accountancy, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 1281–2w
Archaeological sites, St Albans 1232w
Archaeology, Finance 935w
Art works, Ethiopia 1233w
Arts festivals, Aldeburgh 345w
Broadcasting, Regulation 935–6w
Capita, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 346–8w
Churches, VAT 264w
Cinemas 1231w
Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment 1159w
Contracts, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 1155–7w
Culture Online 267–8w
Design Champions Ministerial Group 1231w, 1282–3w
Digital broadcasting 268–9w
Discrimination, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 1232w
Employment tribunals, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 933w
Energy, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 1231–2w
English Heritage 933w
English Heritage, Fees and charges 1154–5w
English Tourism Council, Finance 269w
Equal pay, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 931w
Film, North East region 929–32w, 1155w
Hotels, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 931w
Information officers, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 1282w
Internet, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 269w
Listed buildings, Internet 932w
Manpower, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 344w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 933–4w
Museums and galleries 932–3w
Museums and galleries, Fees and charges 267w
Museums and galleries, Finance 261–2w
National Gallery, Reviews 1283–4w
North West Arts, Arts Council of England 934w
Objects in lieu of tax 268w
Parental leave, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 1232w
Public libraries 1231w
Public relations, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 264w, 576–7w, 929w

Howells, Dr Kim*—continued*
Publications, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 270–4w
Radio, Licensing 1159w
Railways, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 346w
Recruitment, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 269–70w
Religious broadcasting, Licensing 264–5w
Relocation services, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 931–2w
Royal Institute of British Architects 1159w
Royal Parks Constabulary 261–2w
Television, Licensing 266w, 934–5w
Theatre 1231w
Tourism, Terrorism 1154w
United Christian Broadcasters, Licensing 265–6w
Voluntary work, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 344–5w
World heritage sites 1158w
Written questions, Administrative delays 345w

Hoyle, Mr Lindsay
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Consignia (12.03.02) 175–9wh, 195wh
Questions
Accident and emergency departments 1016–7w
British overseas territories 860w
Chorley and South Ribble Hospital 1018–9w
Chorley and South Ribble Hospital, Accident and emergency departments 992w
Chorley and South Ribble NHS Trust, Preston Acute Hospitals NHS Trust 1143w
Deep vein thrombosis 565–7w
Education, Assessments 388–90w
Gibraltar, EC grants and loans 61–2w
Gibraltar, Spain 61w
Health authorities, Lancashire 817w
Lancashire Ambulance Service NHS Trust 988–9w
Neighbourhood wardens, Lancashire 709w
NHS trusts 1018w
NHS trusts, Public appointments 818w
Prescription drugs, Rationing 983w
Runshaw College, Assessments 389w

***Hughes, Beverley**, Parliamentary Secretary, Home Office*
Debates etc.
Cemeteries (11.03.02) 735–8
Questions
Aylesbury Young Offender Institution, Fire prevention 1097w
Bail hostels 713w
Blakenhurst Prison 1224w
Chelmsford Prison 159w
Corporate manslaughter 975–6w
Doncaster Prison 1224–5w
Electronic tagging, Greater London 1225w
Electronic tagging, Offenders 1098w
Habitual offenders 715w
Home detention curfews 707–8w
Miscarriages of justice, Counselling 972w
Moreton Lane Prison 1223–4w
National Probation Directorate 1096–7w
National Probation Service for England and Wales, Pay 1097w
Onley Prison 1223w
Police custody 514w
Prison Service, Pay 597–8w
Prisoners 514w, 720–1w, 978w
Prisoners, Ethnic groups 600–4w
Prisoners, Personal records 46–7w
Prisoners, Wales 973–4w
Prisoners' release 514w

Hughes, Beverley*—continued*
Prisons, Education 716w, 1226–7w
Probation officers, Manpower 1097w
Sexual offences 1103–4w
Sexual offences, Essex 1225–6w
Sexual offences, Rehabilitation 47–8w
UK Detention Services 1223w
Wandsworth Prison 1225w
Wolvercote Clinic 1101–2w
Young offender institutions, Human rights 515–6w
Young offenders 710–1w
Young offenders, Disadvantaged 710w

Hughes, Mr Kevin Michael
Questions
New deal schemes, Doncaster 14w

Hughes, Simon
Debates etc.
Drugs, Points of order (11.03.02) 637
Questions
Anti-Terrorism Crime and Security Act 2001 1263w
Asylum, EC action 969–70w
Asylum, France 969w
Crimes of violence 628
Homelessness 133–4
National Probation Directorate 1096–7w
National Probation Service for England and Wales, Pay 1097w
National security 597w
Prison Service, Pay 597–8w
Prisoners 720–1w
Sexual offences, Rehabilitation 47–8w

Human experiments
Porton Down 1104w, 1167–8w

Human rights
527w, 1133–4w
Asylum 516w
Colombia 862–3w, 1172–3w
Education 948–9w
Indonesia 688w, 1293–4w
Iraq 864w
Nepal 1195–6w
Young offender institutions 515–6w

Human Rights Act 1998
Questions
431w, 515–6w

Human trafficking
Africa 646w
Children 646–7w
Females 45w

Humber bridge
Repairs and maintenance 556–7w

Humber Police
Sick leave 157w

Humberside Fire Authority
Standard spending assessments 746w

Humble, Mrs Joan
Questions
Witnesses, Press 196w
Written questions, Administrative delays 192w

Hume, Mr John
Debates etc.
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (04.03.02) 116

Hunter, Mr Andrew
Questions
Institutional care, Basingstoke 1138w
Northern Ireland government 871w

Hunting
792w

Hurst, Mr Alan
Questions
Aviation, Insurance 11w

***Hutton, Rt Hon John**, Minister of State, Dept of Health*
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Eyesight, Diseases (05.03.02) 48–53wh
Questions
Accident and emergency departments, Attendance 546w
Advertising, Dept of Health 1039–40w
Arthritis, Drugs 836w
Asthma, Children 450w
Cancer, Drugs 815w
Cancer, Nurses 814–5w
Chemical and biological warfare 1028w
Chemical and biological warfare, Vaccination 1028–9w
Community health services, Manpower 124–6w
Contracts, Dept of Health 429w
Day surgery 551w
Diabetes, Ambulance services 1247w
Doctors, Retirement 1000w
Energy, Dept of Health 831w
Eyesight, Surgery 826–7w
Fair trade initiative, Dept of Health 835w
Family practitioner services, Nurses 838–9w
Forms, Dept of Health 538–9w
General practitioners 276w
General practitioners, Children 1063–4w
General practitioners, Manpower 1024–5w
General practitioners, Performance appraisal 289w, 805–6w, 1038w
General practitioners, Recruitment 805w
General practitioners, Retirement 999–1000w
General practitioners, Standards 289–90w
General practitioners, Training 304–5w
General practitioners, Waiting lists 548–9w
Gynaecology, Manpower 445–8w
Health action zones, Greater London 817w
Health authorities, Lancashire 817w
Health authorities, Reform 816w
Health centres 429w
Health services 552–3w
Health services, Overseas visitors 1141w
Health services, Private sector 435–6w, 812–3w, 840w
Health services, Research 806w
Heart diseases 800–1w
Heart diseases, Health services 462w
Hip replacements, EC countries 829w
Hospital beds 832w
Hospital beds, Greater London 995w
Hospital wards, Repairs and maintenance 810–1w
Hospitals 1047w
Hospitals, Closures 830w
Hospitals, Consultants 845w
Hospitals, Crimes of violence 849–50w, 1291w
Hospitals, Private finance initiative 806–7w, 833–4w, 1027–8w
Hospitals, Private sector 834w, 1007w
Hospitals, Waiting lists 423w, 436–7w, 544w, 807w, 809w, 826–7w
Information officers, Dept of Health 1062–3w
Knee replacements, Waiting lists 827–8w
Manpower, Dept of Health 1054w
Medical profession, Training 282w, 284–5w
Medical treatments, Costs 287–8w
Medical treatments, EC countries 809w, 1060w, 1147w
Members, Correspondence 136w, 802–4w

Hutton, Rt Hon John*—continued*
Mental health services, Public appointments 819w
Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust, Surgery 299–300w
Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust, Waiting lists 302w
NHS 1007–8w, 1038w
NHS, Administration 855w
NHS, Combined heat and power 831w
NHS, Executives 427–8w, 1065–6w
NHS, Finance 138w, 142–6w, 277–80w, 296–300w, 450w, 799–800w, 993w, 1059w
NHS, Individual learning accounts 999w
NHS, Information technology 1053–4w
NHS, Manpower 1042–4w
NHS, National insurance contributions 1038w
NHS, Pensions 839w
NHS, Per capita costs 136w, 292–6w, 550–1w
NHS, Procurement 304w
NHS, Public relations 1246–7w
NHS, Retirement 1000w
NHS, Security 547–8w
NHS, Standards 835–6w, 846–7w, 1058–9w
NHS Leadership Centre, Public appointments 850w
"NHS Plan News" 847–8w
NHS Professionals 837w, 1007w, 1034–5w, 1150w, 1246w
NHS Professionals, Complaints 837w
NHS Professionals, Expenditure 1246w
NHS Professionals, Standards 1033–4w
NHS trusts, Debts 118–9w
NHS trusts, Procurement 804w
NHSnet 423–4w
Northwood and Pinner Hospital 840w
Nurses, Foreign workers 122–4w
Nurses, Manpower 141w, 838w
Pain, Health services 821–2w
Pharmacy, Training 1291w
Physiotherapy, Greater London 1290w
"Primary Care" 849w
Primary care trusts 1035–7w, 1142w
Primary care trusts, Environmental health 830w
Private finance initiative, Dept of Health 140w, 279–81w
Public expenditure, Dept of Health 999w, 1025–6w
Public private partnerships, Dept of Health 282–4w
Public relations, Dept of Health 1054–5w
Publicity, Dept of Health 1055–6w
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 1063w
Radiography 1291w
Radiography, Manpower 850–4w
Rahman, Shiblu 1049–50w
Rehabilitation 1059w
St George's Hospital Tooting, Accident and emergency departments 822w
Speech therapy, Training 283w
Surgery 846w, 995–7w, 1050–3w
Surgery, Death 612w
Surgery, Greater London 1143w
Surgery, Manpower 1023w
Surgery, Private sector 281w
Terrorism, Dept of Health 1055w
Transplant surgery 1021–4w, 1053w
Transplant surgery, Glasgow 1150w
Transplant surgery, Manpower 1022w
Weston Hospital 550w
Whittington Hospital, Repairs and maintenance 808w
Wigan and Bolton Health Authority, Finance 811w

Hutton, Rt Hon John*—continued*
Written questions, Administrative delays 1045w

Hyndburn
Housing (12.03.02) 225–32wh

Hyperactivity
Disability living allowance 419w, 439–40w

Iddon, Dr Brian
Debates etc.
Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (13.03.02) 965–6, 970, 981–2
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Energy Policy Review (13.03.02) 275wh, 279–80wh
Questions
Housing investment programmes 175w
Incapacity benefit 536w
Magistrates' courts, Closures 406–8w
Primary care groups, Bolton 426w

Illsley, Mr Eric
Questions
Police, Pay 715w
Recycling, EC law 400

Immigration
516w, 1107w
Applications 506–10w
Marriage 516w

Immigration and Asylum Appeals (Procedure) (Amendment) Rules 2001
Questions
971–2w

Immigration controls
EC action 1106w

Immobilisation of vehicles
Fees and charges 722w

Immunity from prosecution
1235w

Import controls
Meat 221–2w

Imports
Animal feed 227–8w
Genetically modified organisms 76–7w
Meat 105w, 139–40w, 229w, 409–10, 937w
Plants 229w

Incapacity benefit
18–20, 534w, 536w, 1125–6w
North Yorkshire 411w
York 411w

Incinerators
290–2w, 793–4w
Greater London 358w
Newcastle upon Tyne 794w
Pollution control 358–9w
Taxation 9w

Income support
1239–40w, 1251–2w
Pensioners 10–3, 414–5w, 960–1w, 1128w, 1241w

Income tax
696w

India
Civil disorder 282
Hawk aircraft 1196w
Nuclear weapons 1298–300w
Overseas aid 685–6w
Politics and government 868–9w
UN Security Council 865w

India-UK Round Table
865w

Individual learning accounts
233–4w, 390w, 623–4w, 997–9, 1010–1, 1215w
NHS 999w
North East region 624w
Personal records 384–5w, 622–3w

Indonesia
Armed forces 867w
Human rights 688w, 1293–4w

Industrial diseases
Compensation 350–1w, 417–8w, 671–2w, 1186–7w
Galloway 671w
Merseyside 350w

Industrial disputes
Jobcentre Plus 534w, 957–8w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 52w
Ministry of Defence 325w
Solicitor-General 873w

Industrial health and safety
(14.03.02) 315–58wh, 563–4w
Asbestos 95w, 179–80w, 910w

Industrial injuries
563w

Industrial injuries disablement benefit
1119w, 1128w

Industrial relations
Railways 191–2w

Infectious diseases
1029w
Brighton Healthcare NHS Trust 857–8w
Hospitals 857–8w
Medical equipment 577w

Inflation
472w

Influenza
1061–2w
Middlesbrough 1030w

Information officers
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 1282w
Dept for International Development 898w, 1131w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 903–4w
Dept of Health 1062–3w
Dept of Trade and Industry 588w
Home Office 1096w
President of the Council 605w
Solicitor-General 1117w

Information technology
Jobcentres 16w, 27w
NHS 1053–4w, 1147–8w

Ingram, Rt Hon Adam*, Minister of State, Ministry of Defence*
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 323–4w, 658w
Afghanistan, Peace keeping operations 870w
Air force, Resignations 658w
Apache WAH-64 helicopter 30w, 654w
Armed forces, Deployment 318w
Armed forces, Equal opportunities 316–7w, 655–6w
Armed forces, Gulf states 1182w
Armed forces, Kuwait 1182w
Armed forces, Macedonia 323w
Armed forces, Northern Ireland 32w
Armed forces, Pensions 321w
Armed forces, Sierra Leone 652w
Armed forces, Training 318–20w
Armed forces, USA 167w
Army, Londonderry 656w
Army, Manpower 650w

***Ingram, Rt Hon Adam**—continued*
Bloody Sunday Tribunal of Inquiry 33w
Brompton Barracks, Public private partnerships 657w
Colerne airfield 1253–4w
Courts martial 651–2w
Defence equipment, Procurement 325w
Departmental expenditure limits, Ministry of Defence 325w, 652w
Exercise Tradewinds 01 30–1w
Harrier aircraft 1168–9w, 1254w
HMS Fearless 474w
HMS Sheffield 33w
HMS Sheffield, Inquiries 1181w
HMS Talent 1254w
HMS Vanguard, Repairs and maintenance 33w
Jeans, Simon 1253w
Kosovo 1162w
Kosovo, Armed conflict 1182–3w
Military aircraft 321–2w
Military aircraft, Iraq 649w
Military bases, York 655w
Patrol craft, Caribbean 29w
Patrol craft, Weapons 33w
Public expenditure, Ministry of Defence 315w
RAF Henlow 658–9w
Submarines 165w
Type 22 frigates, Weapons 34w
Type 42 destroyers, Decommissioning 34w

Injuries
Brain 836–7w, 1006–7w
Heating 429–30w

Inland Revenue
Codes of practice 965w

Insolvency
490–1w, 1257w
Liability 1256w
Small businesses 1257w

Insolvency practitioners
491w, 1255w

Insolvency Service
1255w
Standards 1256w
Telephone services 1255w

Institutional care
301–2w, 425w, 548w, 830w, 840–1w, 1011–2w, 1014w
Basingstoke 1138w
Bed and breakfast accommodation 616–7w, 841w
Closures 808w
East Sussex 548w
Eastbourne 548w
Essex 825–6w
Fees and charges 425w, 462w, 542w, 611w, 816–7w, 1002w, 1026–7w, 1060–2w, 1140–1w
Herefordshire 615–6w
Kent 425–6w
Lancashire 121w, 280–1, 609w, 839w
Non-domestic rates 695–6w
Oxfordshire 825w
Planning permission 426w
Prescription drugs 1003–4w
Private sector 1061w
Small businesses 813w
South Tyneside 990–1w
Standard spending assessments 751w
Standards 542–3w, 986w, 1001–2w
VAT 116–7w

Insurance
Aviation 11w, 695w, 1111w
Business 701w
Motor vehicles 1257–8w

Integrated administration and control system
479w
Administrative delays 222–3w
Gloucestershire 223w

International Development Association
328w

Internet
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 269w
Dept for Education and Skills 232–3w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 792w
Home Office 1262–3w
Listed buildings 932w
Ministry of Defence 315–6w
Pornography 979–80w
Scotland Office 512w

Intrastat
402–3w

Iran
Overseas aid 1192w

Iraq
(06.03.02) 69–89wh, 743–8
Armed conflict 1066w
Foreign relations 866–7w
Human rights 864w
Military aircraft 649w
Politics and government 864–5w
Terrorism 344w
Weapons 287, 884

Iron and steel
3w
Czech Republic 3w, 503w
Ministerial statements (06.03.02) 307–19
Romania 63w, 681w
USA 154w, 281–2, 487w, 674–5w, 884
Wales (05.03.02) 155–217

Isle of Wight
Dental services 450w
Public appointments 1205w

Israel
Arms trade 590–1w, 689w
Nuclear weapons 505w

Israeli-Palestinian conflict
see Middle East

Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Questions
Annuities 7
Corporation tax 1228w
Energy Policy Review 402–3
Hazardous materials, Waste management 72w
Institutional care, Lancashire 280–1
Ozone layer, EC action 797–8w
Refrigerators, Waste disposal 644w, 1152w
Roads, Tolls 187w
Tomography, North West region 1030w
Transport, North West region 172w

Jackson, Ms Glenda
Debates etc.
Office of Communications Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (06.03.02) 365–7
Questions
Homelessness 134
Housing benefit, Abuse 5–6

Jackson, Helen
Debates etc.
Equal opportunities, Females (14.03.02) 1067, 1074, 1079
Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 156–7
Questions
Regional assemblies 144
Rural areas 413–4
USA, Iron and steel 884

***Jamieson, Mr David**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions*
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Level crossings (06.03.02) 121–4wh
Questions
A6, Bypasses 167w, 1087w
A12, Noise 188w
A36 1203–4w
Air traffic control, Fees and charges 580–1w
Aircraft, Hijacking 752w
Aircraft, Noise 375w
Airline Group 176w
Airports, Air pollution 375–6w
Airports, Finance 168w
Airports, Security 373–4w
Airports, South East region 918w, 1200w
Alderley Edge bypass 923w
Bridges, Somerset 372–3w
British Transport Police, Arrest warrants 1087w
Channel tunnel 919–20w
Channel tunnel railway line 560w
Channel tunnel railway line, Finance 557–8w
Channel tunnel railway line, Freight 558w, 742–3w, 1088w, 1204w, 1276–7w
Channel tunnel railway line, Scotland 174–5w
Chiltern railway line, Finance 190w
Cleaner Vehicles Task Force 1278w
Crossrail line 921w, 1275w
Deep vein thrombosis 565–7w
Driving, Licensing 738w
Driving under influence, Cannabis 583w
East London river crossing 917w
Freight 918w
Galileo project, Road traffic control 382w
Great Western Railway 1274w
Great Western Trains, Standards 380w
Harbour authorities 749w
Heathrow Airport 1199–200w
Heathrow Airport, Air routes 1203w
Humber bridge, Repairs and maintenance 556–7w
Jubilee line 89w
London Underground, Public private partnerships 83–9w, 169–70w, 371w, 555–6w, 735–7w, 914–6w, 1082w, 1205w, 1274–5w
London Underground, Rolling stock 1274w
London Underground, Speed limits 1082w
LTS Rail, Passengers 191w
M11 371–2w
M42, Noise 99w
McAllister, Iain 171w
Motor vehicles, EC law 1090w
Motor vehicles, Edinburgh 374w
Motor vehicles, Excise duties 1089–90w
Motor vehicles, Licensing 374w
Motor vehicles, Scotland 1277w
Motor vehicles, Testing 185–6w
Motor vehicles, Young people 1271w
Motorways, Repairs and maintenance 745–6w
MV Solway Harvester 752w
National Air Traffic Services 564w
National Air Traffic Services, Finance 741w
Navigation 97w, 749w
Navigation, Conditions of employment 749w
Navigation, River Humber 97–8w
Passenger's Charter 905–6w
Ports, Shoreham 753–4w, 1200w
Public transport, Passengers 920–1w
Rail Industry Group 735w
Railtrack 170w

Jamieson, Mr David—*continued*
- Railtrack, Finance 103w, 171w, 369–70w, 373w, 737–8w, 911–2w, 1084w
- Railway Industry Advisory Committee 89–90w, 750–1w
- Railway stations 103w
- Railways 81–2w, 191w, 373w, 559w
- Railways, Assets 170w
- Railways, Disabled 739–40w
- Railways, EC action 102w
- Railways, EC countries 908–9w
- Railways, Electrification 1274–5w
- Railways, Fares 190–1w, 919w
- Railways, Finance 170–1w, 191w, 369w, 379–80w, 908w, 918w
- Railways, Freight 137–8, 1276w
- Railways, Greater London 81w, 907w
- Railways, Greater Manchester 1275w
- Railways, Industrial relations 191–2w
- Railways, Manpower 1273w
- Railways, Repairs and maintenance 560w, 583w
- Railways, Road traffic 919w
- Railways, Safety 168w, 380w, 571–2w, 745w, 1271–2w
- Railways, Skilled workers 907–8w
- Railways, South East region 175w
- Railways, South West region 743–4w, 1272w
- Railways, Standards 379w, 745w, 906–7w, 1272–3w
- Railways, Training 747w
- Regional airports, Construction 376w
- Regional airports, South East region 375w
- Research, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 90–1w, 910–1w
- Research, Disclosure of information 750w
- Road traffic 1092w
- Road traffic, Greater London 383w
- Road traffic control, Greater London 380–1w
- Road traffic control, Schools 175w
- Roads 176–8w, 583w
- Roads, Accidents 94w, 381w, 561–2w
- Roads, Construction 917w
- Roads, Expenditure 585w
- Roads, Privatisation 380w
- Roads, Repairs and maintenance 91–2w, 583–4w
- Roads, Safety 561w
- Roads, Tolls 141w, 917w
- Roads, Wales 169w, 1083w
- Rolling stock, Procurement 1273w
- Severn bridge 558–9w
- Shipping, Accidents 746–7w
- Shipping, Safety 374w
- Shoreham Port Authority 754w
- Shoreham Port Authority, Pay 754w
- Shoreham Port Authority, Public appointments 178–9w, 1091–2w
- Speed governors 492w
- Speed limits, Cameras 1227w
- Speed limits, Road signs and markings 561w
- Supply estimates, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 380w
- Swanwick Air Traffic Control Centre 177w, 742w
- Swanwick Air Traffic Control Centre, Costs 581–2w
- Thames Safety Inquiry 190w
- Trains, Overcrowding 1275w
- Transport, Finance 559w, 583w, 741–2w, 918–20w
- Transport, Manchester 748w
- Transport, South East region 92–3w
- Transport Research Laboratory, Publications 101w
- West coast railway line 171w

Jamieson, Mr David—*continued*
- West coast railway line, Finance 171w
- Written questions, Administrative delays 756w

Jeans, Simon
- 1253w

Jenkin, Mr Bernard

Questions
- Afghanistan, Armed conflict 323–4w
- Afghanistan, Peace keeping operations 30w
- Apache WAH-64 helicopter 30w
- Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, Public private partnerships 1168w
- Defence Science and Technology Laboratory 1163–4w
- Departmental expenditure limits, Ministry of Defence 325w, 1181–2w
- EC defence policy 31w
- Exercise Tradewinds 01 30–1w
- Harrier aircraft 1168–9w, 1254w
- Helicopters 29–30w
- HMS Invincible 33w
- HMS Talent 1254w
- Jeans, Simon 1253w
- Kosovo 1162w
- NATO 30w, 1254–5w
- NATO, EC defence policy 31w
- Patrol craft, Caribbean 29w
- Planning 1081–2w
- Planning obligations 1083w
- Planning permission, Appeals 1083w
- Qinetiq 1163–6w
- RAF Headley Court 659w
- RAF Henlow 658–9w
- Rapid deployment forces, EC countries 476w
- Regional development agencies, Publicity 1079–80w

Jenkins, Mr Brian

Debates etc.
- Central Government Audit and Accountability Review (13.03.02) 899

Questions
- Jobcentre Plus 15w
- Livestock, Markets 411

Jobcentre Plus
- 15w, 413w
- Industrial disputes 534w, 957–8w
- Manpower 533–4w

Jobcentres
- Advertising 1126–7w
- Crimes of violence 1120–1w
- Information technology 16w, 27w
- Security 1121w

Jobseeker's allowance
- Non-teaching staff 41w

***Johnson, Alan**, Minister of State for Employment Relations and Regions, Dept of Trade and Industry*

Sittings in Westminster Hall
- Energy Policy Review (13.03.02) 291–2wh

Questions
- BAE Systems, Filton 670w
- Conditions of employment, EC law 356w
- Enterprise grant scheme, Derbyshire 3w
- Enterprise grant scheme, South Yorkshire 889w
- Equal pay, Finchley 669w
- Equal pay, Glasgow 668w
- Equal pay, Milton Keynes 151w
- Equal pay, North West region 1185w
- Equal pay, Stafford 151w
- Equal pay, Statistics 1184w
- Equal pay, Stockton on Tees 1183–4w
- Equal pay, Warrington 1184–5w

Johnson, Alan—*continued*
- Regional development agencies, Publicity 1079–80w
- Smurfit Corrugated, Redundancy 151w
- South West Regional Development Agency 1080w
- Timeplan 252w

Johnson, Mr Boris

Debates etc.
- Greater London (12.03.02) 852
- Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 169

Questions
- Capita, Dept for Education and Skills 234w, 759w
- Capita, Dept for International Development 337w, 466w
- Capita, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 564–6w
- Capita, Dept for Work and Pensions 418–9w
- Capita, Dept of Health 464w
- Capita, Dept of Trade and Industry 1w
- Capita, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 607w
- Capita, Lord Chancellor's Dept 776w
- Capita, Northern Ireland Office 526w
- Capita, Treasury 1113w
- Institutional care, Oxfordshire 825w
- Zimbabwe, Elections 742
- Zimbabwe, Foreign relations 862w

***Johnson, Miss Melanie**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept of Trade and Industry*

Debates etc.
- Copyright (Visually Impaired Persons) Bill, 2R (15.03.02) 1200–3

Questions
- Alcoholic drinks, Measurement 593w
- Bankruptcy 1256w
- Bankruptcy, Fees and charges 1256–7w
- Company law 1081w
- Consumers, Credit 1080w, 1258w
- EU Internal Market Consumer Affairs and Tourism Council 1077–8w
- EU Internal Market Consumer Affairs and Tourism Council, Scottish Executive 489w
- Exchange Direct, Company investigations 490w, 1258w
- Fireworks 152–3w
- Insolvency 490–1w, 1257w
- Insolvency, Liability 1256w
- Insolvency practitioners 491w, 1255w
- Insolvency Service 1255w
- Insolvency Service, Standards 1256w
- Insolvency Service, Telephone services 1255w
- Loan sharks 153w
- Members, Correspondence 1255w
- Metrication 593w
- Motor vehicles, Insurance 1257–8w
- Paragon Finance 153w
- Small businesses 646w
- Small businesses, Bank services 149w
- Small businesses, Insolvency 1257w
- Supermarkets, Farmers 1077w

Jones, Helen M

Questions
- Business questions 428
- Caesarean sections 991–2w
- Equal pay, Warrington 1184–5w
- Magistrates, Warrington 408w
- Members, Correspondence 1203w
- Mental health services, Public appointments 819w
- Smurfit Corrugated, Redundancy 151w
- Warrington, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 528w

***Jones, Helen M**—continued*
Warrington, Dept for Education and Skills 391w
Warrington, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 795w
Warrington, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 190w
Warrington, Dept for Work and Pensions 253w
Warrington, Dept of Trade and Industry 673w
Warrington, Home Office 717–8w

Jones, Ian
1278w

Jones, Mr Jon Owen
Questions
Eyesight, Surgery 135w

Jones, Mr Kevan
Debates etc.
Greater London (12.03.02) 769
Terrorism (07.03.02) 519

Jones, Dr Lynne
Debates etc.
Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (13.03.02) 969
Questions
Computers within reach programme 633–4w
Higher education 236w
Higher education, Research 1134w
Home energy efficiency scheme 640w, 795w
Housing, West Midlands 1084w
Housing benefit 371w
Immigration 516w
Institutional care, Fees and charges 542w
Museums and galleries, Finance 261–2w
New deal for communities, Kings Norton 1089w
Pensioners, Income support 960–1w
Prisons, Education 716w
Railtrack, Finance 1084w
Social rented housing 83w
State retirement pensions 1118w
Written questions, Administrative delays 1045–6w

Jones, Mr Martyn David
Debates etc.
Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 204
Questions
Colombia, Human rights 862–3w
EC labour policy 1240w
Television, Licensing 935w

Jones, Mr Nigel
Questions
Chemical and biological warfare 547w
NHS, Pensions 839w
NHS, Security 547–8w
Schools, Security 241w
West Africa, Overseas aid 326w

***Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa**, Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport*
Questions
Casey, Derek 259–60w
New Millennium Experience, Expenditure 262w
Public appointments, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 1283w
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 265w, 573–6w, 1158w
Television, Licensing 679w
UK Sports Council 259–60w
Warrington, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 528w

Joyce, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Equal opportunities, Females (14.03.02) 1082, 1088, 1098, 1114
Terrorism (07.03.02) 503, 513–4

Jubilee line
89w

Juries
Ethnic groups 1245w

Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
Rep and 3R (04.03.02) 22–122

Kalifeh I
see MV Kalifeh I

Kashmir
861–2w

Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Debates etc.
BBC, Points of order (06.03.02) 320–1
Office of Communications Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (06.03.02) 347, 350, 352–7, 360, 362
Questions
Business questions 421
Members, Correspondence 23w, 802–3w, 869–70w, 1049w
Middle East, Armed conflict 688w
Middle East, Peace negotiations 752
Overseas aid 110w

***Keeble, Ms Sally**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for Transport Local Government and theRegions*
Debates etc.
Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL), Programme motion and Rep (11.03.02) 689–91, 697–700, 706–9, 712, 714–6, 719–21, 723–5
Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (13.03.02) 908, 914–8, 922–3, 930–3, 936, 941–2, 945–8, 952–62, 968–70, 986–7
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Housing, Hyndburn (12.03.02) 228–32wh
Starter home initiative, Hertfordshire (06.03.02) 127–32wh
Questions
Aerials, Planning permission 98–9w
Blue badge scheme, Autism 95w
Braunstone Community Association 103–4w
Bus lanes 186w
Bus services, Concessions 1088w
Bus services, Rural areas 752–3w
Coal, Mining 102–3w
Coalfields Regeneration Trust, Cynon Valley 187w
Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL) 2001/02 93w
Community development 174w
Community transport, Excise duties 172w
Council housing, Construction 82w, 173–4w
Council housing, Rents 84w
Deprivation indicators 1092w
Disabled facilities grants 1200–1w
Disabled Person's Transport Advisory Committee, Autism 95w
Empty property, St Helens 83–4w
Empty property, Tyne and Wear 582w
English Partnerships 1085w
Forests, Environment protection 364w
Fraud, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 751w
Hedges and ditches 102w, 381w
Homelessness 93–4w, 923–4w
Housing, Empty property 173w

***Keeble, Ms Sally**—continued*
Housing, Finance 747–8w
Housing, Greater London 376–8w
Housing, Prices 189–90w
Housing, Rural areas 554w
Housing, Sales 1088–9w
Housing, South East region 188–9w
Housing, Telford 100–1w
Housing, Urban areas 179w
Housing, West Midlands 1084w
Housing benefit 371w
Housing investment programmes 175w
Landlords, Taxation 923w
Leasehold 196w
Manton colliery 1085w
Members, Correspondence 1203w
Mersey Basin Trust 1082w
Millennium Exhibition 367–9w
Mortgages, Equity 1110w
New deal for communities, Kings Norton 1089w
Park and ride schemes, Finance 187–8w
Planning 140–1, 1081–2w
"Planning and Delivering a Fundamental Change Consultation Paper" 176w
Planning obligations 1083w
Planning permission, Appeals 99–100w, 1083w
Planning permission, Areas of outstanding natural beauty 1204–5w
Planning permission, Greenbelt 185w, 747w
Planning permission, Rural areas 83w
Ports, Shoreham 754w, 1091–2w
Priority routes, Greater London 82w
Public appointments, Isle of Wight 1205w
Public transport, Fares 92w
Refuges 922–3w
Regional assistance 748w
Regional assistance, Private sector 383w
Regional development agencies 922w
Regional development agencies, Finance 747w
Regional planning and development 174w
Rented housing, Construction 176w
Rents, Selby 909–10w
Right to buy, Greater London 567w, 1202–3w
Roads, Tolls 753w
Shared ownership schemes 189w
Single regeneration budget 748w
Social rented housing 83w
Social rented housing, Energy 903w
Social rented housing, Executives 172w
Stationery, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 562w
Structure plans, Gloucestershire 382–3w
Supporting people programme 181–2w
Taxis, Disabled 748w
Tenants, Nuisance 175w
Transport, Schools 382w, 747w
Travel, Concessions 187w
Warrington, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 190w

Keetch, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Zimbabwe (14.03.02) 1036
Questions
Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham, Transplant surgery 537w

***Kelly, Ruth**, Economic Secretary, Treasury*
Debates etc.
Economic and monetary union (05.03.02) 266–70
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Mortgages (05.03.02) 58–60wh
Questions
Accountancy, Treasury 1114w

Kelly, Ruth—continued
Advance corporation tax, Pension funds 110–1w
Advertising, Treasury 469–70w
Alcoholic drinks, Expenditure 1114–6w
Annual business inquiry 399–400w
Annuities 9w
Annuities, Advertising 472–3w
Arthur Andersen, Treasury 699–700w, 1288w
Autism Awareness Year 2002 1110–1w
Average earnings 1229w
Aviation, Insurance 695w, 1111w
Bank services 1115–6w
Bristol, Treasury 1111–2w
Business, Statistics 703w
Cancer, Death rate 703–4w
Capita, Treasury 1113w
Capital gains tax 400–1w
Catering, Treasury 106w
Cohen, Ronald 111w
Community investment tax credit 1230w
Computers 678w
Conferences, Treasury 10w, 200w
Contracts, Treasury 1113–4w
Departmental responsibilities, Treasury 111–2w
Economic and monetary union 106w, 112w
Economic and monetary union, Publicity 645w
Email, Treasury 401–2w
Energy, Treasury 1115w
Equal pay, Treasury 471–2w
Euro, Business 468w
Fair trade initiative, Treasury 110w
Financial services, EC action 111w
Financial services, Low incomes 492w
Foreign loans, World War II 1114w
Global Crossing, Treasury 105w
Health insurance, Terrorism 403w
Hotels, Treasury 696–7w
Inflation 472w
Insurance, Business 701w
Intrastat 402–3w
Land use, Treasury 106w
Ministerial policy advisors, Treasury 1115w
National insurance contributions, Overseas residence 697w
National Savings and Investments, Accountancy 468–9w
Older workers, Treasury 1112w
Overseas aid 109w
Pension funds, Accountancy 702w
Performance and Innovation Unit 105w
Premium bonds 695w
Press releases, Treasury 401w
Proceeds of crime, Nigeria 645w
Public finance 1230w
Public private partnerships 1228–9w
Public relations, Treasury 401w
Railways, Treasury 471w
Recruitment, Treasury 694–5w
Relocation services, Treasury 401w
Roads, Accidents 141–2w
Sponsorship, Treasury 700w
State earnings related pension scheme 471w
State retirement pensions, Overseas residence 199w
Teenage pregnancy 618–22w, 700–2w
Temporary employment, Treasury 645w
Visits abroad, Treasury 704w
Voluntary work, Treasury 202w
Wood, Treasury 964–5w
Work sharing, Treasury 1111–3w
Written questions, Administrative delays 700w

Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
Debates etc.
Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference (06.03.02) 295–6
Questions
Energy supply, Scotland 673–4w
Police, Conditions of employment 883–4
Railtrack, Finance 282–3

Kennedy, Jane, Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office
Questions
Baton rounds, Northern Ireland 524–5w
Defence equipment, Northern Ireland 705w
Firearms, Northern Ireland 58w
Police, Northern Ireland 525w

Kent
Hospitals 288
Institutional care 425–6w

Kent and Canterbury Hospital
(07.03.02) 524–32

Kenya
Politics and government 333w

Key, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Nuclear power stations (05.03.02) 251, 254
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Energy Policy Review (13.03.02) 280wh, 289–91wh
Sudan (13.03.02) 249–53wh
Questions
A36 1203–4w
Atlantic Frontier Environmental Network 347–8w
Combined heat and power 942w
Electricity 348–9w
Genetics 136w
Health education, Sex 136w
Qinetiq, Military aircraft 165w
RAF Chilmark 165–6w
Regional assemblies, South West region 567w, 569–70w, 921–2w
Regional government, South West region 567–9w
Roads 583w

Khabra, Mr Piara S
Questions
Developing countries, Overseas aid 275–6

Kidderminster
Foot and mouth disease 783w

Kidney, Mr David
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Consignia (12.03.02) 199wh
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 31w
Anti-Terrorism Crime and Security Act 2001 597w
Equal pay, Stafford 151w
Forests, Subsidies 795–6w
Housing, Rural areas 554w
Institutional care, Fees and charges 816–7w
Jobcentres, Information technology 16w
Money laundering 1236–7w
Mortgages, Equity 1110w
Road traffic offences 1106w
Speed limits, Cameras 1227w
Teachers, Pay 1212w
Weeds Act 1959 218–9w
Winter fuel payments 960w
World Summit on Sustainable Development 479–80w

Kidney patients
Lancashire 821w

King, Andy
Questions
Working families tax credit, Minimum wage 885

King, Ms Oona
Debates etc.
Police (08.03.02) 605–6
Questions
Asthma, Children 450w
Disadvantaged, Greater London 547w
Housing, Finance 747–8w
Housing benefit, Non-dependent deductions 729–30w
Local government finance 920w
Parliementary data and video network 1207–8w
Regional assistance 748w
Regional development agencies 922w
Rent Service 958–9w
Rented housing, Social security benefits 958w
Right to buy, Greater London 567w
Roads, Accidents 141–2w
Single regeneration budget 748w

King Edward VII Hospital Medhurst
Heart diseases 462w

Kings Norton
New deal for communities 1089w

Kingston upon Hull
Hospitals 545w
Surgery 544–5w

Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Debates etc.
Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference (06.03.02) 302
Questions
MMR vaccine 1032–3w, 1138w

Kirkwood, Mr Archy
Questions
Disability Discrimination Act 1995 536–7w
Filkin, Elizabeth, Pay 467–8w
House of Commons, Equal opportunities 1116–7w
House of Commons, Operating costs 1117w
Housing benefit 959w
Non-teaching staff, Conditions of employment 626w
Non-teaching staff, Jobseeker's allowance 41w

Knee replacements
Waiting lists 827–8w

Knight, Rt Hon Greg
Debates etc.
Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL), Programme motion and Rep (11.03.02) 703, 709, 717, 720
Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (13.03.02) 912, 925–7, 929–30, 941–2
Questions
Motorways, Repairs and maintenance 745–6w
Teachers, Pay 1212w

Knight, Jim
Debates etc.
Terrorism (07.03.02) 507–8
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Cultural heritage (07.03.02) 143–7wh
Questions
Business questions 429
Teachers, Pay 1005

Kosovo
1162w
Armed conflict 1182–3w

Kumar, Dr Ashok
Debates etc.
Cleveland Constabulary, Inquiries (06.03.02) 396
Iron and steel, USA (06.03.02) 317
Ministerial statement intervention (06.03.02) 314
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Energy Policy Review (13.03.02) 278–82wh
Questions
Airguns 598–600w, 721w, 980w
Asthma 1144–5w
Cancer, Health services 287w
Cancer, Nurses 814–5w
Cancer, Research 610–1w
Civil servants, Recruitment 256–7w
Courier services, Northern Ireland Office 258–9w
Courier services, Scotland Office 513w
Criminal Courts Review, Magistrates 409w
Firearms, Accidents 132–3w
Firearms, Licensing 312–3w
Higher civil servants, Manpower 955–6w
Influenza, Middlesbrough 1030w
Juries, Ethnic groups 1245w
Osteoporosis 1035w
UK Human Tissue Bank 1002–3w

Kuwait
Armed forces 1182w

Labour turnover
Crown Prosecution Service 307–8w

Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Debates etc.
Greater London (12.03.02) 762–3, 770, 773
Questions
Blue badge scheme, Autism 95w
Disabled Person's Transport Advisory Committee, Autism 95w
Heart diseases, Surgery 288
Higher education, Student numbers 1210w

Laeken Summit (EC)
395–7w

Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Debates etc.
Equal opportunities, Females (14.03.02) 1064, 1068–9
Greater London (12.03.02) 774, 790, 799, 808, 815, 818–21, 825, 851, 854
Questions
Autism 1139w
Special education, Autism 759w

Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Debates etc.
Greenwich Hospital, Points of order (06.03.02) 339
Nuclear power stations (05.03.02) 234–8
Questions
Asylum, RAF Turnhouse 719w
Floods 642w
Public expenditure, Scotland 275w

Lamb, Norman
Debates etc.
Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference (06.03.02) 302–3
Zimbabwe (14.03.02) 1043
Questions
Afghanistan, Bomb disposal 686w, 1129–30w
Aircraft, Hijacking 752w
Arthritis, Drugs 424–5w

***Lamb, Norman**—continued*
Bus services, Rural areas 752–3w
Community services grant 1153w
Dental services, Fees and charges 987w
Further education, Finance 1212w
Income support 1251–2w
Nations Trust 467w
Plant power 479w
South Africa, HIV infection 466–7w
Tanzania, Air traffic control 685w
Zimbabwe, Elections 686w
Zimbabwe, Reconstruction 686w

Lammy, David
Questions
Local government finance, Haringey 184w
Young offenders, Disadvantaged 710w

Lancashire
General practitioners 805w
Health authorities 817w
Hospital beds 612w
Institutional care 121w, 280–1, 609w, 839w
Kidney patients 821w
Neighbourhood wardens 709w

Lancashire Ambulance Service NHS Trust
988–9w

Land
National Lottery 936w

Land use
Dept for Education and Skills 237–8w
Dept of Health 1141w
Dept of Trade and Industry 348w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 608w
Home Office 1102w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 409w
Ministry of Defence 164w
Transport 918w
Treasury 106w

Landfill tax
9–10w, 698w

Landfill tax credit scheme
10w
Entrust 697–9w

Landlords
Taxation 923w, 964w

Languages
Exports 674w
Primary education 1212–3w
Schools 1001–3

Lansley, Mr Andrew
Questions
Hospital beds 1033w
Police, Conditions of employment 621–2
VAT, Private education 703w

Latex
Allergies 1004w

Latin America
64w

Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Debates etc.
Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 166–7
Questions
Car allowances, Service industries 1289w
Financial Services Authority, Public appointments 1110w
National Savings and Investments, Accountancy 468–9w

Laws, Mr David
Debates etc.
Bank services (14.03.02) 1030
Economic and monetary union (05.03.02) 262–5, 267–9

***Laws, Mr David**—continued*
Terrorism (07.03.02) 495–8
Questions
Armed forces, Gulf states 1182w
Armed forces, Kuwait 1182w
Health insurance, Ministry of Defence 315w
Health services 552–3w
Hospitals, Private finance initiative 1027–8w
Hospitals, Private sector 834w
Hospitals, Waiting lists 809w, 827w
Jobcentres, Crimes of violence 1120–1w
"Local Government White Paper" 739w
Medical treatments, EC countries 1060w
NHS, Finance 993w, 1059w
Police, Health insurance 158–9w
Social Security Benefits Agency, Security 723–4w
Students, Finance 999
Written questions, Administrative delays 398w, 1045w, 1048w

Laxton, Mr Bob
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Cultural heritage (07.03.02) 150–3wh
Questions
UK membership of EC 62w

Lazarowicz, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Environmental audit (07.03.02) 480–2
Office of Communications Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (06.03.02) 329–30
Police (08.03.02) 596–7
Roads, Safety (08.03.02) 610–4
Questions
Consumers, Credit 1080w
Employment, Discrimination 28w

Learning and Skills Act 2000
Questions
952–3w

Learning and Skills Council for England
Grants 502w

Learning and skills councils
1134w, 1213w
Basic education 36w

Learning disability
Administration of justice 154–5w

Leased territories
USA 1171w

Leasehold
196w

Lee Valley
Floods 942w

Leeds
Education 241–2w

Legal aid
197–8w

Legal costs
Dept for Education and Skills 759w
Ministry of Defence 324w
President of the Council 404w
Solicitor-General 873–5w

Legal profession
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency 164w

Leicestershire
Teachers 1212w

Leigh, Mr Edward
Debates etc.
Central Government Audit and Accountability Review (13.03.02) 895–6
Police (08.03.02) 561

Leonard Cheshire Foundation
837–8w

Lepper, Mr David
Debates etc.
Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL), Programme motion and Rep (11.03.02) 726–7
Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (13.03.02) 967–8, 983
Greater London (12.03.02) 798–804
Questions
Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service 526w
Forfeiture 774w

***Leslie, Mr Christopher**, Parliamentary Secretary Cabinet Office*
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Politics, Young people (05.03.02) 42–4wh
Questions
Advertising, Cabinet Office 1074–5w
Billing, Cabinet Office 955w
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 81w
City of London Corporation, Cabinet Office 422w
Civil servants, Employment tribunals 875
Civil servants, Recruitment 256–7w
Civil service, Reform 878–9, 1072w
Crime, Victims 1107–8w
Duchy of Lancaster Benevolent Fund 1070w
Electronic government 79–80w
Empty property, Cabinet Office 777–9w
Equal pay, Cabinet Office 956–7w
Global Crossing, Cabinet Office 422w
Higher civil servants, Manpower 955–6w
Manpower, Cabinet Office 1073–4w
Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill 2001/02 81w
Non-departmental public bodies, Supermarkets 258w
Ombudsman, Reform 874
Press releases, Cabinet Office 779w
Public appointments, Cabinet Office 955w
Public appointments, Ethnic groups 1071w
Public relations, Cabinet Office 779w
Railways, Cabinet Office 421w
"Regions White Paper" 957w
Relocation services, Cabinet Office 1209–10w
Royal commissions 253w
Royal National Institute for Deaf People 1071–2w
Visits abroad, Cabinet Office 421–2w
Voluntary work, Cabinet Office 255w
Whitehall and Industry Group, Secondment 422w
Work sharing, Cabinet Office 257–8w, 780w

Letwin, Mr Oliver
Questions
Aircraft, Noise 562w
Alder Hey Children's Hospital 1145w
Churches, VAT 264w
Crimes of violence 629–30
Data protection 487–8w
Protec, Contracts 1263–4w

Leukaemia
Drugs 1065w

Level crossings
(06.03.02) 117–24wh

Levitt, Mr Tom
Questions
NHS, Local authorities 135–6w
Road traffic, Greater London 383w

Levy, Lord
687–8w

Lewes
Floods 483w

***Lewis, Mr Ivan**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for Education and Skills*
Questions
Accountancy, Dept for Education and Skills 1279w
Advertising, Dept for Education and Skills 760–2w
Asthma 194w
Bristol, Dept for Education and Skills 493w
Capita, Dept for Education and Skills 234–5w, 759w
Children and Young People's Unit 390–1w
Civil servants, Employment 236w
Connexions Service 501w, 769–70w, 952–3w, 1135w
Correspondence, Dept for Education and Skills 493–4w
Design, Dept for Education and Skills 387w, 769w
Drugs, Health education 1218w
Education, Assessments 388–90w, 624w, 1209–11w
Education, Asylum 947–8w
Education, Qualifications 1218w
Education, Standards 1217w
Education, Wales 232w
Engineering 1211w
Engineering, Higher education 678w
Fair trade initiative, Dept for Education and Skills 757–8w
Further education, Finance 1212w
GCE A level, Mathematics 249–50w
Gifted children, Secondary education 756w
Higher education 236w
Hotels, Dept for Education and Skills 384w, 1278–9w
Internet, Dept for Education and Skills 232–3w
Land use, Dept for Education and Skills 237–8w
Learning and Skills Council for England, Grants 502w
Legal costs, Dept for Education and Skills 759w
Literacy 251w
Manpower, Dept for Education and Skills 1216w
Modern apprenticeships 242w, 390w
National vocational qualifications, Engineering 250w
Non-governmental organisations, Dept for Education and Skills 1217w
Offices, Dept for Education and Skills 235w
Press releases, Dept for Education [illegible] Skills 764w
Primary education, Languages 1212–3w
Private finance initiative, Dept for Education and Skills 387w
Public appointments, Dept for Education and Skills 756–8w, 1279w
Public relations, Dept for Education and Skills 1133w
Pupil exclusions, Drugs 251w
Pupils, Absenteeism 238w
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 626w
Regulatory Impact Unit, Dept for Education and Skills 1279–80w
Relocation services, Dept for Education and Skills 951w
Research, Dept for Education and Skills 384w
Retirement, Dept for Education and Skills 947w
Runshaw College, Assessments 389w

***Lewis, Mr Ivan**—continued*
Schools, Arson 953–4w
Schools, Crime 251–2w
Schools, Curriculum 239–40w
Schools, Drugs 251w
Schools, Languages 1001–3
Schools, Science 1214–5w
Schools, Security 241w
Schools, Sports 1214w
Secondment, Dept for Education and Skills 236–7w, 946–8w
Sixth form education, Student numbers 1217–8w
Special education, Autism 238–9w, 759w, 1217w
Special education, Somerset 1219w
Television, Dept for Education and Skills 249w
Trade unions, Dept for Education and Skills 503w
Truancy 1279w
Visits abroad, Dept for Education and Skills 1216w
Vocational education, Finance 502w
Voluntary work, Dept for Education and Skills 387w
Warrington, Dept for Education and Skills 391w

Lewis, Dr Julian
Debates etc.
Bank services (14.03.02) 1026
Brockenhurst, Petitions (07.03.02) 522–3
Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL), Programme motion and Rep (11.03.02) 664
Democracy, Electronic government (12.03.02) 866
Greater London (12.03.02) 841, 851–2
Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 177–8
Police (08.03.02) 557
Terrorism (07.03.02) 497
Questions
Civil servants, Employment tribunals 875
Food Standards Agency 409–10
Homelessness 134
Pensioners, Social security benefits 21–2w
Romania 64–5w
Sponsorship, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 65w

Liability
Insolvency 1256w

Libraries
see also Public libraries
Building Research Establishment 347w

***Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen**, Secretary of State for Scotland*
Debates etc.
Nuclear power stations (05.03.02) 220–1, 226–36, 248
Questions
A76, Speed limits 1207–8w
Asbestos, Scotland 693–4w
Census, Scotland 61w
Consultants, Scotland Office 511w
Courier services, Scotland Office 513w
Departmental responsibilities, Scotland Office 1208w
Electoral register 511w
Electricity Act 1989 693w
Eyesight, Scotland Office 513w
Females, Scotland 899–900w
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries 1209w
Internet, Scotland Office 512w
Nuclear power stations, Planning permission 513w
Orders and regulations, Scotland Office 512–3w
Public appointments, Scotland Office 901w

***Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen**—continued*
Scotland Act 1998 1207w
Stress, Scotland Office 511–2w

Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Questions
Explosives, Factories 656w, 1169w
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries 1209w
Guided weapons 1166–7w
Nuclear power stations, Scotland 1208w
Police, Somerset 712w
Pupils, Personal records 237w
Qinetiq 1162–3w
Special education, Somerset 1219w
Veterinary services, South West region 219w

Lidington, Mr David
Debates etc.
Environmental audit (07.03.02) 484–7
Questions
Aylesbury Young Offender Institution, Fire prevention 1097w
Business, Statistics 703w
Census, Scotland 61w
Climate change levy 6–8w, 117–8w, 1228w
Climate change levy, Euro 117w
Climate change levy, Horticulture 230w
Climate change levy, NHS 1146w
Climate change levy, Schools 759–60w
Customs and Excise, Computers 118w
Customs and Excise, Debts 397–8w
Customs and Excise, X rays 112–3w
Driving under influence, Cannabis 583w
Emissions trading scheme, EC action 73–4w
Energy, Conservation 73–6w
Excise duties, Alcoholic drinks 473w
Excise duties, Fuels 9w, 116w
Fuels, Northern Ireland 113w
Grammar schools 1009
Intrastat 402–3w
Landfill tax 9–10w
Landfill tax credit scheme 10w
Lung diseases 538w
Members, Correspondence 1030–1w
Mittal, Lakshmi, Taxation 117–8w
National Lottery, Franchises 116w
Pesticides 198–9w
Public Record Office, Census 55–6w, 1175–6w
Regional assemblies 144
Research and development tax credit 10w
Sixsmith, Martin 902w
Smuggling, Confiscation orders 108–9w
Smuggling, Fuels 113w
Smuggling, Tobacco 10w, 107–8w
Taxation, Incinerators 9w
VAT 11–2w, 114–5w
VAT, Computers 113–4w
VAT, Digital certificates 114–6w
VAT, Housing 9w
Waste management 681w
Written questions, Administrative delays 1045w
Written questions, Dept of Health 276w

Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Debates etc.
Retirement, Points of order (05.03.02) 151
Questions
Anti-Terrorism Crime and Security Act 2001 1263w
Archaeological sites, St Albans 1232w
Non-teaching staff, Manpower 1010
Railtrack, Finance 142–3

Lincolnshire
Primary education 633–5w

Linton, Martin
Debates etc.
Police (08.03.02) 545, 575–80
Questions
Asylum 709w
Crime, Greater London 634–5

Listed buildings
Internet 932w

Literacy
251w
Primary education 38w

Lithuania
Work permits 974–5w

Litter
284–5, 1153w

Liverpool
Local government finance 744w

Livestock
Markets 229w, 410–1, 784w
Transport 478w, 480w, 644w

Lloyd, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Zimbabwe (14.03.02) 1037–8
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Industrial health and safety (14.03.02) 316wh, 321wh, 335–8wh, 342wh, 357wh
Questions
Alcoholic drinks, Misuse 1013w
Grammar schools 1008–9
Kosovo, Armed conflict 1182–3w
North West Arts, Arts Council of England 934w

Llwyd, Mr Elfyn
Debates etc.
Iron and steel, USA (06.03.02) 314
Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 164, 168, 175, 200–5
Questions
Angola 1295–6w
Angola, Arms trade 1259–60w
Angola, Overseas aid 1187–8w
Children, Protection 1135–6w
Civil servants, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1075w
Correspondence, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 366–7w
Location, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1238w
Manpower, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1238w
NAW Assembly Cabinet, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1237–8w
Non-teaching staff, Manpower 1216w
Police, Conditions of employment 887–8
Public expenditure, Dept for Education and Skills 756w
Public expenditure, Ministry of Defence 315w
Public expenditure, Wales 1075w
Publications, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1075w
Social security benefits, Abuse 411w

Loan guarantee scheme
Small businesses 349w, 589w

Loan sharks
153w

Loans
Students 1132w
Teachers 1135w

Local authorities
Electronic government 183–4w
NHS 135–6w
Pollution control 219–20w, 641w, 793w
Public private partnerships 920w

Local Authorities (Conduct of Referendums) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2002
Debates etc.
(05.03.02) 261

Local education authorities
South West region 1135w

Local government
560–2w
Elections 173w, 570w, 1086w
Manpower 755–6w
Pensions 187w
Publications 183–5w
Reform 1085–6w
Standards 168–9w

Local government finance
174w, 567–8w, 738–40w, 920w, 1083w
City of London 377–9w, 739w
City of Westminster 377–9w, 739w
Haringey 184w
Liverpool 744w
Surrey 91w

"Local Government White Paper"
739w

Local strategic partnerships
102w
Fire services 1090w

Location
Health authorities 461w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1238w
Small businesses 1186w

London
see Greater London

London Ambulance Service
Standards 1049–50w

London Development Agency Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (06.03.02) 271, (13.03.02) 871

London Underground
(15.03.02) 1204–12
Chemical and biological warfare 1167w
Fares 370–1w
Public private partnerships 83–9w, 169–70w, 371w, 469w, 555–6w, 735–7w, 914–7w, 1082w, 1205–6w, 1274–5w
Rolling stock 1274w
Speed limits 1082w

Londonderry
Army 656w

Lone parents
Social security benefits 534–5w

Long term unemployed
19–20w

"Long-Term Reductions in Greenhouse Gas Emissions in the UK"
351–2w

Lord Chancellor's Dept
Accountancy 1176–7w
Advertising 776–8w
Attendance 51w
Capita 776w
Catering 962–3w
EC law 56–8w
Fair trade initiative 526w
Hotels 963w
Industrial disputes 52w
Land use 409w
Non-governmental organisations 408–9w
Offices 1244–5w
Official hospitality 404w
Operating costs 1178w

Lord Chancellor's Dept—continued
- Press releases 579w
- Public appointments 1242–3w
- Public relations 579–80w
- Railways 405w
- Recruitment 578–9w
- Relocation services 773w
- Trade unions 52–4w
- Voluntary work 196–7w
- Work sharing 961–2w

Loughton, Tim
Debates etc.
- Greater London (12.03.02) 776, 778, 807, 809, 813–4
- Medical treatments, Points of order (05.03.02) 151
- Police (08.03.02) 538, 588–93

Sittings in Westminster Hall
- NHS, Finance (12.03.02) 218–21wh

Questions
- Ambulance services 848w
- Ambulance services, Brighton 848–9w
- Archaeology, Finance 935w
- Asbestos 75w, 96w
- Asbestos, Industrial health and safety 95w
- Autism, West Sussex 438–9w
- Autism Awareness Year 2002 1110–1w
- Brighton Healthcare NHS Trust, Complaints 848w
- Brighton Healthcare NHS Trust, Screening 1145–7w
- Caesarean sections 992w
- Cancer, Brighton 854–6w
- Cancer, Death rate 703–4w
- Cancer, Medical treatments 1148w
- Fuel poverty 885w
- Hearing aids 833w
- Heart diseases, Surgery 138–9w
- Hip replacements, EC countries 829w
- Home detention curfews 707–8w
- Hospital beds 858w
- Hospital wards 847w
- Hospital wards, Repairs and maintenance 810–1w
- Hospitals, Catering 849w
- Hospitals, Crimes of violence 849–50w
- Hospitals, Infectious diseases 857–8w
- Information officers, Dept of Health 1062–3w
- Institutional care, Private sector 1061w
- Knee replacements, Waiting lists 827–8w
- Medical equipment 853–4w
- Medical records 855–6w
- Medical treatments, EC countries 1147w
- Methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus 850w
- Methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus, Death 1145w
- Mid Sussex NHS Trust, Spinal injuries 850w
- MMR vaccine 812w
- National Care Standards Commission 1039w
- NHS, Administration 855w
- NHS, Combined heat and power 831w
- NHS, Executives 1065–6w
- NHS, Finance 138w
- NHS, Information technology 1147–8w
- NHS, Public relations 1246–7w
- NHS Leadership Centre, Public appointments 850w
- "NHS Plan News" 847–8w
- Oxygen, Medical treatments 839–40w
- Physiotherapy, Brighton 856–8w
- Physiotherapy, Sussex 858w
- Ports, Shoreham 753–4w, 1091–2w, 1200w
- Premium bonds 695w
- "Primary Care" 849w
- Primary care groups, West Sussex 846w

Loughton, Tim—continued
- Radiography 1291w
- Radiography, Manpower 850–4w
- Recycling 477w, 641w
- Roads, Tolls 753w
- Shoreham Port Authority 754w
- Shoreham Port Authority, Pay 754w
- Shoreham Port Authority, Public appointments 178–9w, 373w, 1091–2w
- Surgery 846w
- Teenage pregnancy 700–2w
- Written questions, Administrative delays 275w, 700w
- Written questions, Dept of Health 843–5w

Love, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
- Greater London (12.03.02) 843–5, 848

Sittings in Westminster Hall
- Cultural heritage (07.03.02) 142wh

Questions
- Abandoned vehicles, Medway 1234w
- Floods, Lee Valley 942w
- Housing benefit, Abuse 6
- India, Nuclear weapons 1298–300w
- Motor vehicles, EC law 1090w
- Motor vehicles, Excise duties 1089–90w
- Non-teaching staff, Manpower 1009–10
- Waste management 1233–4w

Low incomes
- Financial services 492w

Low pay
- Pensions 21w

LTS Rail
- Passengers 191w

Lucas, Ian
Debates etc.
- Environmental audit (07.03.02) 458, 466
- Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 158

Questions
- Crown Prosecution Service 1236w
- Fraud 201w
- Military aircraft 321–2w
- Overseas aid 109–10w
- Railtrack 170w
- Teachers, Pay 1003–4
- UK Mission to United Nations, Manpower 1297w
- Young offenders 710w

Luff, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
- Police (08.03.02) 544

Questions
- Asylum, Housing 160w, 718w
- Asylum, Throckmorton airfield 595–7w
- Autism 543w
- Land use, Dept for Education and Skills 237–8w
- Land use, Dept of Health 1141w
- Land use, Dept of Trade and Industry 348w
- Land use, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 608w
- Land use, Home Office 1102w
- Land use, Lord Chancellor's Dept 409w
- Land use, Ministry of Defence 164w
- Land use, Treasury 106w
- Regional assemblies, Referendums 172w

Luke, Mr Iain
Debates etc.
- Nuclear power stations (05.03.02) 246

Questions
- Business questions 431
- Middle East, Peace negotiations 861w

Lung diseases
- 538w

M1
- Repairs and maintenance 745–6w

M11
- 371–2w

M42
- Noise 99w

McCafferty, Ms Chris
Debates etc.
- Equal opportunities, Females (14.03.02) 1088–91

***McCartney, Rt Hon Ian**, Minister for Pensions, Department for Work and Pensions*
Questions
- Accountancy, Dept for Work and Pensions 26–7w
- Annuities 20w
- Capita, Dept for Work and Pensions 23–6w, 418–9w
- Employment, Discrimination 28w
- Empty property, Dept for Work and Pensions 1117–8w
- Members, Correspondence 23w
- Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for Work and Pensions 27–8w
- Occupational pensions 19w
- Older workers, Dept for Work and Pensions 418w
- Pension Service 22w, 418w
- Pensioners, Income support 10–3, 414–5w, 960–1w, 1241w
- Pensioners, Social security benefits 15w, 21–2w
- Pensions, Foster care 420w
- Pensions, Low pay 21w
- Pensions, Patients 16–7w
- Pensions, Public sector 253w
- Pensions, Regulation 15w
- Personal pensions 18–9w, 253w
- Retirement, Age 23w
- Social security benefits, Abuse 255w
- Social security benefits, Patients 723w, 727–8w
- Stakeholder pensions 22–3w
- State earnings related pension scheme 254–5w
- State retirement pensions 725–6w, 1118w
- State retirement pensions, Overseas residence 253–4w
- State retirement pensions, Uprating 410–1w
- Warrington, Dept for Work and Pensions 253w
- Winter fuel payments 960w
- Winter fuel payments, Overseas residence 959–60w

McDonagh, Ms Siobhain
Sittings in Westminster Hall
- Diabetes (13.03.02) 300–3wh

Questions
- Local government, Elections 173w
- Robbery 713–4w
- Social Exclusion Unit, Community development 1071w
- Working mothers 13

McDonnell, John
Debates etc.
- Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (13.03.02) 971
- Environmental audit (07.03.02) 462
- Hospitals, Greater London (13.03.02) 995–6

Questions
- City of London Corporation, Cabinet Office 422w
- City of London Corporation, Northern Ireland Office 60w

McDonnell, John—continued
City of London Corporation, Prime Minister 342w
City of London (Ward Elections) Bill 1998/99 342w

MacDougall, Mr John
Debates etc.
Nuclear power stations (05.03.02) 232
Questions
Aung San Suu Kyi 1296w
Economic and monetary union 112w
Gambling, Manpower 346w
Gambling Review Body 346w, 680w
Gambling Review Body, Coastal areas 345w
Gaming machines 345w

Macedonia
1162w
Armed forces 323w

McFall, Mr John
Debates etc.
Bank services (14.03.02) 1022
Central Government Audit and Accountability Review (13.03.02) 895
Questions
Annuities 7–8
Russia, Overseas aid 859w

McIntosh, Miss Anne
Debates etc.
Office of Communications Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (06.03.02) 332–4, 344–5, 357, 372–8, 386–7
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Cultural heritage (07.03.02) 138–43wh, 158–9wh, 166–9wh, 172wh
Questions
Aviation, Insurance 695w
Breast cancer, Herceptin 994–5w
Bridges, Axle weights 924w
EC law, Parliamentary scrutiny 62–3w
European Bank for Reconstruction and Development 693w
Flood control 413
Hospital beds, North Yorkshire 1010–1w
Incapacity benefit, York 411w
Livestock, Markets 229w
Livestock, Transport 644w
Members, Correspondence 636–7w
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 573–4w
Religious broadcasting, Licensing 264–5w
Roads, Repairs and maintenance 583–4w
Sports, Training 263w
Terrorism, Health insurance 403w, 868w
Working mothers 13–4

McIsaac, Shona
Debates etc.
Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL), Programme motion and Rep (11.03.02) 711–2, 718, 725–6
Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (13.03.02) 934–5, 939, 941, 946–7, 965, 984–5
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (04.03.02) 86
Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, Rep and 3R (15.03.02) 1140, 1142, 1146–9
Questions
Cleaner Vehicles Task Force 1278w
Employment, Disadvantaged 20w
Humber Police, Sick leave 157w
Primary education, Lincolnshire 633–5w
Total allowable catches 483w

MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Debates etc.
Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference (06.03.02) 301–2
Iron and steel, USA (06.03.02) 315

MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew—continued
Jones, Ian, Points of order (04.03.02) 40
Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 165–6
Zimbabwe (14.03.02) 1040
Questions
Business questions 428–9
Ministers, Codes of practice 876

McKechin, Ann
Debates etc.
Fair trade initiative (14.03.02) 1116–20
Questions
Central Africa, Peace negotiations 331–2w

Mackinlay, Andrew
Questions
Crime, Victims 620
Members, Correspondence 157w
Ministers, Codes of practice 876
Northern Ireland, Solicitor-General 1235w

Maclean, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
Greater London (12.03.02) 854
Questions
Foot and mouth disease, Meat 1016w
MMR vaccine, Cumbria 985w
North Cumbria Health Authority 1020–1w

McLoughlin, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
Dept of Health, Points of order (05.03.02) 217
Greater London (12.03.02) 761–2, 773
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Consignia (12.03.02) 176wh, 179–81wh, 185wh, 192wh, 198wh
Questions
Beef, France 478–9w
Business questions 431
Members, Correspondence 636w, 985–6w
Railways, East Midlands 136

McNamara, Mr Kevin
Debates etc.
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (04.03.02) 34, 50–1, 111, 118–9
Questions
Administration of justice, Northern Ireland 58w
Army, Londonderry 656w
Baton rounds, Northern Ireland 524–5w
Courts, Northern Ireland 774–6w
Criminal Cases Review Commission 968–9w
Criminal Courts Review 772–3w
Firearms, Northern Ireland 58w
Housing, Urban areas 179w
Magistrates, Northern Ireland 197w
Magistrates' courts 56w
Miscarriages of justice 311w
Miscarriages of justice, Prisoners' release 1221w
Multiple sclerosis, Cannabis 1029w
North South Ministerial Council 52w
Northern Ireland Dept of the Director of Public Prosecutions 195w
Northern Ireland Dept of the Director of Public Prosecutions, Finance 197w
Northern Ireland Dept of the Director of Public Prosecutions, Manpower 51w
Post codes, Northern Ireland 488w
Prosecutions 194–5w
Racial discrimination, Conferences 692w
UN Convention Against Torture 692w

***MacShane, Mr Denis**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office*
Debates etc.
Fair trade initiative (14.03.02) 1120–4

MacShane, Mr Denis—continued
Ministerial statement intervention (14.03.02) 1034, 1036
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Sudan (13.03.02) 266–71wh
Questions
Accountancy, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1171w
Advertising, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1169–70w
Afghanistan, Drugs 204–6w
Angola 392w, 1295–6w
Angola, Arms trade 1259–60w
Arms trade, Export controls 66w
Asylum, Deportation 392w
British Indian Ocean Territory, Mines 1300w
Capita, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 607w
Central America, Children 863w
Colombia 63–4w
Colombia, Human rights 862–3w, 1172–3w
Colombia, Peace negotiations 607w, 862w
Drugs, Crime 866w
Fair trade initiative, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 606w
Falkland Islands, Armed conflict 1171w
Falkland Islands, Fisheries 739–40
Freedom of Information Act 2000, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1297–8w
Hong Kong, Foreign relations 394w
Hotels, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 607w, 686w
Land use, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 608w
Latin America 64w
Madagascar 1173–4w
Madagascar, Politics and government 868w
Mercenaries 66–7w, 325–6w
Mittal, Lakshmi 67w
North Korea 754–5
Overseas investment, Government assistance 63w, 689w
Panchen Lama 1172w
Prisoners of war, Compensation 393w, 503w
Public relations, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1170w
Publicity, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1174w
Racial discrimination, Conferences 692w
Railways, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 606w, 688w
Sangdrol, Ngawang 1172w
Secondment, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1169w
Sudan, Armed conflict 861w, 1170w
Turkmenistan, Drugs 692w
UK Mission to United Nations, Manpower 1297w
UN Commission on Human Rights, Capital punishment 692w
UN Convention Against Torture 692w
Visits abroad, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 606–7w
Wines, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 67–8w
Zimbabwe, Foreign relations 862w
Zimbabwe, Pensions 208w, 1294w
Zimbabwe, Politics and government 862w

Mactaggart, Fiona
Debates etc.
Equal opportunities, Females (14.03.02) 1071, 1074, 1076–9
Questions
Kashmir 861–2w
Public appointments, Cabinet Office 955w

Mactaggart, Fiona—continued
- Public appointments, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 1283w
- Public appointments, Dept for Education and Skills 1279w
- Public appointments, Dept for International Development 895w
- Public appointments, Ethnic groups 1071w
- Public appointments, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1297w
- Public appointments, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1242–3w
- Public appointments, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 957w
- Public appointments, Scotland Office 901w
- Public appointments, Treasury 1110w
- Teachers, Recruitment 1213–4w

McWalter, Mr Tony
- *Debates etc.*
- Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL), Programme motion and Rep (11.03.02) 666

Madagascar
- 1173–4w
- Politics and government 868w

Magistrates
- Bristol 405–6w
- Criminal Courts Review 409w
- EC action 1107w, 1177–8w
- Ethnic groups 405–6w
- Northern Ireland 197w
- Warrington 408w

Magistrates' courts
- 56w
- Closures 406–8w

Maharaj, Krishna
- 202–3w

Mahon, Mrs Alice
- *Debates etc.*
- Middle East, Points of order (12.03.02) 757
- *Sittings in Westminster Hall*
- Iraq (06.03.02) 77–8wh

Maintenance
- Children 412–3w, 604w, 723w

Maize
- Genetically modified organisms 210w

Males
- Heart diseases 991w

Malins, Mr Humfrey
- *Debates etc.*
- Prescriptions, Petitions (12.03.02) 862
- *Questions*
- Asylum, Deportation 158w
- Channel tunnel railway line, Freight 1204w
- National Asylum Support Service 631
- Prisoners 978w
- Yarls Wood Detention Centre 522w

Mallaber, Judy
- *Questions*
- Community transport, Excise duties 172w
- Individual learning accounts 998–9

Mallon, Mr Seamus
- *Debates etc.*
- Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (04.03.02) 29–34, 47–50, 54, 59, 61, 81–2, 86, 91, 100–1, 115–7

Malnutrition
- 137–8w, 615w, 994w

Manchester
- Commonwealth Games (05.03.02) 61–8wh, 682w, 888, 1252w

Manchester—continued
- Transport 748w

Mann, John
- *Questions*
- British overseas citizenship, Special voucher scheme 161w
- Cinemas 1231w
- Dogs, Animal welfare 796w
- Education, Qualifications 1218w
- Education, Standards 1217w
- English Partnerships 1085w
- Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 408
- Learning and skills councils 1134w
- Manton colliery 1085w
- National Lottery, Applications 1158–9w
- Sixth form education, Student numbers 1217–8w
- Skilled workers 1134w
- Small businesses, Location 1186w
- Swimming pools 1158w
- Theatre 1231w

Manton colliery
- 1085w

Maples, Mr John
- *Questions*
- Refrigerators, Waste disposal 1152w
- Refrigerators, West Midlands 210w

Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill 2001/02
- *Debates etc.*
- Rep and 3R (15.03.02) 1125–91
- *Questions*
- 81w

Market research
- Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 209w
- Dept of Health 1056w

Marketing
- Food 938w

Markets
- Livestock 229w, 410–1, 784w

Marriage
- Immigration 516w

Marriage guidance
- Grants 404–6w

Marris, Rob
- *Sittings in Westminster Hall*
- Industrial health and safety (14.03.02) 350–2wh

Marsden, Mr Gordon
- *Questions*
- Chronic fatigue syndrome, Research 998w
- Crime, Victims 619–20
- New deal for disabled people 16–7

Martlew, Mr Eric
- *Questions*
- Reserve forces, Deployment 474w

Maternity services liaison committees
- 131w

Mathematics
- GCE A level 249–50w

Maude, Rt Hon Francis
- *Debates etc.*
- Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference (06.03.02) 298

May, Mrs Theresa
- *Debates etc.*
- Jones, Ian, Points of order (04.03.02) 40
- *Sittings in Westminster Hall*
- European Parliament elections (06.03.02) 104–6wh

May, Mrs Theresa—continued
- *Questions*
- Abandoned vehicles 1234–5w
- Aviation 748–9w
- Channel tunnel railway line 733–5w
- Council housing, Empty property 1086w
- Disciplinary proceedings, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 904w
- Dismissal, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 905w
- Information officers, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 903–4w
- Jones, Ian 1278w
- Litter 1153w
- Local government, Elections 1086w
- Local government, Manpower 755–6w
- Local government, Reform 1085–6w
- London Underground, Public private partnerships 916–7w, 1205–6w
- Mayors, Elections 1090w
- Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 904w
- Public libraries 1231w
- Railtrack 1084–5w
- Railtrack, Finance 149–50, 755w, 913w
- Railways, Finance 738w, 1207w
- Railways, Skilled workers 1206w
- Railways, Training 1206w
- "Regions White Paper" 957w
- Roads, Accidents 1277w
- Roads, Ambulance services 755w
- Roads, Police 755w
- Roads, Repairs and maintenance 755w
- Schools, Arson 953–4w
- Sixsmith, Martin 902–3w
- Sleeping rough, Statistics 186w
- Trade unions, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 904–5w
- Transport 1096w
- Truancy 1279w

Mayors
- Elections 1090w
- Referendums 553–4w

McAllister, Iain
- 171w

***Meacher, Rt Hon Michael**, Minister of State for the Environment, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs*
- *Debates etc.*
- Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, Rep and 3R (15.03.02) 1125–6, 1130–8, 1150–8, 1162–4, 1170–2, 1174–80, 1182–3, 1190–1
- *Sittings in Westminster Hall*
- Dolphins, Conservation (13.03.02) 296–9wh
- *Questions*
- Abandoned vehicles 1234–5w
- Abandoned vehicles, Medway 1234w
- Agriculture, Chemicals 478w
- Air pollution 484w
- Asbestos 75w
- British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, Finance 639–40w
- Combined heat and power 643w, 942w, 1153w
- Compost 362w
- Electronic equipment, Waste disposal 5w, 78w, 477–8w
- Emissions trading scheme, EC action 73–4w
- Energy, Conservation 73–6w, 361–3w, 640–1w
- Environment, EC law 479w
- Exhaust emissions 362w

***Meacher, Rt Hon Michael**—continued*
Farms, Plastics 485w
Fuel poverty 360–1w
Fuel poverty, Rural areas 48[illegible]
Game, Farms 637–8w
Genetically modified organisms, Crops 75–7w
Genetically modified organisms, Imports 76–7w
Genetically modified organisms, Maize 210w
Hazardous materials, EC action 792–3w
Hazardous materials, Waste management 72w
Home energy efficiency scheme 640w, 795w, 797w
Incinerators 793–4w
Incinerators, Greater London 358w
Incinerators, Newcastle upon Tyne 794w
Litter 1153w
Motor vehicles, Waste disposal 642w
Ozone layer, EC action 797–8w
Ozone layer, Pollution control 798w
Pollution control, Local authorities 219–20w, 641w, 793w
"Protection of Waters Against Agricultural Nitrate Pollution in England Consultation Paper" 798w
Radioactive wastes 405–6
Recycling 477w, 641w
Refrigeration, Government departments 1152–3w
Refrigerators, Waste disposal 477–8w, 643–4w, 1151–2w
Refrigerators, West Midlands 210w
Sellafield, Radioactive wastes 1287w
Sewers 230–1w
Sustainable development 642–3w
Sustainable development, Government departments 793w
Tipping of waste 224w
Tipping of waste, EC law 217w
Tipping of waste, Hazardous materials 794w
Waste disposal 72w
Waste management 1233–4w
Water, EC law 480w
Water, Meters 638w
Water treatment, EC law 231w
Wild ducks 940–1w
World Summit on Sustainable Development 479–80w

Means tested benefits
1240–1w

Measles
Greater London 1139w

Measurement
Alcoholic drinks 593w

Meat
222w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 128w, 781w, 1008w
Exports 944–5w
Foot and mouth disease 1016w
Import controls 221–2w
Imports 105w, 139–40w, 229w, 409–10, 937w
Smuggling 221w

Medals
Armed forces 681w
Defence Fire Service 578w

Medical equipment
853–4w
Ear nose and throat 1058w
Infectious diseases 577w
Radiotherapy 128–30w

Medical profession
Training 282w, 284–5w
Worcestershire 1040–1w

Medical records
855–6w
Accident and emergency departments 1017w

Medical treatments
Cancer 130w, 285w, 985w, 1148w
Costs 287–8w
Cystic fibrosis 436w
EC countries 306w, 809w, 1060w, 1147w
Heart diseases 814w
Motor neurone disease 537–8w
Oxygen 839–40w
Private sector 1007–8w

Medicine
Student numbers 35w

Medway
Abandoned vehicles 1234w

Members
Correspondence 23w, 136–7w, 154w, 157w, 350w, 426w, 431–2w, 544w, 608w, 636–7w, 798–9w, 802–4w, 869–70w, 939w, 967w, 982w, 985–6w, 1030–1w, 1049w, 1100w, 1145–6w, 1203w, 1255w, 1285w
Data protection 706w
Rulings and statements (07.03.02) 522

Men
see Males

Mental health
NHS Direct 430w

Mental Health Act 1983
Questions
1057w

Mental health services
819w
Children 820w
Finance 819–20w
Hospital beds 125–7w
Nurses 989–90w
Public appointments 819w
Standards 430w
Warrington 819w
Young offender institutions 127w
Young people 127w

Mental patients
430–2w, 617–8w, 1057w
Hospital wards 285w

Mental patients' rights
431w

Mentally ill
989w
Discrimination 1124w

Mentally incapacitated
549–50w

Mercenaries
66–7w, 325–6w

Mercer, Patrick
Debates etc.
Equal opportunities, Females (14.03.02) 1102–4
Terrorism (07.03.02) 504, 512–3
Questions
Army, Manpower 650w
Infectious diseases, Medical equipment 577w
Police, Newark 981w
Police stations, Newark 597w
Qinetiq 32w
Research, Ministry of Defence 31w
Stakeholder pensions 22–3w

***Mercer, Patrick**—continued*
Type 45 destroyers 649–50w

Merron, Ms Gillian
Questions
Deprivation indicators 1092w
Drugs, Crime 1109w
Drugs, Health education 1218w
Exercise referral schemes 133w
Sector skills councils, Sports 235w
Students, Finance 1000

Mersey Basin Trust
1082w

Mersey Tunnels Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (05.03.02) 133, (12.03.02) 739

Merseyside
Hospital beds 815–6w
Industrial diseases 350w

Meters
Water 638w

Methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus
850w
Death 1145w

Metrication
593w

Metropolitan Police
Conditions of employment 884

***Michael, Rt Hon Alun**, Minister of State, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs*
Questions
Community services grant 1153w
Countryside, Access 641–2w
Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 227w
Environment Agency 220w
Fishing 485w
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 406–8
Foot and mouth disease, Public footpaths 415–6
Forests, Subsidies 795–6w
Hunting 792w
Internet, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 792w
Rural areas 413–4
Rural areas, Small businesses 1150–1w
Transport, Disadvantaged 227w
Village halls 227w
Water sports 77w, 220w, 364w, 796–7w

Microcredit programmes
Afghanistan 1189w
Females 340w

Microfinance
South East Asia 271–2

Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust
Dental services 1146w, 1290w
Surgery 299–300w
Waiting lists 302w, 828w

Mid Sussex NHS Trust
Spinal injuries 850w

Middle East
Armed conflict 505–6w, 683–4w, 688w
Peace negotiations 749–53, 861w, 887

Middlesbrough
Influenza 1030w

Midwives
Greater London 614w

***Milburn, Rt Hon Alan**, Secretary of State for Health*
Questions
NHS, Finance 614–5w
Public expenditure, Scotland 275w
Written questions, Administrative delays 192w, 275w
Written questions, Dept of Health 841–5w, 1046w, 1149w

Miliband, Mr David
Debates etc.
World Summit on Sustainable Development (07.03.02) 445
Questions
Police, Conditions of employment 623–4

Military aircraft
321–2w, 1161w
Iraq 649w
Procurement 653w, 655w
Qinetiq 165w

Military bases
Security 29w
York 655w

Milk
215w

Millennium Exhibition
367–9w

Millennium Experience
see New Millennium Experience

Miller, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Office of Communications Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (06.03.02) 323
Questions
National Asylum Support Service 631
Police, Bureaucracy 711–2w
State earnings related pension scheme 254–5w

Milton Keynes
Equal pay 151w

Mines
British Indian Ocean Territory 1300w

Minimum funding requirement
536w

Minimum wage
Working families tax credit 885

Mining
Coal 102–3w

Minister for Women
Home Office 47w

Ministerial Design Champions Group
see Design Champions Ministerial Group

Ministerial policy advisors
487w, 871–2
Codes of practice 1070w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 933–4w
Dept for International Development 896–7w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 572w, 904w, 1199w
Dept for Work and Pensions 27–8w
Dept of Health 1062–3w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1076w, 1238w
Treasury 1115w

Ministerial responsibility
Parliamentary questions 1069w

Ministerial statements
Bank services (14.03.02) 1015–30
Central Government Audit and Accountability Review (13.03.02) 889–900

Ministerial statements—continued
Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference (06.03.02) 291–303
Iron and steel (06.03.02) 307–19
World Summit on Sustainable Development (07.03.02) 437–49
Zimbabwe (14.03.02) 1031–45

Ministers
Aviation 1196–7w
Codes of practice 875–7, 1066w, 1070–1w

Ministry of Defence
Air conditioning 870–1w
Buildings 163w, 657w
Cellular phones 162w
Construction 316w
Contracts 1161w
Departmental expenditure limits 325w, 652w, 1181–2w
Equal pay 1161–2w
Hazardous materials 486w
Health insurance 315w
Holiday leave 314w
Hotels 654w
Industrial disputes 325w
Internet 315–6w
Land use 164w
Legal costs 324w
Non-governmental organisations 476w
Offices 163w
Official cars 1180w
Parliamentary questions 475w
Press releases 1181w
Public expenditure 315w, 476w
Railways 653w, 1161w
Relocation services 655w
Research 31w
Retirement 162w
Secondment 324w
Television 324w
Trade unions 316w, 578w
Work sharing 577–8w

Ministry of Defence Police
164–5w

Mirror Group Newspapers
Company investigations 1258–9w

Miscarriages of justice
311w
Counselling 972w
Prisoners' release 1221w

Misconduct
Teachers 240w

Misuse
Alcoholic drinks 435w, 1013w
Drugs 46w, 435w, 708w, 714w, 822–3w, 1148–50w
Steroid drugs 277w

Mitchell, Mr Andrew
Questions
Business questions 425–6

Mitchell, Mr Austin
Questions
Accountancy, Dept for Education and Skills 1279w
Accountancy, Dept for International Development 897w
Accountancy, Dept of Trade and Industry 890w
Accountancy, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1171w
Accountancy, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1176–7w
Accountancy, Treasury 1114w
Common agricultural policy, Euro 214w
Enron, Dept of Health 427w
Fisheries, Compensation 152w
Harbour authorities 749w

Mitchell, Mr Austin—continued
Hospitals, Private finance initiative 806–7w
Navigation 97w, 749w
Navigation, Conditions of employment 749w
Navigation, River Humber 97–8w
Non-teaching staff, Conditions of employment 1218w
Public private partnerships 1109–10w
Refrigerators, Export controls 1109w

Mitchell, Violet
1001w

Mittal, Lakshmi
1–3w, 63w, 67w, 154w, 338w, 349w, 509w, 890–1w, 893–4w, 1066w
Opposition days (05.03.02) 155–217
Taxation 117–8w, 470w

MMR vaccine
812w, 1032–3w, 1138w
Cumbria 985w

Mobile phone masts
see Aerials

Mobile phones
see cellular phones

Modern apprenticeships
242w, 390w

Moffatt, Laura
Debates etc.
Equal opportunities, Females (14.03.02) 1104–6

Monetary compensatory amounts
224w

Money laundering
594–6w, 1236–7w
Serbia 975w

Montenegro
393–4w

***Moonie, Dr Lewis**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Ministry of Defence*
Debates etc.
Terrorism (07.03.02) 515, 517–20
Questions
Aerospace industry, EC action 32w
Air conditioning, Ministry of Defence 870–1w
Antitank missiles, Procurement 1162w
Apache WAH-64 helicopter 653–4w
Armed forces, Housing 163–4w
Armed forces, Pensions 652–3w
Armed forces, Training 1160w
Armoured fighting vehicles, Procurement 1162w
Buildings, Ministry of Defence 163w, 657w
Cape Wrath, Uranium 34w
Cellular phones, Ministry of Defence 162w
Challenger tanks 649w
Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Nancekuke 28–9w
Chemical weapons, Baltic Sea 166w
Commonwealth War Graves Commission 322–3w
Construction, Ministry of Defence 316w
Contracts, Ministry of Defence 1161w
Defence equipment, Procurement 476w
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, Legal profession 164w
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, Public private partnerships 313–4w, 577w, 1168w
Defence Science and Technology Laboratory 1163–4w
Departmental expenditure limits, Ministry of Defence 1181–2w

Moonie, Dr Lewis—*continued*
- Equal pay, Ministry of Defence 1161-2w
- Explosives, Factories 656w, 1169w
- Future large aircraft 658w
- Future large aircraft, Engines 871w
- Guided weapons 29w, 1166-7w
- Hazardous materials, Ministry of Defence 486w
- Health insurance, Ministry of Defence 315w
- Helicopters 29-30w
- HMS Invincible 33w
- Holiday leave, Ministry of Defence 314w
- Hotels, Ministry of Defence 654w
- Industrial disputes, Ministry of Defence 325w
- Infectious diseases, Medical equipment 577w
- Internet, Ministry of Defence 315-6w
- Land use, Ministry of Defence 164w
- Legal costs, Ministry of Defence 324w
- Military aircraft 1161w
- Military aircraft, Procurement 653w, 655w
- Military bases, Security 29w
- Ministry of Defence Police 164-5w
- Non-governmental organisations, Ministry of Defence 476w
- Nuclear power stations, Decommissioning 162-3w
- Nuclear weapons, USA 651w
- Offices, Ministry of Defence 163w
- Official cars, Ministry of Defence 1180w
- Parliamentary questions, Ministry of Defence 475w
- Porton Down, Human experiments 1167-8w
- Press releases, Ministry of Defence 1181w
- Public relations, Cabinet Office 1180w
- Qinetiq 32w, 1162-6w
- Qinetiq, Military aircraft 165w
- Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 578w
- RAF Chilmark 165-6w
- RAF Headley Court 659w
- RAF High Wycombe, Air conditioning 656-7w
- Railways, Ministry of Defence 653w, 1161w
- Relocation services, Ministry of Defence 655w
- Research, Ministry of Defence 31w
- Reserve forces, Deployment 474w
- Retirement, Ministry of Defence 162w
- Roll-on roll-off ships 326w
- Satellite communications, Procurement 578w
- Secondment, Ministry of Defence 324w
- Television, Ministry of Defence 324w
- Tomahawk missiles 653w
- Trade unions, Ministry of Defence 316w, 578w
- Type 45 destroyers 649-50w
- Uranium, Health hazards 1179-80w
- War graves, Belgium 166-7w
- War graves, France 166w, 475w
- War pensions 1160-1w
- Work sharing, Ministry of Defence 577-8w

Moore, Jo
- 487w, 901-2w

Moran, Margaret
- *Questions*
  - Domestic violence, Children 287-8
  - Domestic violence, Police 1105-6w
  - Landlords, Taxation 923w
  - Refuges 922-3w
  - Social rented housing, Executives 172w
  - Taxation, Landlords 964w

Morecambe Bay Health Authority
- Surgery 991w

Moreton Lane Prison
- 1223-4w

Morgan, Julie
- *Debates etc.*
  - Equal opportunities, Females (14.03.02) 1066, 1099-101
- *Questions*
  - Business questions 427
  - Prisoners, Wales 973-4w

***Morley, Mr Elliot**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept of Environment Food and Rural Affairs*
- *Questions*
  - Agricultural products, South West region 938-9w
  - Agriculture, Public relations 226w
  - Agriculture, Regulation 77-8w
  - Agriculture, Sustainable development 944w
  - Animal feed, Imports 227-8w
  - Animal welfare, Circuses 791w
  - Animal welfare, Dogs 796w
  - Animal welfare, Pigs 944w
  - Apples, EC law 229w
  - Beef, France 478-9w
  - Bovine tuberculosis, Disease control 786-90w
  - Bristol, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 638w
  - Common agricultural policy 214-5w, 940w
  - Common agricultural policy, Euro 214w
  - Common fisheries policy 408-9
  - Dolphins, Fishing gear 216-7w
  - Drift nets 483w
  - EC Agriculture Council, Scottish Executive 229-30w, 361w
  - Empty property, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 218w
  - Equal pay, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 940w
  - Fair trade initiative, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 642w
  - Farm business tenancies 229w
  - Fish, Conservation 210-2w
  - Fisheries 483w
  - Fishing vessels 363-4w
  - Fishing vessels, Decommissioning 212w
  - Flood control 363w, 411-3, 484w
  - Floods 642w
  - Floods, Lee Valley 942w
  - Floods, Lewes 483w
  - Food, EC law 942-3w
  - Food, Marketing 938w
  - Foot and mouth disease 212-3w, 481-2w
  - Foot and mouth disease, Compensation 213w, 416, 783w
  - Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 212-3w, 481-2w, 485w, 784w
  - Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries 216w, 783-4w
  - Foot and mouth disease, Northumberland 212w
  - Foot and mouth disease, Rodents 213-4w
  - Foot and mouth disease, St Agnes Farm 482-3w
  - Forests, Conferences 798w
  - Fruit, Pesticides 225-6w
  - Horticulture, Climate change levy 230w
  - Integrated administration and control system 479w
  - Integrated administration and control system, Administrative delays 22[illegible]3w
  - Integrated administration and control system, Gloucestershire 223w
  - Livestock, Markets 229w, 410-1
  - Livestock, Transport 478w, 480w, 644w
  - Market research, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 209w

Morley, Mr Elliot—*continued*
- Meat 222w
- Meat, Exports 944-5w
- Meat, Import controls 221-2w
- Meat, Imports 229w
- Meat, Smuggling 221w
- Members, Correspondence 636-7w, 798-9w, 939w, 1285w
- Milk 215w
- Monetary compensatory amounts 224w
- Older workers, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 215w
- Organic farming 797w
- Plant power 479w
- Poultry, EC law 796w, 943-4w
- Railways, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 939-40w
- Relocation services, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 792w
- River Roding, Floods 483-4w
- Salmon, Severn estuary 941-2w
- Sea fisheries committees 211w
- Secondment, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 209-10w
- Sheep, MV Kalifeh 1 791w
- Sheep, Shipping 791w
- Sheep, Transport 478w
- Shellfish 404-5
- Total allowable catches 483w
- Veterinary medicine, EC law 228w
- Veterinary services, South West region 219w
- Voluntary work, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 224-5w
- Warrington, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 795w
- Weeds Act 1959 218-9w
- Wheat, Prices 223-4w
- Work sharing, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 791w
- Working hours, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 638-9w
- Written questions, Administrative delays 794-5w

***Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle**, Secretary of State for Education and Skills*
- *Questions*
  - Public expenditure, Dept for Education and Skills 756w
  - Students, Finance 999-1001
  - Teachers, Pay 1003-6

Mortgages
- (05.03.02) 54-60wh
- Equity 1110w

Mortuary
- Hospitals 547w

Moss, Mr Malcolm
- *Questions*
  - Arson 98w
  - Fire services, Standards 98w
  - Policy development grant, Home Office 981w
  - Regional assemblies 145

Motor neurone disease
- Medical treatments 537-8w

Motor vehicles
- EC law 217-8w, 586-7w, 1090w
- Edinburgh 374w
- Excise duties 1089-90w
- Insurance 1257-8w
- Licensing 374w
- Northern Ireland 258w
- Scotland 1277w
- Testing 185-6w
- Theft 158w
- Waste disposal 642w
- Young people 1271w

Motorways
Repairs and maintenance 745–6w

Mullin, Mr Chris
Questions
Afghanistan, Overseas aid 753
Textiles, Sunderland 21w

Multiple sclerosis
1064w
Cannabis 1029w
Drugs 1003w

Munn, Meg
Debates etc.
Iron and steel, USA (06.03.02) 317
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Politics, Young people (05.03.02) 31–3wh
Questions
Public appointments, Females 879
Young offenders 711w

Murphy, Mr Jim
Debates etc.
Terrorism (04.03.02) 125–8
Questions
Afghanistan, Drugs 204–6w
Afghanistan, Peace keeping operations 870w
Antisemitism 45–6w
Drug seizures, Heroin 1288–9w

***Murphy, Rt Hon Paul**, Secretary of State for Wales*
Debates etc.
Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 164–75, 178
Questions
Asthma, Wales 529w
Civil servants, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1075w
Contracts, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 365–6w
Correspondence, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 366–7w
Fair trade initiative, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 365w
Foreign investment in UK, Cynon Valley 529–30w
Hazardous materials, Cynon Valley 365w
Higher education, Wales 1076w
Hospitals, Asbestos 608w
Hotels, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 148w
Location, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1238w
Manpower, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1238w
Ministerial policy advisors, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1076w, 1238w
NAW Assembly Cabinet, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1237–8w
Orders and regulations, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 148w
Postal services, Wales 957w
Public appointments, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 957w, 1237w
Public expenditure, Wales 1075w
Public private partnerships, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1238w
Publications, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1075w
Relocation services, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 530w
Secondment, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 528w
Standards, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1075w
Trade unions, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1076–7w
Unemployment, Cynon Valley 529w

Murphy, Rt Hon Paul—continued
Visits abroad, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 147–8w, 1076w
Voluntary work, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 586w
Welsh Development Agency 530w

Murrison, Dr Andrew
Debates etc.
Police (08.03.02) 606–7
Questions
Accident and emergency departments, Medical records 1017w
Accident and emergency departments, Waiting lists 828w
Armed forces, Equal opportunities 316–7w
Chemical and biological warfare 1028w
Chemical and biological warfare, Vaccination 1028–9w
Ear nose and throat, Medical equipment 1058w
Hospital beds 990w
Medicine, Student numbers 35w
Mental health services, Hospital beds 125–7w
NHS, Standards 998w
Olive oil, Contamination 945–6w
Primary care trusts 1035–7w
Primary care trusts, Environmental health 830w

Museums and galleries
932–3w
Fees and charges 267w
Finance 261–2w

Muslims
Cemeteries 147w

MV Kalifeh 1
Sheep 791w

MV Solway Harvester
752w

Nancekuke
Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment 28–9w

National Air Traffic Services
564w
Finance 741w, 1275–6w

National Assembly for Wales (Representation of the People) (Amendment) Order 2002
Debates etc.
(13.03.02) 988

National Asylum Support Service
(12.03.02) 241–8wh, 630–1

National Care Standards Commission
1039w
Commission for Health Improvement 1144w

National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts
Grants 934w

National Experience Corps
see Experience Corps

National Gallery
Reviews 1283–4w

National Institute for Clinical Excellence
(05.03.02) 1–23wh

National insurance contributions
NHS 1038w
Overseas residence 697w

National Insurance Contributions Unit
see Social Security Contributions Agency

National Insurance Fund
468w

National Lottery
266w, 346w
Applications 1158–9w
Franchises 116w
Land 936w
NHS 140–1w
Rugby 13w
Rural areas 784w

National Portrait Gallery
Reviews 1283–4w

National Probation Directorate
1096–7w

National Probation Service for England and Wales
Pay 1097w

National Savings and Investments
Accountancy 468–9w

National security
597w

National training organisations
250–1w

National vocational qualifications
Engineering 250w
Home care services 433w

Nations Trust
467w

NATO
30w, 1254–5w
EC defence policy 31w

Natural gas
353–4w, 672w
Exploration 593–4w

Navigation
97w, 749w
Conditions of employment 749w
River Humber 97–8w

NAW Assembly Cabinet
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1237–8w

Naysmith, Dr Douglas
Questions
Analgesics, Packaging 612–3w
EC enlargement 863–4w
Higher education, Research 1215w

Negligence
NHS (06.03.02) 109–16wh

Neighbourhood wardens
Lancashire 709w

Nepal
203w
Human rights 1195–6w
Peace negotiations 203w
Politics and government 203–4w, 863w

New deal for communities
Kings Norton 1089w

New deal for disabled people
16–8

New deal for young people
1121w, 1127w

New deal schemes
Doncaster 14w

New Millennium Experience
Expenditure 262w

New Opportunities Fund
After school clubs 35w

New Scotland Yard
see Metropolitan Police

Newark
Police 981w

Newark—continued
Police stations 597w

Newcastle upon Tyne
Incinerators 794w
Social security benefits 1124–5w

NHS
1007–8w, 1038w
Administration 855w
Ancillary staff 1248–50w
Climate change levy 1146w
Combined heat and power 831w
Communication 1142w
Compensation 447w
Executives 427–8w, 1065–6w
Fees and charges 1143w
Finance 138w, 142–6w, (12.03.02) 201–24wh, 277–80w, 296–300w, 450w, 614–5w, 799–800w, 993w, 1015w, 1059w
Hillingdon 1042–4w
Individual learning accounts 999w
Information technology 1053–4w, 1147–8w
Local authorities 135–6w
Manpower 1042–4w
National insurance contributions 1038w
National Lottery 140–1w
Negligence (06.03.02) 109–16wh
Pensions 839w
Per capita costs 136w, 292–6w, 550–1w
Powderject 305–6w
Procurement 304w, 437–8w
Public appointments 1031–2w
Public relations 1246–7w
Retirement 1000w
Security 547–8w
Standards 438w, 835–6w, 846–7w, 998w, 1058–9w

NHS Direct
1008–9w
Mental health 430w

NHS Leadership Centre
Public appointments 850w

NHS Magazine
1029w

"NHS Plan News"
847–8w

NHS Professionals
837w, 1007w, 1034–5w, 1150w, 1246w
Complaints 837w
Expenditure 1246w
Standards 1033–4w

NHS trusts
1018w
Debts 118–9w
Procurement 804w
Public appointments 818w

NHSnet
423–4w

Nigeria
Proceeds of crime 645w

Night clubs
Drugs 968w

Noise
A12 188w
Aircraft 375w, 562w
M42 99w

Non-departmental public bodies
Supermarkets 258w

Non-dependent deductions
Housing benefit 729–30w

Non-domestic rates
Greater London 180w
Institutional care 695–6w

Non-governmental organisations
Cabinet Office 780w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 1160w
Dept for Education and Skills 1217w
Dept for International Development 465–6w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 177w, 1086w
Dept of Trade and Industry 592w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 391w, 1296w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 408–9w
Ministry of Defence 476w
President of the Council 605w

Non-teaching staff
502w, 1010
Conditions of employment 626w, 1218w
Jobseeker's allowance 41w
Manpower 1009–10, 1216w

Norman, Mr Archie
Sittings in Westminster Hall
NHS, Finance (12.03.02) 202wh, 211–3wh
Questions
Institutional care, Kent 425–6w

Norman Shaw buildings
Wood 585w

North Cumbria Health Authority
1020–1w

North East region
Film 929–32w, 1155w
Individual learning accounts 624w
Post offices 670w

North Korea
754–5

North South Ministerial Council
52w

North West Arts
Arts Council of England 934w

North West region
Equal pay 1185w
Hospital beds 801–2w
Pancreatic cancer 984–5w
Poverty 1072–3w
Tomography 1030w
Transport 172w

North Yorkshire
Foot and mouth disease 781w
Hospital beds 1010–1w
Incapacity benefit 411w

Northern Ireland
Administration of justice 58w
Armed forces 32w
Baton rounds 524–5w
Courts 774–6w
Criminal Records Bureau 712w
Customs and Excise 470w
Defence equipment 705w
Firearms 58w
Fuels 113w
Magistrates 197w
Motor vehicles 258w
Police 525w
Post codes 488w
Prisoner escapes 705w
Prisoners' release 285
Solicitor-General 1235w
Terrorism 885

Northern Ireland Dept of the Director of Public Prosecutions
195w
Finance 197w
Manpower 51w

Northern Ireland government
871w

Northern Ireland Office
Accountancy 59w
Capita 526w
Catering 59–60w
City of London Corporation 60w
Contracts 58–60w, 525–6w
Correspondence 61w
Courier services 258–9w
Empty property 57–8w
Environment protection 57w
Manpower 60–1w
Offices 58w
Operating costs 872w
Press releases 525w
Public relations 872w
Railways 523–4w
Recruitment 59w

Northumberland
Foot and mouth disease 212w

Northwood and Pinner Hospital
840w

Nuclear power stations
Carbon dioxide 152w
Climate change levy 152w
Commonwealth of Independent States 588w
Decommissioning 162–3w
Opposition days (05.03.02) 218–61
Planning permission 513w
Scotland (05.03.02) 218–61, 1208w

Nuclear weapons
India 1298–300w
Israel 505w
Pakistan 1298–300w
USA 651w

Nuisance
Tenants 175w

Numeracy
251w
Primary education 38w

Nurses
Avon Health Authority 1247w
Cancer 814–5w
Family practitioner services 838–9w
Foreign workers 122–4w
Manpower 141w, 838w
Mental health services 989–90w
Weston Area Health NHS Trust 1247w
Working hours 1034w

Nutrition
Salt 295–6w

Oaten, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Greater London (12.03.02) 797, 802
Sittings in Westminster Hall
NHS, Finance (12.03.02) 201–5wh, 222wh
Questions
Ambulance services, Hampshire 989w
Meat, Import controls 222w
Meat, Smuggling 221w

Objects in lieu of tax
268w

O'Brien, Mr Mike
Debates etc.
Cemeteries (11.03.02) 734–5

O'Brien, Mr Stephen
Debates etc.
Greater London (12.03.02) 793
Questions
Developing countries, Overseas aid 273–4
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 406–7
Holocaust Memorial Day, Armenia 1222–3w

***O'Brien, Mr Stephen**—continued*
Individual learning accounts 997–8
Planning 140

O'Brien, Mr William
Questions
Planning 140
Recycling, EC law 400–1

Occupational pensions
19w

Offences against children
Africa 646–7w, 1187w

Offenders
Electronic tagging 1098w

Office for Standards in Education
Manpower 41w

Office of Communications Bill (HL) 2001/02
Debates etc.
Rep and 3R (06.03.02) 322–90

Office of the Minister for Women
see Minister for Women

Office of the Secretary of State for Wales
Civil servants 1075w
Contracts 365–6w
Correspondence 366–7w
Fair trade initiative 365w
Hotels 148w
Location 1238w
Manpower 1238w
Ministerial policy advisors 1076w, 1238w
NAW Assembly Cabinet 1237–8w
Orders and regulations 148w
Public appointments 957w, 1237w
Public private partnerships 1238w
Publications 1075w
Relocation services 530w
Secondment 528w
Standards 1075w
Trade unions 1076–7w
Travel 1076w
Visits abroad 147–8w, 1076w
Voluntary work 586w

Offices
Dept for Education and Skills 235w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 1244–5w
Ministry of Defence 163w
Northern Ireland Office 58w
Solicitor-General 883w

Official cars
Dept of Health 1006w
Ministry of Defence 1180w

Official engagements
Prime Minister 344w

Official hospitality
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 580w
Home Office 722w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 404w
Solicitor-General 661–3w

Official visits
Romania 391w, 510–1w

Offshore drilling
1257w

Oil
Exploration 593–4w
Refineries 356w
Waste disposal 792–3w

Older workers
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 215w
Dept for Work and Pensions 418w
Treasury 1112w

Olive oil
Contamination 945–6w

Ombudsman
Reform 874

O'Neill, Mr Martin
Debates etc.
Iron and steel, USA (06.03.02) 311

Onley Prison
1223w

Ophthalmic services
Pendle 831–2w

Opik, Lembit
Debates etc.
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (04.03.02) 22–4, 51, 58, 60, 101, 117–8
Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 159, 161, 173, 175–6
Nuclear power stations (05.03.02) 222
Questions
Work permits, Lithuania 974–5w

Opposition days
Greater London (12.03.02) 760–862
Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 155–217
Nuclear power stations (05.03.02) 218–61

Oral cancer
119–20w

Organic farming
797w, 936w

Organised crime
EC action 519w

Osborne, Mr George
Debates etc.
Police (08.03.02) 540, 586, 603–5
Questions
Alderley Edge bypass 923w
Asbestos, Compensation 1121–2w
Health services, Private sector 435–6w
Hospitals, Private sector 1007w
Hospitals, Waiting lists 423w
Police, Conditions of employment 621–2
Terrorism 748
Transport, Manchester 748w

Osborne, Sandra
Debates etc.
Equal opportunities, Females (14.03.02) 1065, 1070, 1094–6

Osteoporosis
1035w

Ottaway, Richard
Questions
Civil service, Reform 1072w
Occupational pensions 19w
Romania, Iron and steel 681w
Travelling people 715w
Zimbabwe, Elections 740–1

Overcrowding
Trains 1275w

Overpayments
Social security benefits 415–7w

Overseas aid
109–10w, 334–5w
Afghanistan 753–4
Africa 886
Angola 465w, 1187–8w
Brazil 332w
Burkina Faso 891w
Cameroon 1188w
Central Asia 1192w
Democratic Republic of Congo 894w
Developing countries 273–6
Ethiopia 892–3w
Health education 684–5w

***Overseas aid**—continued*
HIV infection 647–8w, 897w
India 685–6w
Iran 1192w
Russia 859w
South East Asia 339w
Sri Lanka 648w
Sub-Saharan Africa 329w, 339w
West Africa 326w
Zimbabwe 328w, 898–9w

Overseas investment
392–3w
Commonwealth Development Corporation 891–2w
Government assistance 63w, 343–4w, 689w

Overseas residence
National insurance contributions 697w
State retirement pensions 199w, 253–4w
Winter fuel payments 959–60w
Zimbabwe 504–5w

Overseas visitors
Abortion 135w
Health services 1141w

Owen, Albert
Debates etc.
Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 162

Oxfordshire
Institutional care 825w

Oxygen
Medical treatments 839–40w

Ozone layer
EC action 797–8w
Pollution control 798w

Packaging
Analgesics 612–3w

Page, Mr Richard
Questions
Climate change levy 199w
Nuclear power stations, Climate change levy 152w
Refrigerators, Waste disposal 478w

Paice, Mr James
Debates etc.
Greater London (12.03.02) 840, 847–50
Police (08.03.02) 537, 543–52, 558
Questions
Council tax, Tax rates and bands 104w
Councillors, Allowances 104–5w
Food, EC law 942–3w
Meat, Imports 105w
Police, Conditions of employment 624

Pain
Health services 821–2w

Paisley, Rev Ian
Debates etc.
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (04.03.02) 23, 81, 86–9

Pakistan
Nuclear weapons 1298–300w
Politics and government 860–1w

Palmer, Dr Nick
Questions
Crimes of violence 627
Education, Assessments 1209–10w
Iraq, Weapons 884
Social security benefits, Carers 3–4

Panchen Lama
1172w

Pancreatic cancer
North West region 984–5w

Paragon Finance
153w

Parental leave
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 1232w
Dept for International Development 1128–9w
Dept of Trade and Industry 885–6w

Parental responsibility
EC action 50w

Park and ride schemes
Finance 187–8w

Parliamentary data and video network
1207–8w

Parliamentary questions
Dept for International Development 895w
Dept of Health 1048–9w
Ministerial responsibility 1069w
Ministry of Defence 475w

Parliamentary scrutiny
EC law 62–3w

Passengers
Great Eastern Railway 191w
LTS Rail 191w
Public transport 920–1w

Passenger's Charter
905–6w

Patent Office
Forms 740–1w

Paterson, Mr Owen
Questions
Asbestos 192–4w, 551–2w, 1015–6w
Farms, Plastics 485w
Hospitals, Asbestos 608w
Poultry, EC law 796w, 943–4w
Surgery 133w
Veterinary medicine, EC law 228w

Patients
138w
Pensions 16–7w
Social security benefits 723w, 727–8w, 1251w

Patrol craft
Caribbean 29w
Weapons 33w

Peace keeping operations
Afghanistan 30w, 870w

Peace negotiations
Central Africa 331–2w
Colombia 607w, 862w
Middle East 749–53, 861w, 887
Nepal 203w
Sudan 327w

Pears
EC law 229w

Pendle
Ophthalmic services 831–2w

Pension credit
696w

Pension funds
Accountancy 702w
Advance corporation tax 110–1w

Pension Service
22w, 418w

Pensioners
Clwyd 935w
Housing benefit 14–5w
Income support 10–3, 414–5w, 960–1w, 1128w, 1241w
Social security benefits 15w, 21–2w
Telford 934–5[illegible]
Waltham[illegible]1w

Pensions
Armed forces 321w, 652–3w
Foster care 420w
Local government 187w
Low pay 21w
NHS 839w
Patients 16–7w
Police 977–8w
Public sector 253w, 1230–1w
Regulation 15w
Zimbabwe 208w, 1294w

Pensions Act 1995
Questions
253w

Performance and Innovation Unit
105w

Performance appraisal
General practitioners 289w, 805–6w, 1038w

Perham, Linda
Debates etc.
Equal opportunities, Females (14.03.02) 1065–6, 1108–10
Questions
Conditions of employment, EC law 356w
Cyprus, EC enlargement 755–6
Fireworks 152–3w
NHS, Retirement 1000w

Personal income
726–7w

Personal pensions
18–9w, 253w

Personal records
Individual learning accounts 384–5w, 622–3w
Prisoners 46–7w
Pupils 237w

Personal statements
Bradshaw, Ben (07.03.02) 450
Galloway, George (07.03.02) 450

Pertussis vaccine
823–4w

Pesticides
198–9w
Food 121–2w
Fruit 225–6w
Pregnancy 121–2w

Petitions
Aerials (04.03.02) 124, (11.03.02) 730
Brockenhurst (07.03.02) 522–3
Dronfield School (07.03.02) 523
Prescriptions (12.03.02) 862
Schools (07.03.02) 523

Pharmacy
Training 1291w

Physics
GCE A level 249–50w

Physiotherapy
Brighton 856–8w
Greater London 1290w
Recruitment 611–2w
Sussex 858w

Pickles, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Greater London (12.03.02) 760–70, 772
Questions
London Underground, Fares 370–1w
London Underground, Public private partnerships 169w
Railtrack, Finance 369–70w
Railways, Freight 138
Railways, Greater London 81w
Roads 176–8w

Pickles, Mr Eric—continued
Schools, Governing bodies 625w

Pickthall, Mr Colin
Questions
Multiple sclerosis 1064w

Pigs
Animal welfare 944w

Pike, Mr Peter L
Debates etc.
Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference (06.03.02) 299
Zimbabwe (14.03.02) 1038–9
Questions
Duchy of Lancaster Benevolent Fund 1070w
Foot and mouth disease, Public footpaths 415
Housing, Empty property 173w
New deal for disabled people 17–8
Pakistan, Politics and government 860–1w
Police, Conditions of employment 633
Sexual offences, Children 713w

Pilotage Act 1987
Questions
749w

Planning
140–1, 1081–2w

"Planning and Delivering a Fundamental Change Consultation Paper"
176w

Planning obligations
1083w

Planning permission
Aerials 98–9w
Appeals 99–100w, 1083w
Areas of outstanding natural beauty 1204–5w
Greenbelt 185w, 747w
Institutional care 426w
Nuclear power stations 513w
Rural areas 83w

Plant power
479w

Plants
Imports 229w

Plaskitt, Mr James
Debates etc.
Bank services (14.03.02) 1023–4
Questions
Annuities 8–9
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 575–6w
Senegal, HIV infection 329w

Plastics
Dumping 670–1w
Farms 485w

Playing fields
Schools 249w, 497–501w

Poisoning
Shellfish 122w

Police
(08.03.02) 533–609
Aviation 635–6
Brixton 156w
Bureaucracy 711–2w
Conditions of employment 621–4, 632–3, 883–4, 887–8, 1227w
Coventry 709w
Diabetes 537w
Domestic violence 1105–6w
Health insurance 158–9w
Housing 155–6w
Legislation 1264w
Manpower 1266–70w

Police—continued
  Newark 981w
  Northern Ireland 525w
  Pay 708–9w, 714–5w
  Pensions 977–8w
  Recruitment 160–1w
  Roads 755w
  Secondment 156w
  Somerset 712w

Police custody
  514w

Police stations
  Charing Cross 981w
  Newark 597w

Policy development grant
  Home Office 981w

Political refugees
  see Asylum

Politics
  Young people (05.03.02) 24–44wh

Politics and government
  Cameroon 1188–9w
  India 868–9w
  Iraq 864–5w
  Kenya 333w
  Madagascar 868w
  Nepal 203–4w, 863w
  Pakistan 860–1w
  Zimbabwe 862w

Pollard, Mr Kerry
    Sittings in Westminster Hall
  Starter home initiative, Hertfordshire (06.03.02) 125–7wh, 131wh

Pollution control
  Incinerators 358–9w
  Local authorities 219–20w, 641w, 793w
  Ozone layer 798w

Pond, Mr Chris
    Debates etc.
  Greater London (12.03.02) 811, 829–33
  Police (08.03.02) 584, 594–6
    Questions
  Civil proceedings, Gravesend 773–4w
  County courts, Gravesend 1178w
  Repossession orders, Gravesend 773w
  Thames Safety Inquiry 190w

Pope, Mr Greg
    Sittings in Westminster Hall
  Housing, Hyndburn (12.03.02) 225–8wh, 232wh

Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
  1196w

Pornography
  Internet 979–80w

Porton Down
  Human experiments 1104w, 1167–8w

Ports
  Shoreham 753–4w, 1091–2w, 1200w

Post codes
  Northern Ireland 488w

Post offices
  1183w
  Bank services 26w, 414w, 1183w
  North East region 670w
  Social security benefits 670w

Postal services
  Competition 880
  Rural areas 358w, 488w
  Wales 957w

Postgraduate education
  Student numbers 250w

Post-mortems
  Royal Liverpool Children's NHS Trust 1145w

Poultry
  EC law 796w, 943–4w

Pound, Mr Stephen
    Debates etc.
  Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (04.03.02) 60

Poverty
  1241w
  Cameroon 338w
  Children 1123w
  North West region 1072–3w
  Urban areas 1073w

Powderject
  NHS 305–6w

Powers
  Child Support Agency 411–2w

Powers of attorney
  Fees and charges 961w

Pregnancy
  Chemicals 1012–3w
  Pesticides 121–2w

Premium bonds
  695w

Prentice, Ms Bridget
    Debates etc.
  Police (08.03.02) 552–6
  Roads, Safety (08.03.02) 610

Prentice, Mr Gordon
    Debates etc.
  Business questions intervention (07.03.02) 421
    Questions
  Aerospace industry, Engineers 592w
  Agriculture, Chemicals 478w
  Business questions 426
  Civil service, Reform 872–3
  Engineering 1211w
  General practitioners, Lancashire 805w
  Higher education, Teachers 763–4w
  Institutional care 548w
  Institutional care, Lancashire 121w
  Iraq, Politics and government 865w
  Kidney patients, Lancashire 821w
  Multiple sclerosis, Drugs 1003w
  Ophthalmic services, Pendle 831–2w
  Oral cancer 119–20w
  Steroid drugs, Misuse 277w

Pre-school education
  1133w
  Finance 763w
  Sussex 763w

***Prescott, Rt Hon John**, Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State*
    Questions
  British Irish Council 1070–1w
  Civil service, Reform 872–3
  Disadvantaged, Transport 1070w
  Energy Policy Review 873–4
  Ministers, Codes of practice 1070–1w
  Non-governmental organisations, Cabinet Office 780w
  Social Exclusion Unit, Community development 1071w

Prescription drugs
  Institutional care 1003–4w
  Rationing 983w
  Schizophrenia 997w, 1019–20w

Prescriptions
  Cystic fibrosis 1293w
  Fees and charges 983w, 1292–3w

Prescriptions—continued
  Petitions (12.03.02) 862

President of the Council
  Advertising 605w
  Catering 605w
  Correspondence 198w
  Hotels 403–4w
  Information officers 605w
  Legal costs 404w
  Non-governmental organisations 605w
  Publicity 403w
  Railways 606w
  Recruitment 606w
  Trade unions 403w
  Voluntary work 605w
  Work sharing 604w

Press
  Witnesses 196w

Press releases
  Cabinet Office 779w
  Dept for Education and Skills 764w
  Dept for International Development 466w
  Dept of Trade and Industry 4–5w
  Home Office 1227–8w
  Lord Chancellor's Dept 579w
  Ministry of Defence 1181w
  Northern Ireland Office 525w
  Treasury 401w

Preston Acute Hospitals NHS Trust
  Chorley and South Ribble NHS Trust 1143w

Price, Adam
    Debates etc.
  Central Government Audit and Accountability Review (13.03.02) 898–9
  Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 155–64, 170, 198, 207
    Questions
  Arthritis, Wales 1024w
  Education, Wales 232w
  Heart diseases, Males 991w
  Levy, Lord 687w
  Mittal, Lakshmi 1w, 63w, 67w
  Postal services, Wales 957w
  Romania, EC enlargement 391w
  Romania, Iron and steel 63w
  Romania, Official visits 391w, 510–1w

***Primarolo, Ms Dawn**, Paymaster General*
    Questions
  Advance corporation tax 112w
  Car allowances, Service industries 1289w
  Climate change levy 6–8w
  Corporation tax 1228w
  Double taxation, USA 1229–30w
  Employee share ownership schemes 966–7w
  Equitable Life Assurance Society 966w
  Excise duties, Fuels 9w
  Foot and mouth disease, Taxation 967w
  Income tax 696w
  Inland Revenue, Codes of practice 965w
  Landfill tax 9–10w
  Landfill tax credit scheme 10w
  Members, Correspondence 967w
  Mittal, Lakshmi, Taxation 470w
  National Insurance Fund 468w
  Non-domestic rates, Institutional care 695–6w
  Orders and regulations, Treasury 10–1w
  Pension credit 696w
  Regulatory Impact Unit, Treasury 399w
  Research and development tax credit 10w
  Small businesses, Investment 470–1w
  Small businesses, Tax allowances 704w
  Small businesses, Telephone services 397w
  Smuggling, Tobacco 10w

Primarolo, Ms Dawn—continued
  Social Security Contributions Agency, Standards 473w
  Stamp duties, Exemptions 966w
  Tax evasion 397w
  Taxation 470–1w, 705w
  Taxation, Incinerators 9w
  Taxation, Landlords 964w
  Taxation, Self-assessment 966w
  VAT 11–2w
  VAT, Housing 9w
  Working families tax credit 697w

"Primary Care"
  849w

Primary care groups
  Bolton 426w
  West Sussex 846w

Primary care trusts
  1035–7w, 1142w
  Environmental health 830w

Primary education
  Cameroon 1188w
  Languages 1212–3w
  Lincolnshire 633–5w
  Literacy 38w
  Numeracy 38w
  Standards 38–9w

Prime Minister
  City of London Corporation 342w
  Debates 682w, 693w
  Equal pay 1252w
  Hotels 680–1w
  Manpower 486–7w, 1252w
  Official engagements 344w
  Railways 680w
  Relocation services 1252w
  Work sharing 1069w

Priority routes
  Greater London 82w

Prisk, Mr Mark
  Sittings in Westminster Hall
  Industrial health and safety (14.03.02) 338–40wh
  Questions
  Crime, Victims 620
  Personal pensions 18–9w

Prison Service
  Pay 597–8w

Prisoner escapes
  Northern Ireland 705w

Prisoners
  64w, 514w, 720–1w, 978w
  Afghanistan 69–70w, 207–8w, 504w, 859–60w, 868w
  Ethnic groups 600–4w
  France 1297w
  Personal records 46–7w
  Wales 973–4w

Prisoners of war
  Compensation 393w, 503w

Prisoners' release
  514w
  Miscarriages of justice 1221w
  Northern Ireland 285

Prisons
  Education 716w, 1226–7w

Private education
  VAT 703w

Private finance initiative
  Dept for Education and Skills 387w
  Dept of Health 140w, 279–81w
  Fire services 1202w
  Hospitals 806–7w, 833–4w, 1027–8w

Private finance initiative—continued
  Recycling 71–2w

Private sector
  Health services 435–6w, 812–3w, 840w
  Hospitals 834w, 1007w
  Institutional care 1061w
  Medical treatments 1007–8w
  Regional assistance 383w
  Surgery 281w

Privatisation
  Roads 380w

Probation Directorate
  see National Probation Directorate

Probation officers
  Manpower 1097w

Procedure Select Committee
  (04.03.02) 123

Proceeds of crime
  Nigeria 645w

Procurement
  Antitank missiles 1162w
  Armoured fighting vehicles 1162w
  Defence equipment 325w, 476w
  Military aircraft 653w, 655w
  NHS 304w, 437–8w
  NHS trusts 804w
  Rolling stock 1273w
  Satellite communications 578w

Productivity
  Public sector 1108w

Programme motions
  see Timetabling of bills

Project Al Yamamah
  1245w

Prosecutions
  194–5w
  Fraud 1012–3, 1236w

Prosser, Mr Gwyn
  Questions
  Shipping, Safety 283–4

Prostate cancer
  820–1w

Protec
  Contracts 1263–4w

"Protection of Waters Against Agricultural Nitrate Pollution in England Consultation Paper"
  798w

Psychiatric nurses
  Young people 616w

Public Administration Select Committee
  (04.03.02) 123

Public appointments
  Cabinet Office 955w
  Dept for Culture Media and Sport 1283w
  Dept for Education and Skills 756–8w, 1279w
  Dept for International Development 895w
  Dept of Health 281–2w, 1031–2w
  Ethnic groups 1071w
  European Commission 1067–8w
  Females 879, 1071w
  Financial Services Authority 1110w
  Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1297w
  Isle of Wight 1205w
  Lord Chancellor's Dept 1242–3w
  Mental health services 819w
  NHS 1031–2w
  NHS Leadership Centre 850w
  NHS trusts 818w
  Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 957w, 1237w

Public appointments—continued
  Scotland Office 901w
  Shoreham Port Authority 178–9w, 373w, 1091–2w
  Small Business Service 669–70w
  Treasury 1110w

Public expenditure
  201w
  Dept for Education and Skills 756w
  Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 743–5w
  Dept of Health 999w, 1025–6w
  Dept of Trade and Industry 1w
  Devolution 201w
  Ministry of Defence 315w, 476w
  Scotland 275w
  Wales 1075w

Public finance
  1230w

Public footpaths
  Foot and mouth disease 415–6

Public libraries
  1231w

Public private partnerships
  1109–10w, 1228–9w
  Brompton Barracks 657w
  Defence Evaluation and Research Agency 313–4w, 577w, 1168w
  Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 82w, 1096w
  Dept of Health 282–4w
  Local authorities 920w
  London Underground 83–9w, 169–70w, 371w, 469w, 555–6w, 735–7w, 914–7w, 1082w, 1205–6w, 1274–5w
  Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1238w

Public Record Office
  Census 55–6w, 962w, 1175–6w

Public relations
  Agriculture 226w
  Cabinet Office 779w, 1180w
  Dept for Culture Media and Sport 264w, 576–7w, 929w
  Dept for Education and Skills 1133w
  Dept for International Development 465–6w, 682–3w
  Dept of Health 1054–5w
  Dept of Trade and Industry 5w, 593w
  Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1170w
  Lord Chancellor's Dept 579–80w
  NHS 1246–7w
  Northern Ireland Office 872w
  Treasury 401w

Public transport
  Fares 92w
  Passengers 920–1w

Publicity
  Dept of Health 1055–6w, 1058w
  Economic and monetary union 645w
  Electoral Commission 750w
  Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1174w
  President of the Council 403w
  Regional development agencies 1079–80w
  Solicitor-General 881–3w

Publishing
  489–90w

Pugh, Dr John
  Debates etc.
  Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL), Programme motion and Rep (11.03.02) 710–1
  Questions
  Higher education, Student numbers 1210w

Pupil exclusions
Drugs 251w

Pupils
Absenteeism 238w
Personal records 237w

Purchase, Mr Ken
Questions
Jobcentres, Advertising 1126–7w
Nepal, Politics and government 863w

Purnell, James
Debates etc.
Office of Communications Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (06.03.02) 354
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Politics, Young people (05.03.02) 44wh
Questions
Jobcentre Plus 15w
Museums and galleries 932–3w
Pensions, Foster care 420w
Students, Finance 1007–8

Qinetiq
32w, 1162–6w
Military aircraft 165w

Quality protects programme
451–61w

Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham
Transplant surgery 537w

Queen Elizabeth II
Anniversaries 265w, 269w, 573–6w, 578w, 626w, 681w, 897w, 1063w, 1158w

Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre
Air conditioning 584–5w

Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Questions
Afghanistan, International assistance 329–30w
Gynaecology, Manpower 445–8w
NHS, Compensation 447w
Regional assemblies 145–6
Terrorism 859w

Quinn, Lawrie
Questions
Drugs, Crime 866w
Electronic government 877–8
Rapid Response Service 14–5

Race Relations Act 1976
Questions
655–6w

Racial discrimination
1104–5w
Conferences 692w
EC action 520w

Radiation exposure
134w

Radio
Licensing 1159w, 1186w

Radioactive wastes
405–6
Sellafield 1287w

Radiography
1291w
Manpower 850–4w

Radiotherapy
Medical equipment 128–30w
Waiting lists 284

RAF Chilmark
165–6w

RAF Headley Court
659w

RAF Henlow
658–9w

RAF High Wycombe
Air conditioning 656–7w, 870–1w

RAF Turnhouse
Asylum 719w

Rahman, Shiblu
1049–50w

Rail Industry Group
735w

Railtrack
170w, 1084–5w
Finance 103w, 141–4, 148–50, 171w, 282–3, 285–7, 369–70w, 373w, 737–8w, 755w, 911–3w, 1084w

Railway Industry Advisory Committee
89–90w, 750–1w

Railway stations
103w

Railways
81–2w, 191w, 373w, 559w
Assets 170w
Cabinet Office 421w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 346w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 939–40w
Dept for International Development 685w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 562–3w
Dept of Health 1143w
Dept of Trade and Industry 356w
Disabled 739–40w
East Midlands 135–7
EC action 102w
EC countries 908–9w
Electrification 1274–5w
Engineers 558w
Fares 190–1w, 919w
Finance 170–1w, 191w, 369w, 379–80w, 738w, 908w, 912–3w, 918w, 1207w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 606w, 688w
Franchises 1273w
Freight 137–8, 1276w
Greater London 81w, 907w
Greater Manchester 1275w
Home Office 1099w
Industrial relations 191–2w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 405w
Manpower 1273w
Ministry of Defence 653w, 1161w
Northern Ireland Office 523–4w
President of the Council 606w
Prime Minister 680w
Repairs and maintenance 560w, 583w
Road traffic 919w
Safety 168w, 287, 380w, 571–2w, 745w, 1206w, 1271–2w
Scotland 343w
Skilled workers 907–8w, 1206w
South East region 175w
South West region 743–4w, 1272w
Standards 379w, 745w, 906–7w, 909w, 1272–3w
Training 747w, 1206w
Treasury 471w

Rain forests
Brazil 337w

Rammell, Mr Bill
Debates etc.
Greater London (12.03.02) 768, 789–94
Questions
Local government finance 174w

Ramsbottom
342w

Randall, Mr John
Debates etc.
Greater London (12.03.02) 771, 782, 804–6
Hospitals, Greater London (13.03.02) 996
Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, Rep and 3R (15.03.02) 1126, 1138–9, 1141, 1147–8, 1157–8, 1170–3, 1186–8
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Dolphins, Conservation (13.03.02) 294wh
Questions
Alternative energy 488–9w
Cancer, Waiting lists 289–90
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 81w
Crime, Greater London 635
Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill 2001/02 81w
Metropolitan Police, Conditions of employment 884
NHS, Manpower 1042–4w
Schools, Languages 1001
Social Security Benefits Agency, Crimes of violence 532w
Water, Meters 638w

Rapid deployment forces
EC countries 476w

Rapid Response Service
14–6
Finance 495–6w

Rapson, Syd
Sittings in Westminster Hall
NHS, Finance (12.03.02) 210–1wh
Questions
Housing benefit, Abuse 4–5

Rationing
Prescription drugs 983w

Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick*, Minister for Local Government, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions*
Debates etc.
Greater London (12.03.02) 766, 770–81, 788
London Underground (15.03.02) 1208–12
Questions
Elections, Expenditure 752w
Fire services 746w
Mayors, Referendums 553–4w
Regional government 147–8
Standard spending assessments, East Riding 751–2w
Standard spending assessments, Institutional care 751w

Recess motions
(11.03.02) 730

Reconstruction
Zimbabwe 686w

Recruitment
Civil servants 256–7w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 269–70w
Dept for International Development 341w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 735w
Dept of Trade and Industry 886–8w
General practitioners 805w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 578–9w
Northern Ireland Office 59w
Physiotherapy 611–2w
Police 160–1w
President of the Council 606w
Skilled workers 1122–3w
Teachers 36w, 772w, 951w, 1213–4w
Treasury 694–5w

Recycling
477w, 641w

Recycling—continued
EC law 399–402
Private finance initiative 71–2w

Redundancy
18w
Corus 349–50w
Smurfit Corrugated 151w

Redwood, Rt Hon John
Debates etc.
Bank services (14.03.02) 1027
Questions
Government offices for the regions, Finance 779–80w
London Underground, Public private partnerships 1205w
National Air Traffic Services, Finance 1275–6w
Railways, Finance 912–3w
Railways, Franchises 1273w
Railways, Safety 745w, 1206w
Railways, Standards 909w
Rolling stock, Procurement 1273w
"Transport 2010" 919w

Reed, Mr Andy
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Politics, Young people (05.03.02) 25wh, 36–7wh
Questions
Developing countries, Overseas aid 274–5

Referendums
Mayors 553–4w
Regional assemblies 172w

Refineries
Oil 356w

"Reforming Public Services Principles into Practice"
486w

Refrigeration
Government departments 1152–3w

Refrigerators
Export controls 1109w
Waste disposal 477–8w, 643–4w, 1151–2w
West Midlands 210w

Refugees
see Asylum

Refuges
922–3w
Children 807w

Regional airports
Construction 376w
South East region 375w

Regional assemblies
144–6
Finance 172w
Referendums 172w
South West region 567w, 569–70w, 921–2w

Regional assistance
748w
Private sector 383w

Regional development agencies
922w
Finance 747w
Publicity 1079–80w

Regional government
147–8
South West region 567–9w

Regional planning and development
174w, 1072w

"Regions White Paper"
957w

Regulatory impact assessments
Small businesses 149w

Regulatory Impact Unit
Dept for Education and Skills 1279–80w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1203w
Dept of Trade and Industry 353w
Treasury 399w

Regulatory Reform (Voluntary Aided Schools Liabilities and Funding) (England) Order 2002
Debates etc.
(12.03.02) 862

Rehabilitation
1059w
Sexual offences 47–8w

Reid, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Nuclear power stations (05.03.02) 231, 239, 253
Questions
Members, Correspondence 636w
Railways, Scotland 343w

***Reid, Rt Hon Dr John**, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland*
Debates etc.
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (04.03.02) 79–80, 92–3, 109–13, 116
Questions
Accountancy, Northern Ireland Office 59w
Capita, Northern Ireland Office 526w
Catering, Northern Ireland Office 59–60w
City of London Corporation, Northern Ireland Office 60w
Contracts, Northern Ireland Office 58–60w, 525–6w
Correspondence, Northern Ireland Office 61w
Courier services, Northern Ireland Office 258–9w
Empty property, Northern Ireland Office 57–8w
Environment protection, Northern Ireland Office 57w
Manpower, Northern Ireland Office 60–1w
Motor vehicles, Northern Ireland 258w
Northern Ireland Dept of the Director of Public Prosecutions, Manpower 51w
Northern Ireland government 871w
Offices, Northern Ireland Office 58w
Operating costs, Northern Ireland Office 872w
Press releases, Northern Ireland Office 525w
Prisoner escapes, Northern Ireland 705w
Public relations, Northern Ireland Office 872w
Railways, Northern Ireland Office 523–4w
Recruitment, Northern Ireland Office 59w

Religious broadcasting
Licensing 264–5w

Relocation services
Cabinet Office 1209–10w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 931–2w
Dept for Education and Skills 951w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 792w
Dept for International Development 899w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 750w, 905w
Dept of Trade and Industry 667w, 669w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1294w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 773w
Ministry of Defence 655w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 530w

Relocation services—continued
Prime Minister 1252w
Treasury 401w

Rendel, Mr David
Debates etc.
Central Government Audit and Accountability Review (13.03.02) 899
Sittings in Westminster Hall
NHS, Finance (12.03.02) 203–4wh
Questions
Pensioners, Income support 10–1
Research, Dept for Education and Skills 384w
Standards Fund 41–2w
Students, Finance 1000

Renewables Obligation Order 2002
Debates etc.
(07.03.02) 522

Rent Service
958–9w

Rented housing
Construction 176w
Social security benefits 958w

Rents
Council housing 84w
Selby 909–10w
York 909–10w

Repossession orders
Gravesend 773w

Research and development tax credit
10w

Reserve forces
Deployment 474w

Resignations
Air force 658w

Retirement
Age 23w
Dept for Education and Skills 947w
Doctors 1000w
General practitioners 999–1000w
Ministry of Defence 162w
NHS 1000w

Retrospective legislation
409–10w

Reviews
National Gallery 1283–4w
National Portrait Gallery 1283–4w

Right to buy
Greater London 567w, 1202–3w

River Humber
Navigation 97–8w

River Roding
Floods 483–4w

River Thames Safety Inquiry
see Thames Safety Inquiry

Road signs and markings
Speed limits 561w

Road traffic
1092w
Greater London 141w, 383w
Railways 919w

Road traffic control
Galileo project 382w
Greater London 380–1w
Schools 175w

Road traffic offences
1106w

Roads
176–8w, 583w
Accidents 94w, 141–2w, 381w, 561–2w, 612w, 1264w, 1277w

Roads—continued
Ambulance services 755w
Construction 917w
Expenditure 585w
Greater London 187w
Police 755w
Privatisation 380w
Repairs and maintenance 91–2w, 583–4w, 755w
Safety 561w, (08.03.02) 610–8
Tolls 141w, 187w, 753w, 917w
Wales 169w, 1083w

Robbery
713–4w

Robertson, Angus
Debates etc.
Nuclear power stations (05.03.02) 240
Terrorism (04.03.02) 129, (07.03.02) 499
Zimbabwe (14.03.02) 1041
Questions
EC Agriculture Council, Scottish Executive 229–30w, 361w
EC Foreign Affairs Council, Scottish Executive 65–6w, 504w, 870w
EC Research Council, Scottish Executive 355w
EU Employment and Social Policy Council, Scottish Executive 1241w
EU Internal Market Consumer Affairs and Tourism Council, Scottish Executive 489w

Robertson, Hugh
Debates etc.
Greater London (12.03.02) 835–8
Kent and Canterbury Hospital (07.03.02) 527–8, 531
Terrorism (07.03.02) 505–7
Zimbabwe (14.03.02) 1044
Questions
Afghanistan, International assistance 330w
Apples, EC law 229w
Armed forces, Sierra Leone 652w
Day surgery 551w
Fruit, Pesticides 225–6w
Grammar schools 1008

Robertson, John
Debates etc.
Nuclear power stations (05.03.02) 225, 245, 248–9
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Iraq (06.03.02) 73wh
Questions
Afghanistan, Prisoners 69–70w
Business questions 433
Industrial injuries disablement benefit 1119w

Robertson, Mr Laurence
Questions
Agriculture, Sustainable development 944w
Citizens' advice bureaux, Finance 964w
Common agricultural policy 214–5w
Cystic fibrosis, Prescriptions 1293w
Equitable Life Assurance Society 966w
Flood control 411–2
Genetically modified organisms, Crops 75–7w
Genetically modified organisms, Imports 76–7w
Home energy efficiency scheme 797w
Integrated administration and control system, Administrative delays 222–3w
Integrated administration and control system, Gloucestershire 223w
Local authorities, Electronic government 183–4w
Meat 222w

Robertson, Mr Laurence—continued
Meat, Import controls 221w
Meat, Imports 139–40w
Meat, Smuggling 221w
Milk 215w
Monetary compensatory amounts 224w
Motor vehicles, Waste disposal 642w
Pharmacy, Training 1291w
Pigs, Animal welfare 944w
Prescriptions, Fees and charges 1292–3w
Public Record Office, Census 962w
Social Security Contributions Agency, Standards 473w
Structure plans, Gloucestershire 382–3w
Tipping of waste 224w
War graves, Belgium 166–7w
War graves, France 166w
Water sports 796–7w
Wheat, Prices 223–4w
Winter sports, Gloucestershire 263w

Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Debates etc.
Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL), Programme motion and Rep (11.03.02) 672

Robinson, Mrs Iris
Questions
Economic and monetary union, Publicity 645w

***Roche, Mrs Barbara**, Minister of State, Cabinet Office*
Debates etc.
Equal opportunities, Females (14.03.02) 1087–8, 1113–5
Questions
Bristol, Cabinet Office 80w
Children, Day care 1072w
Disadvantaged, Transport 1070w
Electronic government 877–8
Government offices for the regions, Finance 779–80w
Ministerial policy advisors 871–2
Ministers, Codes of practice 875–7
Poverty, North West region 1072–3w
Poverty, Urban areas 1073w
Public appointments, Females 879
Regional planning and development 1072w

Rodents
Foot and mouth disease 213–4w

Roe, Mrs Marion
Questions
House of Commons, Breast feeding 467w
Members, Correspondence 136w, 803w, 1145–6w, 1285w

Rolling stock
London Underground 1274w
Procurement 1273w

Roll-on roll-off ships
326w

Romania
64–5w
Diplomatic service 391w
EC enlargement 391w
Iron and steel 63w, 681w
Official visits 391w, 510–1w

Rooney, Mr Terry
Questions
Average earnings 1229w
Consumers, Credit 1258w
Working mothers 14

Rosindell, Mr Andrew
Questions
Asylum 1102w
EC budget, Fraud 521w
Economic and monetary union 106w

Rosindell, Mr Andrew—continued
Equal pay 5–6w
EU Justice Home Affairs and Civil Protection Council 520–1w
European Federation of Journalists 68w
European Police Office, Terrorism 519w
European Police Office, USA 519–20w
Fishing vessels 363–4w
Health services, EC countries 295w
Immigration 1107w
Immigration controls, EC action 1106w
Laeken Summit (EC) 395–7w
Magistrates, EC action 1107w, 1177–8w
Organised crime, EC action 519w
Parental responsibility, EC action 50w
Racial discrimination, EC action 520w
Railways, EC action 102w
Schengen Agreement 521–2w
Small Business Europe 349w
Small businesses, EC countries 149w
Teachers, Recruitment 951w
Terrorism 603w
Wines, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 67–8w

Roy, Mr Frank
Debates etc.
Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 174, 192
Questions
Incapacity benefit 1125–6w

Royal charters
Urban areas 962w, 1243w

Royal commissions
253w

Royal family
Aviation 1196–7w

Royal Institute of British Architects
1159w

Royal Liverpool Children's NHS Trust
Post-mortems 1145w

Royal National Institute for Deaf People
1071–2w

Royal Parks Constabulary
261–2w

Ruane, Chris
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Consignia (12.03.02) 189wh, 198wh
Questions
HIV infection, Health education 1047w
NHS 1007–8w

Ruddock, Joan
Debates etc.
Oral question time intervention (07.03.02) 403
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Energy Policy Review (13.03.02) 273wh, 280wh
Questions
Afghanistan, Females 330–1w, 864w
Energy Policy Review 402
Food, Pesticides 121–2w
Fruit, Schools 1138–9w
Organic farming 797w
Police, Manpower 1266–70w
Pregnancy, Chemicals 1012–3w

Rugby
National Lottery 13w

Runshaw College
Assessments 389w

Rural areas
413–4
Bus services 752–3w
Fuel poverty 484w
Housing 554w
National Lottery 784w

Rural areas—continued
Planning permission 83w
Postal services 358w, 488w
Schools 385–6w
Small businesses 1150–1w

Russell, Bob
Debates etc.
Economic and monetary union (05.03.02) 265
Questions
British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, Finance 639–40w
Council housing, Construction 173–4w
Inland Revenue, Codes of practice 965w
Institutional care, Essex 825–6w
Manpower, Prime Minister 486–7w
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 578w, 681w, [illegible]58w
St Helena 860w
St Helena, Airports 327–8w
Schools, Sports 1214w
Social Security Benefits Agency, Facilities 531–2w
Urban areas, Royal charters 962w
Voluntary work, Cabinet Office 255w
Voluntary work, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 344–5w
Voluntary work, Dept for Education and Skills 387w
Voluntary work, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 224–5w
Voluntary work, Dept for International Development 341–2w
Voluntary work, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 179w
Voluntary work, Dept of Health 1141w
Voluntary work, Dept of Trade and Industry 350w
Voluntary work, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 203w
Voluntary work, Home Office 1102–3w
Voluntary work, Lord Chancellor's Dept 196–7w
Voluntary work, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 586w
Voluntary work, President of the Council 605w
Voluntary work, Treasury 20[illegible]w

Russell, Ms Christine
Questions
Africa, Health services 3[illegible]w
Heavily indebted poor countries initiative 335–6w

Russia
Chemical weapons 474–5w
Overseas aid 859w

Ryan, Ms Joan
Debates etc.
Equal opportunities, Females (14.03.02) 1066, 1072
Greater London (12.03.02) 806–10
Questions
Domestic violence 1174–5w

St Agnes Farm
Foot and mouth disease 482–3w

St Albans
Archaeological sites 1232w

St George's Hospital Tooting
Accident and emergency departments 822w

St Helena
860w
Airports 327–8w

St Helens
Crime 603w
Empty property 83–4w

Salmon
Severn estuary 941–2w

Salmond, Mr Alex
Debates etc.
Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference (06.03.02) 300
Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 171, 181
Nuclear power stations (05.03.02) 218–28, 230, 233–4, 237–8, 242, 244, 252–3, 255
Nuclear power stations, Points of order (06.03.02) 320
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Aggregates levy (13.03.02) 308–14wh
Questions
Advertising, Cabinet Office 1074–5w
Advertising, Dept of Health 1040w
Advertising, Dept of Trade and Industry 592w
Advertising, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1169–70w
Advertising, Home Office 974w
Advertising, Treasury 469–70w
Entrust, Landfill tax credit scheme 697–8w
Housing benefit, Students 958w
Landfill tax 698w
Members, Correspondence 967w
Roads, Accidents 612w
Theft, Motor vehicles 158w

Salt
Nutrition 295–6w

Salter, Mr Martin
Debates etc.
Greater London (12.03.02) 760

Sanders, Mr Adrian
Debates etc.
Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL), Programme motion and Rep (11.03.02) 639, 641, 650–2, 667, 696, 721–3, 727
Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (13.03.02) 917–8, 929, 958, 966–7, 982–3, 985
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Diabetes (13.03.02) 301wh
Dolphins, Conservation (13.03.02) 293–6wh, 298–9wh
Questions
Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL) 2001/02 93w
Diabetes 120–1w
Homelessness 93–4w, 923–4w
Non-governmental organisations, Cabinet Office 780w
Non-governmental organisations, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 1160w
Non-governmental organisations, Dept for Education and Skills 1217w
Non-governmental organisations, Dept for International Development 465–6w
Non-governmental organisations, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 177w, 1086w
Non-governmental organisations, Dept of Trade and Industry 592w
Non-governmental organisations, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 391w, 1296w
Non-governmental organisations, Lord Chancellor's Dept 408–9w
Non-governmental organisations, Ministry of Defence 476w
Non-governmental organisations, President of the Council 605w

Sangdrol, Ngawang
1172w

Satellite communications
Procurement 578w

Savidge, Mr Malcolm
Debates etc.
Zimbabwe (14.03.02) 1042
Questions
Iraq 747
Terrorism 859w

Sawford, Phil
Questions
A6, Bypasses 167w, 1087w
Central America, Children 863w
Haemophilia, Blood transfusions 1140w
Hedges and ditches 381w
Livestock, Markets 411
Publishing 489–90w

Sayeed, Mr Jonathan
Debates etc.
Oral question time intervention (07.03.02) 402
Questions
Air conditioning, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 1235w
Air conditioning, Dept for International Development 896w
Air conditioning, Home Office 1221–2w
Air conditioning, Ministry of Defence 870–1w
Air conditioning, Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre 584–5w
Air conditioning, RAF High Wycombe 656–7w
Air conditioning, 10 Downing Street 1069w
Electronic equipment, Waste disposal 5w, 78w, 937–8w
Motor vehicles, EC law 217–8w
Ozone layer, Pollution control 798w
Radioactive wastes 405–6
Refrigeration, Government departments 1152–3w
Refrigerators, Waste disposal 1152w
Retrospective legislation 409–10w

Schengen Agreement
521–2w

Schizophrenia
Prescription drugs 997w, 1019–20w

SchlumbergerSema
530–1w

Schools
387w
Admissions 1281w
Arson 953–4w
Climate change levy 759–60w
Crime 251–2w
Curriculum 239–40w
Drugs 251w
Fruit 1138–9w
Governing bodies 625w
Inspections 41w
Languages 1001–3
Petitions (07.03.02) 523
Playing fields 249w, 497–501w
Repairs and maintenance 1219–20w
Road traffic control 175w
Rural areas 385–6w
Science 1214–5w
Security 241w
Sponsorship 387–8w
Sports 1214w
Standards 40w
Transport 382w, 747w

Science
Further education 625–6w
Schools 1214–5w

Scotland
Asbestos 693–4w
Census 61w

Scotland—continued
Channel tunnel railway line 174–5w
Energy supply 673–4w
Females 899–900w
Film 281
Foot and mouth disease 1209w
Motor vehicles 1277w
Nuclear power stations (05.03.02) 218–61, 1208w
Public expenditure 275w
Railways 343w
Social security benefits 727–8w

Scotland Act 1998
Questions
1207w

Scotland Office
Consultants 511w
Courier services 513w
Departmental responsibilities 1208w
Eyesight 513w
Internet 512w
Orders and regulations 512–3w
Public appointments 901w
Stress 511–2w

Scotland Yard
see Metropolitan Police

Scottish Executive
EC Agriculture Council 229–30w, 361w
EC Foreign Affairs Council 65–6w, 504w, 870w
EC Research Council 355w
EU Employment and Social Policy Council 1241w
EU Internal Market Consumer Affairs and Tourism Council 489w

Sea fisheries committees
211w

Secondary education
Gifted children 756w
Standards 624–5w

Secondment
Dept for Education and Skills 236–7w, 946–8w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 209–10w
Dept for Work and Pensions 1119–20w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1169w
Ministry of Defence 324w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 528w
Police 156w
Whitehall and Industry Group 422w

Sector skills councils
250–1w, 670w
Sports 235w

"Secure Borders Safe Haven White Paper"
158w

Security
Airports 373–4w
Jobcentres 1121w
Military bases 29w
NHS 547–8w
Schools 241w
Social Security Benefits Agency 723–4w

Selby
Rents 909–10w

Select Committee on Public Administration
see Public Administration Select Committee

Select Committee on Standards and Privileges

Select Committee on Standards and Privileges—continued
see Standards and Privileges Select Committee

Select committees
Dept of Health 988w

Self-assessment
Taxation 966w

Sellafield
356–7w
Radioactive wastes 1287w

Selous, Andrew
Debates etc.
Aerials, Petitions (11.03.02) 730
Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL), Programme motion and Rep (11.03.02) 652–3, 655, 662
Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (13.03.02) 942
Equal opportunities, Females (14.03.02) 1084, 1104, 1106–8
Questions
Hepatitis 1047–8w
Recycling, EC law 399–400
Schools, Rural areas 385–6w
Yarls Wood Detention Centre 157w

Senegal
HIV infection 329w

Sentencing
1100–1w

Serbia
Money laundering 975w

Service industries
Car allowances 1289w

Severn bridge
558–9w

Severn estuary
Salmon 941–2w

Sewers
230–1w

Sex
Health education 136w

Sex Discrimination Act 1975
Questions
655–6w

Sex Discrimination (Amendment) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (15.03.02) 1203

Sexual offences
1011–2, 1103–4w
Children 713w
Essex 1225–6w
Rehabilitation 47–8w

Shared ownership schemes
189w

Shares
UK Coal 1081w

Shaw, Mr Jonathan
Debates etc.
Greater London (12.03.02) 765, 776, 785, 796–7, 814–8
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Politics, Young people (05.03.02) 28–31wh
Questions
Crimes of violence 627–8
Railways, South East region 175w

Sheep
MV Kalifeh 1 791w
Shipping 791w

Sheep—continued
Transport 478w

Sheerman, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
Greater London (12.03.02) 828
Questions
Immobilisation of vehicles, Fees and charges 722w
Learning and skills councils 1213w
Primary care trusts 1142w
Schools, Languages 1001–2
Social security benefits, Abuse 960w

Sheikh, Ahmed Omar Saeed
202w, 1295w

Shellfish
404–5
Poisoning 122w
Wales 528–9w

Shipley, Ms Debra
Questions
Aerials, Planning permission 98–9w
Criminal Records Bureau, Northern Ireland 712w
Design, Dept for Education and Skills 387w
Design, Dept of Health 1142–3w
Design, Home Office 1225w
Forests, Environment protection 364w
Government departments, Buildings 209w
Private finance initiative, Dept for Education and Skills 387w
Social rented housing, Energy 903w
Sustainable development 642–3w
Tax allowances, Derelict land 398w
Taxation, Construction 398–9w

Shipping
Accidents 746–7w
Safety 283–4, 374w
Sheep 791w

Shoreham
Ports 753–4w, 1091–2w, 1200w

Shoreham Port Authority
754w
Pay 754w
Public appointments 178–9w, 373w, 1091–2w

***Short, Rt Hon Clare**, Secretary of State for International Development*
Questions
Accountancy, Dept for International Development 335w, 897w
Afghanistan, Asylum 1189–91w
Afghanistan, Bomb disposal 686w, 1129–30w
Afghanistan, Females 330–1w, 648w
Afghanistan, Health services 1190w
Afghanistan, International assistance 329–30w, 1130w
Afghanistan, Microcredit programmes 1189w
Africa, Crime prevention 647w
Africa, Debts 1129w
Africa, Human trafficking 646w
Africa, International assistance 328w, 339–40w
Africa, Offences against children 646–7w, 1187w
Air conditioning, Dept for International Development 896w
Angola, Overseas aid 465w, 1187–8w
Arms trade, Export controls 892w
Bolivia, Floods 338w
Brazil, Overseas aid 332w
Brazil, Rain forests 337w
Cameroon, International assistance 272–3
Cameroon, Overseas aid 1188w

Short, Rt Hon Clare—continued
Cameroon, Politics and government 1188–9w
Cameroon, Poverty 338w
Cameroon, Primary education 1188w
Capita, Dept for International Development 337w, 466w
Catering, Dept for International Development 341w
Central Africa, Peace negotiations 331–2w
Children, Employment 683w
Children, Human trafficking 646–7w
Commonwealth Development Corporation, Africa 276–7
Commonwealth Development Corporation, Overseas investment 891–2w
Conferences, Dept for International Development 897–8w
Democratic Republic of Congo, Overseas aid 894w
Developing countries, Children 329w, 1191w
Developing countries, Corruption 331w
Developing countries, Disease control 279–80, 336–7w, 897w
Developing countries, Drugs 331w
Developing countries, Education 278–9, 333–4w, 683w
Developing countries, Fisheries 332–3w
Developing countries, Foreign trade 333w
Developing countries, Overseas aid 273–6
EC law, Dept for International Development 340–1w
Employment tribunals, Dept for International Development 894w
Equal pay, Dept for International Development 899w
Equipment, Dept for International Development 892w
Ethiopia, Overseas aid 892–3w
European Bank for Reconstruction and Development 341w, 693w, 1129w
Flexible working, Dept for International Development 1191–2w
Global Alliance for Vaccination and Immunisation 12–3w
Heavily indebted poor countries initiative 335–6w
Hotels, Dept for International Development 898w
India, Overseas aid 685–6w
Information officers, Dept for International Development 898w, 1131w
International Development Association 328w
Iran, Overseas aid 1192w
Kenya, Politics and government 333w
Manpower, Dept for International Development 337–8w
Microcredit programmes, Females 340w
Middle East, Armed conflict 683–4w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for International Development 896–7w
Mittal, Lakshmi 338w, 893–4w
Nations Trust 467w
Non-governmental organisations, Dept for International Development 465–6w
Operating costs, Dept for International Development 893w
Overseas aid 334–5w
Overseas aid, Health education 684–5w
Overseas aid, HIV infection 647–8w, 897w
Parental leave, Dept for International Development 1128–9w
Parliamentary questions, Dept for International Development 895w
Press releases, Dept for International Development 466w
Public appointments, Dept for International Development 895w

Short, Rt Hon Clare—continued
Public relations, Dept for International Development 465–6w, 682–3w
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 897w
Railways, Dept for International Development 685w
Recruitment, Dept for International Development 341w
Relocation services, Dept for International Development 899w
St Helena, Airports 327–8w
Senegal, HIV infection 329w
South Africa, HIV infection 466–7w
Sri Lanka, Overseas aid 648w
Sub-Saharan Africa, Overseas aid 329w, 339w
Sudan, Peace negotiations 327w
Tanzania, Air traffic control 340w, 648w, 685w
Theft, Dept for International Development 891w
Tibet, Education 1128w
Visits abroad, Dept for International Development 1130w
Voluntary work, Dept for International Development 341–2w
West Africa, EC aid 326–7w
West Africa, Overseas aid 326w
Wood, Dept for International Development 894–5w
Work sharing, Dept for International Development 898w
Zimbabwe, Elections 686w
Zimbabwe, Overseas aid 328w, 898–9w
Zimbabwe, Reconstruction 686w

Sick leave
Humber Police 157w

Sierra Leone
Armed forces 652w

Sight impaired
Dept for Work and Pensions 725w

Simmonds, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, Rep and 3R (15.03.02) 1173

Simpson, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Environmental audit (07.03.02) 461–5
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Iraq (06.03.02) 71–2wh
Questions
Genetically modified organisms, Maize 210w

Single parents
see Lone parents

Single regeneration budget
748w

Sixsmith, Martin
487w, 901–3w, 1083w

Sixth form education
Derbyshire 1213w
Finance 1009
Student numbers 1217–8w

Skilled workers
1134w
Engineering 497w, 888–9w
Railways 907–8w, 1206w
Recruitment 1122–3w

Skinner, Mr Dennis
Debates etc.
Business questions intervention (07.03.02) 419
Questions
Ministers, Codes of practice 877
Non-teaching staff 1010

Skinner, Mr Dennis—continued
Police, Conditions of employment 623
Railtrack, Finance 143

Sleeping rough
Statistics 186w

Small Business Council
589w

Small Business Europe
349w

Small Business Service
Advertising 1078–9w
Manpower 1079w
Public appointments 669–70w

Small businesses
646w, 799w
Bank services 149w, 492w
Disabled 888w
EC countries 149w
Emergencies 1079w
Insolvency 1257w
Institutional care 813w
Investment 470–1w
Loan guarantee scheme 349w, 589w
Location 1186w
Regulatory impact assessments 149w
Rural areas 1150–1w
Tax allowances 704w
Telephone services 397w
Venture capital 150w

***Smith, Rt Hon Andrew**, Chief Secretary to the Treasury*
Debates etc.
Central Government Audit and Accountability Review, Ministerial statements (13.03.02) 889–900
Questions
Aviation, Insurance 11w
Exports, Licensing 701–2w
Fraud 201w
Government departments, Buildings 209w
Government departments, Operating costs 1289w
Government departments, Standards 1108w
London Underground, Public private partnerships 469w
Manpower, Treasury 1109w
Pensions, Public sector 1230–1w
Public appointments, Treasury 1110w
Public expenditure 201w
Public expenditure, Devolution 201w
Public private partnerships 1109–10w
Public sector, Productivity 1108w
Tax burden 468w
Terrorism, Costs 11w, 1289w

Smith, Geraldine
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Consignia (12.03.02) 184–5wh, 194–5wh
Questions
Human rights 527w
Police, Conditions of employment 1227w
Postal services, Competition 880

***Smith, Jacqui**, Minister of State, Dept of Health*
Questions
Alzheimer's disease 609w
Analgesics, Packaging 612–3w
Arthritis, Drugs 424–5w, 613–4w
Arthritis, Wales 1024w
Asthma 1144–5w
Autism 543w, 1139w
Autism, West Sussex 438–9w
Bennett, David 1020w
Brain, Injuries 836–7w, 1006–7w
Cancer, Medical treatments 130w, 985w
Child protection committees, Finance 845w

***Smith, Jacqui**—continued*
Children, Protection 1245w
Children Act 1989 547w
Children in care, Standards 986–7w
Chiropody 539–41w
Chorley and South Ribble Hospital 1018–9w
Chorley and South Ribble Hospital, Accident and emergency departments 992w
Chronic fatigue syndrome, Research 998w
Community care 1024w
Consultation papers, Dept of Health 1009w
Depressive illnesses, Children 616w
Diabetes 120–1w
East Riding Health Authority 845–6w
Health authorities, Location 461w
Health services, EC countries 295w
Health services, Elderly 1037w
Hearing aids 449–50w, 543–4w, 833w, 1143–4w
Hinchingbrooke Hospital, Manpower 1014w
Home care services, National vocational qualifications 433w
Home care services, Standards 434w
Home helps 616w
Hospital beds 296w, 990w, 1011w
Hospital beds, Lancashire 612w
Hospital beds, Merseyside 815–6w
Hospital beds, North West region 801–2w
Hospital beds, North Yorkshire 1010–1w
Hospital beds, South East region 1011w
Hospitals, Admissions 612w
Hospitals, Kingston upon Hull 545w
Hyperactivity, Disability living allowance 439–40w
Infectious diseases 1029w
Institutional care 301–2w, 425w, 548w, 830w, 840–1w, 1011–2w, 1014w
Institutional care, Basingstoke 1138w
Institutional care, Bed and breakfast accommodation 616–7w, 841w
Institutional care, Closures 808w
Institutional care, Eastbourne 548w
Institutional care, Essex 825–6w
Institutional care, Fees and charges 425w, 462w, 542w, 611w, 816–7w, 1002w, 1026–7w, 1060–2w, 1140–1w
Institutional care, Herefordshire 615–6w
Institutional care, Kent 425–6w
Institutional care, Lancashire 121w, 609w, 839w
Institutional care, Oxfordshire 825w
Institutional care, Planning permission 426w
Institutional care, Prescription drugs 1003–4w
Institutional care, Private sector 1061w
Institutional care, Small businesses 813w
Institutional care, South Tyneside 990–1w
Institutional care, Standards 542–3w, 986w, 1001–2w
Kidney patients, Lancashire 821w
Lancashire Ambulance Service NHS Trust 988–9w
Leonard Cheshire Foundation 837–8w
Members, Correspondence 431–2w, 544w, 802–4w, 1030–1w
Mental health services 819w
Mental health services, Children 820w
Mental health services, Finance 819–20w
Mental health services, Hospital beds 125–7w
Mental health services, Nurses 989–90w
Mental health services, Standards 430w
Mental health services, Young offender institutions 127w
Mental health services, Young people 127w

***Smith, Jacqui**—continued*
Mental patients 430–2w, 617–8w, 1057w
Mental patients' rights 431w
Mentally ill 989w
Mentally ill, Discrimination 1124w
Mentally incapacitated 549–50w
Motor neurone disease, Medical treatments 537–8w
National Care Standards Commission 1039w
National Care Standards Commission, Commission for Health Improvement 1144w
NHS, Fees and charges 1143w
NHS, Finance 1015w
NHS, Local authorities 135–6w
North Cumbria Health Authority 1020–1w
Ophthalmic services, Pendle 831–2w
Oxygen, Medical treatments 839–40w
Patients 138w
Physiotherapy, Recruitment 611–2w
Primary care groups, Bolton 426w
Psychiatric nurses, Young people 616w
Quality protects programme 451–61w
Refuges, Children 807w
Social services, Elderly 440–6w, 1063w
Social workers, Training 131w, 609w
Speech therapy, Children 611w, 807w
Speech therapy, Manpower 838w
Spinal injuries 828–9w
Strokes 1012w
Suicide 805w, 809–10w, 834–5w
Surgery, Buckingham 822w
Surgery, Kingston upon Hull 544–5w
Surgery, Waiting lists 991w
Tomography, North West region 1030w
Transplant surgery, Glasgow 1013–4w
Wright, Lauren 1004–5w
Written questions, Administrative delays 1045–6w
Written questions, Dept of Health 275–6w

Smith, Mr John
Questions
North Korea 754–5
Royal family, Aviation 1196–7w

Smith, Llew
Debates etc.
Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 155–6, 160–1, 189–91, 196–7, 201
Questions
Building Research Establishment, Libraries 347w

Smith, Sir Robert
Debates etc.
Nuclear power stations (05.03.02) 230
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Consignia (12.03.02) 177–8wh, 182–3wh, 199–200wh
Energy Policy Review (13.03.02) 273wh, 279wh

Smoking
832w, 1015w

Smuggling
106–7w
Alcoholic drinks 200w
Confiscation orders 108–9w
Fuels 113w
Meat 221w
Tobacco 10w, 107–8w, 200w
Wood 784–6w

Smurfit Corrugated
Redundancy 151w

Smyth, Rev Martin
Questions
Business questions 427
Developing countries, Foreign trade 333w

***Smyth, Rev Martin**—continued*
Disabled facilities grants 1200–1w

Soames, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
Territorial Army, Points of order (05.03.02) 217
Zimbabwe (14.03.02) 1038
Questions
Armed forces, Deployment 318w
Armed forces, Training 318–20w
Working mothers 14

Social Exclusion Unit
Community development 1071w

Social rented housing
83w
Energy 903w
Executives 172w

Social security benefits
728–9w, 1240w
Abuse 17–8w, 255w, 411w, 414w, 960w
Appeals 723w, 730–4w
Automated credit transfer 413–4w
Belgium 17w
Carers 3–4, 536w
Chronic fatigue syndrome 1127–8w
Hackney 1123–4w
Lone parents 534–5w
Newcastle upon Tyne 1124–5w
Overpayments 415–7w
Patients 723w, 727–8w, 1251w
Pensioners 15w, 21–2w
Post offices 670w
Rented housing 958w
Scotland 727–8w
Stroud 535–6w
Uprating 1240w

Social Security Benefits Agency
Crimes of violence 532–3w, 724–5w
Facilities 531–2w
Security 723–4w

Social Security Contributions Agency
Standards 473w

Social services
Elderly 440–6w, 1063w
Finance 1197w

Social workers
Training 131w, 609w

Soley, Mr Clive
Debates etc.
Greater London (12.03.02) 833–4
Questions
Middle East, Peace negotiations 861w

Solicitor-General
Accountancy 660–1w
Conferences 659w
Empty property 883–4w
Fair trade initiative 875–6w
Industrial disputes 873w
Information officers 1117w
Legal costs 873–5w
Northern Ireland 1235w
Offices 883w
Official hospitality 661–3w
Orders and regulations 877w
Publications 877–81w
Publicity 881–3w
Theft 663–4w
Trade unions 876–7w

Solicitors
Standards 1284w

Solihull Hospital
121w

Solway Harvester
see MV Solway Harvester

Somerset
- Bridges 372–3w
- Police 712w
- Special education 1219w

South Africa
- HIV infection 466–7w

South East and East of England Regional Air Services Study
- 375–6w

South East Asia
- Microfinance 271–2
- Overseas aid 339w

South East London Combined Heat and Power
- Dioxins 359–60w

South East region
- Airports 918w, 1200w
- Hearing aids 986w
- Heart diseases 462–4w
- Hospital beds 1011w
- Housing 188–9w
- Railways 175w
- Regional airports 375w
- Transport 92–3w

South Tyneside
- Institutional care 990–1w

South West region
- Agricultural products 938–9w
- Local education authorities 1135w
- Railways 743–4w, 1272w
- Regional assemblies 567w, 569–70w, 921–2w
- Regional government 567–9w
- Veterinary services 219w

South West Regional Development Agency
- 1080w

South Yorkshire
- Enterprise grant scheme 889w

Southworth, Ms Helen

Questions
- Crown Prosecution Service 1013–4
- Equal pay, North West region 1185w
- NHS, Finance 614–5w

Space technology
- 675–8w

Spain
- Gibraltar 61w, 504w, 866w

Speaker and deputies

Debates etc.
- Amendments and new clauses (04.03.02) 41, 56, 65, 77, 99, (05.03.02) 155, 218, (06.03.02) 322, 346, 372, 375, (11.03.02) 648, 650–1, 670, 675, 679, 689, 707, 714, 721, (12.03.02) 760, (13.03.02) 907, 923, 932, 936, 952, 954, 973, (15.03.02) 1132, 1156, 1170, 1172, 1177
- Conduct of proceedings (04.03.02) 51, 80, 87–8, (05.03.02) 135, 139, 141, 155–7, 161, 187, 197, 199, 205, 220, 222, (06.03.02) 277–8, 303, 328, 330–1, 358, (07.03.02) 478, 492, (08.03.02) 541, 549, 573, (11.03.02) 643, 699, 703, 706, (12.03.02) 766, 773, 804, 834, (13.03.02) 873, 905, 929–30, 970, (14.03.02) 1002, 1005, 1029, 1065, 1076, 1079–80, 1086, 1091, 1108, (15.03.02) 1131, 1212
- Disallowed questions (14.03.02) 1030
- Orders and regulations motions (13.03.02) 988
- Points of order (04.03.02) 21–2, 40, 65, (05.03.02) 151, 156, 161, 168, 172, 202, 217, 261, (06.03.02) 320–1, 328, 339, (07.03.02) 483, 514, (08.03.02) 610,

Speaker and deputies—continued
- (11.03.02) 637, 699, (12.03.02) 757, 834, 836, 842, 852, (13.03.02) 901, 906, 932, 970–1
- Rulings and statements, Members (07.03.02) 522
- Rulings and statements, Unparliamentary expressions (08.03.02) 576
- Select committee motions (04.03.02) 123

Sittings in Westminster Hall
- Conduct of proceedings (05.03.02) 23wh, 68wh, (06.03.02) 72wh, 88wh, 90wh, 100wh, 108wh, (07.03.02) 147wh, (12.03.02) 179wh, 195wh, 200wh, 210wh, (13.03.02) 268–9wh, 278wh, 285wh, 288wh, 295wh, 314wh, (14.03.02) 336wh, 343wh
- Points of order (14.03.02) 355wh
- Rulings and statements, Suspension of sittings (06.03.02) 89wh
- Rulings and statements, Unparliamentary expressions (06.03.02) 88–9wh

Special education
- Autism 238–9w, 759w, 1217w
- Somerset 1219w

Special voucher scheme
- British overseas citizenship 161w

Specialist schools
- 390w

Speech therapy
- Children 611w, 807w
- Manpower 838w
- Training 283w

Speed governors
- 492w

Speed limits
- A76 1207–8w
- Cameras 1227w
- London Underground 1082w
- Road signs and markings 561w

***Spellar, Rt Hon John**, Minister for Transport, Department for Transport Local Government and the Regions*

Questions
- Aircraft, Noise 562w
- Central Railway 738w
- Central Railway, Freight 1278w
- Heathrow Airport 167–8w
- London Underground, Fares 370–1w
- London Underground, Public private partnerships 169w
- National Air Traffic Services, Finance 1275–6w
- Railtrack 170w
- Railtrack, Finance 141–4
- Railways, East Midlands 135–7
- Railways, Engineers 558w
- Railways, Finance 912–3w
- Railways, Franchises 1273w
- Railways, Safety 745w, 1206w
- Railways, Standards 909w
- Roads, Tolls 187w
- Rolling stock, Procurement 1273w
- Shoreham Port Authority, Public appointments 373w
- Transport, Land use 918w
- Transport, North West region 172w
- "Transport 2010" 919w
- West coast railway line 138–40

Spelman, Mrs Caroline

Debates etc.
- Equal opportunities, Females (14.03.02) 1069–76

Questions
- Afghanistan, Asylum 1189–91w
- Afghanistan, Females 648w

Spelman, Mrs Caroline—continued
- Afghanistan, Health services 1190w
- Afghanistan, International assistance 1130w
- Afghanistan, Microcredit programmes 1189w
- Africa, Crime prevention 647w
- Africa, Human trafficking 646w
- Africa, International assistance 339–40w
- Africa, Offences against children 646–7w, 1187w
- Alternatives to prison, West Midlands 54w
- Burkina Faso, Overseas aid 891w
- Cameroon, Overseas aid 1188w
- Cameroon, Politics and government 1188–9w
- Cameroon, Poverty 338w
- Cameroon, Primary education 1188w
- Children, Human trafficking 646–7w
- Developing countries, Disease control 336–7w
- Developing countries, Overseas aid 276
- European Bank for Reconstruction and Development 341w, 1129w
- Fair trade initiative, Dept for Education and Skills 758w
- Fair trade initiative, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 642w
- Fair trade initiative, Dept for International Development 339w
- Fair trade initiative, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 179w
- Fair trade initiative, Dept of Health 1142w
- Fair trade initiative, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 606w
- Fair trade initiative, Home Office 1103w
- Fair trade initiative, Lord Chancellor's Dept 526w
- Fair trade initiative, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 365w
- Fair trade initiative, Treasury 110w
- Microcredit programmes, Females 340w
- Mittal, Lakshmi 338w, 893–4w
- South East Asia, Microfinance 271–2
- Sub-Saharan Africa, Overseas aid 339w
- Tanzania, Air traffic control 340w, 648w

Spicer, Sir Michael

Questions
- Members, Correspondence 803–4w

Spinal injuries
- 828–9w
- Mid Sussex NHS Trust 850w

Spink, Bob

Debates etc.
- Aerials, Petitions (04.03.02) 124
- Greater London (12.03.02) 768–9, 781–3, 833–5
- Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, Rep and 3R (15.03.02) 1149–50
- Ministerial statement intervention (06.03.02) 312
- Oral question time intervention (04.03.02) 6

Sittings in Westminster Hall
- Energy Policy Review (13.03.02) 274wh, 278wh, 283wh

Questions
- Abortion, Overseas visitors 135w
- Airports, South East region 1200w
- Asylum, Deportation 392w
- Asylum, Essex 157–8w
- Beta-interferon 1137w
- Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment 1159w
- Design, Dept for Education and Skills 769w
- Design Champions Ministerial Group 1231w, 1282–3w
- Foreign loans, World War II 1114w

Spink, Bob*—continued*
General practitioners, Performance appraisal 289w
General practitioners, Standards 289–90w
Gibraltar 681w
Gilbey, Deena 1295w
Health authorities, Reform 816w
Health services, Overseas visitors 1141w
Hearing aids 544w
Hospital beds, South East region 1011w
LTS Rail, Passengers 191w
Ministerial policy advisors 871
Royal Institute of British Architects 1159w
Sexual offences 1103–4w
Sexual offences, Essex 1225–6w
Shellfish 404–5
Speech therapy, Children 611w, 807w
Terrorism, Costs 1289w
Vietnam, Asylum 206–7w
Young offenders 711w

Sponsorship
Darts 274w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 65w
Schools 387–8w
Treasury 700w

Sport England
see English Sports Council

Sports
Finance 13w
Schools 1214w
Sector skills councils 235w
Tax allowances 263–4w, 527w
Training 263w
Wales 366w
Young people 263w

Spring, Mr Richard
Questions
Madagascar 1173–4w
North Korea 755

Squire, Ms Rachel
Debates etc.
Copyright (Visually Impaired Persons) Bill, 2R (15.03.02) 1192–5
Terrorism (07.03.02) 510–2
Questions
Asbestos, Scotland 693–4w
War pensions 1160–1w

Sri Lanka
Overseas aid 648w

Stafford
Equal pay 151w

Stakeholder pensions
22–3w

Stamp duties
Exemptions 966w

Standard spending assessments
East Riding 751–2w
Education 621–2w, 1215–6w
Humberside Fire Authority 746w
Institutional care 751w
Stoke on Trent 1087w
Wiltshire 1215–6w

Standards and Privileges Select Committee
(04.03.02) 123

Standards Fund
41–2w
Dorset 1280–1w

Standing Committee on Regional Affairs
(13.03.02) 988

Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Debates etc.
Terrorism (07.03.02) 500–3

Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John*—continued*
Questions
Mittal, Lakshmi 509w
Overseas investment, Government assistance 689w

Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Sittings in Westminster Hall
NHS, Finance (12.03.02) 205–7wh, 216–7wh
Questions
Bail hostels 713w
Combined heat and power 352w, 643w
Education, Human rights 948–9w
Equal pay, Milton Keynes 151w
Human rights 1133–4w
Schools, Science 1214–5w
Travel, Concessions 187w
West coast railway line 138–9

Starter home initiative
Hertfordshire (06.03.02) 125–32wh

State earnings related pension scheme
254–5w, 471w, 723w

State retirement pensions
725–6w, 1118w
Overseas residence 199w, 253–4w
Uprating 410–1w

Stationery
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 562w

Statistics
Business 703w
Equal pay 1184w
Sleeping rough 186w

Steen, Mr Anthony
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Dolphins, Conservation (13.03.02) 295wh, 297wh
Questions
Members, Correspondence 544w, 939w
Planning 140–1
"Planning and Delivering a Fundamental Change Consultation Paper" 176w

Steinberg, Mr Gerry
Questions
Teachers, Early retirement 1136–7w

Steroid drugs
Misuse 277w

Stevenson, Mr George
Questions
Panchen Lama 1172w
Railtrack, Finance 142
Sangdrol, Ngawang 1172w
Standard spending assessments, Stoke on Trent 1087w

Stewart, Mr David
Questions
Africa, Debts 1129w
Art works, Ethiopia 1233w
Central Europe, EC enlargement 1297w
European Commission 1172w
European Commission, Public appointments 1067–8w
Film, Scotland 281
France, Prisoners 1297w
India, Hawk aircraft 1196w
Offshore drilling 1257w
Sudan, Peace negotiations 327w

Stewart, Ian
Questions
Public finance 1230w

Stinchcombe, Mr Paul
Questions
Asylum, Detainees 313w

Stinchcombe, Mr Paul*—continued*
Blakenhurst Prison 1224w
Doncaster Prison 1224–5w
Moreton Lane Prison 1223–4w
Offenders, Electronic tagging 1098w
Onley Prison 1223w
Prisoners, Ethnic groups 600–4w
UK Detention Services 1223w

Stoate, Dr Howard
Questions
Cancer, Drugs 815w
Heart diseases 800–1w
Heart diseases, Medical treatments 814w
Herceptin 1065w

Stockton on Tees
Equal pay 1183–4w

Stoke on Trent
Standard spending assessments 1087w

Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin,
Debates etc.
Terrorism (07.03.02) 498–500
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Consignia (12.03.02) 181–2wh
Questions
Overseas aid, HIV infection 647–8w

Straw, Rt Hon Jack*, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs*
Debates etc.
Zimbabwe, Ministerial statements (14.03.02) 1031–45
Questions
Afghanistan, Prisoners 207w
Democratic Republic of Congo, Elections 68w
Iraq 743–8
Middle East, Peace negotiations 749–53
Montenegro 393–4w
Non-governmental organisations, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 391w, 1296w
Overseas investment 392–3w
Romania, Diplomatic service 391w
Terrorism 859w
Turkey, Drugs 690–1w
Zimbabwe, Elections 68–9w, 740–3

Streeter, Mr Gary
Questions
Afghanistan, Overseas aid 753–4
Hospitals 1047w
South West Regional Development Agency 1080w

Stress
Scotland Office 511–2w

Strokes
1012w

"Strong Local Leadership White Paper"
739w

Stroud
Social security benefits 535–6w

Structure plans
Gloucestershire 382–3w

Stuart, Ms Gisela
Questions
Surgery, Manpower 1023w
Transplant surgery 1021–4w, 1053w
Transplant surgery, Glasgow 1013–4w, 1150w
Transplant surgery, Manpower 1022w
Written questions, Administrative delays 275w

Student numbers
Dentistry 813w
Higher education 39–40w, 1210w
Medicine 35w

***Student numbers**—continued*
  Postgraduate education 250w
  Sixth form education 1217–8w

Student wastage
  Higher education 946w

Students
  Debts 41w
  Fees and charges 37w, 764–70w
  Finance 37–8w, 494–5w, 761–2w, 949–51w, 999–1001, 1006–8
  Housing benefit 958w
  Loans 1132w

Stunell, Mr Andrew
  Debates etc.
  World Summit on Sustainable Development (07.03.02) 443–4
  Sittings in Westminster Hall
  Energy Policy Review (13.03.02) 288wh
  European Parliament elections (06.03.02) 100–4wh

Submarines
  165w

Sub-Saharan Africa
  Overseas aid 329w, 339w

Sudan
  (13.03.02) 249–71wh
  Armed conflict 861w, 1170w
  Peace negotiations 327w

Suicide
  805w, 809–10w, 834–5w

Sunderland
  Textiles 21w

Supermarkets
  Farmers 936w, 1077w
  Non-departmental public bodies 258w

Supply estimates
  (07.03.02) 521
  Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 380w, 1198w

Supply teachers
  Manpower 242–8w

Supporting people programme
  181–2w

Surgery
  133w, 846w, 995–7w, 1050–3w
  Buckingham 822w
  Death 612w
  East Riding 544–5w
  Eyesight 135w, 826–7w
  Greater London 1143w
  Heart diseases 138–9w, 288
  Kingston upon Hull 544–5w
  Manpower 1023w
  Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust 299–300w
  Morecambe Bay Health Authority 991w
  Private sector 281w
  Waiting lists 991w

Surrey
  Local government finance 91w

Suspension of sittings
  Rulings and statements (06.03.02) 89wh

Sussex
  Physiotherapy 858w
  Pre-school education 763w

Sustainable development
  642–3w
  Agriculture 944w
  Government departments 793w

Swanwick Air Traffic Control Centre
  177w, 742w
  Costs 581–2w

Swayne, Mr Desmond
  Debates etc.
  Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, Rep and 3R (15.03.02) 1128–9, 1135, 1139, 1156, 1158, 1171–4, 1190
  Questions
  Armed forces, Pensions 652–3w
  Excise duties, Beer 200w
  Excise duties, EC law 109w
  Individual learning accounts 1010–1
  Members, Correspondence 802w
  West Africa, EC aid 326–7w

Swimming pools
  1158w

Swire, Mr Hugo
  Debates etc.
  Equal opportunities, Females (14.03.02) 1063, 1066–7, 1073, 1096–9
  Zimbabwe (14.03.02) 1042
  Sittings in Westminster Hall
  Cultural heritage (07.03.02) 152wh
  Questions
  Departmental expenditure limits, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 571w
  Government departments, Operating costs 1289w
  Income support 1239–40w
  Livestock, Transport 480w
  Public expenditure, Ministry of Defence 476w
  Sports, Tax allowances 263–4w, 527w
  Tax burden 468w

Syms, Mr Robert
  Sittings in Westminster Hall
  European Parliament elections (06.03.02) 98–101wh
  Questions
  Asylum, Detainees 975w
  Electronic equipment, Waste disposal 477–8w
  Teachers, Pay 1211–2w

Tami, Mark
  Debates etc.
  Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 156, 159, 174, 201
  Questions
  Modern apprenticeships 242w
  War graves, France 475w

Tanzania
  Air traffic control 340w, 648w, 685w

Tapsell, Sir Peter
  Questions
  Middle East, Peace negotiations 751–2

Tax allowances
  Derelict land 398w
  Small businesses 704w
  Sports 263–4w, 527w

Tax burden
  468w

Tax Credits Up-Rating Order 2002
  Debates etc.
  (11.03.02) 730

Tax evasion
  397w

Tax rates and bands
  Council tax 104w

Taxation
  470–1w, 705w
  Construction 398–9w
  Foot and mouth disease 967w
  Incinerators 9w
  Landlords 923w, 964w
  Mittal, Lakshmi 117–8w, 470w

***Taxation**—continued*
  Self-assessment 966w

Taxis
  Disabled 748w

Taylor, Ms Dari
  Debates etc.
  Equal opportunities, Females (14.03.02) 1114
  Questions
  Crown Prosecution Service 307–8w
  India-UK Round Table 865w
  Rapid Response Service 15–6
  Redundancy 18w

Taylor, Mr David
  Debates etc.
  Environmental audit (07.03.02) 475–6, 479–81
  Questions
  Railways, East Midlands 135–6
  Teachers, Leicestershire 1212w

Taylor, Mr Ian
  Debates etc.
  Office of Communications Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (06.03.02) 326, 332, 348, 350

Taylor, Mr John
  Debates etc.
  Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (13.03.02) 910, 925–30, 934–5, 983–4
  Questions
  M42, Noise 99w
  Solihull Hospital 121w

Taylor, Matthew
  Debates etc.
  Environmental audit (07.03.02) 456–61
  Questions
  Arthur Andersen, Home Office 973w
  Arthur Andersen, Treasury 1288w
  Capital gains tax 400–1w
  Cohen, Ronald 111w
  Conferences, Treasury 200w
  Contracts, Dept of Health 429w
  Departmental responsibilities, Treasury, 111–2w
  Email, Treasury 401–2w
  Energy, Home Office 975w
  Freedom of Information Act 2000, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1297–8w
  Global Crossing, Cabinet Office 422w
  Global Crossing, Dept of Trade and Industry 153w
  Global Crossing, Treasury 105w
  Government departments, Standards 1108w
  Income tax 696w
  Manpower, Treasury 1109w
  Ministerial policy advisors, Treasury 1115w
  NHS, Finance 799–800w
  NHS, Standards 835–6w, 846–7w
  Overseas investment, Government assistance 63w
  Private finance initiative, Dept of Health 140w
  Public expenditure, Dept of Trade and Industry 1w
  Public private partnerships 1228–9w
  Public private partnerships, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 82w
  Public private partnerships, Dept of Health 282–4w
  Public private partnerships, London Underground 83w
  Public sector, Productivity 1108w
  Regulatory Impact Unit, Dept for Education and Skills 1279–80w

***Taylor, Matthew**—continued*
Regulatory Impact Unit, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1203w
Regulatory Impact Unit, Dept of Trade and Industry 353w
Regulatory Impact Unit, Treasury 399w
Sponsorship, Treasury 700w
State earnings related pension scheme 471w
Swanwick Air Traffic Control Centre 742w
Swanwick Air Traffic Control Centre, Costs 581–2w
Written questions, Administrative delays 700w

Taylor, Dr Richard
Questions
Consultation papers, Dept of Health 1009w

Taylor, Sir Teddy
Debates etc.
Bank services (14.03.02) 1024
Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL), Programme motion and Rep (11.03.02) 641, 643
Questions
EC enlargement, Common agricultural policy 756
Iraq, Foreign relations 866–7w
Members, Correspondence 804w, 982w
Work permits, Applications 45w

Teachers
Early retirement 1136–7w
East Sussex 42w
Higher education 763–4w
Leicestershire 1212w
Loans 1135w
Misconduct 240w
Pay 235–6w, 240w, 954w, 1003–6, 1211–2w
Recruitment 36w, 772w, 951w, 1213–4w
Training 1214w, 1280w
Wales 1211w
Working conditions 502w

Teenage pregnancy
618–22w, 700–2w

Telecommunications masts
see Aerials

Telephone services
Business links 591–2w
Insolvency Service 1255w
Small businesses 397w

Telephone systems
673w

Television
Dept for Education and Skills 249w
Dept of Health 464w
Licensing 266w, 679w, 934–5w, 1238–9w
Ministry of Defence 324w

Telford
Housing 100–1w
Pensioners 934–5w

Temporary employment
Treasury 645w

10 Downing Street
Air conditioning 1069w
Charities 1197w

Tenants
Nuisance 175w

Terrorism
(04.03.02) 125–32, 603w, 748–9, 859w
Costs 11w, 1289w
Dept of Health 1035w
Estimates days (07.03.02) 493–522

***Terrorism**—continued*
European Police Office 519w
Health insurance 403w, 868w
Iraq 344w
Northern Ireland 885
Tourism 1154w

Testicular cancer
820–1w

Textiles
Sunderland 21w

Thames Safety Inquiry
190w

Theatre
1231w

Theft
Cellular phones 251–2w
Dept for International Development 891w
Dept of Trade and Industry 488w
Motor vehicles 158w
Solicitor-General 663–4w

Thomas, Gareth
Debates etc.
Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL), Programme motion and Rep (11.03.02) 655–6, 658
Questions
Baton rounds 969w
Skilled workers, Recruitment 1122–3w

Thomas, Mr Gareth R
Debates etc.
Bank services (14.03.02) 1029–30
Environmental audit (07.03.02) 452, 471–4, 476–9
Greater London (12.03.02) 774
Hospitals, Greater London (13.03.02) 994–5
Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, Rep and 3R (15.03.02) 1126–31, 1139–41
Police (08.03.02) 541
World Summit on Sustainable Development (07.03.02) 446
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Consignia (12.03.02) 178wh
Energy Policy Review (13.03.02) 285–8wh
Industrial health and safety (14.03.02) 316wh
Mortgages (05.03.02) 56wh
Questions
Accident and emergency departments, Standards 1005w
Cemeteries, Muslims 147w
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, Legal profession 164w
Dietary supplements, Research 983–4w
Employment, Disabled 18w
English Heritage 933w
Environment Agency 220w
Fishing 485w
India, Politics and government 868–9w
India, UN Security Council 865w
Loan sharks 153w
Ministers, Codes of practice 876
Northwood and Pinner Hospital 840w
Paragon Finance 153w
Performance and Innovation Unit 105w
Physiotherapy, Greater London 1290w
Physiotherapy, Recruitment 611–2w
Solicitors, Standards 1284w
Sports, Finance 13w
Water, EC law 480w
Water sports 77w, 220w, 364w
Young offenders, Greater London 625

Thomas, Simon
Debates etc.
Environmental audit (07.03.02) 453, 464, 474–5

***Thomas, Simon**—continued*
Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 160–1, 167–8, 181–3, 187
Nuclear power stations (05.03.02) 219, 236, 240
Office of Communications Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (06.03.02) 322–9, 335–6, 339–43, 345–6, 382–4, 386
World Summit on Sustainable Development (07.03.02) 446
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Energy Policy Review (13.03.02) 275wh, 282–5wh
Questions
Colombia, Human rights 1172–3w
Developing countries, Children 1191w
Electronic government 878
Middle East, Peace negotiations 861w
Motor vehicles, Insurance 1257–8w
Students, Finance 1006–7
Veterinary medicine, Wales 1135w

Throckmorton airfield
Asylum 595–7w

Thurso, John
Debates etc.
Nuclear power stations (05.03.02) 240–4
Questions
Cape Wrath, Uranium 34w

Tibet
Education 1128w

Timeplan
252w

Timetabling of bills
(11.03.02) 638–729

***Timms, Mr Stephen**, Minister of State for Schools, Dept for Education and Skills*
Questions
Cambridge Education Associates 242w
Circulars, Dept for Education and Employment 386w
Circulars, Dept for Education and Skills 626–30w
Class sizes 634w
Education, Bristol 1136w
Education, Finance 770–1w, 1218–9w
Education, Leeds 241–2w
Education, Per capita costs 951–2w
Education, Standard spending assessments 621–2w, 1215–6w
Education, Standards 771–2w
Fast track teaching programme, Costs 35–6w
Gehring, Amy 240w
Grammar schools 1008–9
Literacy, Primary education 38w
Local education authorities, South West region 1135w
Non-teaching staff 502w, 1010
Non-teaching staff, Conditions of employment 626w, 1218w
Non-teaching staff, Jobseeker's allowance 41w
Non-teaching staff, Manpower 1009–10, 1216w
Primary education, Lincolnshire 633–5w
Primary education, Standards 38–9w
Pupils, Personal records 237w
Schools 387w
Schools, Admissions 1281w
Schools, Governing bodies 625w
Schools, Inspections 41w
Schools, Sponsorship 387–8w
Schools, Standards 40w
Secondary education, Standards 624–5w
Sixth form education, Derbyshire 1213w
Specialist schools 390w

Timms, Mr Stephen—continued
- Standards Fund 41–2w
- Standards Fund, Dorset 1280–1w
- Supply teachers, Manpower 242–8w
- Teachers, Early retirement 1136–7w
- Teachers, East Sussex 42w
- Teachers, Leicestershire 1212w
- Teachers, Loans 1135w
- Teachers, Misconduct 240w
- Teachers, Pay 235–6w, 240w, 954w, 1211–2w
- Teachers, Recruitment 36w, 772w, 951w, 1213–4w
- Teachers, Training 1214w, 1280w
- Teachers, Wales 1211w
- Teachers, Working conditions 502w

Tipping, Mr Paddy
- *Questions*
  - House of Commons, Operating costs 1117w
  - "Protection of Waters Against Agricultural Nitrate Pollution in England Consultation Paper" 798w
  - South East Asia, Microfinance 271

Tipping of waste
- 224w
- EC law 217w
- Hazardous materials 794w

Tobacco
- Excise duties 200–1w
- Smuggling 10w, 107–8w, 200w

Todd, Mr Mark
- *Questions*
  - Enterprise grant scheme, Derbyshire 3w
  - Equal pay, Statistics 1184w
  - Health services, Research 806w
  - Industrial diseases, Compensation 671–2w, 1186–7w
  - NHS, Information technology 1053–4w
  - Rapid Response Service, Finance 495–6w

Tolls
- Roads 141w, 187w, 753w, 917w

Tomahawk missiles
- 653w

Tomography
- North West region 1030w

Tonge, Dr Jenny
- *Debates etc.*
  - Greater London (12.03.02) 804, 831
- *Sittings in Westminster Hall*
  - Sudan (13.03.02) 253wh, 257wh, 260–3wh, 269wh
- *Questions*
  - Botswana, Ethnic groups 278
  - Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Meat 1008w
  - Brazil, Rain forests 337w
  - Ciprofloxacin 993–4w
  - Commonwealth Development Corporation, Overseas investment 891–2w
  - Developing countries, Disease control 336w
  - Evolution, Curriculum 886–7
  - Global Alliance for Vaccination and Immunisation 12–3w
  - Middle East, Armed conflict 683–4w

Total allowable catches
- 483w

***Touhig, Mr Don**, Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales*
- *Debates etc.*
  - Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 205–9
- *Questions*
  - Community development, Wales 957w

Touhig, Mr Don—continued
- Shellfish, Wales 528–9w
- Sports, Wales 366w

Tourism
- Foot and mouth disease 1154w
- Terrorism 1154w

Town and Country Planning (Fees for Applications and Deemed Applications) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2002
- *Debates etc.*
  - (07.03.02) 522

Trade and Industry Select Committee
- (04.03.02) 123

Trade promotion
- 353w

Trade unions
- Dept for Education and Skills 503w
- Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 904–5w
- Foreign and Commonwealth Office 202w
- Lord Chancellor's Dept 52–4w
- Ministry of Defence 316w, 578w
- Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1076–7w
- President of the Council 403w
- Solicitor-General 876–7w

Training
- Armed forces 318–20w, 1160w
- Dentistry 447–9w
- Fire services 1202w
- General practitioners 304–5w
- Medical profession 282w, 284–5w
- Pharmacy 1291w
- Railways 747w, 1206w
- Social workers 131w, 609w
- Speech therapy 283w
- Sports 263w
- Teachers 1214w, 1280w

Training and enterprise councils
- Fraud 631–3w

Trains
- Overcrowding 1275w

Transplant surgery
- 1016w, 1021–4w, 1053w
- Glasgow 1013–4w, 1150w
- Manpower 1022w
- Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham 537w

Transport
- 1096w
- Dead bodies 1082–3w
- Disadvantaged 227w, 1070w
- Finance 178w, 559w, 583w, 741–2w, 918–20w
- Land use 918w
- Livestock 478w, 480w, 644w
- Manchester 748w
- North West region 172w
- Schools 382w, 747w
- Sheep 478w
- South East region 92–3w

"Transport 2010"
- 918–21w

Transport Act 2000
- *Questions*
  - 84–5w, 87–8w

Transport Research Laboratory
- Publications 101w

Travel
- Cabinet Office 421–2w
- Concessions 187w
- Dept for Culture Media and Sport 259–61w
- Dept for Education and Skills 1216w

Travel—continued
- Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1198w
- Home Office 979w
- Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1076w
- Treasury 704w

Travel Concessions (Eligibility) Act 2002
- *Questions*
  - 92w

Travelling people
- 715w

Treasury
- Accenture 1288w
- Accountancy 1114w
- Advertising 469–70w
- Arthur Andersen 699–700w, 1288w
- Bristol 1111–2w
- Capita 1113w
- Catering 106w
- Conferences 10w, 200w
- Contracts 1113–4w
- Departmental responsibilities 111–2w
- Email 401–2w
- Energy 1115w
- Equal pay 471–2w
- Fair trade initiative 110w
- Global Crossing 105w
- Hotels 696–7w
- Land use 106w
- Manpower 1109w
- Ministerial policy advisors 1115w
- Older workers 1112w
- Orders and regulations 10–1w
- Press releases 401w
- Public appointments 1110w
- Public relations 401w
- Railways 471w
- Recruitment 694–5w
- Regulatory Impact Unit 399w
- Relocation services 401w
- Sponsorship 700w
- Temporary employment 645w
- Travel 704w
- Visits abroad 704w
- Voluntary work 202w
- Wood 964–5w
- Work sharing 1111–3w

Tredinnick, Mr David
- *Sittings in Westminster Hall*
  - National Institute for Clinical Excellence (05.03.02) 8–14wh

Trickett, Jon
- *Questions*
  - UK Coal, Government assistance 1080–1w
  - UK Coal, Shares 1081w

Trimble, Rt Hon David
- *Questions*
  - Prisoners' release, Northern Ireland 285

Truancy
- 1279w

Truswell, Mr Paul
- *Questions*
  - Education, Leeds 241–2w
  - Exchange Direct, Company investigations 490w
  - General practitioners, Waiting lists 548–9w
  - Insurance, Business 701w
  - Local government, Pensions 187w

Tuberculosis
- Buckingham 1064w
- Vaccination 304w, 1015w

Turkey
- Drugs 690–1w

Turkmenistan
Drugs 692w

Turner, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Animal Welfare (Journey to Slaughter) Bill, 1R (05.03.02) 152–4
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (04.03.02) 51
Zimbabwe (14.03.02) 1044
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Iraq (06.03.02) 72–4wh
Questions
Advance corporation tax 112w
Advance corporation tax, Pension funds 110–1w
Ambulance services, Per capita costs 424w
Asbestos 96–7w
Connexions Service 501w, 769–70w, 952–3w, 1135w
Debates, Prime Minister 682w, 693w
Dental services, Isle of Wight 450w
Dentistry, Training 447–9w
Education, Finance 770–1w, 1218–9w
Education, Standards 771–2w
Electronic voting 1204w
Employment tribunals, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 933w
Employment tribunals, Dept for International Development 894w
Employment tribunals, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1294w
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries 216w
General practitioners, Children 1063–4w
German measles, Vaccination 811w
Graduates, Income 1131w
Health services, Private sector 812–3w
Hearing aids 449–50w
Heart diseases, Health services 462w
Heart diseases, South East region 462–4w
Hospitals, Waiting lists 436–7w, 814w
Individual learning accounts 233–4w, 623w
Institutional care, Small businesses 813w
Iron and steel, USA 154w
Livestock, Transport 644w
Ministerial policy advisors 487w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 933–4w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for International Development 896–7w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1199w
Ministerial policy advisors, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 1238w
Ministers, Codes of practice 875–6
Mittal, Lakshmi 1–2w
Mittal, Lakshmi, Taxation 470w
MMR vaccine 812w
Moore, Jo 487w
NHS, Finance 800w
Overseas investment, Government assistance 344w
Planning permission, Areas of outstanding natural beauty 1204–5w
Press releases, Cabinet Office 779w
Press releases, Dept for Education and Skills 764w
Press releases, Dept for International Development 466w
Press releases, Dept of Trade and Industry 4–5w
Press releases, Home Office 1227–8w
Press releases, Lord Chancellor's Dept 579w
Press releases, Ministry of Defence 1181w
Press releases, Northern Ireland Office 525w
Press releases, Treasury 401w

Turner, Mr Andrew—continued
Public appointments, Isle of Wight 1205w
Public relations, Cabinet Office 779w, 1180w
Public relations, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 264w, 576–7w, 929w
Public relations, Dept for Education and Skills 1133w
Public relations, Dept for International Development 465–6w, 682–3w
Public relations, Dept of Trade and Industry 5w, 593w
Public relations, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1170w
Public relations, Lord Chancellor's Dept 579–80w
Public relations, Northern Ireland Office 872w
Public relations, Treasury 401w
Racial discrimination 1104–5w
Sixsmith, Martin 487w, 901–2w, 1083w
Social security benefits 728–9w
Stationery, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 562w
Teenage pregnancy 618–22w
10 Downing Street, Charities 1197w
Terrorism 749
Written questions, Administrative delays 674w

Turner, Dr Desmond
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Energy Policy Review (13.03.02) 272–8wh, 280wh, 292wh
Questions
Homelessness 1123w
Social security benefits, Hackney 1123–4w

Turner, Mr Neil
Questions
Community support police officers 712w
Homelessness 1093–6w

Twigg, Derek
Questions
General practitioners 276w
Immunity from prosecution 1235w

***Twigg, Mr Stephen**, Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Council and Leader of the House*
Debates etc.
Democracy, Electronic government (12.03.02) 865–70

Tyler, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, Rep and 3R (15.03.02) 1180–2, 1188–9
Sittings in Westminster Hall
European Parliament elections (06.03.02) 90–4wh, 107wh
Questions
Business questions 421–2
Ministers, Codes of practice 1070w

Tynan, Mr Bill
Debates etc.
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (04.03.02) 55
Nuclear power stations (05.03.02) 238–40
Questions
Business questions 423–4
Pensioners, Income support 11–2

Tyne and Wear
Empty property 582w

Type 22 frigates
Weapons 34w

Type 23 frigates
Weapons 34w

Type 42 destroyers
Decommissioning 34w

Type 45 destroyers
649–50w

Tyrie, Mr Andrew
Questions
NHS, Finance 450w

UK Coal
Government assistance 1080–1w
Shares 1081w

UK Detention Services
1223w

UK Human Tissue Bank
1002–3w

UK membership of EC
62w, 395w, 1192w

UK Mission to United Nations
Manpower 1297w

UK Sports Council
259–60w

UK-India Round Table
see India-UK Round Table

UN Commission on Human Rights
Capital punishment 692w

UN Convention Against Torture
692w

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
1137w

UN Security Council
India 865w

Unemployment
see also Long term unemployed
1239–40w
Cynon Valley 529w

United Christian Broadcasters
Licensing 265–6w

Universities
see Higher education

Unparliamentary expressions
Rulings and statements (06.03.02) 88–9wh, (08.03.02) 576

Unsolicited goods and services
Email 352–3w

Uranium
Cape Wrath 34w
Health hazards 1179–80w

Urban areas
Housing 179w
Poverty 1073w
Royal charters 962w, 1243w

Urban Regeneration Agency
see English Partnerships

Urban Waste Water Treatment (England and Wales) Regulations 1994
Questions
231w

USA
Armed forces 167w
Double taxation 1229–30w
European Police Office 519–20w
Iron and steel 154w, 281–2, 487w, 674–5w, 884
Leased territories 1171w
Nuclear weapons 651w

Vaccination
Chemical and biological warfare 1028–9w
German measles 811w
Tuberculosis 304w, 1015w

VAT
  11–2w, 114–5w
  Churches 264w
  Computers 113–4w
  Digital certificates 114–6w
  Housing 9w
  Institutional care 116–7w
  Private education 703w

Vaz, Mr Keith
  Questions
  Police, Legislation 1264w

Venture capital
  Small businesses 150w

Veterinary medicine
  EC law 228w
  Wales 1135w

Veterinary services
  South West region 219w

Vetting
  Entertainers 982w

Victims
  Crime 619–21, 710w, 1107–8w

Vietnam
  Asylum 206–7w

Village halls
  227w

Vis, Dr Rudi
  Questions
  Cambridge Education Associates 242w
  Equal pay, Finchley 669w

Vocational education
  Finance 502w

Voluntary organisations
  Cancer 138w

Voluntary work
  Cabinet Office 255w
  Dept for Culture Media and Sport 344–5w
  Dept for Education and Skills 387w
  Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 224–5w
  Dept for International Development 341–2w
  Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 179w
  Dept of Health 1141w
  Dept of Trade and Industry 350w
  Foreign and Commonwealth Office 203w
  Home Office 1102–3w
  Lord Chancellor's Dept 196–7w
  Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 586w
  President of the Council 605w
  Treasury 202w

Voucher schemes
  Asylum 1010w

Wade, Nikki
  276w

Wales
  Arthritis 1024w
  Asthma 529w
  Community development 957w
  Crimes of violence 517w
  Education 232w
  Higher education 1076w
  Hospitals 608w
  Iron and steel (05.03.02) 155–217
  Postal services 957w
  Prisoners 973–4w
  Public expenditure 1075w
  Roads 169w, 1083w
  Shellfish 528–9w
  Sports 366w
  Teachers 1211w

***Wales**—continued*
  Veterinary medicine 1135w

Wales Office
  see Office of the Secretary of State for Wales

Walley, Ms Joan
  Debates etc.
  Environmental audit (07.03.02) 483–4
  Sittings in Westminster Hall
  Energy Policy Review (13.03.02) 276wh, 281wh
  Questions
  Alcoholic drinks, Measurement 593w
  Armed forces, Pensions 321w
  Buildings, Ministry of Defence 657w
  Community investment tax credit 1230w
  Construction, Dept of Health 987–8w
  Foot and mouth disease, Rodents 213–4w
  Forests, Conferences 798w
  Hedges and ditches 102w
  Norman Shaw buildings, Wood 585w
  Planning permission, Appeals 99–100w
  Prescriptions, Fees and charges 983w
  Railways, Freight 1276w
  Social security benefits, Appeals 730–4w
  Taxis, Disabled 748w
  United Christian Broadcasters, Licensing 265–6w
  Wood, Dept for International Development 894–5w
  Wood, Treasury 964–5w
  Working conditions, Drinking water 1153w

Walter, Mr Robert
  Debates etc.
  Equal opportunities, Females (14.03.02) 1086–8

Walthamstow
  Pensioners 961w

Wandsworth Prison
  1225w

War graves
  Belgium 166–7w
  France 166w, 475w

War pensions
  1160–1w

Ward, Ms Claire
  Sittings in Westminster Hall
  Politics, Young people (05.03.02) 35–7wh
  Questions
  Cabinet committees 486w
  Hertfordshire Constabulary 713w
  Middle East, Peace negotiations 887

Warrington
  Dept for Culture Media and Sport 528w
  Dept for Education and Skills 391w
  Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 795w
  Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 190w
  Dept for Work and Pensions 253w
  Dept of Trade and Industry 673w
  Equal pay 1184–5w
  Home Office 717–8w
  Magistrates 408w
  Mental health services 819w

Waste disposal
  72w
  Electronic equipment 5w, 78w, 232w, 477–8w, 937–8w
  Motor vehicles 642w
  Oil 792–3w
  Refrigerators 477–8w, 643–4w, 1151–2w

Waste management
  681w, 1233–4w

***Waste management**—continued*
  Hazardous materials 72w

Water
  EC law 480w
  Meters 638w

Water sports
  77w, 220w, 364w, 796–7w

Water supply
  Hillingdon 638w

Water treatment
  EC law 231w

Waterson, Mr Nigel
  Debates etc.
  Copyright (Visually Impaired Persons) Bill, 2R (15.03.02) 1195–7
  Sittings in Westminster Hall
  Consignia (12.03.02) 179–80wh, 193–6wh
  Questions
  Bankruptcy 1256w
  Bankruptcy, Fees and charges 1256–7w
  Company law 1081w
  Hearing aids, South East region 986w
  Insolvency 490–1w, 1257w
  Insolvency, Liability 1256w
  Insolvency, Small businesses 1257w
  Insolvency practitioners 491w, 1255w
  Insolvency Service 1255w
  Insolvency Service, Standards 1256w
  Insolvency Service, Telephone services 1255w
  Institutional care, Eastbourne 548w
  Metrication 593w
  Teachers, East Sussex 42w
  Terrorism, Northern Ireland 885

Watkinson, Angela
  Debates etc.
  Equal opportunities, Females (14.03.02) 1091–4
  Greater London (12.03.02) 845–6
  Office of Communications Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (06.03.02) 380–2
  Sittings in Westminster Hall
  National Institute for Clinical Excellence (05.03.02) 1–3wh
  Questions
  Business questions 432–3
  Community support police officers 888
  London Underground, Public private partnerships 169w
  Specialist schools 390w

Watson, Mr Tom
  Sittings in Westminster Hall
  Industrial health and safety (14.03.02) 352–3wh
  Questions
  Drugs, Crime 48w

Watts, Mr Dave
  Questions
  Combined heat and power 942w
  Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, Public private partnerships 313–4w

Weapons
  Iraq 287, 884
  Patrol craft 33w
  Type 22 frigates 34w
  Type 23 frigates 34w

Webb, Mr Steve
  Questions
  Annuities 8
  Child Support Agency 1241–2w
  Employer Direct, Standards 531w
  Housing benefit, Abuse 1239w
  Immigration, Marriage 516w
  Jobcentre Plus, Industrial disputes 957–8w
  Maintenance, Children 412–3w, 604w

Webb, Mr Steve—continued
Pension Service 418w
Pensioners, Income support 1241w
Pensioners, Social security benefits 15w
Retirement, Dept for Education and Skills 947w
Retirement, Ministry of Defence 162w
Social security benefits, Abuse 411w
Social security benefits, Appeals 723w
State earnings related pension scheme 723w
State retirement pensions, Uprating 410–1w
Television, Licensing 1238–9w
Winter fuel payments 1239w

Weeds Act 1959
Questions
218–9w

Weir, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Bank services (14.03.02) 1028
Nuclear power stations (05.03.02) 239, 247–51
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Aggregates levy (13.03.02) 310wh
Consignia (12.03.02) 185–7wh
Questions
Correspondence, Dept of Health 1048–9w
Fair trade initiative, Dept for Education and Skills 757–8w
Fair trade initiative, Dept of Health 835w
Fair trade initiative, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 606w
Fair trade initiative, Solicitor-General 875–6w
Manpower, Dept of Health 1054w
Nuclear power stations, Planning permission 513w
Public expenditure, Dept of Health 1025–6w
Public relations, Dept of Health 1054–5w
Select committees, Dept of Health 988w

Welsh Assembly Cabinet
see NAW Assembly Cabinet

Welsh Development Agency
530w

WENA Hotels
Egypt 869w

West Africa
EC aid 326–7w
Overseas aid 326w

West coast railway line
138–40, 171w
Finance 171w
Freight 137

West Midlands
Alternatives to prison 54w
Housing 1084w
Refrigerators 210w

[illegible]st Midlands Police
[illegible]anpower 709w

W[illegible]t Sussex
Autism 438–9w
Primary care groups 846w

Weston Area Health NHS Trust
Nurses 1247w

Weston Hospital
550w

Wetlands
Subsidies 795–6w

Wheat
Prices 223–4w

White, Brian
Debates etc.
Office of Communications Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (06.03.02) 324, 328, 343, 349, 355, 360–1, 378–9
Questions
Pensions, Low pay 21w

Whitehall and Industry Group
Secondment 422w

***Whitehead, Dr Alan**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions*
Sittings in Westminster Hall
European Parliament elections (06.03.02) 106–8wh
Industrial health and safety (14.03.02) 315–22wh, 326wh, 355–8wh
Questions
Absent voting, Diplomatic service 570w
Air conditioning, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 1235w
Arson 98w
Asbestos 96–7w, 192–4w, 551–2w, 1015–6w
Asbestos, Industrial health and safety 95w, 179–80w, 910w
Best value 182–3w
Bus services, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 920w
Capita, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 564–6w
Catering, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 555w
Cendent Relocation (UK), Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 749w
Citizens' advice bureaux, Finance 964w
City of London, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 180w
Contracts, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 100w, 1092–3w
Correspondence, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 555–6w
Council tax 180–1w
Council tax, Greater London 181w
Council tax, Tax rates and bands 104w
Councillors, Allowances 104–5w, 173w
Departmental expenditure limits, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 376w, 571w
Departmental responsibilities, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 740–1w
Electoral Commission, Publicity 750w
Electoral register 381–2w
Electronic voting 1204w
Energy, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1088w
Equal pay, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1198–9w
Equipment, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 84w
Fair trade initiative, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 179w
Fire services 101w, 1091w
Fire services, Diabetes 570w
Fire services, Finance 1201w
Fire services, Local strategic partnerships 1090w
Fire services, Manpower 1201–2w
Fire services, Private finance initiative 1202w
Fire services, Standards 98w
Fire services, Training 1202w
Fire services, Vacancies 1091w
Flexible working, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1088w

Whitehead, Dr Alan—continued
Grants, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 913–4w
Hotels, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 905w
Humberside Fire Authority, Standard spending assessments 746w
Industrial health and safety 563–4w
Industrial injuries 563w
Local authorities, Electronic government 183–4w
Local authorities, Public private partnerships 920w
Local government 560–2w
Local government, Elections 173w, 570w
Local government, Pensions 187w
Local government, Publications 183–5w
Local government, Standards 168–9w
Local government finance 174w, 567–8w, 738–40w, 920w, 1083w
Local government finance, City of London 377–9w, 739w
Local government finance, Haringey 184w
Local government finance, Liverpool 744w
Local government finance, Surrey 91w
"Local Government White Paper" 739w
Local strategic partnerships 102w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 572w, 1199w
Non-domestic rates, Greater London 180w
Non-governmental organisations, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 177w, 1086w
Patent Office, Forms 740–1w
Public expenditure, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 743–5w
Public private partnerships, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 82w, 1096w
Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, Air conditioning 584–5w
Railways, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 562–3w
Recruitment, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 735w
Regional assemblies 144–6
Regional assemblies, Finance 172w
Regional assemblies, Referendums 172w
Regional assemblies, South West region 567w, 569–70w, 921–2w
Regional government, South West region 567–9w
Regulatory Impact Unit, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1203w
Relocation services, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 750w, 905w
Research, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 901w
Sixsmith, Martin 1083w
Standard spending assessments, Stoke on Trent 1087w
Supply estimates, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 1198w
Tax allowances, Sports 527w
Transport, Dead bodies 1082–3w
Transport, Finance 178w
Visits abroad, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 176w, 1198w
Voluntary work, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 179w
Work sharing, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 742w
Working conditions, Drinking water 1153w

Whittingdale, Mr John
Debates etc.
Iron and steel, USA (06.03.02) 309–10
Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 174–80
Questions
Corus, Redundancy 349–50w
Czech Republic, Iron and steel 503w
Iron and steel 3w
Iron and steel, Czech Republic 3w
Iron and steel, USA 674–5w
Mittal, Lakshmi 3w, 154w, 349w
Oil, Exploration 593–4w
Small businesses, Bank services 492w
Small businesses, Loan guarantee scheme 349w, 589w
USA, Iron and steel 487w

Whittington Hospital
Repairs and maintenance 808w

***Wicks, Malcolm**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for Work and Pensions*
Questions
Asbestos, Compensation 1121–2w
Child Support Agency 1241–2w
Child Support Agency, Powers 411–2w
Children, Maintenance 412–3w, 604w
Children, Poverty 1123w
EC labour policy 1240w
EU Employment and Social Policy Council, Scottish Executive 1241w
Homelessness 1123w
Housing benefit 959w
Housing benefit, Abuse 4–6, 1119w, 1239w
Housing benefit, Epsom 410w
Housing benefit, Non-dependent deductions 729–30w
Housing benefit, Students 958w
Income support 1239–40w, 1251–2w
Industrial diseases, Compensation 417–8w
Jobcentre Plus, Industrial disputes 534w
Means tested benefits 1240–1w
Pensioners, Housing benefit 14–5w
Pensioners, Income support 1128w
Post offices, Bank services 414w
Poverty 1241w
Rent Service 958–9w
Social security benefits 728–9w, 1240w
Social security benefits, Abuse 17–8w, 411w, 414w, 960w
Social security benefits, Automated credit transfer 413–4w
Social security benefits, Belgium 17w
Social security benefits, Hackney 1123–4w
Social security benefits, Lone parents 534–5w
Social security benefits, Newcastle upon Tyne 1124–5w
Social security benefits, Overpayments 415–7w
Social security benefits, Rented housing 958w
Social security benefits, Uprating 1240w

Widdecombe, Rt Hon Ann
Debates etc.
Greater London (12.03.02) 778, 794–8, 800–1, 832–3
Questions
Court of Appeal 54–5w
Members, Correspondence 803w

Wigan and Bolton Health Authority
Finance 811w

Wiggin, Mr Bill
Debates etc.
Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL), Programme motion and Rep (11.03.02) 639, 650, 652, 654–6, 658, 676, 702, 705–6, 708

***Wiggin, Mr Bill**—continued*
Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (13.03.02) 935–6, 938, 943, 986
Foreign Exchange Transactions Tax Commission Bill, 1R (13.03.02) 904–5
Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 196–7
Questions
Air ambulance services 1147w
Exchange Direct, Company investigations 1258w
Heart diseases, Herefordshire 615w
Institutional care, Herefordshire 615–6w
Members, Correspondence 637w
Pensions, Regulation 15w
Regional planning and development 174w

Wild ducks
940–1w

Wilkinson, Mr John
Debates etc.
Hospitals, Greater London (13.03.02) 989–92
Police (08.03.02) 562, 572–5
Zimbabwe (14.03.02) 1042
Questions
Business questions 433–4
Young offenders, Greater London 626

Willetts, Mr David
Questions
Annuities 9–10
Housing benefit, Abuse 6
Incapacity benefit 534w
Jobcentre Plus, Industrial disputes 534w
New deal for young people 1121w
Working families tax credit 697w

Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Debates etc.
Central Government Audit and Accountability Review (13.03.02) 893
Questions
Project Al Yamamah 1245w

Williams, Mrs Betty
Debates etc.
Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 202
Questions
Crime, Victims 621, 710w
Cystic fibrosis, Medical treatments 436w

Williams, Hywel
Debates etc.
Members, Points of order (04.03.02) 21
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Consignia (12.03.02) 188–9wh
Questions
Dams, Export credit guarantees 2w
Levy, Lord 687–8w
Livestock, Transport 478w
Pensioners, Income support 12–3
Romania 65w

Williams, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 160
Nuclear power stations (05.03.02) 232
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Aggregates levy (13.03.02) 310wh, 313wh
Questions
Roads, Wales 169w

Willis, Mr Phil
Questions
Civil servants, Employment 236w
Departmental responsibilities, Home Office 48w
Exports, Languages 674w
Fast track teaching programme, Costs 35–6w

***Willis, Mr Phil**—continued*
Secondment, Dept for Education and Skills 236–7w
Teachers, Pay 235–6w, 1004–5
Teachers, Recruitment 36w

***Wills, Mr Michael**, Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Dept*
Debates etc.
Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL), Programme motion and Rep (11.03.02) 638–9, 642–4, 649–50, 656–7, 662–7, 670–4, 675–8, 682–3
Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (13.03.02) 909, 979–81
Questions
Accountancy, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1176–7w
Alternatives to prison, West Midlands 54w
Attendance, Lord Chancellor's Dept 51w
Bloody Sunday Tribunal of Inquiry, Costs 51–2w
Capita, Lord Chancellor's Dept 776w
Catering, Lord Chancellor's Dept 962–3w
Civil proceedings, Gravesend 773–4w
Community service orders, Enforcement 772w
County courts, Gravesend 1178w
Court of Appeal 54–5w
Criminal Courts Review 772–3w
Criminal Courts Review, Magistrates 409w
Damages, Accidents 963–4w
"Damages for Future Loss Consultation Paper" 963w
Data protection 196w
EC law, Lord Chancellor's Dept 56–8w
Fair trade initiative, Lord Chancellor's Dept 526w
Forfeiture 774w
Human rights 527w
Land use, Lord Chancellor's Dept 409w
Magistrates, Ethnic groups 405–6w
Magistrates, Warrington 408w
Magistrates' courts 56w
Magistrates' courts, Closures 406–8w
Offices, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1244–5w
Official hospitality, Lord Chancellor's Dept 404w
Parental responsibility, EC action 50w
Press releases, Lord Chancellor's Dept 579w
Public relations, Lord Chancellor's Dept 579–80w
Repossession orders, Gravesend 773w
Urban areas, Royal charters 1243w
Witnesses, Press 196w

Wilshire, Mr David
Debates etc.
Copyright (Visually Impaired Persons) Bill, 2R (15.03.02) 1199, 1203
Food Labelling Bill, 2R adjourned (15.03.02) 1203
Greater London (12.03.02) 763, 771, 779
Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill, Rep and 3R (15.03.02) 1189

***Wilson, Mr Brian**, Minister of State for Industry and Energy, Dept of Trade and Industry*
Debates etc.
Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 180
Questions
Aerospace industry 150–1w
Aerospace industry, Engineers 592w
Alternative energy 488–9w
Atlantic Frontier Environmental Network 347–8w
British Nuclear Fuels 672–3w
British Nuclear Fuels, Company accounts 151w

***Wilson, Mr Brian**—continued*
Building Research Establishment, Libraries 347w
Combined heat and power 351–2w
Construction, Government departments 149w
Construction, Standards 887w
Credit unions, Disadvantaged 354w
Electricity 348–9w
Electronic equipment, Waste disposal 937–8w
Engineering, Consultants 149–50w
Engineering, Manpower 150w
Engineering, Skilled workers 888–9w
Fuel poverty 884–5w
Fuels, Regulation 357w
Industrial diseases, Compensation 350–1w, 671–2w, 1186–7w
Iron and steel, USA 154w
Motor vehicles, EC law 217–8w, 586–7w, 1090w
Natural gas 353–4w, 672w
Nuclear power stations, Climate change levy 152w
Nuclear power stations, Commonwealth of Independent States 588w
Offshore drilling 1257w
Oil, Refineries 356w
Sellafield 356–7w
UK Coal, Government assistance 1080–1w
UK Coal, Shares 1081w
Wind power 677–8w, 890w

Wiltshire
Standard spending assessments 1215–6w

Wind power
677–8w, 890w

Wines
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 67–8w

Winnick, David
Debates etc.
Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference (06.03.02) 297–8
Office of Communications Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (06.03.02) 356
Zimbabwe (14.03.02) 1039
Questions
Crimes of violence 628–9
Incapacity benefit 18–9
Iraq 746
Members, Correspondence 154w, 350w, 544w

Winter fuel payments
960w, 1239w
Overseas residence 959–60w

Winter sports
Gloucestershire 263w

Winterton, Ann
Questions
Agriculture, Regulation 77–8w
Common fisheries policy 409
Meat, Exports 944–5w
Milk 215w

Winterton, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference (06.03.02) 299
Zimbabwe (14.03.02) 1040
Questions
Cheshire Police Authority, Grants 154w
Gibraltar, Spain 866w
Integrated administration and control system 479w
Local government, Elections 570w
Rural areas 414
Students, Finance 1007
West coast railway line, Finance 171w

***Winterton, Mr Nicholas**—continued*
Zimbabwe, Elections 741
Zimbabwe, Overseas aid 328w

***Winterton, Ms Rosie**, Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Dept*
Debates etc.
Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rep and 3R (04.03.02) 41
Questions
Advertising, Lord Chancellor's Dept 776–8w
Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service 526w
Courts, Northern Ireland 774–6w
Domestic violence 1174–5w
Electoral register 1243–4w
Hotels, Lord Chancellor's Dept 963w
Industrial disputes, Lord Chancellor's Dept 52w
Legal aid 197–8w
Magistrates, EC action 1107w, 1177–8w
Magistrates, Northern Ireland 197w
Marriage guidance, Grants 404–6w
Non-governmental organisations, Lord Chancellor's Dept 408–9w
North South Ministerial Council 52w
Operating costs, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1178w
Powers of attorney, Fees and charges 961w
Public appointments, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1242–3w
Public Record Office, Census 55–6w, 962w, 1175–6w
Railways, Lord Chancellor's Dept 405w
Recruitment, Lord Chancellor's Dept 578–9w
Relocation services, Lord Chancellor's Dept 773w
Solicitors, Standards 1284w
Trade unions, Lord Chancellor's Dept 52–4w
Urban areas, Royal charters 962w
Voluntary work, Lord Chancellor's Dept 196–7w
Work sharing, Lord Chancellor's Dept 961–2w

Wishart, Pete
Debates etc.
Mittal, Lakshmi (05.03.02) 171, 191–3, 198
Office of Communications Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (06.03.02) 330
Questions
Business questions 432
Channel tunnel railway line, Freight 558w
Contracts, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 100w
Contracts, Dept of Trade and Industry 2–3w
Contracts, Home Office 1271w
Contracts, Northern Ireland Office 525–6w
Contracts, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 365–6w
Cost of living 674w
Departmental responsibilities, Scotland Office 1208w
Entrust, Landfill tax credit scheme 698–9w
Heathrow Airport 167–8w
Postal services, Rural areas 358w
Public expenditure 201w
Public expenditure, Devolution 201w
Social security benefits 1240w
Social security benefits, Patients 727–8w
Social security benefits, Uprating 1240w
Tourism, Terrorism 1154w

Witnesses
Press 196w

Wolvercote Clinic
1101–2w

Women
see Females

Wood
Dept for International Development 894–5w
Norman Shaw buildings 585w
Smuggling 784–6w
Treasury 964–5w

Wood, Mr Mike
Questions
India, Civil disorder 282
Tax evasion 397w

Woodward, Mr Shaun
Questions
Annuities 9w
Asylum, Children 970–1w
Asylum, Education 947–8w
Asylum, Housing 160w
Asylum, Human rights 516w
Crime, St Helens 603w
Empty property, St Helens 83–4w
Industrial diseases, Compensation 350w
Industrial injuries disablement benefit 1128w
Means tested benefits 1240–1w
Mental patients' rights 431w
Minimum funding requirement 536w
Regional assistance, Private sector 383w
Secondary education, Standards 624–5w
Young offender institutions, Human rights 515–6w

***Woolas, Mr Phil**, An Assistant Whip*
Debates etc.
Roads, Safety (08.03.02) 614–8

Worcestershire
Medical profession 1040–1w

Work permits
Applications 45w
Lithuania 974–5w

Work sharing
Cabinet Office 257–8w, 780w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 791w
Dept for International Development 898w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 742w
Dept of Trade and Industry 669w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 687w, 867w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 961–2w
Ministry of Defence 577–8w
President of the Council 604w
Prime Minister 1069w
Treasury 1111–3w

Working Age Agency
see Jobcentre Plus

Working conditions
Drinking water 1153w
Teachers 502w

Working families tax credit
697w
Minimum wage 885

Working hours
Accident and emergency departments 1005–6w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 638–9w
Home Office 518–9w
Nurses 1034w

Working mothers
13–4

World Cup
Football 863w

World heritage sites
1158w

World Summit on Sustainable Development
479–80w
Ministerial statements (07.03.02) 437–49

World War II
Foreign loans 1114w

Worthing
Cancer 854–6w

Worthing and Southlands Hospitals NHS Trust
Screening 1145–7w

Wray, Mr James
Debates etc.
Terrorism (04.03.02) 128
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Iraq (06.03.02) 78–80wh
Questions
Armed forces, Training 1160w
Business questions 431–2
Chemical weapons, Baltic Sea 166w
Falkland Islands, Armed conflict 1171w
Gibraltar, Spain 504w
Mentally ill, Discrimination 1124w
Space technology 675–8w
USA, Leased territories 1171w
Wind power 677–8w, 890w

Wright, Mr Anthony D
Questions
Regional government 147–8

Wright, David
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Cultural heritage (07.03.02) 153–5wh
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 658w
Driving, Licensing 738w
Euro, Business 468w
Fire services 101w

Wright, David—continued
Housing, Telford 100–1w
Museums and galleries, Fees and charges 267w
Television, Licensing 934–5w
World heritage sites 1158w

Wright, Lauren
1004–5w

Wright, Tony
Questions
Ombudsman, Reform 874

Written questions
Administrative delays 192w, 275w, 345w, 354w, 398w, 674w, 700w, 756w, 794–5w, 869w, 1045–6w, 1048w
Dept of Health 192w, 275–6w, 841–5w, 1046w, 1049w, 1149w

Wyatt, Derek
Debates etc.
Democracy, Electronic government (12.03.02) 866, 868
Iron and steel, USA (06.03.02) 318
Kent and Canterbury Hospital (07.03.02) 527
Office of Communications Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (06.03.02) 348, 359
Schools, Petitions (07.03.02) 523
Questions
Brompton Barracks, Public private partnerships 657w
Zimbabwe, Overseas aid 898–9w

X rays
Customs and Excise 112–3w

Yarls Wood Detention Centre
157w, 522w, 719–20w

Yeo, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Broadcasting Act 1990 (Amendment) Bill, 1R (12.03.02) 758–9
Office of Communications Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (06.03.02) 346–52, 367–9
Questions
Casey, Derek 259–60w
Digital broadcasting 268w

Yeo, Mr Tim—continued
Members, Correspondence 798–9w
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 897w, 1063w
Television, Ministry of Defence 324w
UK Sports Council 259–60w

York
Incapacity benefit 411w
Military bases 655w
Rents 909–10w

Young, Sir George
Questions
Business questions 426

Young offender institutions
Human rights 515–6w
Mental health services 127w

Young offenders
710–1w
Disadvantaged 710w
Greater London 625–6

Young people
Mental health services 127w
Motor vehicles 1271w
Politics (05.03.02) 24–44wh
Psychiatric nurses 616w
Sports 263w

Younger-Ross, Richard
Questions
Police, Pensions 977–8w
Shellfish 404

Youth Hostels Association
406–8

Zimbabwe
Commonwealth Games 682w, 1252w
Elections 68–9w, 686w, 740–3
Foreign relations 862w
Ministerial statements (14.03.02) 1031–45
Overseas aid 328w, 898–9w
Overseas residence 504–5w
Pensions 208w, 1294w
Politics and government 862w
Reconstruction 686w